# LEISURELY FEELINGS

## EMOTIONS AND CONCEPTS OF OTIUM IN SOUTH ASIA

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for my parents

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Lastly, no words of gratitude are enough for my parents, who have remained the source of all my hope and strength. I am deeply grateful for their understanding, generosity, and relentless faith in me; I dedicate this work to them.

# Notes on Transliteration

I have transliterated Bengali, Urdu, and Hindi words following the standard conventional way of writing alphabets in the Roman script. The consonants and vowels are rendered in their corresponding notation as shown below. If, at times, Persian and Arabic words have been used in the thesis, they have also been transliterated following the notation system in Urdu, since all the alphabets are included in the system (Table 1). This is also done to avoid the confusion that could arise from too many notational systems, unnecessary for scant references to a couple of Persian and Arabic words. In the case of Hindi and Sanskrit though, while most of the consonants and vowels overlap with the Bengali notation system (Table 2), Hindi and Sanskrit words have been transliterated according to the conventional system for modern Indo-Aryan languages in Indic scripts. A few usual differences from the Bengali remain – for example, the Bengali য়, written as ẏa, is absent in Sanskrit and Hindi, where it is simply written as य, transliterated as ya.

I have used the necessary English plural form attached to transliterated words but have not italicised it. For instance, the plural of āḍḍā has been written as āḍḍās. To make for easy reading, I have refrained from using transliteration for names of authors, places, as well as characters. In instances where the name of a character coincides with the title of a work, like Pheluda or Piran, the title of the work has been transliterated and italicised – *Pheludā*, *Pīran* – while references to the character have been made without transliteration – Pheluda or Piran. In addition, some notes on Bengali transliteration follow the table provided. The use of double vowels – common in writings with South Asian languages – like in aaraam or neela has been avoided. Exceptions should indicate their use in quotations, or authors' preferences in naming conventions – for example, Jameel Akhtar.

## Table 1. Urdu transliteration

| v | و | f | ف | ṣ | ص | r | ر | j | ج | ā | ا |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| h | ہ | q | ق | ẓ | ض | ṛ | ڑ | c | چ | b | ب |
| h | ھ | k | ک | ṭ | ط | z | ز | ḥ | ح | p | پ |
| ʾ | ء | g | گ | ẓ | ظ | ż | ژ | kh | خ | t | ت |
| y, ī | ی | l | ل | ʿ | ع | s | س | d | د | ṭ | ٹ |
| e, ai | ے | m | م | ġ | غ | ś | ش | ḍ | ڈ | s̤ | ث |
| | | n | ن | | | | | ẓ | ذ | | |

## Table 2. Bengali transliteration

| অ | a | ক | ka | ট | ṭa | প | pa | স | sa |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| আ | ā | খ | kha | ঠ | ṭha | ফ | pha | হ | ha |
| ই | i | গ | ga | ড | ḍ | ব | ba | ড় | ṛa |
| ঈ | ī | ঘ | gha | ঢ | ḍha | ভ | bha | ঢ় | ṛha |
| উ | u | ঙ | ṅa | ণ | ṇa | ম | ma | য় | ẏa |
| ঊ | ū | চ | ca | ত | ta | য | ya | ৎ | t· |
| ঋ | ṛ | ছ | cha | থ | tha | র | ra | ০ং | ṃ |
| এ | e | জ | ja | দ | da | ল | la | ০ঃ | ḥ |
| ঐ | ai | ঝ | jha | ধ | dha | শ | ś | ০ঁ | ̃ |
| ও | o | ঞ | ñ | ন | na | ষ | ṣ | | |
| ঔ | au | | | | | | | | |

a.  Elision mark, written as ¹, is used to denote the omitted vowel in pronunciation: tinˡṭe, balˡchilām, etc.
b.  Hasanta mark is denoted by · after the consonant, as in: phyat·, mat·sya.
c.  In the case of ba- phalā, where ba/ ব is fused with a consonant, for instance, ব্ব, it is generally transliterated as "dba"; however, for words directly taken from Sanskrit, v is used to denote ব, and is written as svabhāb.

# Notes on Translation and Writing Conventions

All translations of quotations from Bengali and Urdu (and if Hindi is used) are mine unless mentioned otherwise. In several instances, when quoting verses, for example, in Chapter 2, I have relied on published authoritative translations with adequate notes in references. Wherever a published translation has been used, notes have been provided, and these translations are cited following year of publication and page number(s). While discussing the same text in both, the original and published translation, the year of publication should be an indication of the text referred to.

For titles of works in Bengali and Urdu, the original title is written in transliteration; titles of books are italicised, and titles of short stories are italicised within double quotations, whereas essays and chapters are written straight within double quotations. In transliterated titles, I have used capitalisation although Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu do not have different cases. This has been done to avoid confusion regarding words like 'Islam' or other proper nouns, which should be arguably written with the first alphabets in capitals. For instance, while writing the title of the novel *Umrā'o Jān Adā*, capitalisation is necessary as the title refers to the name of the protagonist. While "*Tafrīḥ kī ek dopahar*" could have been written as such, I have decided to write "*Tafrīḥ kī Ek Dopahar*", for the sake of consistency in the transliteration of titles. If an English translation of the title is provided in italics, then it should be a published title. In that case, it follows the convention of writing titles in English, with the first words of the title in capitals. For titles that do not have corresponding English translations, I have provided verbatim translations in parenthesis, without italicisation and capitals. If a Bengali or Urdu title is followed by a published English title and year of publication in parenthesis, the year of publication corresponds to the original, and not the English translation, unless otherwise stated. Translated verses from Bengali and Urdu are written in italics. Within the text, "Urd" refers to Urdu, "Bng" to Bengali, "Ger" to German, and so on.

While it is common in English to refer to an author by the mere use of the surname, the plenitude of South Asian common surnames like Bhattacharya, or Ahmad, can be confusing while following this system. To avoid unnecessary

confusion, I have tried to add the first name, where necessary. It is now also common for scholars writing on Bengali literature or history to write the first names of important figures – for example, Rabindranath Tagore is usually written as Rabindranath, and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, as Bankim.

# Part I

# Introduction

*Poor Maqbul! Who knows how many more chillums he would have to prepare tonight! For tonight, there will be many more battles fought on this playground. The battles began the day the two friends acquired a taste for this game* (khel). *Now, you may ask if they have no work* (kām) *to do. Well, no. After all, what work could affluent landholders have? Praise be to God, both men belong to aristocratic families, and that too, of Lucknow! As the Mughal rule in Delhi remained merely titular, Lucknow emerged as the centre of culture* (tahẕīb). *The people of Lucknow have a taste for enjoyment and leisurely pursuits* (śauqīn mizāj); *to them, work entails spending money on pleasure. There was another aspect to this culture. At the helm of this leisure-loving* (śauqīn) *populace was Navab Wajid Ali Shah, who had a taste for all kinds of pursuits* (śauq), *all but statecraft.*[1]

Satyajit Ray's (1921–92) 1977 cinematic adaptation of Munshi Premchand's (1880–1936) Hindi short story, "*Śatranj ke Khilāṛī*" ("The Chess Players", 1924)[2] weaves together two narratives of play and pleasure. One refers to the two friends – Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Roshan Ali – and their mutual obsession with playing chess. The other depicts the conquest of Avadh by the British East India Company, while the King, Wajid Ali, is far too immersed in the pursuit of his leisurely interests. Premchand's original story begins with a description of the culture of leisure in Lucknow, steeped in sensory pleasures, luxury, and opulence (Hindi, *vilāsitā*; Urdu, *ʿaiś va ʿiśrat*). In the film, this culture of leisure is personified in the figure of the king, his mood for enjoyment, his pursuit of pleasure, or *śauq*. Ray uses the concept of *śauq* to refer to activities of pleasure and leisure. In fact, *śauq* is often inadequately translated into English as 'hobby', 'interest' or 'vocation'. A more accurate translation would be 'pleasurable leisurely pursuits', which sounds clumsy and excessive to the English ear. The concept is more readily understood if we approach it from the perspective of

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1  Satyajit Ray, *Shatranj ke Khilari/The Chess Players* (1977) 03:59. My translation.

2  The story was also rewritten in Urdu by Premchand under the title "*Śaṭranj kī Bāzī*" (c. 1926).

feeling, in terms of a 'leisurely temperament', or *śauqīn mizāj*.[3] In Ray's portrayal, *śauq* is what scholars of emotions term an *emotion concept*. It is both abstract, in its "relational schemas involving the subject", and concrete, as it concerns "subjective experience" and tangible embodiment in feelings and sensory experiences (Winkielman et al. 2018: 1).

The present study engages critically with emotion concepts like *śauq*, which are situated within complex contextual and cultural frameworks that often remain opaque within the established histories and semantics of cultural-linguistic boundaries. Building on the work of conceptual historians Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier (2016), my analysis is grounded in the understanding that the encounter of cultures often triggers the transformation of concepts. I particularly highlight moments of conceptual transformation of otium, leisureliness, and idleness, as represented in the diverse modern South Asian literary fields of Urdu and Bengali. The primary focus of my corpus rests on literary texts but also includes examples taken from literary history and scholarly debates and discussions. This enables us to gain a meaningful and nuanced understanding of the conceptual and emotional entanglements, and to locate leisureliness firmly within the literary context of South Asia.

To return to Premchand's story, the narrative compresses the prevalent leisurely mood of colonial Lucknow into a tightly woven tale of the two noblemen immersed in playing chess while their city is ravaged by British occupation. In contrast, Ray's cinematic adaptation juxtaposes Premchand's macro-narrative of excessive idleness and oblivious decadence with a micro-narrative which revolves around the king, Wajid Ali, and his leisurely attitude and interests, which ultimately culminates in the loss of his crown. The film elaborates on how this culture of leisure, embodied by the king, leads to the British takeover of Avadh and its capital, Lucknow. Ray locates the king's various cultural-intellectual pursuits in quotidian physicality – ranging from performing dance dramas to composing poetry, praying five times a day, to enjoying amorous rendezvous with his many wives, courtesans, and mistresses. Despite his vivid evocation of the times at the story's onset, Premchand's critique of leisureliness and decadence is clearly asserted in an admonishing narrative tone.[4] Premchand was one of many Indian writers and reformers who drew a direct link between the perceived excessive leisureliness of the aristocracy and the British usurpation of the Indian provinces.

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3   *Mizāj* (Urdu) entails a person's temperament, mood, or disposition.

4   "Lakhna'o 'aiś va 'iśrat ke rang men ḍūbā hu'ā thā" (Lucknow was immersed in hues of opulence), "*Śaṭranj kī Bāzī*" (1983), 108.

In 1856, the East India Company annexed the province of Avadh under the Doctrine of Lapse while Wajid Ali Shah was incarcerated and exiled to Calcutta in the east. The failed Indian rebellion of 1857 marked a watershed for encounters and interactions between Muslim elites in North India and British colonial officials. Simultaneously, as the glorious lights of Delhi and Lucknow diminished, the comparatively young city of Calcutta emerged as the hub of colonial power, as well as the centre for cultural and literary revivals. These historical events had a lasting impact on the transformation of concepts of leisureliness, play, idleness, and otium in late colonial and postcolonial India. As we shall see, they become conceptually entangled and resist their separate definitions in the South Asian literary context.

While play and pleasure are depicted as excessive in both narratives, the indulgence in these practices of enjoyment in a carefree, immersive, and artful manner, as leisurely, is contrasted with the evolving colonial conceptions of utility in Ray's film. Premchand, a renowned progressive writer of the early twentieth century, also foregrounds this contrast, but his critique stems from the particular socio-political obliviousness among the people of Lucknow as they remain immersed in games, enjoyment, and pleasure:

> It was as if the entire nation was consumed with sensual enjoyment (*nafs parasti*). People were blinded by pleasure and intoxication. They had no clue as to what was happening in the world, the inventions in the fields of science and philosophy, or how the Europeans had taken control of the world. Here, people were busy fighting quails and training partridges [...]; boards for games of dice (*causar*) and chess (*śaṭranj*) were spread. [...] The armies on game-boards were being ruthlessly massacred. (Premchand 1983: 108)

On the other hand, Ray's history-inspired cinematic adaptation offers more nuanced ways of exploring leisureliness in the context of colonial North India. The Lakhnavi leisurely pursuits and finery in the arts – of the king and the commoners – are regarded as excessively wasteful by the colonial authorities at this point in history. However, relations between the British and the Indians, and the fascination of colonial officers with 'native' pastimes and lifestyles were not the same throughout the long period of colonisation.[5] Engaging with historical documents, Ray dramatises the political game being played by the colonial authorities around the events of 1857. With designs of the 'take over' of Avadh in place, Lord Dalhousie sends General Outram to investigate Wajid Ali's capacities as king and

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5    See, for example, the painting depicting an officer of the East India Company with Wajid Ali's predecessor, Navab Asaf-ud-Daula (1748–97), engaged in a game of 'fighting cocks'. Artist: Unknown, Tate Britain Gallery. Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, "Portraits of the Nawabs" (2008: 33).

ruler. The film skilfully captures the moment from whence these kinds of leisure-ly pursuits are devalued and transformed, turning Wajid Ali into a "frivolous, effeminate, irresponsible and worthless" ruler, in other words, a "bad king" (Ray 1977). The process of transformation occurs almost instantly, in the framework of a drawn-out dialogue between General Outram, who arrives in Lucknow with the explicit aim of ousting the king from his throne, and the residing Captain Weston, who is not only fluent in the local language but also harbours a certain degree of admiration for the king and his poetry. Up to this point, the king's life-style is portrayed in a manner that evokes awe and wonder – a lifestyle of fulfill-ing leisure in the pursuit of cultural-artistic fineries and pleasure. Outram's sud-den diatribe against Wajid Ali's conduct and temperament as "nonsense" (ibid.) drastically changes the perception of leisureliness in the eyes of the viewer. Criti-cal of Weston's praise for the king, Outram does not see any worth in Wajid Ali's poetry. Weston's hesitant reply is crucial to our understanding: "It doesn't trans-late very well, Sir" (ibid.). It is at this moment that translation, and more impor-tantly, the *limits* of translation, become transparent.

Ray's narrative focuses on this mistranslation as the *problématique* in the cultural encounter between the Lakhnavis and the British, between what is per-ceived as a way of living by one community and a waste of time and resources by another. However, the difference is understood beyond simplistic binaries of colonial relations, complicated through the figure of Weston, who partly inhab-its, and has grown to love the language, poetry, and culture of the locals in Lucknow. Ray's depiction of *śauqīn mizāj*, an artful and leisurely mood or tem-perament, is shown as elusive, only glimpsed in the emotional expressions of Wajid Ali's sadness and despair. The gap in translation, cinematically embodied in Captain Weston's overall hesitancy and uncomfortable silences, reveals breaches in conceptual equivalents, cultural encounters, and semantic equilibri-um, and is often inflected with colonial-western perceptions of an 'Indian' lei-surely lifestyle. At times, such perceptions have been (mis)interpreted as the excessive "idleness" and "indolence" of the "natives" (Parkes 2002: 10, 19, 244); alternately, they have been elevated as the "blessings of leisure unknown to the West", "the Peace that passeth Understanding" (Forster 1947: 261). The disparity continues to widen in the neo-colonial present through similar unidirectional perceptions of leisureliness in South Asia. It is, therefore, crucial to be aware of and address these kinds of conceptual differences within cultural encounters. I propose that we can fruitfully engage with, if not bridge the gap by engaging in close readings of emotion concepts, which inhabit the languages, texts, con-texts, and moods wherein the transfer of ideas occurs.

When placed in a global, transcultural framework, the challenge of accu-rately translating and understanding words, concepts and moods also reveals what Dilip Menon (2022) and others have termed *(in)commensurability*. Menon

argues that it is important to acknowledge the lack of a common epistemological framework, especially when dealing with concepts from non-Euro-American contexts. I do not wish to dismiss the inherent solidity of a concept, but it needs to be acknowledged that in the face of the epistemic brevity of a concept in English or other prevailing Western languages like German and French, concepts in other languages, especially from the erstwhile oppressed cultures, need elaborate parameters of reading and analysis. After all the European processes of knowledge-power nexus, which played a central role in conceptualising the Orient, the other, the non-western, was established within extensive procedures of "officializing", which systematically contributed to the project of the Empire.[6] To broaden the horizon of academic inquiries towards decolonial, global comparisons of concepts, we need to engage in "transdisciplinary conversations", which must necessarily be "multilingual" (Menon 2). I agree that rather than focusing on making concepts accessible to a global/Western readership, we, as scholars, must rethink how we approach complex concepts like *śauq*, leisureliness, and otium. This study seeks to contextualise the debates and conversations that marked a watershed in the way concepts of leisureliness/idleness were perceived, negotiated, and represented in literary modes, particularly in modern prose in Urdu and Bengali. How can such approaches contribute towards a global understanding of a concept? What role does literature play in these conceptual transformations and in reading history? These questions are doubly significant, as engagement with the literary itself remains an experiential expression of emotion concepts like *śauq*, leisureliness, and otium; simultaneously, the literary history of leisureliness allows us to read (and write) a history that is largely missing from official records.

## Aims and Objectives: Rethinking Leisure and Idleness

The present study provides ways of rethinking leisure, idleness, and indolence from a South Asian literary perspective by focusing on the aspect of leisure that can be expressed in the conceptual-emotional study of otium. Depending on context, otium is broadly understood as leisure, idleness, or indolence. I aim to show how concepts like leisure and idleness can be liberated from the established binary with work that continues to predominate in modern Western industrial-capitalist societies but now constitutes a larger narrative of global work culture. External perceptions of leisure commonly appear in either nega-

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6    See Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (1996), 3.

tive or positive registers, such as idleness, laziness, sloth, and indolence, often emphasising a class, gender, community, or racial bias; alternately, they are exalted and exoticised, reaffirming these biases (Fludernik 2017: 133–34, also Fludernik 2014: 130–32). Not only do colonial perceptions of 'Indian leisure' carry biased allegation (associated with the 'myth of the lazy native') or exoticisation (an orientalist exaltation of 'Eastern' leisure), but the very use of these categories reinforces the homogenisation of 'India'/South Asia and its cultures and languages under a sweeping gaze of the 'West'. In fact, such a sweeping gaze glances beyond the borders of the Indian subcontinent and generally falls "to the east of the east-west binary", encompassing several deeply heterogeneous cultures in an act of marginalisation or othering.[7] To challenge these complex misconceptions, mistranslations, and biases, conceptual studies need to be approached from the language-literatures of the regions and cultures to enable bi-directional processes of knowledge production and place such studies within a global framework. The present work therefore engages with a variety of modern, regional South Asian language-literatures, namely Bengali and Urdu, as two distinct literary traditions of colonial and postcolonial South Asia. Additionally, the aim is to demonstrate how the study of a concept in a multilingual South Asian context can enrich and contribute to the field of conceptual history, a methodology rooted in the study of European modernity that initially focused on the transformation of concepts in monolingual contexts.

As historians of Global Conceptual History argue, concepts do not exist in isolation but evolve through encounters (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 2). These encounters continue to impact how concepts are perceived and how they function within communities. They also play a central role in informing community identities. It is often through these encounters that social and historical concepts undergo change, and such changes are reflected in the semantic transformations of concepts. While a semantic transformation can accompany a conceptual change in certain cases, in other cases, a concept's value can only be expressed through words that have now become obsolete or are used differently, a process that Quentin Skinner has termed "rhetorical redescription" (Skinner 2016: 138). For instance, in the context of this study, the archaic Latin term *otium* signifies a leisurely state or experiential attitude. It can be rendered in words as diverse as idleness, leisureliness, indolence, sloth, rest, repose, reprieve, and even peace. While the term 'otium' is no longer in use, owing to the sharp distinctions between leisure and work following the ruptures of modernity, it retains its subjectivity as a function of the self, a state of leisureliness embodied in a mood that

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7  Melis Hafez, *Inventing Laziness: The Culture of Productivity in Late Ottoman Society* (2022), vii–viii.

transgresses the borders between formalised work and leisure. The remnants of this inherent subjectivity of the concept can be traced to the emergence of eclectic ideas like work-life balance or flexibility in work cultures. As far as emotional expressions are concerned, we encounter otium in lexemes like idle, slow-paced, and indolent, to name but a few. A historical-semantic analysis is, in and of itself, not sufficient to grasp the ambivalence inherent in the concept of otium. Conceptual inquiry needs to overcome the constraints of semantic boundaries and consider complementary ways of finding meanings. The central question of this book is: what happens to concepts that are identifiable but do not have adequate semantic markers? Acknowledging the necessity of intertwining conceptual history with the history and study of emotions as proposed by Pernau and Rajamani (2016), this book aims to conceptualise emotional manifestations of otium in studying literary texts and contexts in colonial South Asia and postcolonial India. It also foregrounds the significance of contemplation in literary practices – reading, writing, reflecting, and composing, as emotional engagement beyond semantic analysis.

The concept of leisure that we are familiar with, it has been argued, is an early modern European invention following the ruptures of modernity (Burke 1995: 137–40). But the nature of rupture (or modernity, for that matter) is not uniform in varying contexts. In nineteenth-century India under firm colonial grip, the characteristics and effects of this rupture were manifold, resulting in a compressed form of modernisation[8], where new conceptualisations of work and leisure in several colonial societies were imposed rather than invented. These impositions, far from being unidirectional, drew great engagement and responses from writers, thinkers, and reformers under the colonial regime. Nevertheless, the intensity of impositions and responses took place in a short, sudden, and condensed manner. These condensed processes can be seen to introduce and, more significantly, normalise alien notions of work and non-work, along with value judgments and colonial/racial bias and prejudice. The new notions of labour and leisure had to be adapted immediately, leading to a pervasive feeling of confusion and alienation in the South Asian context. What impact did these impositions have on the perceptions of leisureliness and idleness for South Asian actors? How did vernacular semantics like *furṣat* (opportune leisure), *ārām* (rest), *abakāś* (space/opportune time), *abasar* (opportune time), *śān-*

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8   The notion of 'compressed modernisation' is defined as a "civilizational condition in which economic, political, social and/or cultural changes occur in an extremely condensed manner in respect to both time and space". See Chang Kyun-Sup, "The second modern condition? Compressed modernity as internalised reflexive cosmopolitization" (2010).

*ti* (peaceful rest) and *śauq/śakh* (leisurely pursuits) respond to these binaries? This question acquires a heightened significance as historical semantics directs us to parallel, multiple connotations of lexemes like *abasar* that include anecdotal meanings like a pause caused by rain or a meeting held in secret.[9] Such anecdotal connotations, along with their meanings of leisure, opportunity, or a suitable time, give us a glimpse of the considerable extent to which words and their meanings were regulated and adapted in their use within colonial impositions of compressed modernity and concise dictionaries. Identifying colonial rule itself as an overarching hindrance to conditions of freedom, leisureliness, and rest for an indigenous population and their knowledge systems, this study seeks to map the story of leisure, its various manifestations, registers, and trajectories in South Asia. A focused gaze on the enormous transformations in colonial impositions and disciplinary measures also leads us to clues in understanding the modern disciplining of leisure that emerged from the Industrial Revolution. The simultaneity of the age of colonial conquests and the age of industrialisation is, after all, not a mere historical coincidence but played off each other, as forces of colonial capitalism were deeply intertwined with the near-criminalisation of idleness.

While conceptually, the contrast and connection between otium/leisure/idleness and work are significant, the present study aims to emphasise the conceptual differences in the two states or attitudes – i.e., *leisurely* (or idle, lazy) as informal and relatively free of official obligations; and *utilitarian* as efficient, official, and formal. These attitudes are central to my reading, both historically as well as conceptually. Work, too, can be leisurely (cf. Chapters 3 and 5), and leisure experiences, in turn, are conceived (increasingly) as more formalised and disciplined, motivated towards self-enhancement, often aiming at increased productivity. This difference lies at the heart of the mistranslation portrayed in Ray's film. Through the narrative, we witness how colonial authorities strive to bring 'productivity', 'efficiency' and 'brevity' into the leisurely Lakhnavi chronotope of enjoyment, play, and the pursuit of pleasure. These efforts are realised materially through the postal system, the railways, and even through the introduction of English rules in the game of chess, designed to end the game quickly.[10] The central tension of the narrative in Ray's film is between the lei-

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9    See entry in *Student's Bengali to English Dictionary: with words, compound words, phrases, idioms, and proverbs.* Ed. Ashu Tosh Dev (1967): *abasar*. See also, Farha Noor (2021), 305–6.

10    According to the new rules, pawns reaching the opposite end of the board could result in the reinstatement of the queen (among other powerful pieces), resulting in a quicker endgame.

surely mood or *śauqīn mizāj* of Lucknow and the hurrying pace of colonial modernity. Between these two emotional attitudes, the concept of 'play' remains misunderstood in the portrayals of the East and the West.

These misunderstandings formulated the central discourses of the nineteenth-century vernacular literary fields in South Asia. Although there is a certain scarcity of studies on leisure concepts in this context, the present research demonstrates that modern Urdu and Bengali writers were deeply invested in discourses of idleness and leisureliness as they witnessed a transformation in the way of life after the decisive events of 1857. These transformations in life are reflected in literary transformations, responses, and innovations. It is important to note that the responses to this watershed event are seen to frequently vary, as the impact of colonial relations was not felt uniformly throughout the length and breadth of the subcontinent. More importantly, literary expressions and writing during this phase reveal a multiplicity in how their production was linked to specific colonial contexts and demonstrate varying attitudes towards colonial authorities (Harder 2022: 413). Conceptualisations of leisure/labour have to be read and provoked from fresh angles to address the gaps in the narrative. Histories of leisure, although scant, have been analysed in the context of colonial South Asia through a study of social practices like Dipesh Chakraborty's work on the Bengali sociality of *āḍḍā*, or Sumit Sarkar's study of *cāk'ri* (salaried jobs). Recent scholars have also shown interest in and engagement with notions of pleasure, particularly that of *mazā* or enjoyment. Shapiro & Anjaria (2020), in their edited journal issue on *mazā*/"mazaa", have proposed the feeling itself as a methodology based on thoughtful reflexivity and sensuous viscerality. In a latest edited volume, Seema Bawa (2023) and other contributors have drawn attention to conceptions of and attitudes to leisure in various societies in South Asia, spanning the early and premodern history of the region. Acknowledging these significant studies, the present work picks up the story of leisure in South Asia when it becomes a highly contested concept in the aftermath of colonial encounters between communities with asymmetrical power over language policies and knowledge production. In effect, this study focuses on the concept of leisure when it attains the status of a 'counter-concept' (Koselleck 2004a), conceptualised against the idea of progress, and as markers of community identity, transforming the concept into the myth ('of the lazy native' (Alatas 1997). The book highlights literary discourses on leisure, idleness, and otium in colonial and postcolonial South Asia, focusing on the concept's modern history.

This attention towards the literary, the historical, and the conceptual is inherently inextricable from the study of emotions. I accentuate the macro- and the micro-narratives around idleness and leisureliness through a methodology that engages in both conceptual history and an exploration into emotions. As

the brief reading of Ray's film shows, at the heart of the discourses of leisure, enjoyment, or idleness are emotions, feelings, temperament, mood, and atmosphere. Complex emotions like nostalgia, melancholy, and haunting (among others) are read here as manifestations of otium. The argument, however, is that these emotions are not universal or *sui generis* but that each emotion needs to be explored in its physiological, psychological, and social aspects in its context, text, and language. The danger of anachronism in understanding emotions, as has been cautioned by Thomas Dixon (2020) and others, should also be extended to the pitfalls of anachorism.[11] The present study engages with the elusive leisurely mood with which much of modern Bengali and Urdu literature is preoccupied. It approaches the rapidly transforming concept of otium in South Asia through an enquiry into emotions, which, in turn, inform modern India's literary history. My analysis argues for rethinking the ways in which leisure concepts are understood today, globally. The context of colonial South Asia and post-colonial India can be instructive for scholars of otium in a global context, as it foregrounds *speed/acceleration* and *discrimination/exclusion*, both nexuses constituting central aspects of the concept. Leisure and leisureliness have become associated with notions of privilege today on a global scale. Simultaneously, with the deep impact that technology and (social) media has on people's lives and time in the present, ideas of leisure and labour often seem to dissolve. Yet, leisureliness, idleness, and laziness remain integral factors in quotidian, emotional, and physical life for individuals and peoples across the globe.

## Otium as Concept: Definitions, Translations, and Transformations

The semantic absence of 'otium' pertains to the functioning of modern capitalist societies, and simultaneously, to the interdependence of social history and conceptual history, as theorised by Reinhart Koselleck (2016 b: 71–72). In European Antiquity, *otium* was used to connote a 'reprieve', or 'retirement' from one's daily business. *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1968) lists *otium* as "Unoccupied or spare time (as needed for doing something)", "the time", "the leisure". It locates the experience of otium as "at leisure, in peace, undisturbed". It relates to ideas of work as "freedom from business or work" and appreciates the indulgence in otium as "devoted to cultural pursuits". Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi have contextualised otium in contemporary times, describing it as a scenario that allows "individuals to take account of themselves, to focus on their subjectivity" and "frequently result in experiences of transcendence from

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11   I thank Margrit Pernau for drawing attention to this significant discussion.

immediate trivial and mundane concerns"; simultaneously, such scenarios "can also provide a space of communal interaction, sociality, bonding, recreation" (Fludernik and Nandi 2014: 4). While the English words leisure, idleness, and indolence can at times (depending upon context) express experiences of otium, the use of adjectives and adverbs in English, like *idle, leisurely, restful*, or *indolent* are often utilised to express similar experiences. Simultaneously, adjectives of otium can take up quite different registers. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) lists the adjective *otiose*, as "[a]t leisure or at rest; unemployed, idle; inactive, indolent, lazy", but also refers to something as "[h]aving no practical function; idle, superfluous, useless" ("Otiose").[12] Hence, depending on context, otium and its semantic significance remain contested and ambivalent.

Often perceived as the opposite of *negotium* (busyness, active life), otium denotes a sense of time that is felt and experienced as free, leisurely, peaceful, undisturbed, and idle. With reference to cultural pursuits, it is closely linked with the feeling of enjoyment or pleasure, attained in the leisurely pursuit of cultural activities. Literary activities – reading, writing, and composing poetry – are also perceived as significant activities of otium or as encompassing experiences of otium, as "practices and enjoyment of creative leisure" (Fludernik and Nandi 2014: 4). However, the reflective and contemplative mood of otium – for instance in the experience of literary creativity, cannot only be a positive feeling. Melancholy, too, has been read as a significant manifestation of otium (Zirfas 2007). Historically, otium has been associated with experiences within concepts of religion and asceticism, love and obsession, poetry, art, as well as medicine and healing. The experience of time, as unhurried, felt as a duration rather than as progressive, chronological, and sequential time is thus central to the concept. Brian Vickers (1990) has shown that the essential opposite of otium, in antiquity, was not *negotium* but, in fact, *officium* – a concept that entailed obligation, formality and compulsion to work. In the contemporary context, Gregor Dobler has argued that the opposite of otium is not work but alienation/"*Entfremdung*" (Dobler 2014: 68). These proposed dichotomies already assert that an understanding of otium requires a deeper appreciation of its experiential and emotional qualities, along with context, rather than mere recognition of semantic affinities and disparities.

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12    Julian Barnes's recent novel, *The Only Story*, uses "otiose" to mean superfluous (2018) 73.

Leisure has increasingly become linked to ideas of recreation, consumption and filling one's free time with 'leisure activities'.[13] Idleness, the target of several Enlightenment philosophers like Emmanuel Kant and John Locke, has been labelled a social taboo in the face of accelerated modernity and accentuated, escalated productivity. And yet, in various contexts, for example, in the early Victorian era, both leisure and idleness could be used interchangeably and in semantic proximity (Liedke 2018: 19). This breach in semantics emerges from a marked change in the social history of leisure, idleness, and indolence. The most significant social upheaval in this context was the Industrial Revolution in England, which corresponded with the peak of colonial imperialism, reaching new heights with Victorian puritanism. The modern split of time as productive time or 'working hours' and unproductive time or free time (increasingly meaning recreational time) is perceived as a consequence of the "fundamental discontinuity or the great divide between pre-industrial and industrial society".

> The modern distinction between the ideas of work and leisure, like the regular alternation of work and leisure, was a product of industrial capitalism. Pre-industrial societies had festivals (together with informal and irregular breaks from work), while industrial societies have leisure, weekends and vacations. The emergence of leisure is, therefore, part of the process of modernisation. In other words, the history of leisure is discontinuous. (Burke 1995: 173)

Peter Burke formulates the modern idea of leisure through the binding pact of modern society, entangled with Michel Foucault's concept of "discipline" and Norbert Elias's concept of "civilisation" (1995: 149). In Burke's understanding, the rise of leisure as a modern concept relates to these two very modern concerns, circumscribing the idea of "*regulation*" (ibid.). In the now regulated, heavily scheduled and categorised version of time, the experience of *play* undergoes discipline[14], and otium or otiose forms of leisure and their emotional expression, i.e., leisureliness, are perceived as lost to modernity. The relationship of play with otium and leisure is complex and intricate; in certain circumstances, otium allows for play and in other situations, an experience of otium can emerge from play. Both can be contrasted with notions of obligations but not necessarily with seriousness. But play, like leisure, or the semantic concepts signified, have come to acquire a register of opposition to work, which has

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13   See, for example, the convergence of leisure studies with research on tourism, marketing, and sports. Rojek, Shaw & Veal, "Introduction" (2006), 1, 6–8, 15–16. See also, Part 4, 335–415.

14   See Burke (1995), 149. "In the 'disciplinary society', even play has to be subject to rules saying when, where, and among whom 'it is permissible'".

acquired a centrality in attitudes to *living* and *doing*; consequently, play and leisure became marginalised notions, acquiring registers of trifle and slight. They have also increasingly become designed, as Johan Huizinga has claimed, as utilitarian in their functions of rejuvenation and recreation towards increased productivity, thus disciplining the 'leisurely' and the 'playfulness' – the essence of the concepts (Huizinga 1949: 2–5). Thus, the sense of time with which one could do as one willed, enjoy idle and restful leisure, indulge in play, a sense of time-space that is free of obligations, an opportunity for contemplation or immersion in pleasurable cultural pursuits, or time with which one may do nothing, now seems to have transformed socially into a relic, rendering otium as an anachronic concept. Nevertheless, as the above phrases reveal, it is not *time* that is the active agent in these transformations, but a function of free will, of the sovereignty of the self, which is disciplined and regulated within a disciplinary society. And the period of the Industrial Revolution did not merely coincide with imperial prowess for England and Europe, but as mentioned before, was directly dependent on acquiring material and labour resources from the expansive colonies; the Industrial Revolution in England must be seen as a process that went hand in hand with colonial capitalism (Chapter 1).

Against these assertions of disciplinary norms imposed by industrial development and civilisational modernity that continue to impact our present-day notions of temporality, the concept of otium is often found to resonate in its ambivalence with varying experiences of idleness, leisure, immersion, play, and freedom to one's will, outside official obligations. Sometimes, semantically, such concepts can be seen to persist as categorised within culturally exclusive terminology like the Italian *dolce far niente* or the German *Muße*, while remaining subject to descriptive elaboration in English, in a tussle between idleness and leisure, contrasted with influential values of utilitarianism. Contemporary discourses on leisure and leisurely states in the 'West' have harnessed much attention owing to theories of acceleration/deceleration and studies on work-life balance, well-being, and an increasing emphasis on the need for a slow-paced life.[15] Simultaneously, loose, unbound, and unstructured leisurely experiences and practices are considered to be the hallmark of the self-perception of South Asian, or as often branded by themselves, '*desī*'/*deśī*' (from the country, *deś* [of origin]) people. Such experiences are frequently illustrated in the popu-

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[15]   Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (2013); Judy Wacjman, *Pressed for Time. The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism* (2015); Robert Skidelsky & Edward Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough? The Love of Money and the Case for the Good Life* (2012) are a few examples.

lar practices of *āḍḍā, gap*, or leisurely banter/chatting[16]; *āvārahgardī* or *tafrīḥ*, i.e., loitering or strolling/walking leisurely and aimlessly[17]; and *maḥfil* or an assembly/meeting to discuss art, literature, music, and/or poetry, a gathering.[18] Expressions like the Punjabi (but equally intelligible to Hindi and Urdu speakers) *vehlā*, the Bengali *lyāḍ* and the Urdu/Hindi *khālī/khāli* are used more commonly and colloquially in the present, in a (self-)derogatory style to refer to being/feeling idle. Practices and elements of play in the South Asian context, often harking back to allegedly excessive playfulness of the erstwhile decadent classes, are negatively alluded to in collocations like *khel-tamāśā* (play and spectacle). At the same time, significant lexemes of leisure like *furṣat* are used to emphasise its absence (*furṣat nahīṇ*, to not have the opportunity or leisure). The widely familiar emotional-experiential lexeme *mazā*, on the other hand, reveals how playfulness (experientially articulated as 'fun' in English) and sensual/sensory enjoyment are intricately linked with notions of taste (as one of the meanings of *mazā*) (Kabir 2020: 243–45). Taste – with its abstractions and sensory enjoyment – has also been traditionally used to reflect appreciation of literary, artistic, and creative expressions, in the aesthetics of *rasa*. A global conceptual history of leisure and related concepts thus needs to appreciate encounters and transformative processes as intertwined with emotions beyond historical semantics.

The more formal aspects of contemporary Western understanding of leisure ideas, like work-life balance, are often anachoric to realities and discourses of leisure in South Asia, catering, however, to a certain educated upper/middle-class milieu. In the West, particularly in specific Western European contexts, the need for a work-leisure balance is accentuated in the booming leisure industry, now seen to cater towards experiences of quality leisure time, not just filled with activities and consumption but with tailored wellness programs, courses on mindfulness, meditation, and trips to 'ashram-retreats'[19], often ori-

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16    See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "*Adda*: A History of Sociality" (2000), 180–213. For an elaborate picture of literary, urban, and rural formulations of *āḍḍā*, see the Bengali compendium, *Bāṅālir Āḍḍā* (2014 [2009]).

17    Although I do not agree with these labels, Anna Suvorova identifies these as variants of *flânerie* or *derive*. See Suvorova, *Lahore: Topophilia of Place and Space* (2011), 12, 141–42.

18    Suvorova (2011), 157. In a Bengali context, see Kumarprasad Mukhopadhyay's memoir of cultural-literary-musical gatherings, *Mahphil* (1960).

19    'Ashram' in this phrase is loaned from the Sanskrit *āśrama*, meaning hermitage, a space for ascetics, translated into contemporary retreats that are designed to enable a complete break from mundane concerns of quotidian, hectic life. Such an adaptation

ented towards ideas of self-optimisation and enhancement of productivity.[20] For many so-called Western leisure-seekers, perceptions of the East are still often pictured (as well as critiqued) in popular imagination, literature, and cinema, as projected onto images of the Himalayan sublime, in Buddhist/Hindu/Sufi ascetic retreats and 'Eastern'/'oriental' wisdom towards release and detachment from a structured, accelerated life of professional and social ambitions. Simultaneously, the popular perception of leisure as a quality experience for many in contemporary South Asia (and other parts of what is perceived as the 'global south') has been propelled by representations of the wandering traveller backpacking through Europe, an image of the 'good life', holidaying in the 'first' world, to offer some deliberate stereotypes. More significantly, in the 'east', popular ideas of a successful and fulfilling professional life have drawn heavily from the stringency of rigid work structures and certain formal notions of 'professionalism' prevalent in the West. Many of these conceptual exchanges and perceptions in the wake of global capitalism and globalisation have a more extended history, which can be traced back to the heydays of European colonisation. These perceptions continue to influence our ideas of leisure, work, idleness, efficiency, and a fulfilling life. Concepts related to otium, therefore, not only undergo constant change through cultural and linguistic contact, but these encounters also continue to create new (or reiterate extant) notions of culture and community.

A significant aspect of contemporary leisure discourses (at least in the West) is its stark opposition to work. This results in two distinct and significant aspects of leisure today. As work and its formalness, i.e., the official obligation of work, has become central to a Western – arguably, global – value of life today, leisure, too, has increasingly become formulaic and categorised to be experienced in structured ways. Secondly, through such structuring of leisure, it is now designed to function as an experience of self-enhancement, motivated towards increased productivity. I argue that this difference in the functionality of leisure is central to its history of encounter and exclusivity. While experiences and practices of leisure and idleness are ubiquitous in literary, artistic, and quotidian representations from colonial and postcolonial South Asia, as modern concepts, they have been heavily influenced by colonial and neo-colonial impositions regarding work and its formalities, inspired by English ideas of utilitarianism, efficiency, and brevity in the colonial and post-colonial context, as well

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of retreat and its role in enhancing writing can be seen in the German conception of a '*Schreibaschram'* or writing retreat. https://schreibaschram.de/en/ accessed on 24th June 2018.

20    See, for instance, Inga Wilke, *Muße als Strategie* (2023).

as European and American conceptions of increased productivity in the neo-liberal globalised context. With the rise of global capitalism, these influences have led straight towards further discrimination and bias in their perception. And yet, as earlier discussions have shown, what is understood by leisure or leisureliness in the West is often expressed and perceived differently in parts of the Indian subcontinent, and *vice versa*. This difference, too, has a history of encounters and conceptual transformations. This study focuses on that history to arrive at contemporary discussions on leisure in the South Asian context; it restricts the literary study within colonial and post-colonial India and to literary texts and contexts in Urdu and Bengali.

The intention is not to look for a lost concept prevalent in European Antiquity but to recognise the concept's potential as not merely historical but as located within the function of the self's awareness, feelings, and relations with others – human, non-human, and the environment. Although otium may have undergone semantic shifts in its variations in European languages that have had lasting impact on colonial disciplines, dictionaries, and discourses, it continues to manifest in different patterns, experiences, and practices; one may safely say, globally. These patterns and practices can vary from the desire for *Waldeinsamkeit* in German to the experience of deep immersion in composing and listening to *rāgā*s in a South Asian context, from solitary *flânerie* in the streets of Paris to *āvārahgardī* (idle loitering, wandering) through the old walled city of Lahore. It can be traced in big decisions like staring ahead at a year of one's life with no plans whatsoever, refusing to sit at a desk for the next three hundred and sixty-five days, giving up on urban, hectic, competitive life and relocating to the countryside to live close to nature as has been marked as a recent lifestyle trend. It can also be recognised in the small (in)voluntary (in)actions like reminiscing the simpler, more leisurely, 'good old days' and longing for an imagined time of idle freedom while simultaneously losing track of the present. It can be *tasted* in the experience of going to collect mangoes in summer and being lulled into a stupor by the fragrance of the orchard, in spending a potentially productive day in the pursuit of being idle, in feeling the need to be a recluse, and do nothing at all.

Variations of otium as predominant emotion concepts have indeed existed and resurfaced from time to time in multiple languages and cultures. The Portuguese *saudade*, the Turkish *hüzün* and the reminiscing of a time gone by in Urdu – *guzrā huʾā/ guzaśtah zamāne kī yād* – do not entail the same meaning. Still, if unpacked in their emotional contexts, they can be seen to overlap in what they connote as shared feelings, entangled in conceptual overlap, and can initiate dialogue from their particular and global contexts. While such concepts vary in linguistic and socio-historical contexts, concepts like acceleration, occupational burnout, and chronic dissatisfaction have attained global resonance as

work and social life see patterns of repeating homogenisation. This is not to return to the binary of work *versus* otium, but to highlight that far from being lost, concepts like otium, semantically identifiable or not, need to be explored and analysed more than ever. As this book demonstrates, although under-represented as a semantic concept (equivalent to the Latin otium), depictions, emotions, and debates surrounding discourses of idleness, laziness, indolence, and leisure are ubiquitous in South Asian colonial and post-colonial literary and intellectual contexts.

## Research Contexts

Studies on concepts of leisure, laziness, or idleness within the South Asian context are few. It is imperative to acknowledge various conceptual complexities as well as their transformation and translation within cultural encounters, especially since such encounters tend to be highly asymmetrical within the nexus of colonialism. Most discussions on topics related to leisure in the context of colonial India are influenced by the history of English attitudes to the binary of work *versus* leisure/idleness, transferred to a context that may not have dwelled in such binaries before (Thomas 1965: 98–99).[21] While colonial travellers and writers have often subscribed to the 'myth of the lazy native'[22], there has been constant fascination regarding the *blessings of leisure unknown to the West*, as has historically been demonstrated in the colonial coinage of the term *nabob*. Originating in the Arabic *nāʾib* (governor), the English declension emerged out of the aristocratic Indian/Persianate *navāb*, and the Portuguese *Nabâbo*. While it then became associated with a rank title, the term was frequently used in the eighteenth century to refer to English officers who gathered surplus wealth and social status during their service in the East India Company.[23] It began to be used pejoratively to refer to someone who had turned corrupt and licentious owing to their excessive wealth.[24] This is an apt example of how British colonial authorities and their epistemic encounters in India frequently led to misun-

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21   See Chapter 1 for an elaborate discussion.

22   On the discourse of this historical recrimination against forces the ideology of colonial capitalism, see Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977), 1–18.

23   See entry under "Nabób" in *Hobson-Jobson*. Eds. Burnell, Yule and Crooke, (1903 [1886]),   610.   https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/hobsonjobson_query.py?page=612 accessed on 18th March 2019.

24   This connotation became emphasised with Samuel Foote's comedy *The Nabob* (first performed in 1772). The term became emblematic of the scandalous, profligate India-

derstanding, mistranslation, and transformation of concepts. While detailed discussions follow in the various chapters of the book, I wish to point out here that the history of leisure vis-à-vis colonialism is multifaceted, entangled, and heterogeneous, to say the least, and that one must be cautious against generalising and homogenising the colonial experience/encounter.

A conceptual history of otium needs to locate two parallel semantic processes. The first one is the analysis of lexemes for otium in the linguistic-cultural context: this can vary from the simple use of the words *furṣat* or *abasar*/*avasar* – intelligible to speakers of Urdu, Bengali and Hindi as the leisure or opportunity for something – to words in the semantic field like *ārām* or rest/reprieve, to more complex concepts like the already explored Urdu *śauq*, rendered as *śakh* in Bengali. The second is the more significant and challenging task of investigating how such lexemes are deployed rhetorically to depict experiences of otium (if they do) in the literary texts studied. Such an exercise can yield fascinating results: for example, in Premchand's already discussed story written in 1924, contextualising 1857, a conceptual critique of leisurely excess is accompanied by the use of the lexeme "*furṣat*"/opportune leisure in collocation with the absence of rest/opportunity from the obsession with leisure-activities like playing chess. He uses *furṣat* and *mauqā* (opportunity) as words to describe their absence or negation due to the characters' fixation with the game: "*khāne kī furṣat nahīṉ?*" (no leisure to eat?) (c.1926: 109). Conceptual developments thus need to be studied, focusing on the socio-political context and literary-cultural mood portrayed in the texts. Conceptual studies then need to go beyond the analysis of lexemes and delve into the study of emotions that inhabit the concepts in their contexts (Noor 2021: 301–6). This is also in keeping with the study of otium, which repeatedly reveals the ambivalence of the term rather than a simplistic, binary, and redundant reading of the concept as merely 'positive' leisure or 'negative' idleness.

The present study emerges from the context of the Collaborative Research Cluster (SFB or *Sonderforschungsbereich*) 1015 "Otium"/*Muße* at the University of Freiburg.[25] Through the two phases of research (funded by the German Research Foundation/DFG) for eight years (2013–16; 2017–20), the cluster has documented a complex, richly ambivalent, and varied understand-

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returned officer, the 'Oriental despot' during the trial of Warren Hastings, often referred to as the worst of the *nabobs*. See, for example, Michael Edwardes, *Warren Hastings: King of the Nabobs* (1976). See also, Tillman Nechtman, *Nabobs* (2010), 146–55; Smylitopoulos (2012), 11; and Fludernik & Nandi (2014), 7.

25   See the website of the cluster: https://www.sfb1015.uni-freiburg.de/de (accessed on 24th October 2023).

ing of otium. Within the cluster, participation in the sub-project G4, "Leisure in Contemporary Indian Fiction", and research collaboration with Monika Fludernik and Melina Munz have been instrumental. Their studies focusing on narratives of otium in post-colonial Anglophone novels from India have acted as an accompanying as well as contrasting research on otium in the context of colonial South Asia; their findings have informed the present study to a great extent.[26] According to their findings, otium or entangled expressions of nostalgic longing, inaction and ennui, aesthetic immersion, and ideas of uselessness seem to resurface and recur in post-Independence Indian English novels by writers like Sunetra Gupta, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhuri, and others. The present work formulates a dialogue with their research, locating itself within the study of concepts and ideas in the field of literary studies in and literary history of Modern South Asian languages. It argues that literary discussions and formulations of otium in the modern languages (Bengali and Urdu) do not only engage in similar (and at times different) conceptualisations of modernity in recent instances but have been engaged with these themes since (and as a consequence of the encounters during) the colonial period; in fact, several recent perceptions of otium in the Indian context emerge from the colonial period. Tracing that history (in a restricted manner so as to be feasible) and unpacking the various emotional manifestations of the concept, I argue, can contribute to realising a genealogy of otium, leisure, and idleness in the South Asian context.

The cluster's research emerged out of concentrated themes like concepts, spatiality, figures, boundaries, chronotopes, and practices. It focused on studies of otium or idleness concerning spatial and temporal dimensions[27], experiences of productive work, unintended productivity, and entertainment[28], and as a con-

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26    Monika Fludernik, "Nostalgia for Otiose Leisure: Laying Claim to an Indian Tradition of Otium" (2019), "Narrating Otium—A Narratology of Leisure?" (2021), "In the Twilight of Nostalgia: Ambivalences of Leisure, Patriarchy and Genre in two Classic Muslim Novels" (2021); Melina Munz, "Village Idyll? The Blending of Work and Otium in Contemporary Indian Fiction on Rural Life" (2020), "Leisurely Being in the City as a Critique of the Functionalist Modern City Space in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* and Navtej Sarna's *We Weren't Lovers Like That*" (2021). See also Munz's dissertation, *The Promise of Purposelessness: Alternative Temporalities and Experiences of Otium in Contemporary Indian Fiction in English* (submitted 2020).

27    See, for example, the perception of spatial experience over a consciousness of progressive time in Günter Figal, "Die Räumlichkeit der Muße" (2014), 30–31.

28    Gregor Dobler, "Muße und Arbeit" (2014), 54–68; Dobler, Tauschek, Vollstädt & Wilke "Einleitung", *Produktive Unproduktivität* (2020).

cept transgressing free time and leisure time[29] (among several volumes of research output on the topic). The present study has developed, in several ways, from discussions within this impressive body of research and recurs to them when necessary. However, charting a divergent course, my study emphasises the centrality of emotions to the concept and focuses on the field of modern South Asian literary studies in conjunction with the conceptual history of otium. In doing so, it traverses a parallel cultural-linguistic context and asks new questions about the conceptual study of otium in the context of literature. Acknowledging the indispensability of the theoretical angles that the Research Cluster has focused on, I argue for a fresh methodology, approaching the study through an exploration of the emotional manifestations of otium. For example, nostalgia for leisureliness that is now perceived as lost is a recurring emotion within which leisure discourses can be firmly located.[30] I emphasise the need for conceptualising otium in its emotional manifestations within literary expressions. Reading emotional manifestations of otium as expressed in emotion concepts like topophilia, melancholia, mourning and inactivity, the romance of a leisurely lifestyle, and being haunted by memories of (and the absence of) idle pleasures – can lead to relevant and significant meanings of otium as it undergoes upheavals and transformations on spatial and temporal trajectories.

Broadening the scope of research on otium, the present study aims at a conceptual history of otium, for which it focuses on the transformations of several concepts related to otium while engaging with modern literature in Bengali and Urdu as the field and source of study; but as we shall see, the literary, too, has remarkable overlaps with otium, infusing the concept with a theoretical complexity. My attempt here has been to reframe the research questions surrounding the study of otium in order to transcend boundaries enforced by semantics, languages, and philosophies that limit the study in non-European contexts. Thus, in several ways, the present work aims to be an act of translation, which also entails transgression. This translation is not aimed merely at translating otium in the context of South Asia (from Europe to Asia, or the other way around) but at locating it in the broader context of cultural encounters to enable a 'global history' (Schulz-Forberg 2014: 1). This is attained in the parallel translation of otium in its various emotional manifestations, a line of enquiry that is surprisingly understudied and, as this study reveals, can be instructive in understanding the concept beyond linguistic and cultural bound-

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29    Jochen Gimmel & Tobias Keiling. "Einleitung" & "Konzepte der Muße", *Konzepte der Muße* (2016).

30    See also Fludernik's works on nostalgia, ref. f.n. 27. See Munz dissertation chapter, "Nostalgia for the Possibility to Experience Otium?"

aries. Drawing on the expansive and inspiring work of historian Margrit Pernau in the context of emotions and concepts in South Asia, the argument is that taking from the toolbox of conceptual history, questions regarding colonial and contemporary conditions can be reframed and responded to while asserting the need to remain sensitive to text, context, language, and mood. At the same time, I would further wish to provoke the question – what do such re-framings and responses from different epistemological traditions bring to the arguably 'Western' field of the study of concepts? Can a global conceptual history reorient our understanding of 'concepts' themselves?

My work is also inspired by the specific style of comparative study of South Asian languages and literatures that Hans Harder engages with. If not rigorously comparative in analysis (for in-depth comparisons need adequate contextual equilibrium rather than bring in forceful comparisons), the aim is to offer a comprehensive and nuanced overview of South Asian literary texts and contexts so as to create a platform from where reflective comparisons can be made possible, within a global or transcultural framework. For example, in Harder's essay on "Urbanity in the Vernacular" (2016), the global discourse of Urbanity is explored through various genres in several modern South Asian literatures – Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, and Marathi – to investigate the possibility of an "alternative urbanism" (Harder 2016: 435). I find such an approach not only encouraging in its analytical scope but also in how it contributes to the disciplinary formulations in the context of South Asian literary studies (as a distinct discipline with multiple complexities and nuanced variations) and its resonance in a global and interdisciplinary framework. Alternately, the restriction in such discipline-based study is seen, often, in the focus on one literary-language community based on region, language, or history. While this possibly emerges from proficiency and expertise in the language-literature, or arguably, to enable in-depth and intense analysis (and rightly so), they may tend to isolate scholarship on South Asian literary and cultural studies or, alternatively, demonstrate Bengali or Marathi as representative of a South Asian phenomenon. Attempting to keep in view 'the larger picture', nevertheless with the limited three languages (counting English as a South Asian language) I am adept at, my attempt here has been to broaden the scope of the study and allow exchanges of conceptual and emotional transformations. While tracing such transformations within these contexts in a focused manner is not central to this study (as that would burden the already expansive study), my work enables and often engages in such transformations and influences while remaining sensitive to revealing such relational transformations, when possible; for instance, the Urdu concept of *śauq* explored in Ray's portrayal of Wajid Ali is revisited in his own Bengali popular fiction, as a post-colonial leisurely romance – rendered in Bengali as *śakh*. The attempt has been to look at instances of encounters and histories of

conceptual change rather than to go into deep comparisons within South Asian traditions. The comparison is used as a tool in the study of broader encounters vis-à-vis the history of otium as expressed in and as the literary.

In the present study, I use otium as an analytical term to read the various emotional experiences and debates surrounding overlapping aspects of leisure, idleness, and indolence. It can be located in (1) a sense of freedom *from* obligation towards work, (2) freedom *for* contemplative, artistic or aesthetic engagements devoid of official, binding pacts, (3) an idleness that *may be* productive but is not so by any force or design, (4) a pronounced reluctance to deliberately structured obligations of work, and resistance to a lifestyle driven by capitalist economy, and (5) the yearning or desire for a leisurely state of being. Alternately, to denote these experiences in an emotional qualifier, I use the phrase 'leisurely feelings' to describe the shared aspects of the abovementioned states of being and address several emotion concepts elaborated in the following chapters.

In the linguistic-cultural traditions within colonial India, as we have seen in the example of Ray's rendition of *The Chess Players*, the state of a leisurely existence not yet bifurcated by the dialectic of work and indolence was often widely misunderstood and misconstrued by British officials and travellers (arguably with more deliberation than not, since such dissonances would further advance the need to 'civilise the barbarians'). In this context, where European/English industrialisation overlapped with colonial modernity, previous discourses of leisure, idleness and otium underwent debates and revisions that intensified in the nineteenth century and altered the understanding of leisure severely, now brought in direct opposition with progress and development. While many works on such experiences from colonialist and English perspectives have been produced, few books on the topic have been written from the vantage point of modern Indian language-literatures. Writing a case study of leisure in India, Kumkum Bhattacharya disappointingly identifies leisure in the context as "niche" and "cocooned", "as found among the tribes, rural populations and some other categories (religious, linguistic or ethnic) that are integrally connected with festivals and occasions" (Bhattacharya 2006: 88). I would also like to bring to attention Reena Dube's thorough study (2005) of Ray's rendition of *The Chess Players*, and her parsing of "colonial enterprise" through which indigenous attitudes to living, work and play as habits are portrayed as "the other", leading to misconceptions and mistranslations (Dube 2005: 1–3, 41–43, 56–61). Acknowledging the significance of her study, the present study argues for the need to investigate such mis-formulations and gaps within the larger literary-cultural field of South Asian Studies. In the literary-cultural field, leisure-related concepts often inhabit the centre rather than the periphery, and the elite/'high' expressions rather than the "niche". While I am only too aware that this study focuses solely on the elite/high literary expressions, I do so as they were highly influential for

their literary and feeling communities (see Chapter 1), especially in formulations of self-fashioning. The attempt is also to initiate a discussion in the hope that other scholars will address the many questions and contingencies that I have not been able to accommodate.

## State of the Art and Proposed Interventions

Apart from the studies conducted by Bawa et al., Modi, Dube, and Fludernik, in the Indian/South Asian context, noteworthy analyses like Sumit Sarkar's historical study of salaried jobs for the Bengali Indian middle classes under colonial rule have been significant in noting the contrasting perceptions of work, and resistance to work in the context of the present study.[31] Sumit Chakrabarti's recent book (2021) on the colonial clerk in Calcutta has explored this theme to its great potential, nevertheless focusing mainly on ideas of labour. These examples further signify the need for a dedicated study on the ideas of leisure, idleness, and laziness in the modern South Asian context under colonial rule and after. The past decades have seen a resurgence of interest in idleness and leisure as various movements argue for the need to 'slow down' (slow living, slow food), particularly in the 'West'. The *Idler Academy* in London or the *Haus Bartleby* in Berlin demonstrate institutional support for such initiatives. Influential work on the topic (interchangeably, of idleness, contemplation, leisure), based in English literary studies are Richard Adelman's reading of *Idleness, Contemplation and the Aesthetic, 1750–1830* (2011) and Heidi Liedke's *The Experience of Idling In Victorian Travel Texts. 1850–1901* (2018). Important philosophical works constitute *The Philosophy of Leisure* (1989), edited by Cyril Barrett and Tom Winnifrith, and Brian O'Connor's *Idleness: A Philosophical Essay* (2018). These overlapping topics have drawn the attention of sociologists, historians, and anthropologists (among others), leading to significant studies in the humanities like Hartmut Rosa's *Social Acceleration* (2013)/*Beschleunigung* (2005) and *Alienation and Acceleration* (2010), which formulate a new history of modern life through its conception of society functioning under pressures of 'high speed' and 'velocity', often engendering 'alienation' through 'accelaration', 'competition', and promises of the 'good life'. Han Byung-Chul's phenomenal book *The Burnout Society* (2015) has presented a critique of this 'excessive positivity' of the twenty-first century, resulting in what he terms "infarctions" of the present age, including depression, attention deficit hyperactive disorder and burnout.

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31   See Sarkar's essay, "Colonial Times: Clocks and Kaliyuga" (2002), and an earlier version of it, "Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and his Times" (1997c).

Defining acceleration of social change through "the concept of the *contraction of the present*", Rosa argues that "the "present" contracts as much in politics as in the economy, science, and art, in work relations as much as in family arrangements, and just as much in moral as in practical everyday orientations" (Rosa 2013: 76–77). His work on *Resonance* (2019) or *Resonanz* (2016) responds to the crisis of social acceleration through what he terms our (successful/unsuccessful) "relationships to the world".[32] Speaking from the discourses on alienation and modernity, he argues that an experience of 'resonance' can enable humans to engage in a relationship with the world in which we both affect and are affected by the world we inhabit. I propose that *exclusion* and *encounter* are significant axes to the problem of alienation and acceleration, as they are to the ideas of resonance and, of course, to relations. Byung-Chul has highlighted how exclusion and otherness have been transformed into modes of consumption, in the form of the exotic. We cannot discuss acceleration or the pace of modernity without addressing the formulations of encounters with otherness, exclusions, and consumption; they are integral to the experience of modernity as shrinking. Theories of modernity on the theme of the 'contraction of the present' have been proposed by several scholars, including the influential German philosopher Reinhart Koselleck, regarded as a co-founder of the discipline of Conceptual History (*Begriffsgeschichte*). Koselleck's work on temporality, particularly in his two "historical categories": the "space of experience" (knowledge of the past) and "horizon of expectations" (anticipations regarding the future) (Koselleck 2004b), is central to the understanding of modernity in the increasing gap between these categories. How is this increasing gap felt and represented in the context of exclusion and encounter in colonial modernity? How can our relationship with the world be explored and understood through a close reading and analysis of these relations as debated and presented in literature? This study addresses (and responds to) these complex questions by traversing the history of otium and attitudes to leisure and idleness, as well as the debates and discussions surrounding otium in colonial India. It traces this history through a study of conceptual-rhetorical change, focusing on emotions, attitudes, and moods through which these changes are mediated in literature.

The title of this book, *Leisurely Feelings: Emotions and Concepts of Otium in South Asia*, indicates its interest in exploring how leisure/otium/idleness and related concepts are felt and negotiated in literary representations in South Asia. This methodology focuses on representations of otium as experiences and encompasses the attitudes, emotions, and feelings towards otium and associa-

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32    See Rosa (2019), Foreword; see also Introduction, section 2, "The Basic Idea: Successful and Unsuccessful Relationships to the World".

tive experiences. Thus, emotions are both analysed in textual sources and seen as significant factors within literary discourses and the production of literature. *Leisurely* is the keyword which enables us to appreciate the quality of experiences, moods, and emotions through which otium is mediated. I use it as an umbrella term to provide a comprehensive approach to the reading of otium, leisure, and idleness based on the study of emotions, focusing on the *elusive feeling of leisureliness*. I also use the word 'leisurely' to question categorisations in semantic connotations of leisure and idleness, laziness, and indolence. By identifying and analysing emotion concepts, I explore the individual textual representations of leisurely experiences and the historical contexts and encounters within which these discourses are located. I do not insist that reading otium in its emotional expressions is the only or the correct way to study these overlapping concepts, but on the necessity for an enquiry which unpacks the essence of leisureliness in the texts and contexts, in their multiple historical and conceptual entanglements.

This necessity is intensified by two factors: firstly, conceptual research on leisure, idleness, and otium in the context of South Asia is negligible; moreover, the extant studies often offer historical-sociological understandings of select case studies rather than engaging with contextualised literary history. Secondly, and more significantly, in several primary texts written during the colonial period, for example, in the influential works of Altaf Husain Hali (1836/7–1914) or Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838–94), repeated arguments are made against leisureliness and leisurely attitudes, often represented in discussions of decay, decadence, and regress (as does Premchand's story). However, these assertions and reactions are, at best, ambivalent and require close reading and analysis, situating them within the historical-literary contexts and debates surrounding leisure on the one hand and perceptions of progress on the other. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) emphasises the differences between laziness as wasteful and idle leisure as fruitful towards artistic composition – in fact, in several essays and letters, idle, contemplative leisure emerges as not only something conducive to artistic and literary creativity but is also professed to be a necessity in the modern condition. In-depth and nuanced discourses on leisure and literature in the context of South Asia seem to be elusive at a glance. At the same time, discussions on work/labour, progress, and development take a front seat in the wake of colonial modernity, intensified in ideals of Nehruvian nation-building in the aftermath of Independence.[33] How are ideas of leisure and idleness then incorporated into the nation's literary perceptions? This book follows

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33  Ref. Nehru's stimulating slogans like "ārām ḥarām hai" (rest/relaxation is forbidden).

this journey in reading and analysis of leisurely feelings in Urdu and Bengali literatures.

Before I present the corpus and choice of texts, a brief disclaimer is in place vis-à-vis postcolonial theory as a theoretical approach in this study that traverses colonial and post-colonial India. Acknowledging the immense prowess and continuing relevance of Edward Said's formulation of 'orientalism' (1978) in his reading of colonial and Western hegemonies in epistemological perceptions, as a scholar, I find myself slightly cautious regarding the rather arbitrary homogenisation and categorisation of texts from vastly different contexts into the single historical experience of colonialism and colonial hegemony, often perceived as the only truth of these texts. This perceived singularity of the colonial experience has already been shown (even as this book shows) to be correct, but also, often, as 'missing the point'. My approach to the study of otium in two varying South Asian literary fields emphasises experiential and historical differences within colonial encounters, even within the same perceived nation/colony – British India. The other problem of this 'singularity', put forward by Gayatri Spivak (an erstwhile and renowned proponent of 'postcolonial theory'), is that postcoloniality originates in ideas of nationalism, the present formulations of which itself are a construct of European ideas of imperialism, nationhood, and colonialism (Spivak 1999: 1, 140–46, 160–62, 191). Moreover, the enduring colonial, neo-imperial, and globalised present that shapes our ways of experiencing, reading, and expressing cannot be adequately encompassed within a postcolonial critique which vantages itself on differences between neat categories of the coloniser and the colonised. Furthermore, the trend in the field to categorise writings by non-Westerners as postcolonial texts, submitting them to an imposition of 'writing back', has also been questioned and critiqued.[34] Notwithstanding that postcolonial criticism has served as an influential and resonating theoretical intervention much required in its time, and that it continues to resound in clear significance, and given that it has been immensely instrumental in restructuring questions of power and episteme, it could benefit immensely through a reorientation in interpreting the dynamics between several groups.

In this study, I have attempted to stress this element by bringing in the study of encounters and conceptual change through a reading of literary histo-

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[34]    This is intricately linked to Spivak's critique of postcoloniality, orientalist nationalism, and essentialism, as reflected in Frederic Jameson's much-critiqued 1986 essay on "Third-World Literature" and "national allegory". See Aijaz Ahmad's critique, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'", *In Theory* (1992 a [1987]), especially 96–97.

ry and emotion concepts within colonial and postcolonial contexts. In this reading, colonialism is seen as one of the parameters of encounters between communities, and a parameter that is variable. Global conceptual history can create alternate trajectories for scholarship on South Asia. It looks at the bi- or multidirectional flow of knowledge, ideas, and agencies and can help locate South Asia within a broader global framework while allowing the study of encounters among various communities within South Asia. Furthermore, a sound criticism of orientalist or colonialist discourse would need to go beyond the English "tyranny of monolingualism" (Menon 2022: 25) and turn towards a methodology that is shaped by the languages – not only as Arabic, Hindi, or Bahasa Malaysia, but as systems of knowledge formation, creativity, and communication – literatures and sources of colonised peoples, and move away from colonialist "enquiries" and "modalities" (Cohn 1996: 5–11). We also must keep in mind the origins of "field" and "area studies" within the investigation processes in the post-colonial world that aim for "smoothly functional social change" in erstwhile colonised societies (Cohn 1996: 15). Instead, as this book demonstrates, these changes are haphazard, chaotic, and innovative, and require a shift in attitudes towards methodology and research approach. These shifts can only be envisioned when we interact directly with the variety of expressions – literary and emotional, critical, and socio-political – that are available in South Asian sources, and admittedly, often in English. However, the vernaculars and modern language-literatures are mainly missing in such studies and need urgent attention. In the case of India's diverse and multitudinous linguistic landscape, English remains a language of encounter. It has gradually become internalised as one of India's many languages, a unique medium of communication for its vast, multilingual population. Nevertheless, English cannot entirely detach from its origin and its privilege, being the colonisers' language and the alienated, metropolitan language of the present (Mufti 2016: 14–18, 31–33, 46–48, 154–56). And resting upon this singularity of language, multiple and varying experiences of the 'postcolonial condition' cannot be explored; neither can the life-worlds lived in Urdu, Hindi, or Bengali be adequately analysed solely through Anglophone postcolonial criticism to unpack the complex semantic histories and emotional intricacies of concepts in these language-literatures.

## Corpus and Organisation of the Book

The temporal framework of this book is the late colonial period to the post-Independence period of Nehruvian development. However, it spills over to the 1990s and the onset of India's neo-liberalisation. Taking 1857 and the failed revolt as a watershed moment in the history of northern India, this study

moves (not strictly chronologically) towards the turn of the century. It traverses the struggles of political independence and the 1947 Partition and draws to a close with late twentieth-century discussions and outlooks. The choice of periodisation is motivated by the various significant changes and upheavals in discourses of leisure, laziness, and idleness in the Indian context during the shift from modern colonial India to post-colonial India in a rapidly globalised world.[35] Discussing contemporary conceptualisations of otium in the Indian literary context is also significant; I have attempted to do so despite the already vast timeline. Contemporary discourses on leisure, idleness, and otium are, by necessity, predicated on understanding the rise of economic liberalisation in India in the late twentieth century. Moreover, such discussions must also consider the rapidly changing economic conditions and their impacts on the present and attempt to address the significant question of media and technology on such experiences. I merely explore the representations of these changes (or their absences) in a selection of literary instances at the turn of the millennium. My study aims to facilitate future research by initiating a theoretical-analytical and conceptual study of otium in vernacular South Asian literary contexts. A more detailed reading of otium in the contemporary context will need to understand, first and foremost, how discourses of otium underwent sudden, multiple shifts in the period when late colonialism gave way to political independence[36], and that history of transformation remains at the centre of the present work.

While this book focuses on prose texts from the traditions of modern Bengali and Urdu literatures, I have explored the topic through its interconnections with genres and narrative styles. This decision stems from two distinct but

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35   The use of the term 'globalisation' here does not entail that global interactions were any less prior to the twentieth century. I use the term here to roughly refer to what is accepted as the process of globalisation and global capitalism in the aftermath of the two World Wars and the end of the Cold War.

36   This argument flows in the vein of Sheldon Pollock's opinion "that as crucial to contemporary theory as understanding postcolonial South Asian literary cultures may be, these represent a very thin slice of a long historical experience whose careful preservation in texts makes this region of the world so special. Equally important—and here we confront a weakness of a certain species of postcolonial critique—these contemporary forms of culture and the role of colonialism in shaping them cannot be understood without a deeper understanding of the long premodern past" (Pollock, Introduction in *Literary Cultures in History* [2003], 32). While such a study is necessary, it is not possible within the scope of one study. However, by choosing the period of late colonialism to early post-Independence, some understanding of continuity, rupture and asymmetry will be addressed, rather than beginning, all of a sudden, with the postcolonial in South Asia.

interdependent reasons: first, the aim was to select texts that provided significant representations, discussions, and debates on leisureliness and idleness. Second, as literary trends in Urdu and Bengali underwent various transformations, specific genres were preferred by most writers over other genres in certain periods and often served as the best medium to write on the topic. For instance, although the study begins with the modern Urdu literary sphere and its ambivalent relationship with otium as reflected in the rise of the Urdu novel in the late nineteenth century, this line of enquiry would be challenging to sustain as the novel, as a genre, witnessed a decline in the early twentieth century as the Urdu short story emerged and reached heights of popularity. As a point of contrast, in Bengali, I find the innovation of making epistolary writing accessible to an anonymous public readership more fascinating in its deliberations of a new reading practice that Sudipta Kaviraj has called an "introspective literary culture" (2014b: 79). I therefore turn to the letters of Rabindranath Tagore, which provide a richer source for his conceptualisation of otium than his novels. Tagore's global fame in the early twentieth century as the Nobel Prize winner for literature is closely linked, as he stated, to the portrayal of his leisurely and idle thoughts in these letters written in his youth. Remaining faithful to the significance of the discussions and debates on otium and the innovations these texts brought within the literary landscape, I have prized these genre innovations over genre affiliations. I also argue that genre conventions and distinctions have a different meaning for writers writing in Urdu and Bengali than writers of Anglophone literature, more so in the nineteenth century (see Chapter 1). This study offers a comprehensive reading of various prose genres in Urdu and Bengali in alternating chapters to explore how literary genres generated discourses of otium. For example, the immense popularity of the detective novels/novellas of the leisurely *bhadralok* detective, *Pheludā* (created by Satyajit Ray), after Independence, reveals a new romanticised conceptualisation of 'leisurely' as a masculine lifestyle, expressed in the freedom of choosing one's professional obligations, balanced by loyalty to (Indian) Bengali notions of culture-and-intellect. The postcolonial detective novel, therefore, brings together intellectual stimulation hand-in-hand with a yearning for a leisurely lifestyle while enculturing a new generation of readers in a newly independent nation at the crossroads of economic development and sovereignty.

This book is divided into three parts and six extensive chapters. Part I includes this Introduction and Chapter 1, which serves as a theoretical-conceptual guideline for the rest of the book and offers a contextual overview. In Chapter 1, I provide a brief intellectual and semantic enquiry into otium and introduce the background of colonial South Asia while contextualising the concept's relevance to its history. This chapter also introduces the literary field in colonial India and maps the literary as a space for *creativity* and *play*, an

opportunity and a mode of struggle for expressions of the self. Therefore, the argument is that otium is to be studied along with literature and the literary in this context. The chapter foregrounds a conceptual study through an extended reading of emotional translations to make sense of the concept. It looks at the relations that emotions and otium have with time, space, practices, and communities relevant to this work.

Part II includes four extensive chapters, each focusing on one literary genre, exploring emotion concepts, and demonstrating a shift in perceptions regarding idleness and leisureliness. In every chapter comprising Part II (which can also be read as case studies), an introduction to the literary context has been provided to situate the texts within the intellectual ambience and discussions regarding otium or related concepts. In each case, the development of genre and style in response to leisurely (alternately, regulated) reading practices has been explored. Furthermore, the texts and the contexts, with reference to a literary, "feeling community" (Pernau 2017), are analysed through the discourse of emotion concepts, like nostalgia or melancholy. A close reading of these different emotions and the in-depth textual analysis constitute the core of the chapters. Towards the end of the respective chapters, I have provided an overview of how the texts have emerged from a certain literary context and witnessed, negotiated, or affected conceptual change regarding otium and the literary.

In Chapter 2, I begin with a brief reading of Altaf Husain Hali's influential poem, *Musaddas-i Madd va Jazr-i Islām* (*The Ebb and Flow of Islam*, 1879) to register the literary-critical shift from poetry traditions to prose traditions. This is not to say poetry traditions became obsolete; in fact, new traditions of poetry emerged. This transition proved significant in reading the emergence of the early Urdu novels with regard to otium. Hali's poem is read in contrast and comparison with the surge of the Urdu novel and what the novel/*nāval* entailed for Urdu writers at the time. The new genre of the novel, which had arguably begun with attempts at severance from the idle perceptions of the past steeped in poetic compositions, in fact, emerges as a platform allowing writers to negotiate emotions towards the past and introduce innovations in how the past could be remembered and longed for, in a swiftly changing world. These negotiations are explored in the ambivalences inherent in nostalgia as treated by two significant early novels, *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (*The Repentance of Nussooh*, 1873–74) by Nazir Ahmad (1830–1912) and *Umrā'o Jān Adā* (1899) by Mirza Hadi Rusva (1858–1931). In these analyses, I explore the portrayal of two varying responses to the loss of a leisurely way of life.

Chapter 3 introduces the unique relationship of Bengali literary intelligentsia with the English language and literature and contextualises discourses of otium regarding new reading, writing and socio-literary practices. With the

turn of the century, a parallel discourse of leisure emerges in Rabindranath Tagore's literary creativity, especially in his poetical compositions. Tagore's conceptualisation of leisure(ly) and idle freedom can be perceived in the transformations he brought to the language, literary creativity and pedagogy, as these changes drew great attention in the early twentieth century, particularly after 1913, when he received the Nobel Prize. The chapter situates Tagore's literary career within the discourses of modernity and its relationship with literature while exploring his conceptualisation of modernist enchantment (*māŷā*) as an expression of abstract love. I read love as directed towards both the fleeting perception of time and for open, immense space, particularly the open spaces of rural Bengal as recorded in his collections of letters. Foregrounding topophilia or 'love of space' that emerges as central to his conception of "lonely leisure" and "fulfilling pleasure of idleness", this chapter traces the effect(s) of leisurely experiences in his pedagogical activities, which in turn influenced modern Bengali notions of leisure, nature, and learning for a long time to come. Supplemented by a reading of his multiple essays, speeches, and memoirs, the chapter focuses on two collections of letters that are read as poetic compositions in prose. These are *Chinnapatrābalī* (Collection of torn leaves/letters, written from 1887 until 1895, published in 1960) and his first collection of letters, written during his travels in Europe, *Ŷūrop Prabāsīr Patra* (Letters from a sojourner in Europe, published in 1881). The chapter discusses the genre of private letters and memoirs/autobiographical writing through the lens of otium and a private or *introspective* resonance of literature.[37]

The early twentieth century saw major upheavals in the subcontinent as feelings of rebellion against foreign rule continued to brew, intensified by Marxist-nationalist ideologies. These forces were harnessed by writers, artists, and thinkers, and transformed into the first nationwide literary movement, propelled by the All-India Progressive Writers' Association (est. 1936). Urdu 'progressive' writers became the major force in not only initiating the movement (c. 1936) but also because several Urdu writers and intellectuals of the time, like Sajjad Zaheer and Rashid Jahan, were members of the Communist Party of India. Under the aegis of the PWA, the modern Urdu short story flourished as a genre, expressing the sordid realities of the colonised, poverty-struck, and alienated society. Ideas of leisure, idleness, and contemplation were not themes most progressive writers were interested in; they prioritised society and its suffering over the individual experience. Writing against the grain, Saʿadat Hasan Manto (1912–55) penned some of the most innovative short stories on urban

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37  See Kaviraj's conception of literature or poetry as a "reflective private craft", (2014), 79.

idling or *āvārahgardī* in the sprawling metropolis of Bombay in the 1940s. While Manto's fame largely rests upon his bitter, violent, and intimate portrayals of human tragedy, particularly in the aftermath of the 1947 partition of the subcontinent, the focus here is on the earlier stories in the framework of colonial melancholy as a recurrent emotional manifestation of otium, as registers of protest and resistance against colonial and global notions of progress and capitalism. The stories read are "*Taraqqī Pasand*" (Progress-loving, 1914), "*Inqalāb Pasand*" (Revolutionary, 1935), "*Bū*" (Odour), "*Pīran*", and "*Bādśāhat kā Khātmah*" (End of empire, 1950). These stories of drift and urban idling demonstrate Manto's focus on the magnifying of the 'moment' and the aimlessness of 'drift', both explored remarkably with the genre innovations of short prose.

The second part of the chapter turns to the post-Partition stories written by Qurratul'ain Hyder (1927–2007), mostly in the early 1960s. Childhood and the past are remembered and juxtaposed with the 'golden era' motif of a pre-Partitioned India where *leisurely* is perceived politically as peaceful, as a pace of life lived in communal harmony and unity. The violence and trauma of the Partition are negotiated in the emotion of post-Partition nostalgia, explored in the stories "*Ḍālanvālā*", "*Jugnū'oṉ kī Dunyā*" (A world of fireflies) and "*Yād kī Ek Dhanak Jale*" (A glowing rainbow of memories). Theorising 'post-Partition nostalgia' for the multicultural and inter-communal coexistence of 'Indians' as a grand narrative of the subcontinent's past, this chapter reinstates the significance of nostalgia for twentieth century Urdu literary discourses, where migration to Pakistan vis-à-vis memories of a united subcontinent continue to resurface. Although ambitious in its conception, Chapter 3 traces the emergence of the Urdu short story (*afsānah*) vis-à-vis utilitarian, 'socially relevant' literature and responds to the dissonance of temporality in the works of Manto (in his elaboration of the present as suspended) and Hyder (in her conceptions of the past as looming in the present), traversing the troubled terrain of the 1947 partition.

After Independence and during the early years of nation-building, discussions of leisureliness are permissible only as entangled with work (profession as vocation), fraught with questions of unemployment and autonomy. Chapter 5 goes on to contextualise post-colonial urban Calcutta in the framework of Nehruvian notions of development, and the ensuing disillusionment with unemployment, corruption, and political unrest in the city. In this precarious scenario (even more for leisurely experiences), Satyajit Ray's popular detective fiction series provides a hopeful fantasy of a leisurely lifestyle with the romance of the autonomous vocation of the 'private detective'. Reading the overlapping aspects of knowledge and idleness in the figure of the Benjaminian *flâneur* and the postcolonial Bengali detective, this chapter locates Ray's eponymous protagonist, Pheluda, as the leisurely, intellectual, and cerebral *bhadralok/*

gentleman, reorienting investigative *flânerie* in his critique of colonialism. Reading the concepts of culture and intellect as central to the romance of civility (*bhadratā*) for the *bhadralok*, the chapter explores the familial and the familiar sleuth, the construction of a leisurely and genteel masculinity and the instilment of these values in continuing the leisurely pedagogy on a parallel scale. The chapter also locates detective fiction, particularly Ray's detective fiction, as highly popular and leisurely reading across various age groups at this time. Referring to Ray's other works, this chapter focuses on six novellas in the series and two short stories, including the first published story, "*Pheludār Goẏendāgiri*" (Pheluda Turns Detective 1965) and "*Laṇḍane Pheludā*" (Pheluda in London, 1989). The novels include some of the most popular texts of the series: *Bādˡśāhī Āṃṭi* (*The Emperor's Ring*, 1966–67), *Sonār Kellā* (*The Golden Fortress*, 1971), *Raẏāl Bengal Rahasya* (*Royal Bengal Mystery*, 1974), *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth* (*The Mystery of the Elephant God*, 1975), *Gorosthāne Sābdhān* (*Trouble in the Graveyard,* 1977), *Ṭiṇṭoreṭor Yīśū* (*Tintoretto's Jesus*, 1982) and *Rabārtˡsaner Rubi* (*Robertson's Ruby*, 1992). This chapter constitutes the final, in-depth 'case study', as texts and contexts in independent India of the 70s and the 80s rush towards liberalisation of the 1990s.

Part III consists of Chapter 6 and a Coda. This section draws from the previous chapters and the various conceptions of leisurely feelings already explored. Looking forward, it analyses specific conceptual changes in how discourses of leisureliness are advanced in a setting that is presented as different, even asynchronous in its pace, heading towards economic upheavals and beyond the grasp of the lived present. In Chapter 6, I read various works in Bengali and Urdu genres of the short story, the long story, and the novel to determine how questions of otium are conceptualised in late twentieth century India of neoliberal acceleration. The themes of gender and class discrimination and a renewed capitalism merge with emotions of haunting and being haunted, requiring new lenses of reading otium. Simultaneously, the environment and the mythic, with their deep entanglements with literature (story) and creativity (music), provide for discussions of spatiality and temporality in the experiences central to modern-day leisure questions. Chapter 6 presents diverse and provocative trajectories of otium through the analytical tool of hauntology to explore otium's entanglements with the occult, the mythic, the dystopian, and the environmental.

Khalid Javed's Urdu long story "*Tafrīḥ kī Ek Dopahar*" (2008) is a significant example discussing questions of idleness vis-à-vis haunting. Several writings by Intizar Husain connect the literary with the uncanny and their shared itinerant characteristics. In the Bengali context, I analyse Bani Basu's novel *Gāndharbī* (1993) as a text that situates experiences of immersion, freedom for artistic creativity, and gender constraints against the backdrop of a society at

the brink of economic transformations. I go on to explore economic upheavals, class consciousness, and globalised capitalism in contrast to individual and collective freedom, idleness and otium in the works of Nabarun Bhattacharya, including his phenomenal novel *Hārˈbārṭ* (1993) and his short stories about the rebellious and notorious flying humans, *Phyātāṛū* (written from 2004). Chapter 6 locates otium in the context of a new trend of capitalism where otium emerges, in the examples above, as a complex critique of discriminatory society through deliberations with haunting and hauntology. This idea, I hope, will be explored further to enrich and expand studies of otium and emotions. The chapter acts as a threshold that looks back at the several manifestations of leisurely feelings through a century of Urdu and Bengali literary attachments, as it remains poised towards the future, inviting further research on the topic. The Coda at the end directs us to a reflection on the significance of concepts like otium and their studies in the global south to our current concerns on a global scale. It discusses methods of knowledge production and conceptualisation for a deeper understanding of concepts, ideas, and emotions towards a resonance between individuals and communities, while addressing the question of the non-western self.

Some disclaimers regarding the corpus and choice of texts are in order. I am cautious regarding the "triangle of categories that is at the bottom of literary history", i.e., literature, language, and nation (Harder 2018 b: 7). While such a formulaic narration of the "nation" vis-à-vis otium is one of the dangers of my choice (inclusion/exclusion) of texts, the scope of a research monograph makes it challenging to overcome this slippery slope. At the same time, I am certainly conscious of "the gaps in knowledge, as well as the great fluidity and unquantifiability of what is known" of the so-called idea of 'Indian Literature'; as Aijaz Ahmad has rightly pointed out, the conceptual connotation of such a category is chastening, and we must be cautious of claiming to cover these gaps (Ahmad 1992 b: 247–48). While I do not claim to theorise or read otium in "Indian Literature", I concede that the project should have included literary examples by Pakistani and Bangladeshi writers. However, such a corpus is beyond the scope of this first book. It would also mean overstepping the mark to yoke several contemporary Urdu sources from India and Pakistan in one section without equal and sustained attention to their shared and yet distinct genealogies. The discourses of leisure and idleness in post-colonial Pakistan and Bangladesh, as represented in Urdu and Bengali literature, are evidently slightly different from their Indian counterparts (while they are also identifiable on several levels) and therefore need adequate attention and fine-tuning for a sensitive and justified reading. Precedence has been given to retaining the alternating view of India's Bengali and Urdu traditions to resist another hegemonic literary history of regionalism. I see various possibilities for research that would

include several other writers. This book aims not to 'cover' the topic but to establish a literary study of otium and provoke further discussions in the larger context. Another brief disclaimer is in place, perhaps, regarding the oft-perceived communal/linguistic-cultural division of Bengali/Hindu authors *versus* Muslim/Urdu authors that may seem misleadingly apparent from the corpus. It is a matter of choosing texts rather than authors. As has been clarified by scholars like Jennifer Dubrow (2018) and Kavita Datla (2013), Urdu has been and remains a secular and cosmopolitan language and has seen writers from various communities. Similarly, several Muslim Bengali authors, such as Syed Mujtaba Ali, would be an excellent choice for such a study. Without delving into extensive histories of communal strife, linguistic ideologies, and literary modernity (which require more space), I would like to state, for any uninformed reader, particularly in the current ambience of intolerance, that contrary to orientalist viewpoints, traditions of idleness, indolence, contemplation and creativity discussed in this study are not communally exclusive. *Leisurely*, as this book argues, is a state of being, a pace of life, and a description of a certain mood/temperament/emotion (*mizāj*) that perhaps, at the risk of sounding hopelessly romantic, is one of the many shared aspects within diverse and heterogenous traditions in South Asia.

# 1 Literature, Otium, and Emotions: Conceptualising Leisurely Feelings in Modern Urdu and Bengali Prose

What does it mean to write on the concept of otium? Why does conceptualising otium entail constant reference to a couple of associative synonyms like *idleness*, *laziness,* or *leisure* to make meaning(s)? Or rather, to turn the question around, why do I, as the author of this study, use this archaic Latinate word beside its more relatable, recognisable English substitutes? Why or how do I use it as the subject of this study on modern South Asian languages and literatures? These and several related, significant questions will be explored and answered in this chapter, paving the theoretical path for this book. As already stated in the Introduction, the concepts of leisure and idleness have altered over the centuries with various societal changes in Europe, (South) Asia, and elsewhere across the globe. However, it is crucial first to pinpoint the term otium and arrive at an understanding of what it means to work on otium today and why this word represents the central concept of this study, even at the risk of anachronism. The following section will demonstrate that a conceptual approach to studying otium must consider the overlap between aspects of leisure, idleness, and related concepts, as well as the absence of otium's essential connotations in these lexemes if independent of context. At the same time, to understand otium in its historical evolution, we must unavoidably explore its relations with work, efficiency, and utilitarianism – concepts that form the central narrative of modernity, colonisation, global capitalism, and the present-day conceptualisations of acceleration and exclusion. For otium, even historically, contained exclusion as an integral aspect of the concept. Slaves and soldiers in Roman antiquity are not reported to have enjoyed otium; instead, fear of excessive idleness amongst them has been deemed pejoratively as lazy and idle by the Roman elite (Vickers 1990: 7–9; Dobler, Wilke et al. 2020: 1). One may take the argument forward to claim that a life of creative leisure and contemplation for the elite in this context was, in fact, made possible due to the existence of a slave society. Simultaneously, its descriptive use to express the idleness of soldiers in its earliest record also directs us to the layers of ambivalence in the concept, already containing the axis of alienation and exclusion. Let us turn now to the ambivalence that informs the history of the concept.

## 1.1 A Brief Outline of the Conceptual and Semantic Histories of Otium, Leisure, and Idleness

While otium in its earliest literary record, in Quintus Ennius's *Iphigenia*, has been used to signify a rest or reprieve from the occupation of war, its connotations have been argued to vary. Brian Vickers (1990) contends that although in modern accounts of seventeenth-century English poetry and literature, otium has been interpreted as a positive form of leisure prevalent in Roman antiquity, a diachronic semantic approach, as was carried out by Jean-Marie André, reveals a more 'ambivalent' connotation of the word.[38] For the Romans, otium was distinguished, according to Vickers, into "*otium negotiosum*, leisure with a satisfying occupation" and "*otium otiosum*, unoccupied and pointless leisure" (Vckers 1990: 7). In the context of *Iphigenia*, where the word was first used (as recorded), this ambivalence with a tendency towards 'pointless' leisure is expressed in the emotional experience of the soldiers – translated for our modern understanding as "unoccupied, resting and bored, wanting to return home" (1990: 6). Let us note, here, that in translating the mood of soldiers as "bored", semantic formulations are adapted to express an emotional condition that we now identify as 'bored', arguably, a modern condition that has a very recent history, at least in the western world.[39] Simultaneously, otium has often been linked to the Greek term *scholé*/Σχολαί (Ltn. *schola*, Eng. school), while gradually itself coming to acquire certain scholarly and intellectual connotations, following the fashioning of this leisurely time not as bored but as contemplative and intellectually productive. The varying connotations of otium, retrospectively, can range from rest, relaxation, and boredom for individuals and groups, to political tranquillity and sustained peace. It is often argued that the German *Muße* (or Italian *ozio*, French *l'oisiveté*) is closer to the Latin otium when compared to the English renditions.[40] However, we must keep in mind that *Muße* is construed to have a more definitely positive connotation compared to the other lexemes, as elaborated by Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi (2014), Heidi

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[38]   On the ambivalence of otium in ancient Latin literature, see Franziska Eickhoff, "*Otium*, Muße, Müßiggang – mit Vorsicht zu genießen" (2021), 35–55.

[39]   See Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani, 'The Delicate Monster: Modernity and Boredom' (2009), 10. Lars Svendsen diagnoses this emergence in conjunction with Romanticism, when demands are made on life to be *interesting*. See Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (2008), 27–28. See also, Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (1995), ix.

[40]   The CRC/SFB *Muße*/Otium at the University of Freiburg argued that leisure and idleness are not seen as appropriate equivalents. This already highlights the breach in semantic history. See further discussion in Noor (2021), 300–7.

Liedke (2018) and myself (Noor 2021: 206). Otium, on the other hand, as Vickers has demonstrated, appears to be more ambivalent and contested in its meanings. Its negative connotations can vary from wasteful leisure, inertia and sloth to excessive idleness, luxury, and even avarice.

Registering the ambivalence in connotations of positive and negative otium, let us now turn to the English words idleness and leisure, which were often used interchangeably in the Victorian age (Liedke 2018). Like leisure, idleness, too, has had a contested trajectory in its implications in the modern era. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in particular, witnessed various debates around idleness in Europe, especially in Great Britain. In English literature, the period spanning the Romantic era and the Victorian era has seen a revolution in the attitudes of philosophers and writers towards idleness (Adelman 2011, Fludernik & Nandi 2014). Tracing the relevant meanings of the lexeme to examples from works of modern English writers, *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "idleness" in its modern usage as "the state or condition of being idle or unoccupied; want of occupation; habitual avoidance of work, inactivity, indolence; an instance of this". Although idleness is perceived as unfavourable in early modern literature and only attained a more positive connotation with time, particularly amongst Romantic writers[41], it was broadly seen as a vice, a negative disposition, and the source of many crimes (Bentham 1983 [1816/7]). However, it is also the eighteenth century, as Fludernik argues, which presents "a threshold opening to a society of leisure" (2017: 133), with the availability of more free time and social actors from different classes. Fludernik demonstrates the "conflicted nature" (Fludernik 2017: c.f. title) of idleness in the eighteenth century through a perceptive analysis of the *Spectator* essays (1761) by Addison and Steele and Samuel Johnson's essays in *The Idler* (1758–60) and *The Rambler* (1750–52). She notes the heightened negative portrayal of idleness in Johnson's essays, compared to those of Addison and Steele, where the former emphasises the "psychological and physiological dangers of idleness", which threaten the individual and can transform him into a "vegetative state of inactivity" (Fludernik 2017: 150).

Brian O'Connor (2018) has shown how eighteenth-century thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Schlegel, among others, have contributed to a highly complex and contested reading of idleness as hedonism, savagery, reluctance to work, the cause for boredom, and play, as well as the enjoyment of a particular idea of freedom. O'Connor's exploration of idleness is expressed as "idle freedom" in contrast to many eighteenth-

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41  For instance, see Richard Adelman's reading of idleness and contemplation as poetic meditation and aesthetic engagement in William Cowper and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry in *Idleness, Contemplation and the Aesthetic* (2011), 68–101.

century thinkers' attitudes who demonstrate that "idleness is a [*sic*] bad, whereas busyness, self-making, usefulness, and productivity are supposedly the very core of what is right for beings like us" (O'Connor 2018: 3). In his in-depth study of Jeremy Bentham's 'utilitarian education' and Friedrich Schiller's 'aesthetic education' as well as in the analysis of the attitudes of Romantic poets (particularly Coleridge) towards idleness, Richard Adelman has demonstrated that for most thinkers, idleness or idle thought is portrayed "as containing elements of several different, often antithetical faculties" (Adelman 2011: 8). These varying connotations of idleness evidently depend on the context, culture, and period. Heidi Liedke (2018) argues that "idleness has to be defined more precisely for the period, namely always in connection and in contrast to the terms leisure (which underwent a conceptual change in Victorian England) and work, and can only be understood when the specific semantic context it is employed in is taken into consideration" (Liedke 2018: 19). Fludernik differentiates leisure and idleness in the class-exclusions of eighteenth-century English society, focusing on the class of the speaker (2017: 133). Elsewhere, she also argues that the dynamics of social exclusivity and the performativity of the same "tends to go hand in hand with discourses of recrimination against the excluded other", contextualising the British experience in India (2014: 131).[42]

Conceptually, however, leisure, which has come to acquire a meaning of filling one's idle time (in the sense of leisure activities and consumption) in the last two centuries, is understood to be quite different from idleness and its variants. The discipline of leisure studies demonstrates this by the sheer topics and foci, particularly, consumption and activities with which to fill one's free time, such as games and sports, alcohol, tobacco, and fast food, casualisation of work, and the heightened allure of travelling and vacation spots (Rojek, Shaw & Veal 2006). Leisure has also become a much-admired concept at highly efficient workspaces, where regulated activities and experiences of leisure between periods of work are designed to increase efficiency and enhance productivity. More significantly, leisure in English has now acquired the connotation of 'free time', a period *allowed* as free and devoid of work. This is where leisure differs largely from otium and idleness – in its sense of disciplined, permissible, *acceptable* reprieve from work and its connotations of consumption. Infused with the idea of enhancing 'work' and productivity, disciplined leisure can "renew our capacity to perform" (O'Connor 2018: 7). Concerning these contemporary 'uses' of leisure, O'Connor has theorised idleness in the "notion of *idle freedom* — where work is no kind of virtue

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42  There are also, of course, plenty of records of amicable and shared leisure activities indulged in by both Indian aristocrats and English officers during their time in India. See Spear (1998), 127–36.

or path to worthiness". He argues that idleness is in itself "meaningful and real enough to deserve protection" (O'Connor 2018: 3). This definition of idleness is closer to otium than contemporary notions of leisure, but it does not build on the flow of creativity, contemplation, and artistic experiences that can often emerge from or lead to a state or experience of otium.

Let us now turn to otium in relation to work, efficiency, and utility. As mentioned before, otium does not entail the opposite of work. Vickers (1990) pertinently points out, quoting Ernst Bernert[43] that unlike what many modern scholars tend to believe, otium is not conceptually opposed to *negotium* (life of busyness or activity), "but to *officium* or *occupationes*" (Vickers 1990: 5). *Officium* is explained to be different from *negotium* as it entails an obligation, duty, and official service. This misplaced opposition also explains the seemingly paradoxical phrase of productive leisure, in Latin, *otium negotiosum*. As Fludernik (2020) and Gregor Dobler (2014) explicate, otium *may* include activity or work, but *it does not have to*. Fludernik elaborates that the time during an experience of otium (identifying it with *Muße*) can be used to "meditate or to listen to music; to relax while hiking, dancing or swimming; one can also engage in a burst of musical composition or in a work flow of concentrated reading or writing" (Fludernik 2020: 17). Thus, what emerges as central to the meaning of otium is a feeling of freedom from obligations or restraints, as well as the freedom to indulge in voluntary activities, inactivity, or musings. This focus on the feeling of 'freedom' reaffirms Vickers' argument that otium is not the opposite of *negotium*. In fact, Dobler has demonstrated repeatedly that work and otium are not necessarily contradictory but can be intertwined and enmeshed experiences (Dobler 2014: 54–68; 2020: 305–14). Otium, then, is a concept opposed to an obligation towards work, to constraints of official perceptions of efficiency and utilitarianism, the modern gospels on which enlightenment philosophy rests. These complex and ambivalent aspects of otium with work further enhance its deep connection with a consciousness of the self and self-determination, often lost in contemporary debates (mainly due to rigid connotations in English) between leisure, work, and idleness/indolence. However, its relevance to modernity and the modern condition is evident.

In light of these intellectual and semantic contrasts and conflicts, I use the term '*leisurely*' to denote what is understood as the felt experience of otium, idleness, and leisure. This experience of *dwelling in the leisurely*, although not devoid of all contours and boundaries, can free actors from societal and struc-

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43  See Vickers, n9: "auch der Gegensatz zu otiosus [ist] niemals negotiosus, sondern occupatus". C.f. Ernst Bernert, 'Otium', *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft, 4* (1949–50), 89–99.

tural obligations, various degrees of exclusion, and enable them to pursue idle pleasures, artistic or literary creativity, reflective contemplation and enjoy the leisureliness of doing nothing. Such an experience can also embody resistance and a protest against a societal drive towards productivity and progress. Thus, focusing on the essence of the experiential quality of otium, it seems fruitful to be concerned with the 'leisurely' as an emotional qualifier, often interchangeably used with 'otium' in instances where 'leisure' and 'idleness' cannot fulfil the intended meanings in the context. As such, the conceptualisation of 'leisurely', though not at odds with work, is more than often opposed to a manner of *feeling*, *dwelling* and (*not*)*doing*; it is a sense of the self against obligations of efficiency and utilitarianism, but one that responds to the community and habitus it inhabits. Such feelings are not necessarily individualistic in nature but can and often do have deep anchors in shared collectives and a sense of community, especially when we move away from individualistic and utilitarian perceptions of societies and the idea of a contained self.

Amongst the eighteenth-century proponents of utilitarianism, the most notable for our context was Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). Bentham's views on idleness and the role it played in his conception of activity and reward for inmates in the *Panopticon Letters* (1791) and his plans for radicalising school education in *Chrestomathia* (1816) have defined essential understandings of efficiency that are reflected in disciplinary formulations in the modern and the present. His ideas around practical and useful instruction and efficient work, posited in opposition to idleness, ennui, and leisurely states of being, resonate with recent and contemporary global work structures. His thoughts on utilitarianism are also significant for our focus on the context of colonial India, where English liberals, championing colonialism as a despotic (but argued as necessarily humanitarian) form of enlightenment, were staunch advocates of utilitarianism. Javed Majeed (1992) has argued that Bentham's language of utilitarianism had an immense impact on the complexities of British imperialism in India. As Erik Stokes (1959) has shown, Bentham, along with James Mill, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Babington Macaulay, can be seen to represent the "transformation of English mind and society, as it expressed itself in liberalism" through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This transformation, as Stokes highlights, "was brought to bear on the Indian connexion", which makes Indian history as significant for British Intellectual History as the latter was for India and its history. Furthermore, the notion of utilitarianism for such British politicians was always apparently conflicting, based upon an exclusion and otherisation towards the 'natives' and 'barbarians', and claiming, on the other hand, to include them, through colonisation, coercion, and discipline, in the European ideals of enlightened civilisation. In fact, the two aspects complemented each other towards the ideals of colonial capitalism.

## 1.2 Contextualising Leisure, Idleness, and Otium in Colonial South Asia

Studying otium in the context of colonial South Asia entails a double reading of the concept. Firstly, one needs to consider comparable discourses of otium, semantically, conceptually, and temporally, within the context of what can be broadly understood as South Asia. Secondly, one has to acknowledge the dual forces of racial domination-driven colonisation and rapid industrialisation emergent in the European notion of empire. These forces have benefitted exponentially, hand-in-hand with surplus economic profits from the colonies and quick, constant material-production processes in these spaces and societies, entailing a new perception of the work-otium dichotomy. These forces need to be recognised as significant disruptions as well as influences in the extant concepts of experiential time within various cultural contexts in South Asia. Recognising the significance of colonial capitalism and the emergence of work-leisure binaries is central to exploring the axis of colonial encounter in the evolution of these concepts. Within the colonial encounter, the significance of otium is naturally one of asymmetry and inequality. Colonialist discourses and approaches to the production of knowledge further accentuate this disparity. In addition, the significance of utilitarian thought that encompasses British rule as necessary despotism requires special attention, for utilitarian thought also plays a vital role in the way concepts of leisure transform in the wake of post-Enlightenment notions of progress and the Industrial Revolution in England and Europe. These ideas of progress and taboos around idleness had an overarching influence on extant notions of leisure in the cultures of the colonies where concepts of English leisure and idleness were often directly imposed.

### 1.2.1 Otium and the Colonial Encounter

In her essay on 'Indian' aspects of otium or otiose leisure, Fludernik mentions the "motif[s]" of "urban flânerie" in ancient Sanskrit dramatic genres, alongside the pre-colonial "courtly traditions" of artistic performances and poetry compositions in the courts of "*nawabs* and *rajas*" as "native traditions" (Fludernik 2020: 18). Kumkum Bhattacharya mentions leisure represented as "activities" in ancient Indian epics and social accounts like Vatsyayana's *Kāmasūtra*, Kalidasa's *Meghadūtam* and a few other texts (2006: 75). She also discusses leisure as "entertainment" through her reference to the Sanskrit word *vinoda*, "synonymous with pleasure, entertainment, enjoyment, and so on" (Bhattacharya 2006: 80). Seema Bawa, and contributors to the edited volume (2023) explore aspects of leisure in early and premodern South Asia. While Fludernik and Bhattacharya

attempt to look at histories of leisure in India through reading "motifs" and "activities" in various literary texts, the approach for this study positions the research problem from a different vantage point. With reference to the late colonial period, the focus needs to be on discourses of leisure, idleness and, significantly, laziness that have emerged in interactions between the British colonial authorities and the 'Indians'. These emergent contestations are particularly important, not only due to the complex power-nexus of colonial encounter, but also because, as Keith Thomas has argued, the nineteenth century was a time when "English attitudes to leisure" were "exported all over the world, introducing into India, for example, a dichotomy between work and leisure which had not previously existed there" (1965: 98). This rupture is also signalled by Kumkum Bhattacharya in her suggestion that those communities that are "yet to be inducted into the mindset that goes with industrialisation cannot draw distinctions between work and non-work or work time and free time in their daily lives" (Bhatacharya 2006: 78). Thomas recaps Ranajit Guha's contribution to the seventh 'Past and Present Conference' of 1964:

> Summarising a pre-industrial attitude to labour and leisure, R. GUHA (University of Sussex) described India before the 1850s. Neither in the written codes of Hinduism nor in practice was there a clear-cut distinction between labour and leisure, or a moral and social objection to idleness, or a clear distinction between free and servile labour. Montesquieu and other Europeans, therefore, described Asians as averse to labour. Thrift was not regarded as a virtue by the Indian élite and extravagance was the fashion. The dichotomy between work and leisure, and the condemnation of leisured life even for those who could afford it, only appeared after 1850 as the result of European influence (Thomas 1965: 99).[44]

Guha's reported claims ignore the influences of Islam and Christianity in early modern India and their possible impact on time or its management along lines of labour and leisure. Ishwar Modi foregrounds leisure as deeply intertwined with social structure; while social structure formulates leisure, leisure also influences new structures and social norms (Modi 2012: 387–88). While Modi also identifies leisure in India as transforming through social changes in various historical periods (ibid.), Bawa's edited volume highlights case studies of leisure in visual arts, literary representations, and performative forms in a *longue durée* view of 'premodern' South Asia (Bawa 2023). The present study on

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[44] The Conference was held in London on 9th July 1964. Thomas's paper cited here summarises the discussions of the afternoon sessions on that day of the conference, published by Oxford University Press on behalf of The Past and Present Society in 1965. See Keith Thomas, "Work and Leisure in Industrial Society" (1965), 96–103.

leisure in modern South Asia, picks up the narrative, acknowledging "the result of European influence" in the industrial-colonial period as a seminal moment in the history of leisure in South Asia. Sumit Sarkar has argued that during this period of colonial encounter, transformations due to the impact of clock-time and print culture led to the emergence of consciousness of the self in relation to temporality (Sarkar 1997 b: 186–90). This consciousness can be seen in several Bengali books he discusses, where writers from varying social strata reflect upon and evaluate their perceptions of temporality. Sarkar's study of *cāk'ri*, too, responds to the discussion of the self in relation to temporality within the experience of Bengalis pertaining to salaried jobs, especially that of the petty clerk of colonial bureaucracy. While these studies directly lead us to the significance of transformations under colonial rule, there is a scarcity of secondary sources in Bengali or Urdu that discuss leisure or related concepts, except, perhaps, a couple of sources on *āḍḍā*.[45] The swell in Bengali and Urdu literature (especially in the nineteenth century) that discuss and debate idleness or other leisurely states of being needs urgent attention and the present study hopes to address that requirement and initiate conversations on these topics.

As Fludernik (2014 and 2020) has argued, one crucial aspect of colonial interactions is the emergence of leisure and idleness as analytical terms used to identify the colonisers and the colonised as exclusive communities. A strategic use of these terms results in the semantics of leisure as instruments of *othering*. In his reading of ideology and colonial capitalism, Syed Hussein Alatas (1977) has demonstrated how orientalist stereotypes and ethnic prejudices on the part of the coloniser gave rise to the 'myth of the lazy native'[46] in the context of Southeast Asia. Fludernik's reading expands on this theme in the context of India, making the apposite point that just as class, social status and gender can make leisure an exclusive experience, the prejudice of race and ethnicity in the context of colonisation can likewise recriminate the excluded other (Fludernik 2014: 131). At the same time, from such constructions of exclusion and othering, a counter-narrative is evident in which "the orientalist allegation of idleness with regard to the so-called 'lazy native' is counterpointed by British aspirations to become rich and to imitate the style of living observed among the native elites" (2014: 130). Thus, on the one hand, encounters with the so-called indolent and lazy natives in Mughal India gave rise to aspiring 'nabobs' (mimicking courtly representations of pleasure and the indolence of the *navāb*s); on

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45    For example, the compendium of Bengali essays on āḍḍā, *Bāṅālīr Āḍḍā* (2009), ed. Lina Chaki.

46    C.f. Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977).

the other hand, the leisurely attitudes of the 'natives' were seen by (self-proclaimed) industrious British colonisers as suspicious and even dangerous.

This suspicion and caution did not only emerge from moral prejudice and fear of laziness or sloth amongst the godless lazy natives that could infect Puritan Christian work ethics. Another significant threat posed by the laziness of the natives, I would argue, was its possibly damaging impact on colonial capitalism and the expansion of the empire. While colonial capitalism, on the one hand, thrived on the principle of exploitation of indigenous people and their resources, the project of expanding the empire was intricately linked to attempts at understanding, however (in)adequately, the cultures and civilisations of the governed. As such, a reading of the discourses of leisure and idleness in this context cannot avoid questions of power and knowledge, cultural and epistemological concerns that were, in the context of colonialism, deeply entangled with politics and political language. As Javed Majeed has reasoned through a pertinent reading of James Mill's *The History of British India* (1817) and of the orientalist imagination in the works of Romantics like Thomas Moore and Robert Southey, imperial desires to critique such orientalist imaginations as "undisciplined" complemented the desire to control and govern the empire overseas efficiently (Majeed 1992: 5).

While some colonial historians and administrators like William Jones (1746–1794) attempted to "define an idiom in which cultures could be compared and contrasted" through a committed interest in the languages, literatures, and laws of the 'natives', others like Mill and Bentham made attempts to fashion an idiom through which these cultures could be criticised (Majeed 1992: 43–44). Majeed elaborates on this tension between the varying epistemological perceptions of the colonised other by the coloniser in his reading of Bentham's language of utilitarianism and the profound impact it had on James Mill and his understanding of India. Although Majeed cautions us to read Mill's *History* as a direct application of utilitarian values to the case of India, what becomes evident in his arguments is the variety of approaches towards what Edward Said has termed 'Orientalism' amongst British philosophers, colonial administrators, and historians (and writers). While they all saw the 'native cultures' through lenses of constructed representations of the other, attempts at 'redeeming 'Indian culture' (made by William Jones) conflicted with attempts of 'reforming' the same (Mill and Bentham).

Such conflicts played a central role in conceptualisations of leisure discourses in the Indian subcontinent, in the wake of colonial upheavals, of course, but also in relation to the larger framework of *civilising* the barbarians and *disciplining* the idle. Simultaneously, colonial interactions have also often resulted in appreciation and admiration for the leisurely ways of the East. One must be cautious of a simplistic reading of attitudes towards leisure in such a multifaceted context as merely divided between groups as 'colonisers' and their conceptualisations of the 'colonised'. The history of colonial interactions in

India is entangled and, at times, multi-directional. Not only is the term 'colonised' applicable to vastly different communities with varying relations to colonising authorities, but as Saugata Bhaduri (2020) has shown, the idea of labelling a single colonial authority as the only colonialist regime for a contested region like Bengal is problematic when read against the entangled history of competing colonial powers, or in his terms, 'polycoloniality' (Bhaduri 2020). In the case of academic interests among colonial officers, as Majeed (2019) has demonstrated, even over-arching and standardised projects like Abraham Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* reveal a "loose and flexible" relationship with the colonial state (Majeed 2019: 1–12, 17–41). Likewise, it is imperative to remember that the changing attitudes to leisure discourses are bound to be far more complicated and contested than naïve and simplified binaries. The literary landscape of the nineteenth century provides for a nuanced exploration of these discourses from South Asian perspectives, thus enabling a bi-directional conversation beyond the restrictions of semantic history, colonial forms of knowledge production, and dangers of epistemic violence.

## 1.2.2  Semantics of Otium in South Asia and the Role of Literature

Leisure in Bengali is denoted by the words *abakāś* or *abasar*. These lexemes also embody the notion of 'space' or an 'opportunity'; *furṣat* is used in Urdu and Hindi (as well as in colloquial Bengali) and can be understood as 'leisure', but also 'opportunity', 'rest' or 'ease'; c*huṭṭī* in Urdu and Hindi or *chuṭi* in Bengali can refer to a "release or freedom from something" connoting the end of some engagement or occupation, a holiday.[47] However, as discussions on lexemes of leisure in Indian languages by Melina Munz (2020) and myself (2021) have demonstrated, these words do not precisely express the "various experiences and practices" of what we interpret as otium in the texts – neither in English nor in Urdu/Bengali/Hindi. The words for leisure, for example, both the Bengali *abakāś* and the Urdu *furṣat*, imply being free from regular business, but they also have – and this is how they are mostly used – a connotation of having an opportunity, similar to the German *Muße* [48] – that is, to be able to do something else in the absence of regular business of life. As Munz correctly derives, the concept

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47    For an elaborate discussion of otium lexemes in Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu, see Noor (2021), 302–7.

48    An etymological reading of *Muße* would be fascinating in this context, with its associations with the verb *müssen* ('to have to') that seems to have evolved from the sense of the verb *können* ('to be able to') with its earlier connotations of "*Gelegenheit, Möglichkeit*"

"excludes 'mere' idleness and instead denotes something fruitful and thoughtful" (Munz 2020).

I have claimed that "words like *furṣat, rāhat, ārām, avakāś, śānti, sukūn* are closer to otium than the English leisure in its present-day meaning", mainly because they all imply a "sense of 'opportunity'" (Noor 2021: 306–7). But it is not through a semantic investigation of such lexemes in the literary that we can arrive at a reading of otium and related concepts. Often, different lexemes, especially pertaining to emotion, feelings, and mood – for example, the Urdu *śauq/śauqīn* (see Introduction) or the Bengali rendition, *śakh/śakher* (see Chapter 5) – describing a leisurely/vocational mood or attitude can be seen to embody such conceptual formulations of otium in a more comprehensible manner. Similar lexemes are *āvārah* (footloose, itinerant, aimless; Chapters 4 and 6), *māyā* (allure, love, enchantment), *ālasya* (indolence, laziness; see Chapter 3), and *yād* (remembrance; Chapters 2 and 4), among others. The word for idleness, *bekār* (derived from the Persian compound, *bi* – privative, *kār* – 'work') is used by all three languages – Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali to connote idle, unemployed, and even useless. In Bengali, *alasatā* or *ālasya* connote laziness, sloth, and indolence. A significant difference in the connotations of a word like *bekār or ālasya* with European terms like the English idleness, the Italian *ozio*, and the French *oisiveté* is that, unlike these words, the Urdu and Bengali lexemes did not have an inherent association with "religious morality", or "sin" (Noor 2021: 306–7). In response, Munz claims that in the "European context and in capitalist societies, the protestant work ethic has strengthened this association" (Munz 2020: n.p.). Contemporary references to unproductive time in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent (but also in Hindi-Urdu speaking parts of the southern peninsula like Bombay and Hyderabad) are embodied in colloquial expressions like *khālī* in Urdu or *khāli* in Bengali and Hindi, meaning free, without occupation. *Vehlā* (Punjabi) is a slang used casually in Hindi and Urdu to refer to someone idle and unoccupied, and useless, synonymous with the above-discussed *bekār*. In Bengali, the expression *lyād khāoẏā* (literally, consuming laziness, for even feeding oneself takes effort) is ubiquitously used to refer to feelings of lethargy, procrastination, and idleness, considered typical of inefficient and lazy Bengalis.[49] However, it is the Indian-English expression of 'time-pass' that is understood across the length and breadth of the subcontinent to express both indifferent as well as enjoyable states of unproductivity, as not doing

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(opportunity, possibility). See entry in *Kluge Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (2002 [1883]).

49   See entry 'lyād khāẏoā' on the Facebook page *Characters of Calcutta*, where it is expressed as 'taking rest before feeling tired'. https://www.facebook.com/CoFCal/

something productive to 'pass the time', but as participating or indulging in useless or unproductive actions, mostly talking, strolling, and socialising without any regard or attention to time or schedule, just passing the time.[50] These contemporary expressions are not discussed in literary expressions as much as they are used in digital spaces and colloquial speech in public spheres. A committed study of these expressions would require a different approach and corpus from the present study.

Like other early colonial dictionaries, John Gilchrist's *English-Hindoostaa-nee Dictionary* (1786) emphasises the sense of negative sloth in South Asian languages. Gilchrist translates idleness as "*tu'uttool*", "*byathao*"[51], describing the practice of sitting around idle. Idle or idler have many denotations, decidedly negative, including "*nikumma*" (useless), "*kumchor*" (literally, *stealing* away from work) and "*tumash been*" (an idle spectator, or someone who sits around *doing nothing*). Indolence is translated as "*soostee*", "*kahilee*" and "*mujhoolee*", while Gilchrist retains "*foorsat*", "*furaghut*", "*chootkara*", "*chootee*" and "*khula-see*" for leisure. Descriptions of the body and the senses play a significant role in formulating lexemes and semantics of laziness, particularly the allegedly idle and lazy native's body. On the other hand, positive connotations of leisure, as an opportunity, a gift, a blessing is used in the preface to the dictionary, albeit in reference to European 'mankind':

> Mankind had a right to expect the fullest, and most accurate information, on the Indian dialects, from a quarter in which, they must have been employed as the medium of sublime moral doctrines, for a long series of years, by a regular succession too of able men, all versed in the ancient, and modern languages of Europe, surrounded by native disciples, *blessed with leisure*, and many *opportunities* which never fell to my lot, in the course of a distracted weary pilgrimage here. (Preface, i.)

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photos/lyadha-quintessential-bengali-term-that-bongs-cannot-do-without-in-the-city-that/650879425114549/ accessed on 30th March 2020.

See also the recent Bengali comic short film, titled *Lyād* (2021), directed by Amlan Dutta. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx4FlYYvqKw accessed on 15th October 2022.

While such colloquial expressions do not feature in dictionaries, they are communicated across the linguistic community based on shared culture and sensory experiences.

50   See, for example, a comic, self-derogatory discussion of Indian "time-pass" in the stand-up comedy set, *Yours Sincerely*, by Indian comedian Kanann Gill on Netflix. Alternately, 'time-pass' is also used to describe a value judgement on an event or an experience that is not good enough to be taken seriously.

51   Words in double quotations are retained in Gilchrist's transliteration, which is different from the transliteration system I have followed.

Later in the same paragraph, Gilchrist mentions that it is not the Church and the European missionaries who had any role in the development of or had success in communicating with the languages of 'Hindoostan', but that it was the East India Company and its "permanent power" that had been the "grand source of information" in Indian Philology and study of "the other branches of Indian lore" (Preface, ii). The East India Company and its many administrators demonstrated an insatiable interest in colonial projects oriented towards 'production of knowledge'. This interest was amply expressed in the number of dictionaries and grammars of Indian languages and several historical and philological treatises compiled by members of the Company – from William Jones and John Gilchrist to James Mill and George Abraham Grierson, to name a few. Simultaneously, their keen interest served to promote the study of Indian languages and literatures to such an extent that not only did they establish centres for learning and translation of classical texts from Indian languages, but in some cases, attempts were also gradually made to censor the kinds of books that were written, translated, and published for British officials in India as well as for Indian readers (see Chapter 2). These extensions of interest and involvement had an impact (if not always directly) not only on literary discourses in colonial India but also on discourses of leisurely learning, i.e., on otium as practices of reading, writing, and composing poetry, performative, or literary works.

As such, any study of leisure/idleness/otium has to position itself within the semantic networks presented in conflicted and complex literary discourses in colonial India. Literary texts in this context are seen to respond to debates on idleness, indolence, or leisurely states, with reference to these impositions of utilitarianism and reform. For example, Altaf Husain Hali critiques idleness and excessive leisure as intertwined with his criticism of Urdu poetry, particularly the *ġazal*; however, he also expresses an impossible longing for the leisurely past and the glorious tradition of Urdu poetry before the events of 1857 (explored in Chapter 2). Likewise, Bankimchandra Chatterjee's satirical critique of Bengali *bābu*s and their emulation of European ideas of Enlightenment in the voice of his brilliant literary creation, the idle, undisciplined and opium-consuming Kamalakanta, can be read in contrast with his admonitory commentary on the lazy, idle ways of new/modern Bengali women, *nabīnā*, who do not work enough, wasting their days in the leisurely pursuit of reading novels.[52] The next section follows these ambivalences and contestations in the context of English notions of utilitarianism and its influences on the vernacular literary fields in colonial South Asia.

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52  Chattopadhyay, "Kamalākānta" and "Prācīnā ebaṃ Nabīnā" (1954), 49–112, 249–354.

### 1.2.3  Utilitarian Discourses in Colonial India and Otium as Literary Creativity

Several factors played critical roles in developing literary discourses in India under the aegis of colonial administration, leading to influential encounters between various literary communities and interactions within public spheres.[53] Along with the rise of print and new media, standardisation of certain regional languages, and the flourishing of several genres, literary processes also acted as the platform wherein encounters between the colonisers and the colonised took place. The literary sphere became a space of contestations between communities for socio-political and intellectual discussions and reflections regarding civilisation, politics, and culture. If cultural expressions of play were misunderstood and mistranslated by colonial authorities, the literary fields emerged as platforms for expressions of creativity and play for many Indian writers. This book proposes that literature, in its multiple contestations, attains an agency which incorporates the freedom and possibilities of the play-element of otium in response to colonisation (as a hindrance to the possibility of otium).[54] We have to be open to reorienting our understanding of the self under colonial/ alien rule if we are to understand otium in its contexts of ambivalence and exclusion. After all, it is only as a function of the consciousness of the self that otium can be recognised, experienced, and historicised. Racial and civilisational otherising are significant aspects of British colonial rule in South Asia. The contending and contested consciousness of the self are to be read as reflected and expressed in literature and literary discourses. This is the proposition from which I argue for a reading of otium as entangled and deeply interlinked with the literary in South Asia.

On the part of colonisers, the early interactions often led to admiration and interest in 'the languages and literatures of Hindoostan'. Gradually, however, this interest went on to take the shape of direct intervention through the disciplining and regulation of literary output. Likewise, the responses and reactions from Indian writers often led to various challenging, chaotic, and fascinating innovations within the literary. Two important early events, both in 1800, are the establishment of the College of Fort William in Calcutta by Marquess Wellesley and the founding of the Serampore Mission Press by William Carey and William Ward; the Serampore Press printed a massive number of texts in

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53 For a concise overview, see Harder (2021), 412–23.

54 The idea of play is not in opposition to seriousness but to the play aspects of cultural and civilisational expressions, often strategically formulated in language, literature, and art forms. Huizinga (1949), 5–6.

numerous South Asian languages and provided much of the textbooks for study at the Fort William College. Several scholars, particularly Sisir Kumar Das (1978), have shown that the purpose of the establishment of the college was "to help towards the growth of an efficient civil service in India", by educating new recruits of the East India Company in the languages and literatures of India (Das 1978: 1). The Press was set up by missionaries and it worked towards the production of several translated versions of the Bible in Asian languages. Both these events had an immense impact on the development of vernacular literary spheres, as Indian writers and intellectuals began to respond to and utilise these platforms – especially that of print technology (Harder 2021: 413–14).

Literary-cultural interests of the early colonial administrators were often intertwined with a desire to understand and appreciate Indian languages and literatures. But these curiosities and affinities were more than often "pragmatically" linked to the efficient governing of the empire and its people. As C M Naim (2004 a) has shown, such engagements gradually evolved into definitive forms of intrusion, which in turn can be seen to shape certain literary discourses in India, especially for the Persianate-Urdu sphere. One instance is that of the 1813 mandate whereby the East India Company was to set aside funds for "the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India" (Naim 2004 a: 120). Similar strategic support (and thus intervention) increased rapidly in the coming decades. Eventually, English became the chosen medium of higher education in India, replacing the classical languages, Persian and Sanskrit. In turn, these languages became irrelevant as languages of instruction in modern India due to the more common use of standardised regional languages, like Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu, at the primary and secondary education levels (Naim 2004 a; Harder 2021: 415). It has been aptly noted that reading such myriad developments in the vernacular literary spheres must venture beyond the notion of colonialist discourse and clear space for the agency, influence, and activities of the vernacular intelligentsia within this context (Harder 2021: 414–16). Simultaneously, it is also important to note that the interventions of the British authorities were not felt the same across the breadth of the subcontinent. In Bengal, for example, such interventions and innovations were often met with enthusiasm. However, it remains undisputable that both – Bengali and Urdu – and almost all standardised regional modern languages of India underwent immense and rapid transformations under colonial modernity, especially through the nineteenth century, in a compressed (or condensed) form. In these transformative processes, strategic creativity and leisurely playfulness were as persistent as ideas of utilitarianism and reform.

Scholars have seen the British attitude towards Indian languages and literatures as falling into two categories: the 'Orientalists' (who argued for the revival of Sanskrit, Persian and other 'native languages') and the 'Anglicists', who debated for the need to establish the centrality of English as the language of learning. In a decisive victory of the latter, Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859) appealed for an amendment in the 1813 clause for funding the education and knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of British India. He argued that the government would pay, not for "reviving literature in India" as the Orientalists had proposed, but for the promotion of knowledge in subjects and languages that would be 'useful'. In his 1835 *Minute on Education*, Macaulay drew a direct link between utility and literature as follows: "The grants which are made from the public purse for the encouragement of literature differ in no respect from the grants which are made from the same purse for other objects of *real* or *supposed utility*".[55] As is only too well-known, he refuted the need for learning in Arabic and Sanskrit, deeming the "vernaculars" to be "poor and rude", containing "neither literary nor scientific information".[56] He decreed infamously that "the whole native literature of India and Arabia" was merely worth "a single shelf of a good European library" and that the only aspect of literature at which the learned Indians were competent was poetry. Since, in his view, the poetical tradition of Europe was no less valuable, he claimed:

> But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the *superiority* of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is *less valuable* than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. (Emphases mine)

Macaulay's minute had two significant arguments: one was to abolish centres of learning in Arabic and Sanskrit and simultaneously impose English as the *lingua franca*; the other was not to pay the Indians to teach the British these languages but to utilise the government funds towards a transformation of the education system, so that the natives could benefit from the 'truth' and 'pro-

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55    Emphasis mine. From Macaulay's *Minutes*: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html accessed on 27th May 2018.

56    Although he attacked the 'vernaculars', he was discussing the 'classical' languages, Arabic and Sanskrit. See Hans Harder's detailed discussion on this strategic switch (2024), 9–10.

gress' of European and English education. The languages, literatures and texts of India were deemed 'useless'; so were the demands to preserve and revive them on behalf of the Orientalists. Macaulay's arguments in designing such policies and their implementation demonstrate a fine interweaving of racist-colonialist bias towards Indian languages and literatures – either in the classical languages or in the regional languages – and a rigid adherence to utilitarian policies in connection with the 'proper' and 'justful' use of government funds. Thus, the earlier colonial interest in Indian literatures and languages, stemming from cultural affinities and literary engagement was gradually replaced by a firm, utilitarian, and disciplinary administrative hand.[57] The crux of colonial education and learning has been seen by several historians as focused on the use of literature and language as tools for the efficient administration of the British territories in India in serving the empire, both at home and overseas. Macaulay's utilitarian policies and Mill's "scale of civilisations", based on *utility*, formed the framework within which the despotic rule over 'lower'/'barbarous' societies was justified (Majeed 1992: 135–36).

These influences of the colonialists on the literary discourses of colonial India have been noted by several scholars of both Urdu and Bengali (and other modern Indian) literatures. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note, as Sudipta Kaviraj emphasises, that the relationships that colonial authorities had with the Indian-language intelligentsia were often varied and thus had varying effects on the different language-literary fields. The differences in the case of Bengal and North India lay majorly in the perception of the British amongst the Indian intelligentsia. While the Bengali intelligentsia, at least in the early days, saw the British as a trade power, in North India, the perception was one of contending empires (even if on different scales). Both Delhi and Lucknow were seats of political power, reigned over by emperor and king with established ancestries. The British rule had threatened and finally overthrown these symbols of power, represented by the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775–1862) and the last king of Lucknow, Wajid Ali Shah (1822–87).[58]

For literature, a concrete difference was that patronage under the king and the court was no longer possible.[59] Instead, monetary support (in the form of

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57 See also Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls* (1991 [1951]), 50–51.

58 And they were merely symbols, titular rulers at best, with real administrative powers in British hands by this time. However, their symbolic value was the last straw for the Indo-Muslim civilisation and its glorious history. And such symbols had kept the peace despite rapid foreign colonisation.

59 For a good understanding of literary patronage and the place of the court, see Frances Pritchett's *Nets of Awareness* (1994), especially "The Lost World".

meagre prize money) from the British government entailed direct intervention from the alien and powerful adversary, as seen in Macaulay's policies (see Chapter 2). On the other hand, the nineteenth-century boom in print technology encouraged many writers to become entrepreneurs (and thus, to a certain degree, independent and indifferent towards authorities), as several writers juggled journalism and printing/publishing along with literary creativity. The intelligentsia's relationships with colonial authorities in these linguistic-cultural centres were thus varying and in flux. While in Bengal one may (primarily) see an emergent relationship based on strategic compromise and cooperation, even enthusiasm for English and European learning, in the Urdu-Persian linguistic-cultural centres of North India after 1857, this relationship was fraught with distrust and suspicion. The conflict was reflected in the mourning for the lost glory of a world influenced by court culture and a scepticism for and even reluctance towards the English language and foreign methods of learning. These already dynamic relations changed rapidly through the events before and after 1857 as they were influenced by the many political upheavals as the colonial rule transitioned from that of the East India Company into the direct reign of the Crown.

Despite influences and impositions of colonial authorities, literature and the literary saw magnanimous developments in the regional languages owing to the innovations on behalf of Indian writers, print entrepreneurs and publishers. One significant change was the confirmative emergence of prose genres. The nineteenth century witnessed a boom in the genre of the vernacular novel (see Chapter 2). Some literary spheres, like Bengali, also witnessed the emergence of the modern short story already in the late nineteenth century while a condensed rise and growth of the modern short story in Urdu took place a couple of decades later (Chapter 4). Personal prose (Chapter 3), essays, sketches, and autobiography surged with the proliferation of and access to printed texts. Literary practices amongst women became common – in fact, the nineteenth century witnessed a great change in the quotidian connection of women with reading and writing, especially in the vernaculars. Print media infiltrated the homes and lives of readers of these regional languages.

While it can be argued that the earlier focus on poetry had now shifted towards prose, poetry, too, benefitted greatly from the literary innovations of the time. Elite, as well as popular literary pastimes like the traditions of the spontaneous flow of poetry at poetic assemblies – the Urdu *muśāʻirah* and the Bengali *kabigān* – underwent significant transformations. As poetry was now more available in the visual form of the print, rather than the earlier popular forms of the oral and the aural, engagement with poetry had become a reflective, private, and solitary experience within a few decades. Kaviraj notes that the pleasurable literary pastimes (social in nature) were "fatally undermined by

a more introspective literary culture, marking a fundamental shift in the nature of the literary itself" (Kaviraj 2014b: 79).[60] A significant aspect was brought into the technical structure of poetry as its value changed from the aural and the oral to the semantic and the thematic to suit the modern silent reader (ibid). Literary criticism also emerged in the poetic tradition in a completely new manner (see Chapter 2). *Muśāʿirah*s or poetic symposiums, too, were renewed with a utilitarian intention, influenced by British officials like Colonel Holroyd and G W Leitner, where instead of the earlier spontaneity that allowed a flow in poetic compositions, now a premeditated theme or subject was chosen, more 'connected to real' life (Pritchett 2003: 35–36).

Thus, through a complex program of 'instruction' and 'improvement', certain English notions of puritan work ethic, utilitarianism and efficiency in education, literature, and learning took hold of colonial India in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Such developments are manifest in various social and literary-cultural phenomena, for example, the proliferation of print and useful literature in the vein of 'self-help' that catered to a growing consuming middle-class readership; in the standardisation of English as a language for scientific study at higher levels; and the widespread induction of a section of the population into clerical or salaried jobs, where reading and writing became monotonous experiences. In his concise overview of literary developments in India during the colonial rule, Hans Harder (2022) has suggested that for certain literary innovations with respect to the vernacular fields, colonialism could, with the necessary caution, perhaps be seen as a "rather contingent outer frame with little influence on the dynamics of the linguistic and literary fields", instead of simply attributing the new literary and linguistic developments at this time merely to the colonial situation (Harder 2022: 413). I agree with this proposition regarding the enormous and varied literary developments in South Asia and South Asian languages, as Harder appropriately demonstrates and as the following chapters in the present study also argue. While the backdrop of colonialism had a significant impact and influence on these processes – as a provocation or catalyst – they did not necessarily "directly encourage" literary production (Harder 2022: 421). My proposal is to tweak the reading of colonialism and literature in reading otium in this context, for the opposing force – colonialist utilitarianism – was vocalised loud and clear, particularly in the form of misguided critique of South Asian literature as 'useless' and 'wasteful'. Many Indian writers agreed with the colonialist critique (see Chapter 2), and many of

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[60] Simultaneously, new forms of literary pastimes emerged, for example, the literary *āḍḍā* of the nineteenth century, often surrounding literary journals like Bankimchandra's *Baṅgadarśan*. See Chapter 3.

them refuted such claims (see Chapter 3) – all of them contributed towards developments and innovations, thereby negotiating the literary as a space of playful innovation, politics of insurgence, and self-expression.

Chronologically, we witness a decline in such 'responses' to the notion of useful literature as propagated by colonial authorities and can observe a more independent attempt at carving a distinct literary space for possibilities of otium through the century. As the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries reaped the fruits of these origins of utilitarianism in literary, political, and social discourses, writers responded to these debates in a variety of ways, establishing their literary creativity, engaging literature with the consciousness of freedom and playfulness, and fashioning themselves as constituents of autonomous, modern, and often cosmopolitan literary and emotional communities. Literature, thus, has to be read as a concept intricately linked with otium in contextual frameworks historically constructed around imposed notions of utilitarianism. I propose that otium be read, in this context, as manifested in emotional ties to the literary, in the mood of literariness and creative freedom, and the sociability (and/or solitude) of literary experiences as resonance. Literature – in Bengali, *sāhitya* and Urdu, *adab* (both lexemes containing a sense of sociability and etiquette/way of living already constitute the component of otium as creative experience (rendered as free and/or regulated). Literature and otium then formulate an entangled concept – not only that which is transformed but also the vehicle which transforms the meanings of these concepts for the reading, writing, and feeling communities.

## 1.3  Approaches to the Study: Concepts, Translation, and Emotions

Against colonialist methods of conceptualisation, the approach of this book is intensely conscious of how concepts, words, and meanings meant different things to different communities within the colonial encounter. Bernard Cohn has suggested that "meaning" for the English was "something attributed to a word, a phrase, or an object, which could be determined and translated" (Cohn 1996: 18–19). For "Indians", meaning was more than something with a specific referent, and it often included "effect and affect" (ibid.). From such a vantage point, this book also addresses the problem of our present postcolonial, Western/global academic methodologies bound within strict disciplinary considerations. My approach to reading otium and literature as entangled concepts relies on the intersection of multiple fields in this study, locating the literary-conceptual-emotional within this system of effect and affect. I conceptualise the study from a historical vantage point, alternately comparing the two literary contexts but not to draw distinct and specific results to quantify or qualify them;

instead, the approach is to explore what moods and trends affected the discourses of otium and how these influenced the history of otium in South Asia. In principle, the discipline of comparative literary studies is a useful approach to reinstate that not all South Asian literary studies are bound to understand or express literature, literary developments, or a literary-cultural concept in the same way, within or beyond colonial contingencies. The differences and similarities in the two traditions of Urdu and Bengali as modern Indian languages, with regards to their individual and collective responses to colonial (and at times English) understanding of literature and otium, are significant for this study. However, for comparison to result in fruitful understanding between languages, traditions, and histories, "the objects of comparison have to be clearly defined. This definition, moreover, has to remain stable throughout the period under investigation" (Pernau 2012: 2). While the focus of this study, and the base of such a comparison, is the concept of otium, and because it is such a contested and dynamic concept teeming with ambivalences and issues of rhetoric and semantics, not to mention translation, comparative methodology in this context needs to be reconsidered.

Since the concept is at the centre of these histories and encounters, I argue that this history is best explored through the discipline of conceptual history, which shares multiple tenets with intellectual history or the history of ideas. The shift from national history to entangled histories has also played a significant role in understanding encounter and transfer that are now more adequately traced within conceptual history in a global framework (Pernau 2012). It would thus be helpful to approach this study through the reconsiderations in the discipline, which has come to name itself 'global' conceptual history, which also shares certain commonalities with global intellectual history. As Andrew Sartori and Samuel Moyn (2013) explicate, global intellectual history attempts to "create a more inclusive intellectual history that respects the diversity of intellectual traditions and broadens the parameters of thought beyond the narrow limits defined by the traditions institutionalised in the Western or Eurocentric academy" (Sartori & Moyn 2013: 7). Global conceptual history does the same by focusing on the transformation of concepts through transnational historical encounters in various periods and regions. A central aspect of this approach is the 'translation processes' of words and concepts, which undergo encounters and evolution and eventually have lasting impact on their meanings. These translations do not merely pertain to words and concepts but also to cultures and contexts and can be extended across languages (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 2) and other modes of expression. This section clarifies my methodological take on the study of otium in modern Urdu and Bengali prose, encompassing the issues of translating concepts across cultures, chronotopes, and language(s), and how they provide a way of reading concepts in their entangled formulations.

### 1.3.1 Conceptual History in a Global Framework and Entangled Concepts

Traditionally, the sub-discipline of conceptual history or *Begriffsgeschichte* deals intensely with historical semantics of concepts and terms, focusing on their transformations, sometimes from antiquity to modernity and the present day.[61] In his 'Introduction' (2016 [Ger. 1972]) to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Basic Concepts in History), Reinhart Koselleck explicates that to a considerable extent, the lexicon [*GG*] is "oriented to the present": "Its theme is how the modern world has been registered through language; how, in other words, it was comprehended and articulated through concepts which we still use" (2016 a: 33). The central problematic of the lexicon has been pivoted around "the dissolution of the old society" and "the development of the modern world" (ibid.). For Koselleck, the transformation of concepts from the old society to the modern world could only happen during a "threshold period", which he termed the *Sattelzeit* (literally, *saddle period*), a time of profound change in social and political histories.[62] Many articles in the lexicon, although focusing on German (and sometimes a broader European) society and its social and political concepts, have revealed how the "significance of old concepts was altered to fit the changing conditions of the modern world", demonstrating a profound change in the meanings of concepts and their terminology (ibid.).

However, Koselleck also warns us about the superimposition of language in the study of concepts. Influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics, Koselleck was deeply aware of the significance of sociocultural context, and language and identity in relation to the interpretation of and transformations of concepts in question (Koselleck 2016 a: 44). Taking the concept beyond its linguistic boundaries, he illustrates that a concept may be attached to a word, but it is not reducible to the word alone; it is much more than the word (Koselleck 2016 a: 45). Beyond the impact of spoken or written language, he has argued for systems of communication like semiotics, behavioural patterns, and other systems within which language is embedded. While such systems may be reducible to language, they can also "evoke or control the corresponding actions, attitudes or patterns of behavior" (Koselleck 2016 b: 60). Here, the idea of doing conceptual history beyond the mere study of semantics and lexicons can be observed. In fact, moving beyond a mere history

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61    C.f. *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (*Basic Concepts in History*, 1972–90), a dictionary in eight volumes, on key concepts in social and political terminology, compiled by Otto Brunner and Reinhart Koselleck.

62    Koselleck locates the eighteenth century as such a period in European history.

of words, the discipline of conceptual history can adequately engage with literary systems to locate conceptual transformations within literature and the literary. Referring to the occurrence of events in the present and their records in the form of past experiences, Koselleck points at the nature of 'linguistic evidence' of literary genres like mythology, drama, and novels, which "all presuppose and thematise the original connection between speaking and doing, of emotion, speaking and silence" (Koselleck 2016 b: 63). Koselleck's approach is that of interdependence. While the scientific terminology of social history for him should remain directed to the history of concepts, "conceptual history must continue to consult the results of social history in order to keep the difference in view between vanishing actuality and its linguistic testimony which is never to be bridged" (Koselleck 2016 b: 72).

British intellectual historian Quentin Skinner, on the other hand, focuses on what he terms 'rhetorical change' or 'rhetorical redescription' in the transformation of concepts. Unlike Koselleck's view of the diachronic transformation of a concept in the *longue durée*, Skinner approaches the question of conceptual change through synchronicity, of short-term changes, or "sudden conceptual shifts", in the way in which words are used in an argumentative structure. He contends that "the transformations we can hope to chart will not strictly speaking be changes in concepts at all. They will be changed in the use of the terms by which our concepts are expressed" (Skinner 2016: 138). He illustrates this through various examples of complex vocabularies that are still extant in English historical dictionaries but have lost their connotations in the sense of either "condemnation" or "commendation" since our ways of evaluating such behavioural patterns have changed (ibid.). For Skinner, such short-term changes are indexes or reflections of "deeper transformations in social life" (ibid.). In Skinner's understanding, a sudden conceptual shift is caused by attempts to persuade an audience of alternative or new ways of applying or using vocabulary. It is not just the meaning of a particular word in context that is altered, but the fundamental values regarding the particular word (Skinner 2016: 141). This idea can be applied in the present study to see how, for example, in the cases of Rabindranath Tagore and Altaf Husain Hali, the idea of 'aristocratic leisure' is expressed and posited, argued for and against in entirely different ways while using lexemes from the same field (*nabābī* and *śurafā*, respectively,) that have influenced their literary communities (see Chapters 2 and 3). Koselleck and Skinner's approaches to conceptual change can be instructive for our study of the transformation of otium, leisure, and idleness as individual and overlapping concepts in South Asia's colonial and post-Independence contexts. As Kari Palonen has claimed, although both approaches differ in certain significant ways, they are not necessarily incompatible; Skinner's

approach can be seen as an aspect of Koselleck's more ambitious project.[63] This study then considers the approaches of semantic and rhetoric change in leisure/idleness/otium concepts in Urdu and Bengali literary spheres, over time, experienced as encounters, transformations, and translations. Furthermore, as this book demonstrates, such encounters and transformations in both semantics and rhetoric lead to an entanglement within a concept itself, where the discourses within encounters imbibe a concept with connotations of the past and the present, the foreign and the indigenous, the original and the translated. Otium can be read as one such entangled concept, where the essence of the concept retains multiple connotations – of idleness and leisureliness.

If concepts evolve from encounters between communities, the actors who translate concepts are positioned within these encounters. They work with at least bilateral meaning formations, if not multilateral. This does not necessarily entail the treachery of translation or threaten the integrity of a concept – it acknowledges that concepts that evolve within encounters attain a characteristic of entanglement, containing asymmetrical influences in their transformation. This entanglement in concepts is a logical process within encounters, as can be witnessed in the global resonance of several concepts today, for instance, democracy or secularism, even if many of these concepts have regional, linguistic, and historical particularities. Entanglement in concepts is inevitable in the 'global conceptual history' framework. Although, as a field, conceptual history has focused on European national histories for quite some time – in particular, historically powerful nations like Germany, Britain, and France – recent instances of scholarship have shown how the field has evolved as a useful approach to study concepts cutting across many languages and regions of the world (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 3). Such studies focus on the historical "connections", "encounters" and "entanglements" between various regions of the globe and the significant impact such meetings – harmonious or otherwise – have had on actors, shaping the very categories through which we study history:

> Global history has shown not only the extent of encounters and connections across different regions but also the measure to which these very encounters brought forth nations, societies, and cultures. It almost goes without saying that such entanglements also had a formative influence on concepts and languages. Moreover, global historians are increasingly becoming aware of the mutuality of influence between colonial powers and their colonies. If we

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63  Here, quoted from Skinner (2016), 145–46. For Palonen's original work, see "Rhetorical and Temporal Perspectives on Conceptual Change: Theses on Quentin Skinner and Reinhart Koselleck" (1999).

proceed further on this route, we discover that this bidirectional pattern impacted the development and transformation of the concepts as well. (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 3)

A significant aspect of global conceptual history is the malleability of the concept 'global' itself, which refers to a "framework of analysis", replacing nations, regions, and languages, which are instead seen as "products of historical interactions" (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 8). For such an approach, the object of study is the interactions and encounters which act as agents of conceptual change. These studies focus alternately on micro and macro levels of encounters and trace the bidirectional flow of knowledge that allows exploration of the relations of power and hegemony between two 'entangled' or unequally related/asymmetrically positioned communities. At the same time, the field is also interested in "changes within the local languages of colonised societies, as well as the conflicts surrounding these changes" (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 4). As Pernau & Sachsenmaier explicate, contrary to what the term 'global' seems to imply, many projects within the rubric actually focus on sample cases from different world regions while situating the research within a global framework of analysis (2016: 7–8).

Koselleck himself laid the path to such a transregional or translinguistic approach for the field in his conceptualisation of asymmetric counterconcepts/"*asymmetrische Gegenbegriffe*" (Koselleck 2004a: 155). When a certain group or community uses a linguistically universal concept to establish its own generality and universality, defying all comparisons, this "kind of self-definition provokes counterconcepts which discriminate against those who have been defined as the 'other'" (Koselleck 2004a: 156). Although traditions of historiography like 'world history' or 'global history' are indeed, and not without reason, susceptible to various controversies of wishful ambitions, the surge in transnational histories, entangled, and connected histories shows them to be a fertile approach of study as well. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam warns us, "it is impossible to write a global history from nowhere"; and as he rightly suggests, such histories often focus on detailed first-hand research on archives and texts where perhaps synthesis does not always prevail.[64] Taking the study of conceptual history through comparisons in a global framework, recent historians have focused on translation as the impossible but necessary process in understanding the transformation of concepts as well as in comparing them. The dialogues between conceptual history and global history, intel-

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[64] See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "On the Origins of Global History" (2013). https://books.openedition.org/cdf/4200 accessed on 19th June 2020.

lectual history, and transnational history have opened up multiple ways of reading historical encounters and conceptual transformations in the recent past, directing the field towards fruitful investigations in non-European contexts.[65] As Hagen Schulz-Forberg (2014) points out, conceptual history can fruitfully operationalise global history when "it is based on an epistemological horizon towards which European and Asian, or indeed any agency and semantics, are related on an equal basis and with equal validity" (2014: 1). The context of South Asia provides for a vibrant field for transregional, transnational, trans- or multilingual or connected histories. In fact, scholars of South Asian literary and cultural histories inevitably work with borders between communities and categories of languages, regions, and nations. Trained in methods of literary and cultural histories of various regions with expertise in at least one regional/classical South Asian language and English, along with a background in subaltern studies, area studies, postcolonial studies, and/or colonial histories of the Portuguese, Dutch, French and the British encounters with various parts of the subcontinent, many South Asian scholars recurrently engage with connected or entangled histories.[66]

Recent decades have seen a movement towards intellectual and conceptual histories on the subcontinent.[67] These examples of scholarship show that intellectual and conceptual history can lead to fruitful explorations of the historical transformation of ideas and concepts in a multifaceted society, especially one constantly in contact with various other societies in a continual process of entanglement. At the same time, for scholars of leisure, idleness or otium, this approach can also lead to some significant rephrasing of questions concerning the (now obsolete) Latin otium, or the German *Muße,* or the English idleness,

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65   For reference to various research projects around conceptual history in and outside Europe, see Willibald Steinmetz's essay, "Forty Years of Conceptual History – The State of the Art" (2016). See also *Civilizing Emotions* (2015), co-authored by Margrit Pernau, Helge Jordheim, Christian Bailey, et al.

66   For example, Sanjay Subrahmanyam's works, particularly *From the Tagus to the Ganges: Explorations in Connected History* (2011). See also Saugata Bhaduri (2020).

67   *An Intellectual History for India* (2010), ed. Shruti Kapila; Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History* (2008); it looks at entangled histories of culturalism that underwent a transformation from eighteenth-century Germany to early nineteenth-century England and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bengal where the significance of the genealogy is not imitation but a social and intellectual transformation of culturalism within the framework of global capitalism. Margrit Pernau's interdisciplinary study, *Ashraf into Middle Classes* (2013), examines the given identity of 'Muslims' in this context through various analytical categories of identities, drawing from multilingual and multi-genre sources to explore the transformation of *aśrāf* society into the middle classes, through the concept of citizenship.

and locate ways of unpacking the multiple meanings of shared and entangled concepts in multiple contexts. The present study hopes to trace a conceptual history of otium in South Asia through an entangled, multidirectional reading of the concept in Bengali, Urdu, and English.[68] Without delving into "transnational" literary histories, it locates the transfers between and within the multilingual context of North India and Bengal. The transfer of concepts and ideas is seen as not only occurring between these two literary spheres, but also through their different and entangled associations with British colonialism and English literature and language, as well as English notions of distinct work and leisure experiences, further engaged with key concepts like progress, civilisation, and discipline/regulation.

In India, as this study hopes to show, notions of regulation were interwoven with various attitudes on the part of the Indian intelligentsia; sometimes, they were challenged, and at times, they were championed. What is certain is that these entangled histories led to a transformation of the ideas of leisure, work, and time, for both the English as well as the different 'native' communities involved. Earlier works on these histories are few and even fewer from the vantage point of literary sources in regional Indian languages. Percival Spear's account *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century India* (1998 [1932]), shows a gradual change in attitudes to ease and freedom in daily activities in the lives of British officials during the various phases of governance in India, and the transformation of the extravagant 'nabob' into the disciplining *sahib*. Jeffrey Auerbach's book *Imperial Boredom: Monotony and the British Empire* (2018) challenges the notion of the exciting lives of 'nabobs' and colonial officers, as well as men (and sometimes women) stationed overseas, and argues instead that the experiences of ennui, monotony and boredom were central to their lives, lived in unfamiliar landscapes. Pia Masurczak's dissertation *(No) Excuse for Idleness: Leisure and Idleness in British Colonial Discourse, c. 1770–1900* (2016) makes a strong case for studying these conceptualisations of colonial idleness, leisure, and laziness in India through a postcolonial critique of material like travel writing and colonial photography. These studies posit themselves from the vantage point of British experiences. Sumit Chakrabarti's recent work *The Calcutta Kerani and the London Clerk* (2021) offers a historical study of the conceptual entanglements in monotonous work, discipline, colonialism, and race in the figures of the British clerk in London and the Indian/Bengali *kerāni* (clerk) in Calcutta. As mentioned,

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68 See Pernau, "Whither Conceptual History? From National to Entangled Histories" (2012), 4–8.

some studies by Sumit Sarkar and Dipesh Chakraborty have also analysed the discourse of *cāk'ri* (salaried job) in colonial Bengal.[69]

The present book attempts to bring together some of the overlapping concerns of these extant studies in the field. It also primarily aims to address the proverbial elephant-in-the-room by situating the study of otium in the regional languages and literatures of colonial India, locating the corpus and concept within the literary spheres of Urdu and Bengali. It thus provides a substantial discussion of the debates around leisure, idleness, otium, play, boredom, and work and the transformations they undergo. It analyses the layers of entanglement in concepts of leisureliness, idleness, laziness, and introduces new ways of thinking through these concepts. The methodology is to approach the transformations through a reading of various emotional manifestations of the entangled concept of otium (See Section 1.4). Rolf Reichardt has argued for a socio-historical semantics as a middle course between 'lexicometry' and conceptual history (2016: 75–78). While problems of sheer lexicometry have already been addressed, documenting the frequency of concept-words in Bengali and Urdu texts with the help of computers is challenging partly due to difficulties in digitising processes. Language (Reichardt mentions particularly everyday language) is then seen as the medium through which social knowledge is propagated. Although not doing a sociology of literature proper, but because the literary in embedded within the public sphere, creating a platform for mass propagation and interaction of social knowledge, to acknowledge the wide range of debates that have been influential within contemporary discourses of otium in South Asia, this work addresses Urdu and Bengali literary texts. It also demonstrates how literature and the literary undergo conceptual transformations vis-à-vis semantic fields surrounding the notion of otium.

Sudipta Kaviraj draws our attention to the interdisciplinarity of literary texts approached differently (though not incompatibly) by 'literary criticism' and 'sociology of literature'. While literature is to be "enjoyed" (and literary enjoyment is an experience of otium), it "also helps us think about its own worlds in interesting and unprecedented ways"; "it is important to reflect on the way the text sees the world, and, as far as possible, the way the world saw the text" (Kaviraj 2014a: 1–2). Enjoyment, and other feelings, I argue, are extremely significant in reading experiences of otium, as idle, leisurely, or indolent are states of feeling, judgements, and perception, the corporeal and the cerebral, encompassing the emotional. The history of emotions has drawn

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69 Sarkar, "Colonial Times" (2002); Chakraborty, "Family, Fraternity, and Salaried Labor" (2000).

great attention in recent years, largely from the discipline of history. However, the deep connection of literature and writing with emotions and feelings are as old as literature itself, and this study contributes to the wider study on emotions from a literary-historical perspective. The method of reading otium as a transforming (or transformative) concept in relation to literature can fruitfully be explored through the translation of otium in its emotional manifestations, in each particular context; but also, by placing emotions at the centre of the experiences of otium in these texts, my research brings the literary in close contact with recent research on emotions. The attempt here, however small, is to study, as Aijaz Ahmad proposes, "across disciplinary boundaries, and through undertakings which submit 'literary criticism' to a whole range of the expressive arts and the human sciences" (Ahmad 1992 b: 254). Before delving into the emotional association of otium, the question of translation requires some attention.

### 1.3.2  Translating Concepts and Contexts: Between Untranslatability and Multilingualism

The issues and processes of translation are central to the study of concepts and ideas. Translation is a significant challenge while looking at concepts that become central to historical encounters; in such cases, often, translating a concept transforms it. Concepts can be expressed through not only language but also other semiotic as well as sensory systems (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 3). Actors interpret these systems through acts of translation. One of the most significant challenges of this research and other works on otium (see Munz 2020, for instance) is the problem of translating otium as experiences of leisure-liness, idleness, or laziness. Jochen Gimmel and Tobias Keiling (2016) point out the difference between the connotations of the English lexemes, leisure and idleness, and the German words *Muße* and *Müßiggang* in the German translation of Bertrand Russell's essay "In Praise of Idleness" (1935) as "*Lob des Müßiggangs*" (Gimmel and Keiling 2016: 19–20). Translation of overlapping concepts like leisure, idleness, laziness/indolence are further entangled in different languages according to the semantic fields they inhabit and often depend on the speaker-actor dynamic. Semantic histories of such concepts also show a change in the connotations of specific terms over time.

While otium slipped out of usage, the terms leisure and *Muße* underwent various transformations. Friedrich Engels' Introduction to *Condition of the Working Class in England* (*Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England,* 1845) shows the blurring of work and leisure for a rural weaver in pre-industrialised England:

> So it was that the weaver was usually in a position to lay by something, and rent a little piece of land, that he cultivated in his *leisure hours*, of which he had as many as he chose to take, since he could weave whenever and as long as he pleased. True, he was a bad farmer and managed his land inefficiently, often obtaining but poor crops; nevertheless, he was no proletarian, he had a stake in the country, he was permanently settled, and stood one step higher in society than the English workman of today. [...] They did not need to overwork; they did no more than they chose to do, and yet earned what they needed. They had *leisure* for healthful work in garden or field, work which, in itself, was *recreation* for them, and they could take part besides in the *recreations* and games of their neighbours, and all these games – bowling, cricket, football, etc., contributed to their physical health and vigour.[70]

In the German original, Engels uses the word *Mußestunden* (p. 12) in the first instance, and in the second, *Muße*, the opportune leisure for healthful work ("*sie hatten Muße für gesunde Arbeit*" p. 12). The semantic shift in these words, as Engels also makes explicit, occurred through the industrial revolution in England, as work and non-work became the dominating categories of people's daily lives.[71] The massive influence of this binary in conceptualising lived and felt time in England since the industrial revolution can be witnessed in the transformed meaning of the word 'leisure', demarcating it as the opposite of work. Through this transformation, the essence of 'opportune leisure' or *Muße* for the rural weavers in the above-quoted passage became obsolete in some ways. The fundamental values through which such concepts were understood had changed (in a Skinnerian fashion). As Peter Burke (1995) explicates, the rise and spread of 'leisure' in modern England of industrial capitalism "was connected with the process or processes which Norbert Elias called the rise of 'civilisation', and Michel Foucault the rise of 'discipline' in "a history of regulation" (Burke 1995: 149). As has been made amply evident, these ideas and practices of disciplinary regulation were exported to and imbibed in many parts of the world. They were simultaneously in dialogue, however asymmetrically, with other histories of lifestyles in the colonies and elsewhere. Like in pre-industrial England, in many parts of the world, as in South Asia, the modern idea of "leisure" was not necessarily conceptualised or intellectualised as opposed to work

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70 Here, quoted from *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1987), 2. Emphases mine. References to the German original are from the microfilm version of the text published in 1845.

71 See Gimmel & Keiling for the difference between *Arbeit* (work), *Freizeit* (leisure time/free time) and *Muße* (condition of opportune leisure/otium) in *Konzepte der Muße* (2016), 11–23.

but was intertwined with life and work, blurring the opposition between work and leisure.[72] The history of modern leisure, in different contexts, is now seen retrospectively, through binary lenses today, in contradiction to, or in conjunction with the history of labour.

The Urdu/Hindi and Bengali words that could possibly connote otium or leisure, as discussed before, are *furṣat, rāhat, farāġat, ārām, abasar, abakāś*, and *chuṭṭī/chuṭi*. At the same time, lexemes from the semantic field, for example *śauq* or *śānti* can often carry the inherent meanings entailed by otium in certain situations. Such translations are not enough for understanding the concept in the South Asian texts and contexts, and translations need to go beyond finding the lexicometric equivalents. We need to approach these ideas and concepts through a contextual and textual focus on rhetorical change, which influenced the literary communities. The failed revolt of 1857 and its aftermath saw an upheaval in the way 'leisure' and 'idleness' were regarded by the Urdu intelligentsia in North India, often intertwined with depictions of aristocratic exuberance as well as a flair for traditions of poetry like the *ġazal*, which came under much criticism at this time. The old-world ways of living leisurely were severely attacked by influential writers such as Altaf Husein Hali, Syed Ahmad Khan, and Nazir Ahmad, all of whom were closely associated with the British authorities in some way or another. In their works, the words to describe leisure or leisureliness lean more towards the English equivalent of idleness; thus, *ġaflat* (carelessness), *farā ġat/fāriġ* (leisureliness), *sair* (recreational excursion, amusement), *havākhorī* (taking the air, strolling, wandering) were used in strong opposition to European notions of toil and hard work (*miḥnat*) as well as in opposition to religious reformation. These lexemes are posited in contrast with Europe's progress (*taraqqī*) and success for Hali. For Nazir Ahmad, they are presented as wasteful, as sin, and are yoked into an irredeemable reformist binary with penitence (*taubah*) and religious morality (see Chapter 2).

The sense of taboo surrounding the old ways of living idly, leisurely, with a carefree attitude towards time pervaded literary and intellectual discussions. These ways of living were critiqued, often, in conjunction with colonial impressions of the 'lazy native' and the reformist approach of several Indian intellectuals. On the other hand, many nineteenth-century writers, like Ratannath Sarshar, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Kaliprasanna Sinha, satirised colonial urban culture of hustle, and the confused Indian imitators for copying British notions of progress, civilisation, and efficiency[73]; some also presented scathing

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72    See Ishwar Modi, "Leisure and Social Transformation" (2012), 389–90.

73    See Hans Harder, *Verkehrte Welten* (2011), especially "Einleitung" and the entries on Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, Basantak and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

criticisms of the monotonous and exhausting work culture embodied by administrative clerks or *kerāni* jobs. However, both these reactions are embedded in ambivalences and complexities and must be explored in literary and emotional analysis. Literature emerged as the field where the new connotations of leisure and idleness as decadence (Urd. *zavāl*, Bng. *patan*), laziness (Bng. *alasatā, ālasya*, Urd. *sustī, kāhilī*) and wastefulness (Urd. *gavānā,* Bng. *apacaẏ*) were played out, often, as means of mobilising or educating readers and communities. For the Urdu and the Bengali literary spheres in the nineteenth century (as with possibly other literary spheres), the conceptual transformation of leisure needs to be explicated within particular contexts and conflicts. Immediately after 1857, on the one hand, it is difficult to find literary texts that discuss leisure or idleness in any positive light. On the other hand, debates surrounding related concepts like work and efficiency, decadence, and hedonism point to the significance of these absences. This can be read as a manifestation of an asymmetric counter-conceptualisation from a Koselleckean point of view. From a Skinnerian view, this is symptomatic of a rhetorical redescription, entailing a change in values and attitudes. While one way of addressing such asymmetries is to look at communities in interaction on an equal footing, equivalence can be proposed through careful and sensitive comparisons and textual-contextual translations.

Although translation remains a significant aspect, multilingualism, or at least bilingualism is the other important linguistic and mediational aspect of communication in the South Asian landscape. When we speak of translating concepts across cultures, we inadvertently adhere to notions of monolingual nationalisms in Europe – which itself is a recent phenomenon. Words like *bekār, furṣat, abasar, ārām, śānti, chuṭṭi* and *śauq* are notions intelligible to speakers of Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Oriya, Bhojpuri, and Urdu – to list only some of the official languages of the northern half of India. In addition, in the postcolonial context, one observes a strong strain of "vernacularising" English as a unique South Asian language (Saxena 2022) that further complicates this already dynamic multilingualism. What role does multilingualism play in the transformation of concepts? What does the concept of translation in this context mean? As Rita Kothari asks, "Is translation a testimony to the difference between languages, or constitutive of one?" (2018: 2). The question opens an immensity of possibilities, for the multilingual context of South Asia (or even India) remains unquantifiable and undisciplined. What is the source, what is being translated, for whom, and how does translation change and alter a concept? These are some questions that require consideration while working with the translation of concepts in this context.

In reading, concepts across asymmetrical communities, for instance, in the context of colonial relations, translations, transformations, and encounters, need to be addressed through dual sensitivity to two possible viewpoints. Firstly, it

needs to be accepted that certain civilisations or cultures are based on specific concepts that are exclusive so that translating such indigenous concepts could be accepted with their particular challenges. Secondly, and directly linked to the first point, it is important to keep in mind that such concepts are hardly formed in isolation and that histories of civilisations are to be seen in interaction with each other. These two viewpoints are not contradictory but, in fact, complementary in the making of history. Languages are also sites of power relations, particularly in any context of colonialism. While translation is necessary in colonial-indigenous contexts, it is a process fraught with challenges and questions (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 14). Similar to doubts expressed about World History (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 9–10), Emily Apter (2013), has argued against the notion of 'World Literature' in the aftermath of the rapid globalisation movement and recent market tendencies. Apter's primary argument is that while comparatist studies of histories and languages rely on "a translatability assumption", "incommensurability and what has been called the Untranslatable are insufficiently built into the literary heuristic" (Apter 2013: 3). Referring to the many problems of philosophical, theological, and cultural translations, Apter's argument is to keep in mind the specificities in these various directions that, more often than not, are glossed over by vague equivalences, resulting in "'lost in translation', the mistranslated, unreliable translation and the *contresens*" (Apter 2013: 9–10). Also significant is Apter's expression "history of translation", which signifies a "decided emphasis on when and where translation happens, and, especially, on how and why it fails" (ibid.). These problems become further magnified in the entangled and asymmetric colonial and multilingual context of the (North) Indian subcontinent in the nineteenth century. Moreover, as Willibald Steinmetz points out, three distinct aspects of translation need to be considered: "the problem of equivalence at the synchronic comparative level", as well as "in diachrony", and finally, "the problem of the Eurocentrism, or modern bias, of the metalanguage we require in order to be able to communicate with each other about equivalence and translatability" (Steinmetz 2016: 354).

How can we then proceed beyond this '*traduttore, traditore*' imbroglio? How do we deal with the selective lexical asymmetry of otium that this work observes in the texts and contexts of colonial (and post-colonial) South Asia? Translation processes are not simply between two communities and their encounters in this work. The processes of translations should be sensitive to encounters and transfers between both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English ideas within the Urdu literary and intellectual sphere as well as the Bengali counterparts in this period of heightened encounters and self-definitions. Simultaneously, the transfers and translations between Bengali and Urdu concepts should also be considered. Urdu and Bengali, however underrepresented, have also been hegemonic languages. The suppression of Bengali

as the people's language in East Pakistan under the cultural-political supremacy of Urdu; and the earlier, nineteenth-century decline of Persian/Urdu among Bengalis also have to be considered while understanding shifts in South Asian multilingualism. The power garnered by Hindi as a language of political discourse in the twentieth century should also be kept in mind. The plurality of the work and the multilingual situation already helps us address some questions of blind categories and narrow definitions of paradigms. Hans Harder has demonstrated this in the context of nationalisation and literary historiographies; although various claims to such constructed unification are presented, none of them can hold since "the constituting triangle of language, literature and nation, is more or less dysfunctional [...] None of the language-literatures of India can, as it were, claim to represent India as a whole" (Harder 2018 b: 14). Neither can the idea of an Indian nation represent the whole of Urdu or Bengali literature, literary debates, and concepts that have developed in Pakistan and Bangladesh where each language and literary tradition enjoy prestigious positions. While such borders remain porous and contested, the multilingual aspect of this work is also its advantage. As Pernau & Sachsenmaier have pointed out, translation must be sensitive to "relations between languages and also between their respective speakers and translators. After all, translations usually neither occur symmetrically nor do they carry the same meaning in both directions" (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 17). Especially in a shared linguistic space, communication – either through translation or through multilingualism – is bound to remain indeterminate. This inequivalence and indeterminacy must be acknowledged and incorporated as a method of reading multi-linguistically, multi-culturally.

If all these cultural, conceptual, and contextual significance are kept in mind, mediation can be a successful endeavour "if and in so far as it permits the communicative action to go on" (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 19). For such communication, sometimes reading beyond languages is necessary. With reference to extra-linguistic systems and their emotional expressions and experiences, Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani (2016) have also argued for centring the body and the senses in the emotional translations of concepts. Many such concepts, for example, the South Asian concept of monsoon rain, deeply intertwined with romantic love, are seen as translated into practice and then impact reality; such emotional processes are often mediated through images, sounds, food (tastes), scents, and other sensory experiences. Emotions are deeply involved in translation and mediation processes and can expand our understanding of concepts and their transformations in particular texts and contexts. Such emotional translations, I argue, are extremely significant in unpacking an ambivalent concept like otium. Preferring emotional translations over linguistic equivalences within the literary is not necessarily a paradox; it can, as this

study hopes to demonstrate, enhance a literary-cultural communication and understanding that linguistic translations may restrain. As seen from the historical and conceptual development of otium, leisure, idleness, the experiences in each context can entail different phenomena. The sensory, the bodily (as Pernau and Rajamani remind us, the 'mindful body'), and the materiality of leisurely experiences are central to their emotional translations, beyond the constraints of lexemes, linguistic translations and semantic asymmetries within colonial encounters. But such translations are also helpful beyond the colonial experience, as certain cultures are often perceived to privilege the sensory or the lyrical over the linguistic and the textual.

### 1.3.3 Emotions in Translating Concepts

As we have seen, although imperative and ubiquitous, linguistic translations are often not enough to mediate the transformations and debates surrounding a concept. That such a concept – with or without semantic qualifiers – can be expressed in multiple languages that they can be used interchangeably, also needs to be historicised (Pernau 2012: 9). This is why a historical approach is required to mark the conceptual translations and transformations in the semantic networks of otium. Elsewhere, I have argued that in this asymmetric field of power hegemony and bidirectional flow of ideas, historical semantics is necessary but not sufficient. Especially for contested and ambivalent concepts, we need to look for their manifestations in the affective, the sensory and the emotional (Noor 2021). Attention must also be paid to the wide semantic fields and networks within which the concept can be located. The method must consider the relationships, attitudes, and reactions between these contexts – both diachronic and synchronic, as felt and expressed. As this book argues, a fruitful and sensitive method to approach this study is a dual manoeuvre of reading the transformation of concepts vis-à-vis the study of emotions surrounding these concepts. The relationship between concepts and emotions and how the study of one can enrich the other has been demonstrated by Pernau (2015b) and others in their study of 'civilising emotions' in a global framework. As Pernau has shown, the English/imperial enterprise of civility itself is intricately linked to the regulation and 'teaching' of emotions (Pernau 2015b: 50–54); reading emotions in the context of colonial South Asia becomes an undebatable and necessary approach to read otium within the nexus of various civilising forces – colonialist/ Christian/ missionary, but equally significantly, Indian reformist notions of civility like reformist Islam or reformist Brahmo ideals.

  For the present work, translating otium through an analysis of emotions can be further justified by two significant factors. Firstly, the semantic concept

of otium already contains emotional signifiers from its recorded use in antiquity (significantly translated as 'the boredom of soldiers'). This being the case, it is surprising how few studies on the topic place emotions as central to the meaning-making of otium through its various manifestations. After all, ennui, boredom, idleness, yearning for leisure, longing, and refusal/resistance to work are expressions of emotional states. Secondly, the literature this work reads and analyses and the discussions and debates surrounding leisure, laziness and idleness are all expressed in terms of conflicting and negotiating emotions, affects and feelings; as they remain the product of a time of conflicts and debates about civility and civilisation. As Melina Munz has already pointed out in the context of contemporary English novels from India, experiences of otium are not identifiable in any specific manner. Rather, such experiences are expressed through feelings of purposelessness, a freedom to act, and a sense of lingering or dwelling in the present, apart from narrative techniques and an exception to everyday temporality (2021). Monika Fludernik (2020) has further shown how, in certain contemporary English novels from India, the essence of an "Indian" tradition of leisure is claimed through an idealised past and is now dwelled on in the yearning for this past in the emotion of nostalgia. A contextualised study of emotions is therefore an appropriate and necessary method to fruitfully translate the concept of otium in the context of the present work. Moreover, it also helps us address the importance of focusing on emotions in studies on literary concepts, which, I argue, needs urgent attention. It has been argued that emotion words we use today do not necessarily reflect an enduring genealogy (Dixon 2020). Considering the conceptual ambivalence in emotions, an exploration into the feelings associated with laziness and leisure in literary discourses can give us a better understanding of how actors and writers understood these emotions and concepts, which had different implications compared to ours in the present.

Emotional qualifiers, expressions of feelings and sensory descriptions are central to the concept, experience, and representation of otium. With the Industrial Revolution, leisure and idleness became strictly demarcated in their conceptual meaning and acquired narrow, categorised emotional and sensory qualifiers. The fear of lethargy and criminal activities associated with idle minds and hands intensified in the works of philosophers like Bentham and Kant. At the same time, Jean-Jacques Rousseau made a contentious case for physical and philosophical wandering/strolling in his *Rêveries* (1782). With time, as leisure attained overlaps with bodily activities like sports and material consumption, idleness became closely associated with words like 'ramble', 'saunter', and 'drift'. Brian O'Connor lists the phenomenological features of idleness in its sensory and behavioural details and descriptions (2013: 186). One of the central contestations between idleness, laziness and leisure, as illustrated

by Fludernik (2017), is the allegations of lethargy in the behavioural and senso-ry depiction of the *other*. I have reiterated and explored this point in relation to nineteenth-century conceptualisations of work and toil, laziness and leisure vis-à-vis a racial differentiation between the allegedly progressive Europeans (alternately depicted as soul-sucking service-oriented Europeans) and 'lazy' Indians in the writings of Urdu and Bengali intelligentsia (Noor 2021: 295–99). Particularly regarding the understanding of the self and the other vis-à-vis the ideas of agency and autonomy that are central to the concept of otium in a field marked with racial, cultural, and linguistic encounters, it becomes clear that a fruitful method to explore the trajectories of otium is through a deeper explora-tion of its emotional, sensory and affective coding and the various manifesta-tions, meanings, and influences.

This is also a sensible methodology that considers the interdisciplinary approaches in this study, namely literary history, textual analysis, and concep-tual history. The study of emotions has been a force to reckon with in recent decades. Conceptual historians have been working with the history of emotions to adequately expand the semiotics of concepts beyond language and translate emotions as central to the formulations, transformations, and interpretations of concepts (Pernau & Rajamani 2016: 46–65). Traditionally, conceptual history focused on the strong linguistic basis of concepts.[74] However, following Kosel-leck's description of 'semantic field', later historians have strongly suggested working with 'mutimedial semantic nets' (Pernau & Rajamani).[75] While this study is based on literature as its source and since we are not invested in anthropological research, the method is to borrow from the linguistic basis of semantic nets while focusing on emotional expressions, descriptions of feelings and affective dispositions. Although not focusing on a multimedial context, I incorporate the multiple aspects of emotional, sensory, and affective experien-ces in the study of otium.

Furthermore, this decision is strengthened by my observation while work-ing with literary texts of various periods starting from the 1850s. Although otium or what are perceived as its antonyms), are at the centre of various liter-ary discussions, it becomes incredibly challenging to grasp the essence of the concept as it becomes highly contested but also elusive in a lexicometric sense. The reasons for this elusiveness are many. As Kumkum Bhattacharya and Rana-jit Guha have pointed out, in a non-industrialised or rather pre-industrialised

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74  See Jan Ifversen, "About Key Concepts and How to Study Them" (2011), 65–88.

75  The idea of 'semantic networks' was already formulated by historian Rolf Reich-ardt, in "Revolutionäre Mentalitäten und Netze politischer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1789–1795" (1988). For a discussion of the same in English, see Ifversen (2011).

context, people did not have strict differentiation between experiences of work and non-work; activities of leisure and recreation along with hours of dwelling in unaccounted-for temporal states were often finely woven into working time. The sudden intrusion of the rigid opposition between categories of work time and time without work, along with allegations of laziness and uselessness from a colonial-racial bias, was liable to give rise to several confusions regarding experiences and states of otium. The confusion, along with epistemological control and civilisational assertions of race hierarchies, I have argued, creates a sense of "taboo" regarding the slow, unhurried pace of pre-industrialised life-style. We see this amply portrayed in contrast with the Western ideals of industrialisation, utility, and progress (Noor 2021: 302–3). Due to such asymmetries, confusions, and misunderstandings or mistranslations between linguistic and cultural communities, the intricacies and meanings, often coded in emotional, affective or sensory expressions, remain suppressed. At the same time, construed counterconcepts like progress, work, and speed begin to attain a high currency within social knowledge structures that are debated and reflected in literary texts.

By unpacking the emotional aspects of the concept, we can also better understand how emotions themselves undergo a transformation and how they also impact the re-interpretation of these concepts. Cultural contexts within literary texts often depend upon an emotional appreciation of sensory depictions, narrative styles, behavioural patterns, and voices of characters. For example, in the context of Manto's pre-Partition Bombay stories (Chapter 4), the recurring behavioural trait of some of his central characters – idle men from the lower strata of society – is to wander aimlessly in the city. While this may share characteristics with what is understood by flânerie, it is a distinct and separate practice when compared to the European cultural capital associated with the figure of the *flâneur*. Such states of idle wandering are better described in the Urdu concept *āvārahgardī*, closely linked with the emergence, at the time, with the figure of the vagabond or the *āvārah*. While the figure of the *āvārah* appears much further back in time, often associated with Sufi/ascetic practices of renunciation or with the wandering of lovers, in the context of colonial capitalism of the twentieth century, it is closely linked to ideas of (national and individual) independence and autonomy. This itinerant figure is portrayed in literature and cinema of the time as an unlikely protagonist – a defiant and rebellious agent who resists capitalist forces and social structures within the colonial regime. Unpacking this particular aimless wandering for Manto's characters needs to be nuanced through the discontent emotion of colonial melancholy, theorised by Ranjana Khanna (2003). Without the contextualisation of colonial melancholy and its subversion of agency and critique of colonial capitalism, the mere literary reading of aimless wandering cannot explain the intricate questions of agen-

cy and autonomy that are central to aspects of otium. Such acts of reading emotions with nuances can then help us translate from language, context, text, and literary as well as historical discourses.

## 1.4  For a Methodology Based on Emotions

Conceptual historians have already successfully collaborated with the history of emotions in recent years. As a field, the history of emotions has grown exponentially in the past decades, reorienting research into emotions as historicised, cultured, and learnt. Barbara Rosenwein and Riccardo Christiani (2018) aptly summarise the major aspects of the history of emotions as a study of "the emotions that were felt and expressed in the past", asking "what has changed and what ties together their past and present" (Introduction). The topic of emotions has drawn keen interest from researchers in almost every field today, generating curiosity about what emotions mean and how various research disciplines can have different questions, explorations, and understandings of the impact of emotions on their fields. Although several studies focus on contestations regarding what an emotion is, most historians come to the rather open conclusion that today, as before, there is no singular definition of emotion that is unanimously agreed upon. Jan Plamper (2015) poses the pertinent question of whether "we" all mean the same thing by the word emotion in different research contexts, varying from neurosciences, experimental, developmental psychology, philosophy, and history. He appositely places the questions across different historical periods or moments, cultures and languages: "is there a unity of meaning sufficient to permit us to deal with these very different terms originating in very different fields, times, and cultures as 'emotion'?" (Plamper 2015: 11).

For researchers in the Humanities, the most significant questions surround the relationship between emotions and the related words in its semantic nets – moods, sentiments, feelings, affects, judgements, or behaviours (Rosenwein & Christiani 2018: Intr.; Reddy 2004: 3; J. Robinson 2005: 5). While there seems to be an array of disagreements on equating emotion with feeling and emotion as judgment (or 'evaluation' or 'appraisal', as cognition of some change that leads to a certain feeling and/or action), many historians, as discussed by Jenefer Robinson (2005), agree on two main tenants: firstly, some kind of judgment or evaluation of emotion is necessary and, secondly, that there is a strong connection between emotions and our interests, goals and values (Robinson 2005: 26). Peter and Carol Stearns (1985) provoked a significant intervention in the field on the distinction between emotions and emotionology, or "emotional standards", clarifying the difference between thinking about emotions and the experience of emotions. For them, all societies have

emotional standards or collective attitudes towards emotions that "change in time rather than merely differ, constantly, across space" (Stearns & Stearns 1985: 814). William Reddy (2004) has provided an approach for historians in emotion studies through a dialogue with researchers in psychology and anthropology. For him, emotions transform through historical events and impact these events as well. While historians agree on the obvious process that history (historical periods or events or institutions) fashions (limiting or liberating) emotions and vice-versa, the distinction between emotions as natural and as learned or constructed seems to be a recurring debate through the history of emotions themselves, what Plamper describes as the "nature-nurture dyad" (Plamper 2015: 73–74). Literature, this book argues, has a significant and particularly transformative role in questioning this apparent dyad.

## 1.4.1  Emotions, the Arts, and the Literary

In her work on the role of art, music, and literature, Jenefer Robinson explores emotion as a "process" involving "a special kind of automatic 'affective appraisal'" that occurs before reflection or the opportunity to rationalise the emotions. She argues that emotions are, therefore, "deeper than reason" (Robinson 2005: 3). She further develops this argument concerning literature, focusing on our attachment to characters and arguing that interpretation of texts often depends upon prior emotional responses to these texts. In her widely acclaimed book *Upheavals of Thought* (2001), Martha Nussbaum insists on "the intelligence of emotions"; for her, the interpretative dimension is bound by the cognitive or evaluative dimension. She argues that much of what we learn and understand through literary works stems from our emotional involvement with them. Thus, a turn to psychology, literature, and music is necessary for the study of emotions (Nussbaum 2001: 6–7). Patrick Colm Hogan (2011) remarks on the relative absence of literary and verbal art in the interdisciplinary research on emotion "despite the fact that millennia of storytelling present us with the largest body of works that systematically depict and provoke emotion, and do so as a major part of human life" (2011: 1). He argues that literature provides the largest and most unexplored body of data for interpretation in the research of emotions and that it is "a valuable site for interdisciplinary study that integrates psychological, sociological, neurological, and other approaches in the context of nuanced, complex depictions of human emotional experience – specifically, depictions that have had deep and enduring emotional impact across time periods and cultures" (Hogan 2011: 6).

In the annals of 'Western' history, the significance of literature in the study of emotions and vice-versa has a complex and rich trajectory that I will

not delve into here. A mere glimpse at the modern history of English literature can elicit varying examples of forceful ties between literature and emotions. For examples, one could look to Shakespeare and his most memorable and successful tragedies[76], or the sentimental novel and the fashioning of sympathy as a force against enlightenment rationality[77], the Romantic poets and their affinity towards fancy, imagination, sublime, melancholy, and so forth. In ancient Indian theories of aesthetics and dramaturgy, as explicated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra,* it is through an emotional engagement that the characters and/or actors (in a literary and/or performative piece) successfully transfer the audience to a state of not only enjoyment but a mindful awareness of their consciousness through the experience that is explained in the gustatory lexeme of *rasa* (taste, flavour, essence).[78] *Rasa* (depicted in English as 'sentiment') is attained through a synthesis of *vibhāva* (determinants/factors), *anubhāva* (consequents/reactions) and *vyābhicārībhāva* (transitory emotions). At the same time, they are largely based on *bhāvas* (emotional states) (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 105–6, Pollock 2016: 7). While *bhāvas* or emotional states give rise to the sentiments, the sentiments also express or embody the emotional states. For example, *sṛṅgāra rasa,* or the erotic sentiment in a literary or performative text, stems from the emotional state of *rati* or love and is embodied in the bodily and facial expressions of *rati*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* mentions eight kinds of *rasas*, or eight primary sentiments: *sṛṅgāra* (erotic), *hāsya* (comic), *karuṇa* (pathetic), *raudra* (furious), *vīra* (heroic), *bhayānaka* (terrible), *bībhatsa* (odious) and *adbhuta* (marvellous). However, later theorists have suggested and incorporated the ninth *rasa, śānta* (peace or tranquillity) (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 102). Here, unlike in several Western generalisations, being calm or at peace is not seen as devoid of emotion or/and passion, but tranquillity itself is understood to be one of the major *rasa*s. The nine emotions are together expressed famously as *navarasa*, considered to be the range of emotions or sentiments with which the audience/reader/the *rasika* can be transported from the mundane world into the world of art.

This very brief introduction to the place of emotions in ancient Indian aesthetics is only meant to reiterate that the inherent relationship between lit-

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76   For a reading of Shakespeare as the "psychologist of Avon", see Keith Oatley (2009).

77   See Roman Alexander Barton, *The Making of the Sympathetic Imagination* (2020).

78   Although *rasa* is oft translated as juice or essence or taste (see entry in Monier-Williams Dictionary online: printed dictionary, page 869), in terms of poetics and aesthetics, the meaning is closer to taste or flavour and entails a more complex process akin to the preparation of a flavourful sauce – involving various ingredients, cooking processes and the right amount of spices for the right duration, to then arrive at a sauce (literary or performative aesthetic) the taste of which can transform the one who tastes – i.e., the audience/spectator/reader. See chapter six of *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

erature (and other works of art) and emotions was recognised since ancient times and spread across civilisations. Although the *rasa* theory, like Aristotle's conceptualisation of *pathē*, was composed in a pre-modern world, it allows us to understand and read literature and performance with emotion or, as Pollock puts it, "it allows us to admit that we have such experiences in the first place" (2016: 44). Recent scholars of literature and research on emotions have made a strong case for "putting emotions back into literary interpretation".[79] Until recently, the trend against reading emotions, literature, and literary criticism, termed as "affective fallacy", has prevailed due to the mere focus on *affect* and affective reading as subjective and unreliable. The recent so-called "affective turn", or, as Suzanne Keen terms it, the "Affective (Re)turn", takes us back to the earlier unresolved questions rather than making space for departures (Keen 2011: 18). While a distinction between emotions and affect has been significant, the emotional dimension of literature and literature's affective impact on readers remain indisputable.

In the modern West, there appears to be a certain reluctance amongst scholars to read literature and literary texts as the source for the study of emotions. In contrast, history or historical texts are preferred as source material. This line of thought emerges, perhaps, due to the understanding that literary texts are works of imagination and art, in what Sarah McNamer describes as "the problem of literariness" – that they are seen as too *literary* (2015: 1435–36). She elaborates on this issue, where the "more literary the text, the less likely it is to be regarded as a valuable source for the history of feeling", for such "literary" (artful) literature is seen as "both not enough and too much" (McNamer 2015: 1435). The flamboyancy and imagination in such texts are seen as "unstable and untrustworthy" reflections of people's feelings, while the dependency of history on the artfulness of literature – "wordplay, juxtaposition, rhythm, rhyme, irony, allegory, metrical complexity" – has also been questioned. The apparent historicity (or authenticity) of history, already questioned by Michel Foucault, among others, is worth mentioning in the refutation of the 'literariness of literature' (Foucault 2005: xvi–xxvi). Going beyond the conflicts of historicity and textuality of history, I believe that the literariness of literature is not necessarily a disadvantage for the study of emotions. As has already been mentioned, literature and one may add its literariness, has been a key influence on the development of emotions, guiding readers and presenting them with conflicts about feelings, to say the least. Literature has also been a space for reflection on these emotions, engendering changes and developments in the history of feelings. Moreover, as McNamer has rightly pointed out, literature

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79    Jean-François Vernay, *The Seduction of Fiction* (2016).

attains a function of "play", "an arena of creativity" that helps readers to think and feel "beyond the given" (2015: 1436). This function of literature as *play* not only strengthens the need to read the coded emotions and feelings in the literary texts but also reasserts the deep interconnection of literature and emotions with the play-element of otium. I will not belabour the point, but one cannot deny the persistence of rhetorical art in several historical sources, especially war, conquest, and political upheaval. Literary art, naturally, infiltrates most sources of history and forms of history writing. A similar reckoning is also observed in the gradual turn of emotion research towards medieval literary studies.

Bringing a departure in the way otium as a research topic has been approached so far, the present study contributes to the study of emotions and literary studies in modern South Asia. Twentieth-century South Asian studies have so often focused on histories of trauma, war, famine and riots – and other experiences of struggle, and rightly so – that it is rare to find research on topics like aesthetics or emotions of otium, leisure, or idleness. Evidently, a study of otium in the South Asian context is not, and cannot be devoid of conflict; instead, such an approach of reading otium, leisure and idleness can, in turn, relate to many wider cultural and historicised conflicts and struggles. An emotional-conceptual-literary enquiry of otium will reaffirm that it cannot be bound merely within negative and positive experiences of pleasure and pain. This book probes into the very nature of otium as expressed in complex historical-emotional manifestations like nostalgia and melancholy, and topophilia, among others. Such expressions do not necessarily culminate in semantic equivalents like *yād* (remembrance) or *yādgār* regarding nostalgia, for instance. Instead, through a focused reading of literary debates and texts, such an investigation can guide us to the study of semantic networks within which emotional expressions work, where, in reading nostalgia, a resurgence is witnessed in lexemes of 'loss', like *ākhrī* (last, final), *guzaśtah* (past, bygone), and *āṇsū* (tears), to list a few (see Chapter 2). However, the pain of nostalgia is also intertwined, in these cases, with rage and despair, thus challenging the notion that emotions are universal. Through these various explorations, the idea is also to locate the transformations (where they occur) in the concepts of leisure and idleness and how literary works express and deal with the feelings surrounding otium. As such, the study will focus on how otium is discussed, felt, debated, and expressed in literary texts, but will refrain from detailed discussion on how these texts affected individual readers. While such an investigation is beyond the present scope, the conceptualisation of literary platforms as public spheres and the close association of literature with socio-political upheavals in this context, particularly that of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, can help us with a required understanding of readers' relations to these selected texts.

### 1.4.2  Feelings as Practices? Emotions, Time, and Space

Several scholars insist that we need to differentiate between emotions and feelings. While we feel emotions like love, hatred, happiness, grief, and laziness, feelings are also physiological states, like hunger or feeling cold, conditions that may not relate to what we understand as emotions (Robinson 2005: 5). Are emotions then behavioural responses or dispositions? However, many emotions often do not necessarily accompany overt behavioural responses – for example, being secretly in love. Moreover, multiple emotions can have similar behavioural expressions (ibid., 6). The 'Stoics – Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza and many current theorists (neo-Stoics) – see emotions as evaluative judgements or cognitive appraisals. Martha Nussbaum writes of emotions as "acknowledgements of neediness and lack of self-sufficiency" (2001: 22). For Robinson, an emotion is not simply identifiable or defined around judgment theory but is a more complex "process" "involving a number of different events, and, in particular, involving both affective and cognitive evaluations" (2005: 59). Emotions cannot be attributed to either the realm of thoughts/judgements/awareness alone or to the realm of physiological expressions and bodily experiences. It seems very clear that a strong correlation between the two is undeniable, and the dialectic of mind-body has to be done away with to understand and work with emotions.

Emotions and feelings have often been segregated based on 'intentional objects'[80]. That is to say that emotions have intentional objects – fear *of* something, love *for* someone. Antonio Damasio and others have differentiated them as bodily changes (emotions) and mental perception and interpretation in the brain (feeling).[81] William Reddy (2004) famously proposed his concept of "emotives" as a form of utterance, a speech act that is neither descriptive nor performative, where such emotives help actors navigate their vague feelings into particular emotions. While this is a very fruitful approach, particularly with regard to describing the various vague feelings experienced in states of otium, Reddy's understanding of emotions and feelings is entirely based upon the logic of language and does not explore emotions in their variable cultural contexts. One cannot rely on language solely to gauge emotions. Similarly, some understandings of affects, although not logocentric, constitute a certain universality where it is mostly seen "independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology—that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs—because

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80    See Demian Whiting, "The Feeling Theory of Emotion and the Object-Directed Emotion" (2011).

81    Antonio R. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (2003).

they are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning".[82] The present study is interested in understanding and addressing the particularities of emotional experiences and feelings in states of otium in their cultural and temporal-spatial-historical contexts. Simultaneously, it also translates otium in emotional manifestations, depending upon contexts, reflected in texts.

Monique Scheer (2012) convincingly approaches emotions as practices. She argues that "practices not only generate emotions, but that emotions themselves can be viewed as a practical engagement with the world". Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, she contextualises the body as socially situated, adoptive and historical: "Conceiving of emotions as practices means understanding them as emerging from bodily dispositions conditioned by a social context, which always has cultural and historical specificity" (Scheer 2012: 193). Scheer's approach insists that emotions are not only something we *have* but also *do*. She further explains: "Viewing emotion as a kind of practice means recognising that it is always embodied, that an emotion without a medium for experience cannot be described as one" (Scheer 2012: 209). Access to emotion-as-practice, i.e., experience and expression, in sources, according to Scheer, "is achieved through and in connection with other doings and sayings on which emotion-as-practice is dependent and intertwined, such as speaking, gesturing, remembering, manipulating objects, and perceiving sounds, smells, and spaces (ibid.). The experience and expression of emotions and feelings are taken up in the context of research on literature and emotion by Hogan (2011). He writes of emotions as experiences that are "encoded" and "represented" in literary texts. In these texts, writes Hogan, the study of emotions through this approach of exploring the encoding and representations can be done by two methods: a detailed and sensitive readers' response theory and the interpretation of texts themselves. This representation happens through the process of encoding, which entails a certain degree of selection, not a narration of direct experience. The interpretation of these representations is based on the understanding that literature is *neither entirely spontaneous nor entirely artificial*. At the same time, it reflects a social and cultural condition and has lasting impact on our understanding of emotions. For example, the kind of romantic love that is expressed in *Romeo and Juliet* may not be something many readers experience in real life. Still, it impacts how they emotionally perceive and cope with

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82    Ruth Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique" (2011), 437. This is a criticism of the way affect has been understood by scholars like Nigel Thrift and Brian Massumi. This view of effect as prior to cognition has also been discussed by Robinson as "affective appraisal" (2005), 41–43.

romantic love and what they come to expect of it. From such a view, the significance of literary works is that their depictive validity "derives from its *production* of such an experience" (Hogan 2011: 22).

Representation, interpretation, and production of emotions in literary texts are not necessarily to be seen as cognitive or judgmental experiences alone. Scheer's theory of emotion as practice suggests four different practices involving the body, subjected to "specific social setting" and "power relations". These are: "mobilising, naming, communicating, and regulating emotion" (Scheer 2012: 193). All four practices are, I believe, manoeuvred through literary texts, particularly in the context of colonial South Asia. In fact, the genres and texts this book deals with actively produce and indulge in these practices. The early Urdu novel is seen to be attempting to mobilise emotions of remorse, grief, and guilt through an emphasis on ideas of reformation while struggling with emotions of loss, despair, rage, and longing (Chapter 2). In Manto's stories, the emotion of melancholy/*udāsī*, the sensory and bodily experiences of his characters and their psychological circumstances are not only named but also explored in depth through a critique of colonial capitalism and selective notions of progress (Chapter 4). Tagore's letters are seen to be communicating certain emotions of poetic melancholy and idle leisure not only for a primary specific reader but a larger anonymous readership through the epistolary form. They do not only communicate these emotions as felt by the poet, but their genre specificity, that of self-writing/epistolary, also plays a role in guiding readers on how to express abstract love for space and place, which can be read in the emotion of topophilia (Chapter 3). The detective novellas of Satyajit Ray are seen to constantly excite while also regulate emotions of adventure and thrill, further directing readers towards a masculine discipline of calm and intelligence through a pedagogical approach (Chapter 5). These examples are also involved in the other practices to a certain extent, although they may focus on one emotion-practice. The interpretation of otium manifested in each text dealt with in various chapters of this study is also based on the practices of leisure, idleness and ennui depicted in the literary texts, in the "use of language that links the body with the mind" (Scheer 2012: 218). Pernau and Rajamani have also discussed the study of emotions via "processes of emotional translations". That is, the role of the body and the senses in the translation between reality (represented) and interpretations; different media of translations and their impacts on shaping the concept; and that concepts, in turn, translate into practices that impact reality.

Integrating the body and the senses in the study of emotions of otium does not only help in these translations but also allows us to understand and theorise the literary texts' relationship with material reality, temporality, and spatiality; aspects of otium that are centrally linked to its experience and practice. The abstract and embodied or felt aspects together constitute an emotion

concept. Although emotion concepts have been classically understood as "having a simple structure and minimal conceptual content", i.e., "just enough content to distinguish each emotion concept from every other emotion concept", as Zoltán Kövecses (1990) has shown, they have a complex and elaborate structure, and are conceptually richer and more nuanced. But moving away from a strictly linguistic study of emotion concepts, the aim here is to locate emotion concepts – like nostalgia or topophilia, for instance – as embodying specific and yet entangled, contextualised, even conflicted leisurely feelings. In various depictions of otium, in experiences of ennui and laziness, as well as in relishing a leisurely state, time is felt to have slowed down (Chapter 4). In experiences of artistic creativity or poetic/musical compositions, time is felt as still or motionless; alternatively, it can also be felt as immersive or transcendental (Chapter 3). In experiences of nostalgia, time is depicted as caught between the past, present and future (Chapter 2 and 4), where the present and the future as spent in re-membering and recreating memories of the past, as the consciousness of current and impending temporalities fade. In the context of fashioning an enjoyable autonomy through recreational pedagogy in detective fiction, time is ambivalently experienced as a process of disciplined but simultaneously leisurely learning outside the global temporal regimes of office work and school education (Chapter 5). Furthermore, experiences of time in longing for otium, represented in aimless wandering, resistance to socially-economically structured temporal grids, in musical and literary immersion are expressed as transcendental, beyond a purely humanist conception of linearity (Chapter 6). Experiences of otium are seen to have a distinctly different feeling surrounding time, the sense of time being different from its hegemonic linearity, but focused on the relationship of the self with time and space. The very concept of linear, hegemonic time has been critiqued through a reading of it as constructed (West-Pavlov 2013) and, much earlier, as confused (Bergson 1913). In the context of colonialism, notions of cyclical time in high Hindu philosophy of *yuga* have been posited against colonial temporal regimes (Sarkar 2002). Simultaneously, for many Muslim writers in the nineteenth century, time is a pressing concept, in fear of being wasted (Pernau & Stille 2017) and to be caught up with (Hopf 2017). A reading of otium vis-à-vis its experiences, feelings and practices of time is aptly expressed by Munz (2020) in her use of the term "alternative temporality", conceptualised as different from the normalised, historicist linear temporality. This is further explored here, often, as a dissonance of emotions and temporalities in each chapter where emotions of otium are seen in relation to didactics and normative surrounding the concepts of reform, utilitarianism, and global capitalism.

The experience of different temporalities in relation to otium is indispensably connected to the experience of a different spatiality for the self. Spatiality

is often entangled within the temporal experiences charted in the texts explored in the following chapters. The idea of 'timespace' has already been proposed by Jon May and Nigel Thrift with the understanding and acknowledgment that "spatial variation" is a "constitutive part rather than an added dimension of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of social time" (2001: 5). They use the example of 'work' time that gives shape to 'leisure' time while insisting that such conceptualisation of "time only acquires full meaning when enacted in the appropriate setting" (May & Thrift 2001: 4). For example, in the context of overcrowded urban spaces in cities in South Asia, like Delhi, Calcutta, Dhaka or Lahore, a temporal aspect of experiences of otium is often seen to be inherently linked to the spatial dimensions of such an experience, be it in spaces like monuments or ruins in their association of the past, or in spaces of immersive sociality like cafes and tea houses (spaces of *āḍḍā*, the practice itself taking the name from the sense of space, an *āḍḍā* – a place of gathering or meeting). Overcrowded streets, too, can be read in the context of urban South Asia, as spaces enabling immersive experiences in deep engagement with the sensory and the physicality of the feeling mind-body (Suvorova 2011: 140–42).[83]

Alternately, the full meanings and experiences of such time can also be intertwined with what they term "spatial variations". For example, the conceptualisation of emotions like nostalgia is itself entangled with its historical expression as a longing for home that has shifted to a longing for an irretrievable past. In feelings of nostalgic longing, the desired past is also imagined within a framework of a desired space. Nostalgic explorations of the past in colonial Urdu literature are always seen to be closely tied to the bygone days in an aesthetically evoked, lived and imagined place – be it Ghalib's mourning for the delights of Delhi (the area around the court – *Qilʿah-i muʿallā*) before the Rebellion of 1857 or Wajid Ali Shah's laments for Lucknow – again, a glorious Lucknow as experienced before the Rebellion and imagined after it. Spatial entanglements with temporalities constitute a central aspect of such leisurely feelings. This spatio-temporal entanglement – or spatio-temporality/ *Raumzeitlichkeit* has been addressed as a significant aspect of otium/*Muße* by German scholars in the Research Cluster on Otium.[84] Jeffrey Auerbach's *Imperial Boredom* (2018) provides an example of how the spatiotemporal association of emotions can be read as its central aspect. In Auerbach's work, the emotion of boredom experienced by the British communities overseas is closely linked to the perception that this community "grew progressively more isolated from indigenous people and customs". The feeling of boredom is

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83   Being 'at ease' as well as 'participating' in the playfulness of the alive street.

84   See Figal, Hubert & Klinkert eds. *Die Raumzeitlichkeit der Muße* (2016).

explored vis-à-vis the difficulty of passing the time for British men and women through the various spatial journeys in "voyages" and "landscapes" as well as through the everyday experiences and practices of soldiers, governors, travellers, working and visiting men and women.

In the context of colonisation, the very idea of the colony is based on the conquest of territories followed by the civilising of these allegedly 'dark continents'. Records of such experiences are too many and too evident in the genres of colonial travel writing to list here. Spatial designs and planning of colonial cities have often been studied vis-à-vis the architecture of power relations (King 2007 & 1995). The responses to spatiality or rather urbanity in the context of colonialism as represented in vernacular literary genres and styles have been explored by Hans Harder (2016). Multiple volumes on the postcolonial city have emerged following the 'spatial turn' (for example, Boehmer and Davies 2015; Chambers and Huggan 2015). Gaston Bachelard's book *The Poetics of Space* (1958) focuses on the emotions and sensory responses to spaces – built and designed as well as open and abstract. Bachelard builds upon the sentiment of "strong love" for space or topophilia, which was later taken up and made popular by Yi-Fu Tuan (1974). Tuan describes topophilia as a culturally embedded feeling link between people and places. Steven Feld (2014) asserts that places themselves are made sense of through 'intersensorial' perceptions. Soundscapes and aural sensations, like visual and olfactory aspects contribute towards the feeling link people have with places. Several emotional manifestations of otium are embedded and embodied in these various spatial frameworks as an integral aspect of the experience of temporality.

Rabindranath Tagore's experiences and expressions of topophilia, his love of place (rural Bengal) and open natural spaces is likewise connected with the temporal aspects of the romanticised rural landscape (Chapter 3). The spatial aspects are seen to affect the feeling of time for him – slow, passing by lightly, depicted as similar to the rhythmic flow of water at times. These associations are further heightened in his depictions of spatiality and temporality through his expressions for classical music – as day (Western) and night (Indian) – and the depictions of weather, wind, light, and storms in relation to various *rāga*s from the repertoire of Hindustani music. The hilly landscape of Mussoorie and Dehradun recur in the short stories of Qurratulʿain Hyder as lived, remembered, and imagined spatial potential for nostalgia for a time of togetherness before the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent. The microscopic community of people from mixed backgrounds – elite Muslim and Hindu officials, low caste servants, indigenous hill people, humble Anglo-Indians, and performing travellers – is shown to inhabit the space of the small hill station in harmony. This spatialised community is nostalgically idealised and imagined as an alternative to the separation of the old, historical country (*vaṭan*) into two modern nations,

India and Pakistan (Chapter 4). For Satyajit Ray's protagonists of his popular detective fiction, while time is of the essence in the solving of mysteries, it is also experienced as an enjoyable duration of adventure and leisurely learning for the narrator, Topshe, as they travel across cities and suburban spaces in India and abroad, observing and participating in these spaces, in a kind of appropriation of the European *flâneur* as intelligent and intellectual. Each adventure is crafted through an attraction of a new spatial discovery for the three central characters that results in a linear logic of knowledge repository and cultural accumulation. At the same time, the linear progress of these adventures defies the common sense logic of age and continues to return as timeless, located in an unchanging setting of Calcutta after Independence (Chapter 5).

The emotional experiences of otium are necessarily entangled in practices, interactions, and perceptions of an intertwined spatio-temporality where one impacts the other and builds upon the experiences and vice versa. Through such a reading of practices located in a spatio-temporal framework, investigations of otium in its various emotional manifestations could lead to a profitable understanding of the concept as it undergoes transformations and also plays a central role in the very transformation of the emotions it embodies. I explore this further in the final section of this study (Chapter 6), where haunting and/or being haunted acquires the emotional manifestation of a longing for otium, as embedded in spatio-temporality of these feelings. Such expressions are harnessed spatially in the ruins of old abandoned houses and lost sweet shops in small cities in pre-Partition India, as remembered by a migrant writer in the works of Intizar Husain. They are embodied in dysfunctional and dirty parks claimed as spaces of insurgence amongst surreal flying humans, or in the lonely universe accessed on the rooftop terrace for the alienated psychic in the fiction of Nabarun Bhattacharya. The spatiality of longing for otium, as expressed in haunting, allows us to look at not only a critique of dystopian redescriptions of an unfair, unfeeling world but also provides us with an artful expression of requiem where spatial variations and temporal reconfigurations are embodied in the practice of mourning, longing, and grieving.

### 1.4.3 The Literary Conception of Otium in South Asia and Feeling Communities

Before this section is concluded, a brief understanding of contextualising these emotions within their cultural contexts and communities is essential. As mentioned earlier, many researchers on literary studies in South Asian modern language literatures tend to work with single languages and literary spheres. This

demarcation points towards understanding these literary spheres as linguistic and literary communities. However, these literary communities can be quite heterogeneous, even though they can be construed as formed around a single interest. Let me offer two distinct examples to illustrate the understanding of such communities. The Urdu literati and intelligentsia in the aftermath of the Rebellion of 1857, responding to a civilisational-literary crisis, can be retrospectively understood as a community. But they were also aware of each other as constituting a community through their responses to the situation of Muslims. Christina Oesterheld (2017) has shown how Urdu writers of the period, who were highly influenced by Syed Ahmed Khan, attempted to engender a new spirit in literature "with the aim to 'awaken', revitalise and mobilise the Muslim community" (*qaum*).

A different example that shows the extent of heterogeneity in such a literary community can be perceived in the several generations of Bengali readers who grew up reading the most popular children's magazine *Sandeś,* initiated by Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri (1863–1915). Through its various shutdowns, restarts, and generational gaps, many older readers found a culmination of emotional attachment in the extremely popular science fiction and detective novellas of Upendrakishore's grandson, Satyajit Ray. More contemporary generations of readers who grew up with Satyajit Ray's stories and novellas, in turn, go back to read extant copies of the magazine to link Satyajit's work with the pleasure-pedagogical project initiated by his grandfather and fostered by his father, Sukumar Ray. At the same time, readers continue to create a futuristic market for Satyajit's detective series in trans-medial platforms, constituting a genealogy of curiosity and wonder for the postcolonial Bengali juvenile readership. Within this community of texts, their trans-medial renditions and readers, the emotional network surrounding the original texts, calm curiosity, disciplined intellectual engagements, and sheer cool-headedness are transformed into heightened thrill, physical action and affective consumption (Chapter 5). The understanding of a community here, although spanning several generations is based on the notion of being faithful to original texts and simultaneously, in imparting them with varied, new departures.

In addition, it has to be acknowledged that literary communities and/or feeling communities may often overlap with social communities across age or gender, caste or class, for instance. For instance, children provide a very special understanding of community in this context. Childhood is often seen as the most free or unburdened phase of life where idleness, leisureliness, and the joys of holidaying are projected. In addition, as some chapters in this book, for instance, Chapter 3, but more elaborately, Chapter 5 shows, children, especially children-readers, are perceived as an *imagined community* by adults, as expressed in the latter's pedagogical endeavours. These pedagogical endeavours

address intellectual stimulation and moral upbringing, almost always hand-in-hand with a keen sensibility towards the emotional education of children, especially through reading.[85] The pedagogical project of engendering leisurely feelings among children is not only a difficult task, but also one that goes against the educational project after Enlightenment. Chapter 5 addresses this difficulty in the latter half of the twentieth century in a recently independent post-colonial nation under the burden of unemployment and corruption by addressing emotional potentials that are also community identifiers, particularly curiosity and the thrill of adventure. However, children can create quasi-community or group status beyond this imposed imagined community by pedagogues. This is a recurrent theme in leisurely narratives from South Asia where children of similar age groups, and often social classes, in the form of cousins, extended relatives, friends, and neighbours are depicted as 'gathering' to spend summer holidays or such periods of allowed leisure (see Chapter 4). However, the understanding of 'community' in children in such 'free' scenarios is beyond literary communities in that official sense of adult communities and tend to collaborate with communities who inhabit the same narratives in children's observations, the creation of such shared narratives themselves engendering a leisurely community.

Regarding literary communities, regional literatures in the context of colonial times have had a strong community base as is prevalent in the multiple formations of collectives like *sabhā* (assembly, council), *samāj* (society) and *samiti* (committee, association) in nineteenth-century Bengal. This can be seen as a trend amongst both Bengali and Urdu literati. While a detailed comparative study of these community formations is yet to be attempted in a focused manner, acknowledging these community tendencies forms a central aspect of the present work. An underlying assumption is that through strong bonds and emotions in these literary communities, the breach between different linguistic communities is extended over periods of time. Such communities and their mobilisations are seen to have resurfaced in various literary movements. The Progressive Writers' Movement was perhaps the single example that provoked the idealisation of a 'national' movement, given its 'towards independence' spirit. However, most literary movements are composed of a smaller community. For example, the *Ḥalqah-i Arbāb-i Ẓauq* (Circle of men of good taste) that was set up in Lahore in the late 1930s or the even smaller communities like the 'Hungry Generation' of Bengali poets who were active in the 1960s. Restricting

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85  See Ute Frevert, et al. *Learning How to Feel: Children's Literature and Emotional Socialisation, 1870–1970* (2014). See, especially, "Introduction" by Pascal Eitler, Stephanie Olsen, and Uffa Jensen, 2–7.

the study of such official literary communities, I now move towards the relevance of communities in this study through what Margrit Pernau calls "feeling communities" (2017). While communities have largely been seen as constructed after the work of Benedict Anderson and others in the frameworks of nationalism and religion, as Pernau draws attention to, they seem to be studied through the focus on interests. Arguing for the entanglement of emotions with interests and their impact on each other, she calls for "a sustained focus on the importance of emotions in the construction of communities" (Pernau 2017: 6).

Barbara Rosenwein proposed the idea of "emotional communities" as "groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions" (2006: 2). In her understanding, multiple emotional communities exist contemporaneously within a society. They also change over time as "some come to the fore to dominate our sources, then recede in importance" (ibid.). While Rosenwein's postulations are helpful in arguing against a homogenous reading of emotions in broadly labelled societies – in this case, South Asia – these emotional communities are also seen as unified in certain goals, norms, and ethics. Pernau points out that the stress on shared norms is not sufficient and insists on the "importance of shared experiences (which transcend norms), interpretations (which include norms and values, but are not limited to them) and practices (which are shaped by norms but cannot be reduced to them)" (Pernau 2017: 10). For Pernau, the "performative power of emotions" and their potential to trigger and create communities is crucial to research on communities. Although the focus of the present work is not the creation or operation of such communities, the understanding of certain literary communities as "feeling communities" informs the chapterisation of the book. Thus, each chapter focuses not only on authors and texts but also contextualises them as feeling actors and expressions within the community they are embedded in. Such a reading is motivated to understand the transformations of concepts and emotions in texts that are in dialogues with the communities they inhabit and give shape to. It is also useful to consider this understanding of literary communities as feeling communities in reading the oft-complementary and oft-dissonant emotional manifestations of otium as the chapters alter between communities in Bengali and Urdu literary histories. The aim is to understand the interactions, translations, or silences between the different literary discussions on concepts and emotions of otium.

# Part II

# 2 The Ambivalences of Nostalgia in Late-Nineteenth Century Urdu Literary Sphere

> *Five invading armies have fallen upon this city one after another: the first was that of the rebel soldiers, which robbed the city of its good name. The second was that of the British, when life and property and honour and dwellings and those who dwelt in them and heaven and earth and all the visible signs of existence were stripped from it. The third was that of famine when thousands of people died of hunger. The fourth was that of cholera, in which many whose bellies were full lost their lives. The fifth was the fever, which took general plunder of men's strength and powers of resistance.*
>
> Ghalib[86]

In a letter to his friend, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797–1869) describes the various calamities that destroyed Delhi in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first is ushered in by the "rebel soldiers", who fought India's first war of Independence to overthrow British rule.[87] The failed uprising led to further consolidation of British power, now transferred from the East India Company to the Crown. The unrest caused by the Rebellion had remarkable consequences on the socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects of much of northern India, especially the Urdu-speaking population in and around Delhi, the erstwhile seat of Mughal power.[88] Although the Mughals had already relinquished actual political power some time ago, the titular throne in Delhi reminded North Indian Muslims of their former glory, and the reality of an alien rule receded in the background. The failure of the uprising demolished these remnants and altered, among other things (that Ghalib enlists as "life and property and honour and

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86   *Ghalib: Life and Letters.* Trans. Russell & Islam (1994), 243. Addressed to Anvar-ud Daula Shafaq.

87   This uprising of 1857 has been described officially and historically by many names. I use 'Rebellion' to refer to this tumultuous event for clarification and constancy.

88   Historian Margrit Pernau suggests that the importance of the Rebellion was blown out of proportion by "British representation" of it rather than its real impact or that its historical reception was designed by an asymmetric power nexus in narratives and perspectives of the victorious, the British (2015 a), 75.

dwellings"), literary taste and trends. These changes also greatly transformed the perception of time for this community of Urdu-speaking readers and writers, as Victorian perceptions of morality and utilitarianism replaced the earlier loose notion of time. These ideas of morality and utilitarianism, reinforced by the teachings of reformist Islam, became central to the literary discourses following the rupture of 1857.

Literature and literary aesthetics are deeply enmeshed in everyday life in Delhi before 1857. The king, Bahadur Shah II (1775–1862), was also a poet, writing under the ironical *nom de plume* '*Ẓafar*', the victorious. The figure of Bahadur Shah Zafar has been seen, as William Dalrymple (2008) puts it, in "nostalgic sympathy" as a symbol of "romantic longing" for a past that is lost (2008: 414). A patron to several poets, including the illustrious Ghalib, the king famously sponsored and participated in many *muśāʿirah*s (poetic symposiums) at the Red Fort of Delhi. While he has been hailed as a poet and a patron, several historical accounts see his role as king in conflicting light in the context, some accusing him and others sympathising with him for his equivocal response to the Rebellion. The king was arrested, declared guilty of treason, and sent off to exile in Burma, where he died a painful, solitary death, thus bringing to a tragic end the glory of the long-standing Mughal dynasty.

The ways in which lifestyle, time, and literature have been perceived before and after 1857 point to a rupture, a significant alteration in thought, emotion, and action. The period before the Rebellion has been recalled by many historians as one of peace, calm, and cultural exuberance – even termed the 'short-lived Delhi Renaissance' by Percival Spear, Frances Pritchett, and others. For many Urdu writers of the time, this exuberance is reflected in several historical accounts, written immediately in the aftermath of the Rebellion, where the phrase last/"*ākhrī*" recurs, declaring an end, or a rupture.[89] Several texts written after 1857 look back nostalgically at a past that embodied a cultural richness, political or diplomatic peace, leisurely pace, and aesthetics. This glorified image of the past is further enhanced through nostalgic recalling of those times – "*voh zamānah*" – with grief and sorrow.[90] Remembrance/"*yād*" itself emerges as a significant discourse in the late-nineteenth century, moti-

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89    See, for example, some of the Urdu titles referring to the end of Delhi's courtly culture of the time, like Munśī Faiż-ud Dīn Dihlavī's *Bazm-i Ākhir* (1885)/*The Last Gathering*; Rāśid-ul K̲h̲airī's *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Bahār* (1937)/The Last Spring of Delhi; Mirza Farḥat-ullah Baig's *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Śamʿah* (1928)/The Last Glow of Delhi. Here, *śamʿah* (candle or flame) poetically describes the glow of a *muśāʿirah*.

90    Several Urdu writers, including Hali, use this phrase to recall their world before 1857 (see Chapter 2.3.1).

vating several recent historians to explore this feeling of nostalgia.[91] However, nostalgia was felt and expressed in different, often conflicting, and contradictory ways by writers of the time, and as we shall see, in different genres. While for some writers, it was expressed in longing for the bygone era, for many others, it was an emotion that provoked urgent severance from their immediate past, regarded by many as too leisurely, too decadent, and much too otiose. Nostalgia has to be read as conflicted in its nature, as conceptualised in this context. Several writers expressed severe critiques of the past that they also mourned.

This chapter explores the deep relation between the concept of otium and nostalgia in this context. Nostalgia is explored as an emotional manifestation of otium, where the imagery of a 'leisurely past' is reconstructed retrospectively in expressions of loss. Arguing against a universal understanding of nostalgia or that nostalgia feels the same for everyone, the chapter draws out the ambivalences in the emotion through contextual histories and textual analyses. After introducing the literary and emotional conflicts that several influential Urdu writers like Ghalib, Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–98) and Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914) have negotiated and expressed in the aftermath of 1857, the chapter focuses on the rise of the Urdu genre of the novel. The novel evolved out of attempts to allay the influence of the *ġazal* (or lyrical poetry) on Urdu literature of the time and focus on more 'useful' and 'instructive' literary genres *via* a reformation and renewal of literary ethos in the face of loss and defeat. After exploring this reforming spirit in the critical poetry of Altaf Husain Hali in his long poem, *Musaddas* (1879, revised in 1886), the chapter focuses on two significant Urdu novelists, Nazir Ahmad and Hadi Rusva. While offering an understanding of their literary attitudes with regard to depictions of the leisurely past and nostalgia, it focuses on one novel by each novelist – *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (1874) and *Umrāʾo Ǧān Adā* (1899), respectively. In these novels, the emotional conflicts regarding the leisurely past signified through representations of idleness and indulgence in poetry, are played out in the context of an emergent literary ethos. As a final claim, the chapter establishes that this rise of utilitarian ethos in Urdu literature is simultaneously profoundly entrenched with the theme of nostalgia for a leisurely past while the emotion attains a unique trajectory in the journeys of Urdu henceforth.

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91    See Margrit Pernau's article "Nostalgia. Tears of Blood for a Lost World" (2015 a). See Eve Tignol's article "Nostalgia and the City: Urdu shahr āshob poetry in the aftermath of 1857" (2017).

## 2.1 "*Seized by the Incurable Disquiet of the Times*": The Ambivalences of Nostalgia

In the aftermath of 1857, aristocratic Muslims in Delhi were subjected to growing suspicion from British officials for participating in the Rebellion. Muslim families from the elite classes (*aśrāf*) looked towards a precarious future after the loss of a world they had inherited from the Mughal court culture. Before the Rebellion, there was a reportedly increasing fondness between the Muslim aristocracy and the British officials, based on the latter's "latent" admiration of the culture of pleasure and the luxurious, leisurely life of the former.[92] Literature was an integral part of this culture of leisure; an interest in Urdu (and Persianate) language and literature came to be considered "a hallmark of the city itself"; and "poetry was discussed in every house".[93] Literary histories of this period repeatedly refer to a sense of irretrievable loss.[94] The representation of this loss is seen as something irredeemable and with everlasting impact on the written present and the imagined future. It is important to grasp the significance of these repeated metaphors of loss, mostly drawn on metaphors of Persianate-Urdu lyrical poetry of the time, for instance, ruined garden, caged nightingale, flickering lamp, and recurrent mentions of finality – *ākhrī* (last). The constant emphasis on the finality of this loss contributes to a construction of the past by reiterating and reproducing the same. The emotion of nostalgia is almost always intertwined with despair (*ġam*), expressed astutely in genres of poetry like the *śahr āśob* (lament for a ruined city), but also in prose accounts of the time.

The abrupt demise of the so-called 'Delhi Renaissance' and the inevitable destruction of the way of life during Delhi's courtly days were chronicled by Ghalib in his *Dastanbū* (1994 [1858]), an anthology of diary entries (in Persian). He recorded, with much anguish and agony, the painful loss he suffered. He

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[92]   In *Orientalism* [1978], Edward Said expounds the notion of *latent* orientalism to distinguish between the positive and/or negative categorisation of colonial stereotypes regarding the 'natives'. In the context of colonial idleness, Monika Fludernik uses the distinction to explore racial discriminations of idleness. See Fludernik, "The Performativity of Idleness" (2014), 131–35.

[93]   Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (1994), 10.

[94]   See, for example, titles of critical pieces on the Rebellion and literary history: Pritchett's chapter titled "The Lost World", the first part of the book "A Garden now Destroyed"; Pernau's article on Nostalgia and the Rebellion; William Dalrymple's best-selling dramatic historical novel, *The Last Mughal*. These English translations of 'loss' and finality as emotional and historical signifiers are, in turn, inspired by Urdu titles of the declining literary culture of the time.

wrote of this period in the country as one utterly devoid of possibilities of otium, peace, or repose – *"ārām va āsāʾiś se k͟hālī"* (Ghalib 1994: 24). He documented it as a time of *"Hindustān kī vīrānī"* (India's desolation, 25), and of his predicament in the situation as dramatically pitiful: "My face remains devoid of colour and glow until I have washed it a thousand times in tears of blood. Grief and distress have taken the shape of my life and heart; and my bed is woven with thorns" (Ghalib 1994: 82). Controversially, in *Dastanbū*, Ghalib holds the Indian rebel soldiers as responsible for the widespread suffering and misery. At the same time, the British officials are sympathised with, and their torments at the hands of the rebels are seen as outrageous treachery. He makes his loyalties unabashedly clear, defending the British as just and wise rulers (1994: 19, 21– 24) while painting the rebels as men of "blackened hearts" (1994: 23, 37). His loyalty is expressed in an ultimate gesture, the *qaṣīdah* (panegyric) he had penned for Queen Victoria (1994: 47–49), perhaps in foresight, before the outbreak of the Rebellion. Scholars read Ghalib's dubious loyalty to the British as his desperate attempt at survival, where his sustenance depended on royal patronage. Khwaja Ahmad Faruqi, an authority on the *Dastanbū* and one of its first Urdu translators, writes that "he [Ghalib] had to protect himself during those stormy days" but "there is no doubt that Ghalib sided with the Mughal emperor" (Faruqi 1970: 10). Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, translators and editors of Ghalib's letters and records, show through various correspondences that the poet may have "omitted or toned down passages which could give serious offence to the British" and "may have added emphasis to his horror at the acts of the rebel sepoys"; particularly since it became clear that in 1858, Ghalib had conceived of presenting *Dastanbū* to British authorities "as a means of winning their favour and patronage" (Russell and Islam 1994: 132–33). Ghalib suffered profoundly, the loss of his world, his beloved city and the creative life it cultivated, as he shifted allegiance depending upon the patronage he sought for survival in the twilight of his illustrious life.

The loss was felt on different levels by Urdu writers of the time and was not always adequately or unanimously expressed. Specifying the exceptionality of Ghalib's *Dastanbū,* Pernau writes of how this loss and the emotion of nostalgia is strikingly missing from the works of many Urdu writers of the time; they were possibly, she emphasises, "too busy surviving", "demonstrating their loyalty to the British" (2015a: 80–81). Pernau unpacks the emotion as complex, ambivalent, and encompassing "a variety of different phenomena" (Pernau 2015a: 101–3). Following this reading, this chapter demonstrates that nostalgia acquires an ambivalence in this context, closely entangled with claims to a time, place, and memory of peaceful, leisurely existence. In this historical context, nostalgia embodies yearning for the loss of otium for leisurely days of the past. However, it is also an experience of otium in its being felt, allowing one to

dwell in the past while time in the present fades away. I therefore read nostalgia as a manifestation of otium, as it mourns the loss of a leisurely past. It is an emotion that South Asian writers often revisit in the following century to express the mourning of and simultaneous yearning for a leisurely past before the grip of colonial rule had strengthened. Nostalgia then attains a narratorial agency towards the reconstruction of the past, further developed by later writers who already inherited a sorrowful image of the past to build upon.[95] As a historical emotion, it is further highlighted as the past becomes distant.

Arguing against the idea that emotions are felt universally and expressed in the same way, the chapter draws out the ambivalences of nostalgia and the conflicting shades in this emotion expressed differently by different writers like Nazir Ahmad and Hadi Rusva. Here, the emotion is read not only in mourning the passing of a certain time or era (*zamānah*) but also in the attempts made by the writers to distance themselves from this past, associated with the court, with indolence, idleness, and decadence; in fact, they criticised the very leisurely past they mourned since it is this very leisurely past that was often held responsible for the decline of Muslim civilisation in India. Strategically negotiated by writers of various genres, nostalgia in this context evolves as an emotion that allows for criticism of the extravagances of the past, as it simultaneously mourns the loss of the same elements that it criticises. Nostalgia then shapes the future as much as the past, in what Svetlana Boym refers to as "side effects of the teleology of progress" (2001: 10). Many writers in this context who took recourse to remembrances of the past also looked forward to the future and advocated reforms to retain certain semblances of the past. As Pernau puts it, for many such writers, "aiming at colonial modernity did not prevent them from being nostalgic, quite the contrary" (2015 a: 103).

Nostalgia is most emphatically invoked during this time in texts of *śahr āśob* – a genre of poetry that laments the ruin of a city. However, the emotional investment here has brought in certain long-lasting changes to the genre and, in many ways, giving shape to the evolution of the genre itself. Hans Harder suggests that the focus of the style had likely transformed from the pre-existing classical genre of "*śahr āśob*, 'what brings the city into uproar'" to the "*śahr-i āśob*, 'city of decay/terror/uproar'" (2016: 439). Eve Tignol has shown that in the immediate aftermath of 1857, the genre reflected various innovations like collective memory and materiality of the city to construct an emotional representation of the past and the memory of 1857 as "cultural

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95  Fludernik draws out nostalgia as a representation through which recent Indian novels in English are read to "lay claims" to an "Indian tradition of leisure". See Fludernik, (2020), 14–34.

trauma" (2017: 566–67). In this, she sees a stark difference in the genre (despite a sense of claimed continuity) before and after 1857 that thrived beyond the Rebellion and the publication of the commemorative *śahr āśob* collection, *Fuġān-i-Dihlī* (The Lament of Delhi, 1863). Literary genres and trends witness transformations through emotional contextualisation, while the evolution of these genres and styles then reflects how these emotions are expressed, represented, and negotiated. While certain genres and texts evoked nostalgia for a glorious (construction of the) past, many others, in particular, the emerging genre of the Urdu novel, as this chapter explicates, directed their emotional engagements towards a criticism and, at times, negotiations of the same, as they manoeuvred their vulnerable position, in Ghalib's phrasing, "seized by the incurable disquiet of the times".[96] The emergent genre of the novel allowed for narrative innovations where the leisurely past is also mourned in the conflicted nature of characters who are afflicted by nostalgia.

Historically identified in the seventeenth century as an affliction amongst migrant Swiss soldiers, manifested in the feeling of homesickness for one's native land, nostalgia was thought to be curable with the aid of "[l]eeches, warm hypnotic emulsions, opium and a return to the Alps"; progressively it emerged as a modern epidemic among Europeans at the time – significantly except amongst the British (Boym 2001: 4–6).[97] Gradually, it came to be seen as a "shameful disease that revealed a lack of manliness and unprogressive attitudes" (ibid.). Nauman Naqvi argues that nostalgia has long been "discursively constituted as a pathological category in Western epistemic regimes, and the nostalgic represented as a disorderly subject to be subjected to a variety of disciplinary knowledges and institutional practices of discipline and control" (2007: 7). Manliness and progress are two central aspects of the emotion, especially within the "classic Foucauldian disciplinary-institutional paradigm: military, criminological/penal, educational" (ibid.). Much of how nostalgia is perceived in modern times is drawn on experiences and memories of wars and consequential catastrophes, displacements, and sufferings, often expressed in terms of pathology and disease. Beyond this severely psychosomatic notion, through the processes of modernisation on a global scale, its associated conflicts and widespread expressions in cultural memory, modernity can be said to usher in nostalgia as a commonly recognised and felt emotion outside the historical-cultural borders of Europe. Simultaneously, nostalgia itself – in its feeling profile – was transformed from the sense of homesickness or longing for a

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96  "*zamāne ke hāthoṉ nā-qābil-i ʿilāj muṣībatoṉ meṉ giriftār*", *Dastanbū* (1994), 18.

97  For British history, nostalgia attained significant relevance in the aftermath of the loss of the Empire.

lost home (place) into a yearning for bygone days (time) as the upheavals of the last century ushered in shared experiences of loss on a global scale. Universally, nostalgia almost always renders the past as peaceful and leisurely compared to the disillusionment of the present, thereby evoking the feeling of 'longing'.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the South Asian subcontinent underwent several political upheavals and bloody wars. The firm consolidation of British colonial power in the mid-nineteenth century, following the failed Rebellion of 1857, engendered a commonly identifiable emotion of loss. This feeling was shared by many communities in various parts of the subcontinent and emphatically expressed by the Urdu-speaking *aśrāf* (elites), reflecting the image of a destroyed Mughal city and a way of life that it used to boast. While the Urdu writers did not use a word that was directly equivalent to the (linguistically-culturally) European 'nostalgia', prevailing Urdu poetics of loss, expressed in the vocabulary of despair and sorrow (*ġam*), decline (*zavāl/tanazzul*) and remembrance (*yād*) emerged in the aftermath of 1857 as entangled, creating a discourse of grief that constituted for them a nostalgic mourning for the past. Physiological expressions of this emotion, in attributes like tears, sorrowful facial expressions, sometimes even on a pathological level, were directed towards grieving for a time that was once signified by ease/tranquillity/calm – "*ārām va āsāyaś*" – in the words of Ghalib. Simultaneously, the past is also expressed as a time of "*farāġat*" or leisure, steeped in "*sustī*" (sloth, indolence, laziness) and "*ġaflat*" (heedlessness, carefree abandon) by the influential poet and critic, Hali, amongst other writers. Representations of the past, in both terms, heavily coincided with painting the past as *more leisurely* – either in sorrowful longing or in stern criticism. In the aftermath of 1857, the value and utility of time attain great significance; this is starkly visible in repeated phrases that stress the preciousness of time and its limitations – "*vaqt kī qadr va qīmat*", in terms of penance and reward. While texts that claimed the past to be too luxurious and decadent urged for reformation and renewal of the Muslim civilisation in India, they also, as we shall see, succumbed to nostalgia on different levels.

After 1857, many influential Urdu writers blamed the *navābī* (aristocratic) culture of a leisurely life immersed in idle pastimes and wasteful leisure, including poetic contemplation, as the reason for the decay and destruction of the Muslim/Mughal civilisation in India.[98] Literary and cultural societies in post-1857 Delhi attempted to structure themselves around concepts of utilitarianism; while one

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98  Hali, for example, has a string of verses in his *Musaddas* that demeans contemporary Urdu poetry in vitriolic satire: "the filthy archive of poetry and odes, more foul than a cesspool in it putridity/by which the earth is convulsed as if by an earthquake, and which makes the angels blush in heaven/such is the place among other branches of learning of

group attempted to follow the English, others strived to bring older sensibilities in some compatibility with the new ethos.[99] In his brief critical history of Urdu literature from 1850 to 1975, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi points out the nature of the conflict the Urdu writers faced after 1857.[100] The challenge thrown by British supremacy in the aftermath of 1857 was voiced towards the immorality and uselessness of the extant literary culture in Urdu. Urdu literary tradition and its followers had, according to Faruqi, never been concerned with the question of the *usefulness* of literature; thus, this sudden and "alien" question (and criticism) gave rise to unprecedented conflict regarding how literature was perceived and its role in society (Faruqi 2005: 169–71). It "introduced disruptive elements" in the extant literary philosophy (ibid.). Having faced defeat and humiliation at the hands of the very same alien power, littérateurs underwent immense pressure to either change the (allegedly) otiose nature of literature or tried (and failed miserably) to prove its usefulness. Urdu literary ethos had been secular in nature, being fashioned by various literary, linguistic, and cultural influences ranging from Arabian, Persian, and the Indic/Hindvi. This prevalent plurality began to be suppressed, to some considerable extent, as reformist Islam took precedence to 'rectify' the allegations put forth by colonialist critique.

Against the utilitarian values championed by the industrious British and their thus prejudiced understanding of culture, knowledge and education, Urdu literature or *adab*, as a concept, underwent massive transformations and reorientations. At the same time, it also functioned as the media for this transformation. Literature then became the vehicle that best represented this split in perceptions of time and the literary itself became the object of this change, acquiring an "alien" utilitarian ethos under colonial administration. Several writers, now influenced by shifting loyalties or coercion of colonial authorities, looked towards colonial modernity, progress, and functional values of literature. Influential writers like Hali, Muhammad Husain Azad, and Nazir Ahmad followed such quests for reformation and renewal, embodied by the Aligarh Movement, spearheaded by Syed Ahmad Khan. Nevertheless, as scholars like

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our literature, by which learning and faith are quite devastated". In *Hali's Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam.* Trans. Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed (1997), 18. The verse is discussed in detail later in the chapter.

99   See Shamim Hanafi, "Unīsvīṉ Ṣadī: Sar Sayyid aur Munśī Naval Kiśor". https://www.rekhta.org/articles/unniswin-sadee-sir-syed-aur-munshi-nawal-kishor-shamim-hanafi-articles?lang=ur accessed on 28th December 2020.
See also Faruqi (2005). He reads the founding of the Deoband Dār-ul ʿUlūm (1867) as a Muslim response against the westernising responses of Ahmad Khan and his followers, p. 170.

100   See Faruqi, "Conflict, Transition, and Hesitant Resolution" (2005), 168–87.

Frances Pritchett (1994), Margrit Pernau (2015 a), and Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (2006) have shown remarkably, emotions of sorrow for the lost past and anxiety/discomfort towards the impending future continued to trouble these writers as they sought to break ties with their 'peaceful' and 'leisurely', alternately 'wasteful' and 'decadent' past and their erstwhile non-utilitarian, pluralist literary ethos in such times of "incurable disquiet".

## 2.2 Cultural Encounters, Literary Reorientations, and Feelings of Disequilibrium

Encounters with British colonial authorities were not entirely new to Urdu literature. The Fort William College in Calcutta, set up by the Marquess of Wellesley in 1800, was a place of heightened literary activities under the guidance of the orientalist scholar John Gilchrist.[101] Literary texts from Persian and Sanskrit were translated into simpler, more facile expressions. As an institute of what was understood as 'oriental learning', the activities at the College led to a revival of Urdu prose. Simultaneously, the Delhi College served as another framework of enhanced knowledge, translation, and encounters. Admittedly, there was a marked difference between these encounters and those that followed 1857. Earlier attempts were mostly meant to train fresh British recruits of the Company to help them acclimatise to the languages, literatures, and cultures of 'Hindoostan'. It has been adequately argued that much of the motivation among British officials and orientalists towards 'oriental learning' emerged from feelings of admiration and appreciation "before they were slowly replaced by self-righteous utilitarian and evangelical newcomers. This development took off in the 1830s and was sealed with the brutal repression of the revolt of 1857, never to be revived" (Pernau 2006: 11).

The literary encounters between the British and the Indians in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were often bi-directional, motivated by the need to acquire knowledge and understand the other. Gradually, the colonisers were also concerned with educating Indians in the sciences and other aspects of knowledge that they perceived the latter to be ignorant of. The British involvement in educating Indians changed through the nineteenth century. Initially, through the official mandate of 1813, a clause was inserted in the East India Company Act that announced, for the first time, an intention to supply funds towards the development of education and learning of the Indians.[102] In

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101   Gilchrist had already compiled his dictionary of "*Hindoostanee*" in 1787.

102   For details, see C. M. Naim's essay "Prize-Winning Adab" (2004 a), 120–21.

1823, after a bleak report on the status of formal education in the area of Delhi, Agra and other North Indian cities was drawn up, the government sanctioned resources towards the "instruction of Muhammadan youth in Delhi" (Pernau 2006: 10–12). After 1857, these British concerns about educating Indians transformed into direct involvement in the propagation of utilitarian knowledge and literature, particularly in the context of Delhi and the North-Western Provinces. In 1868, William Muir, the Lieutenant Governor of the NW Provinces, announced prize money for native writers for producing "useful works in the vernacular" languages for the moral instruction of Indians (Naim 2004a: 122–23). In about half a century, the nature of encounters between the British colonial officers and the Urdu-speaking North Indians had transformed dramatically from one of diplomacy to one of discipline.[103]

The years after 1857 saw more of such direct British influence in the literary activities of North Indians, which drastically changed the course of Urdu literature. In 1865, G. W. Leitner, a renowned linguist and orientalist scholar, founded the *Anjuman-i Panjāb* (the 'Punjab Society') in Lahore, directed towards "the revival of ancient oriental learning, the advancement of popular knowledge through vernaculars, the discussion of social, literary, scientific, and political questions of interest, and the association of the learned and influential classes with the officers of the government" (Pritchett 1994: 32). The society organised literary talks, set up libraries and reading spaces, and was instrumental in establishing Lahore's Oriental College. It served as a role model for such organisations to be founded in other towns and cities. Leitner had been instructed in Urdu by Muhammad Husain Azad, who fled to Lahore after the destruction of Delhi and the torments his family had suffered in its aftermath. Closely working with the *Anjuman* and under Leitner's watchful guidance, Azad advanced cautiously towards his literary career. He delivered a speech in 1874 in which he called for "a new Urdu poetry and a new poetics, both based on English models", urging poets to leave the "traditional adornments of poetry" behind (Pritchett 1994: 34). The director of public instruction, Colonel W. R. M. Holroyd spoke on the "usefulness of poetry as a teaching tool" and proposed a new series of *muśāʿirah*, which should develop by adhering to a specific predetermined theme or subject instead of the spontaneous flow of verses in a traditional symposium. By now, Altaf Husain Hali was also in Lahore and became closely associated with the *Anjuman*. His involvement in, influenced by his association with British authorities, had a gradual but magnanimous impact on Urdu poetry and criticism, as reflected in his influential works like the *Musaddas* titled *Madd va*

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103   See also references to the remarkable difference in British involvement in North India before and after 1857 in Pritchett (1994), 5 and 6.

*Jazr-i Islām* (*The Flow and Ebb of Islam*, 1879, 1886) and the preface to his *Dīvān*, the *Muqaddamah*. These encounters and their negotiations of Urdu poetry, albeit inspired by their mentors and patrons, encouraged both Azad and Hali to develop their philosophy of a new poetics in their works *Āb-i Ḥayāt* (1880) and *Muqaddamah-i Śiʿr va Śāʿirī* (1893), respectively. While Azad's *Āb-i Ḥayāt* was written in the form of a *taẕkirah* (a chronological, biographical commentary), perhaps even the last traditional *taẕkirah*, Hali's *Muqaddamah* ushered in the revolution of poetry criticism. Annemarie Schimmel has claimed Hali to be the "founder of literary criticism in Urdu" (1975: 226). Shamsur Rahman Faruqi describes him as the writer who "broadened the perspective" but "also narrowed it", invoking the emotion of "guilt" in revaluing the past (2005: 176).

The British had convinced Indians of the former's superiority in literature, knowledge systems, and civilisation. Having experienced the rupture of 1857 first-hand, Azad and Hali sought to salvage what was left of the long literary tradition they had inherited and loved. In their opinion, the only way to do this was by reforming or renewing it to meet the demands of the present. Hali found a guide with whom he could work towards the reformation and revival of Urdu literature in the tall-standing figure of Syed Ahmad Khan. The doyen of Muslim education and social reform in India, Khan worked for the East India Company as a judge and remained loyal to the British during the Rebellion, earning him a knighthood in 1888. His trysts with British values and ethics are reflected in the two most influential results of his efforts – the dissemination of his new journal *Tahẕīb-al Akhlāq* (The Cultivation of Morals, published 1871–97) and his brain-child, the modern education system embodied by the Aligarh Movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[104] Khan utilised his influence on Azad and Hali, and through their voices, he called for a "*necarī*" (natural) form of poetry, one that is inclined towards nature or natural emotions, thus marking a break from the older traditions, implying their dealings with 'unnatural' thoughts and feelings expressed in construed metaphors.[105]

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[104]    David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (1996 [1978]), 102–5.

[105]    In a letter written by Khan to Azad in October 1874. The letter has been quoted by Aslam Farrukhi in his two volume-biography of Azad, *Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād: Ḥayāt aur taṣānīf, ḥiṣṣah-i avval va duvum. Karācī: Anjuman-i Taraqqī-i Urdū, 1965*. The Urdu original line uses the word "*necar*", adopted from the English 'nature': "Apne kalām ko aur ziyādah necar kī ṭaraf māʾil karo" (Turn your poetic writing further towards nature), 280. For a more contextual reading of the letter and several other documents pertaining to this call for a "natural" form of poetry of Syed Ahmad Khan, see his works translated and analysed by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi in his essay "From Antiquary to Social Revolutionary: Syed Ahmad Khan and the Colonial Experi-

This form and style of natural poetry, Syed Ahmad claimed, was to be found in abundance in the annals of English literature.[106] Khan's affinity towards the English language, literature, and its progressive culture intensified during his trip to England in 1869–70. His encounters with English education and literature informed Khan's dreams of turning Aligarh and its institutes into the 'Oxford and Cambridge of India'. This first-hand interaction with England had a tremendous emotional impact on Khan, urging him to 'awaken' Indian Muslims. David Lelyveld writes: "[B]y all accounts Sayyid Ahmad's experience of England was a major personal crisis. His writings took on a new passionate intensity or *josh*, which often expressed itself in terms of shocking self-debasement totally at odds with his usual stance of proud self-respect" (1996: 105). Although overwhelmed by the achievements of the British, Khan was not a man easily immobilised – he used his *joś*/*josh* to stimulate his community. The several encounters (briefly charted above) of Urdu-speaking Indian Muslim writers with British officers, English efficiency and advancement, especially after 1857, generated an influx of emotions of inferiority and helplessness. With their backs against the wall, they formulated several revisions to the extant literary culture as they attempted to cut their ties with the past.[107] Within this emotionally charged historical framework, this chapter reads the discussions surrounding otium, leisure, and idleness as the forward-looking Urdu writers tried to suppress nostalgia for the Delhi of a bygone era, which was felt and constructed as more leisurely and peaceful.

While on the one hand, they looked to the future of Urdu literature and the progress of Muslim society in North India, many such writers could not overcome the asynchronicity of emotions as they mourned a beloved time and city. This emotional conflict echoes what Faruqi describes as "disequilibrium" in the literary field, as Urdu writers attempted to modernise literature by borrowing literary ideas and novelties from English: "The ideas that invaded Urdu lit-

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ence", 9–10. The essay was developed from a speech delivered by Faruqi at Aligarh Muslim University in 2006, published online by Frances Pritchett. http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/srf/srf_sirsayyid.pdf accessed on 29th January 2019.

106    "Zarūr hai ki angrezī śāʿiroṉ ke khayālāt le kar urdū zubān meṉ adā kiʾe jāʾeṉ" (ibid.).

107    Several scholars have addressed these attempts at severance of the past from the present: Pritchett's expansive study on the Urdu *ġazal* focuses on the trials of Hali and Azad as they reoriented Urdu poetry towards a critical functionality; Khan's dissociation from his deep interest in the past reflected in his two-volume book, *Āṣār-us Sanādīd* (1847, 1854) has been analysed by Faruqi (2006) and Pernau (2019) to arrive at the reformer's emotional dilemmas and his reorientation towards the future.

erature from the West were not only modern and novel: they were culturally alien. Furthermore, they introduced disruptive elements into our literary thought" (2005: 171). Many such novelties were responses to the need of the hour, oriented towards uplifting the defeated emotional state of the literary community/*qaum*. While poetry was altered in functionality and form, prose became a more desired genre during this period. The contemporaneous enterprises of the printing press in the middle of the nineteenth century saw great success in the next two decades as printed books became easier and more affordable vehicles for the dissemination of literature. Earlier prose traditions in the oral form, like the *dāstān* and the *qiṣṣa*, were replaced by the call of the genre of the hour, the modern Urdu novel. The printing press also gave rise to other popular prose forms – like periodicals, literary journalism, and popular literature. These possibilities allowed for necessary and exciting literary innovations in Urdu literature, even if they ushered in a disequilibrium in high literary thought. The early Urdu novel provides for a fascinating study of how literature embodied a space where the tussle of tradition and innovation played out, juxtaposing with the 'nostalgic subject' who must be disciplined, and the modern subject who must adapt. In the overall analysis, the focus is on the apparently contradictory prejudices of the nostalgic subject and the modern subject in their attitudes towards forms of otium – leisure, idleness, and indolence, embodied in the leisurely bygone era – and towards nostalgia for that lost past. Before we read the novels as case studies, let us look at the conceptual construction of idleness in the emerging Urdu literary discourses formulated by the most remarkable poem of the time, Hali's *Musaddas* – a poem in critique of the extant tradition of poetry.

## 2.3  Hali's *Musaddas*: The Construction of Counterconcepts and the Critique of Indolence and Poetry

> *In those days, before its destruction, Delhi had recovered itself*
> *for the last time. Although the possibility of illuminating the discourses*
> *of the pastwas null, the city felt full of life and colour, teeming with enduring*
> *men of letters. …. This last brilliant glow of Delhi, the thought of which makes*
> *the heart break with grief, I have seen it with my own eyes, and one by one,*
> *I bade farewell to the lagging caravans of that time.*
>
> Hali[108]

As Ghalib's Delhi and its former cultural and poetic brilliance declined, Khwaja Altaf Husain 'Ḥālī', along with his contemporary senior, Muhammad Husain Azad, tried to gather the remains and progress towards journeys of regeneration. In this quest for a strain of literature significantly different from the previous, allegedly decadent ethos, Hali was highly influenced by Syed Ahmad Khan. However, before Hali came to be acquainted with Khan, he was mentored by two doyens of the old world – Ghalib and Navab Mustafa Khan Sheftah. Hali writes of his time with Ghalib and Shefta (along with other masters he had known) in a nostalgic verse (taken from the same text as that of the epigraph) in which he bids himself to look ahead at the future and let go of these painful memories of the past:

> *Neither Ghalib remains, nor Shefta, not even Naiyar, neither Vahshat remains,*
> *nor Salik, not Anvar;*
> *Hali, now take this to be the gathering of friends; the wounds of friends remain*
> *etched on the heart.* [109]

Here, I explore the emotional conflicts of an influential writer like Hali, who inhabited both worlds – before and after 1857 – and had an irrefutable impact on the future of Urdu poetry and literary ethos. This reading enables contextualising the literary upheavals from within the emotional framework of the poets and writers' experiences and puts emotions at the centre of these debates. The objective of reading a writer like Hali in a chapter on nostalgia is to rethink the perceptions of writers as isolated, unidirectional influences on literary debates. Instead, the impetus is towards reading the contradictoriness within literary debates, vis-à-vis a flow of emotions not only within the writer or the

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108  'Dīvān-i Anvar', *Maqālāt-i- Ḥālī, ḥiṣṣah-i duvum* (1936), 173.

109  "*Ġalib hai nah Śeftah nah Naiyyar bāqī, Vaḥṣat hai nah Sālik hai nah Anvar bāqī, Ḥālī ab isī ko bazm-i yārāṇ samjho, yāroṇ ke jo kuch dāġ haiṇ dil par bāqī*" (ibid.). I thank Saif Mahmood for his help with this verse.

actor but also within contexts and communities – the writer, the text, and the literary sphere.

Time is the poem's central theme, caught in a struggle between history (how time is seen to have progressed) and nostalgia (how time's passing is felt). Spending time in leisurely and idle pursuits is constructed by Hali as the reason for the degradation of Indian Muslims of his time. Interestingly, this squandering of precious time is repeatedly depicted in the composition of useless poetry by the leisurely elite aristocrats. In this emotionally negotiated conceptual manoeuvre, Hali fuses the concepts of leisurely decadence, idleness, and indolence with the state of poetry and literature, declaring the composition of elaborate Urdu poetry and this tradition as wasteful and decadent. In this entanglement, he states poetry and indolence as the inseparable counterconcept to the progress of his community.[110] As the poem advances, the dichotomy is restructured towards progress and idleness, severely criticising the contemporary poets (*śuʿarā*), aristocratic men and their children (*śarīfoṇ kī aulād*) who are busy passing their time in idle activities and the carefree slumber of heedlessness (*ġaflat, fāriġ-ul-bāl*). The cure to this decaying process, Hali asserts, is the reverse of wasting time in elaborate and useless poetry, i.e., the utilisation of precious time through effort and hard work (*kośiś va miḥnat*) and the utilisation of literature towards the inculcation of morality.

Hailing from Panipat, Hali first moved to Delhi in 1854 with dreams of a literary career but travelled to Hisar for practical employment. During this short stint in the capital, he witnessed the 'last brilliant glow of Delhi'. He returned in 1861 and became associated with Shefta and Ghalib, both of whom encouraged him (Shackle & Majeed 1997: 2; Pritchett 1994: 15). These joyous times ended with the consecutive deaths of Ghalib and Shefta in 1969. In 1971, Hali moved to Lahore, but the pinnacle of his career was destined in Delhi. In 1874, he returned to Delhi and became closely associated with his new mentor, Syed Ahmad Khan. Hali was seriously committed to the regeneration of Urdu poetry, which he expressed in the preface/introduction to his collection of poems, the *Dīvān* of 1890. The long preface, titled *Muqaddamah-i Śiʿr-va Śāʿirī* (Preamble to verse and poetry), became a successful book in its own right and was published separately in 1893. In it, he laid down what he believed to be the proper role of poetry. He elaborates on the effects of poetry on the audience's emotions (*śiʿr kī tāṣīr*), on the relationship between poetry and morality (*śāʿirī kā taʿalluq akhlāq ke sāth*) and its dependency on society (*śāʿirī sosāʾiṭī kī ṭābiʿ hai*) among many such func-

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110   Koselleck, "The Historical-political Semantics of Asymmetric Counterconcepts" (2004 a), 155–58.

tionalities of poetry.[111] He offers several examples from European literary history to demonstrate the "political", "social" and "moral" benefits the people of Europe have reaped through a functional relationship of poetry and literature with social reality.[112] These proclamations in the *Muqaddamah* foreshadow the *Musaddas* of 1879, written largely under Khan's mentorship.

Titled *Madd va Jazr-i Islām* or *The Flow and Ebb of Islam* (Trans & Eds. Shackle & Majeed), the *Musaddas* is arguably one of the most important and influential works of poetry in the last half of the century. Disrupting the tradition of poetics and setting a new literary trend, it provoked a series of imitations and reactions that stirred up a small literary storm in the world of Urdu poetry (Shackle & Majeed 1997: 36–48). Unlike previously accepted norms of a poem, Hali's *Musaddas* approached the innovation of literary polemics in its many aspects. Distinctly departing from extant themes in Indo-Persian poetic traditions like love, separation, and longing, it addressed the contemporary sociopolitical situation in its analysis of the rise and fall of Islamic civilisation in world history. Not only does it accomplish a shift in theme but also in style. The *Musaddas* made a distinct mark in moving away from the dominant form of poetry, the *ġazal*. The *Musaddas,* on the other hand, retained its unity of theme(s) and, in itself, became a critical investigation of the social (dis)order, hoping to awaken Indian Muslims through emotions of shame, disgrace, and hope. It is written in the poetic form of the '*musaddas* stanza' – units of six half-verses, composed of 297 such verses, later reduced to 294 in its second edition (1886).[113] The second edition came with a supplement (*zamīmah*) as well as a glossary (*farḥang*) and was clear proof of its momentous success (Shackle & Majeed 1997: 11, 26). The first introduction argued, in the form of a polemic, for an urgent need to severe from the past tradition of poetics; the second criticised the vices of the lazy, immoral, and indolent Muslims. The printed copy of the *Musaddas* was also alien to extant traditions of Urdu poetry. Shackle and Majeed describe it as "Victorian" – "unassuming, disciplined, and prosy" (1997: 9).

The poem is a struggling investigation of the depressing state of Muslims in India, hoisted on the dichotomy of the two concepts, *taraqqī* (progress) and

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111  *Muqaddamah-i Ś'ir-va Śā'irī* (1928), 3, 15 & 17.

112  Ibid. 8–9. Note that Hali writes 'political', 'social' and 'moral' as English words in his Urdu text.

113  As Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed (1997) elaborate in their critical translation of the poem, the fact that the poem underwent many revisions, culminating in a second edition published seven years later, can be seen as something that 'differentiates' it from the rest of Urdu poetry of the time.

*tanazzul* (decay).[114] Hali makes the central claim that the present degradation of Indian Muslims is because, over time, they lost their faith in the simple, moral, and rational teachings of Islam and have become indolent and arrogant. He employs two poetic devices: firstly, he sets up strong, rigid dichotomies between East and West (*maśriq va maġrib*), between progress and decay (*taraqqī va tanazzul*); and then he introduces a cyclical movement of time between the two opposites, destabilising the seemingly fixed positions of these dichotomies, subverting their positions with the passing of time, as if in a cycle of nature. He begins with the age of darkness – the period of '*jāhilīyāt*' or the barbaric times in pre-Islamic Arabia. After descriptions of this dark period, he introduces the birth of the prophet (Muhammad) and the spread of Islam, with which a social revolution is brought about as the early Muslims of Arabia attain "progress" in every aspect of life (*musalmānoṉ kī taraqqiyāt*, 1997: 126–41).[115] After a long list of progress of Arab Muslims, suddenly he depicts the "decay of Islam" (*tanazzul-i ahl-i Islām*, 143), soon followed by the "efficiency of the Europeans" (*ahl-i Yūrap kā ẓabt-i auqāt*, 151) and the fall of Muslim civilisation in India, signalled by "the wind of autumn" (*caman meṉ havā ā cukī hai khizāṉ kī*).

> *The wind of autumn has already come into the garden, the direction of the gardener's gaze has shifted.*
> *The warbling nightingale's cry has altered. Now, the garden is due to depart at any moment.*
> *All the visions which are seen are of destruction. Now, the dawn of catastrophe is about to break.* (1997: 153)

The rest of the long poem is a moralistic critique of the unending reasons responsible for the degradation of contemporary Muslim society in India. The poem then summarises the fortunes and blessings of the British rule in India (*barkat-i ḥukūmat*, 202) before it concludes with the theme of impermanence (*raftanī*, 205–7).

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[114]   Several scholars have identified progress and decay as central themes in Hali's *Musaddas*. See Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed (1997), 6, 49. See also, Arian Hopf (2017), 147, 155.

[115]   See original text and translation in Shackle & Majeed. In this section of the chapter, for quotations and translations of Hali's *Musaddas*, I have used their critical and authoritative translation, unless mentioned otherwise. They have translated the *musaddas* stanza of six half-verses as stanzas of three full verses, presumably for coherence. I have inserted page numbers as in-text citations while using their translation following the year of publication, 1997. This translation also includes the Urdu original on the opposite page of each translation. For references to a separate Urdu original, when required, I use the following version: *Musaddas-i Ḥālī yānī Madd va Jazr-i Islām*. Kānpur: Munśī Naval Kiśor, 1895. Citations from this text will be referred to as 1895.

Through the dichotomy of progress and decay, the poem pivots around change or the impermanence of time, already suggested in the title, *the flow and ebb of Islam*. However, this changing perception of time as natural is contrasted with human action, leading to civilisation's progress. This contrast then transforms time from its natural, cyclical flow into time as a fleeting opportunity, as linear and irretrievable, as valuable and utilitarian. There is a constant tension in the poem regarding the perception of time – and its inevitable turning – which, according to Hali, is then not so natural if it is not invested with human toil and morality (the first instance of this is seen to be achieved through the struggle of the prophet in spreading the message of "original" Islam). This tension and suspicion regarding the nature of time and the fortunes it may (not) bring if (no) human toil is invested is best described in the *rubāʿī* (quatrain) at the beginning:

> *If anyone sees the way our downfall passes all bounds, the way that Islam, once fallen, does not rise again,*
> *He will never believe that the tide flows after every ebb once he sees the way our sea has gone out.* (1997: 102–3).[116]

### 2.3.1 Process or Product? The Contradictions of Time in the *Musaddas*

In his article, "Kyā Musalmān Taraqqī kar Sakte Haiṇ?" (Can Muslims make progress?), Hali compares Europeans and Indian Muslims via the description of two caravans advancing on the same route. He advises the lagging caravan (the one that sets out later, i.e., Indian Muslims) not to lose hope, as the destination of both is the same. This destination, which Arian Hopf identifies and questions as Hali's understanding of historical *telos* (2017: 156–65), is then analysed to be originating in Europe and its advancements, although at the beginning of the poem, it seems that the *telos* was 'original' Islam. The primary question relating time and progress is the contradiction in the construction of the *telos*, a final destination that is required to understand progress (towards a goal), and the simultaneous destabilising of the *telos* with the cyclical movement of time albeit in a linear direction, in troughs and crests, ebb and flow. This nature of time as a variable is grasped with its possibilities of time as valuable in what Shackle and Majeed identify as the "economics of time" (1997: 55). This is further strengthened by the perception of time as limited in its opportunity (*thoṛī hai muhlat*) in the following verse, wherein Hali presumably quotes the philosophy of the prophet (Muhammad):

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116   "*Pastī kā koʾī ḥadd se guzarnā dekhe, Islām kā gir kar na ubharnā dekhe, māne nah kabhī ki madd hai har jazr ke baʿd, daryā kā hamāre jo utarnā dekhe*".

> 'You have your opportunity in health before sickness, in leisure before abundant occupations,
> 'In youth before the affliction of old age, in halting before the traveller goes on.
> 'You have your opportunity in wealth before poverty. Do what you ought, for there is little time to spare!' (1997: 116–17)[117]

With the constructive and moral use of time, its value can be transformed into knowledge (*taʿlīm*) and wealth (*daulat*).

Time is also the resource through which the future can be constructed, by recalling the past, the time that has gone by. Hali's source of progress and a possibly hopeful future for Indian Muslims seems to be knowledge of the past glory of Muslims in Arabia after the advent of Islam. Looking back at the peak of Islam's advancements, his gaze is nostalgic as he depicts its glory. This nostalgia is re-enacted in the epigraph where Hali reminisces the final, short-lived "recovery" of Delhi and its "last glow", the diminishing of which left wounds etched on his broken heart. Hali's emotions for the past are reflective of what is termed by Svetlana Boym as "restorative nostalgia", which "manifests itself in total reconstructions" of signs of the past by investing in the process of "myth-making of history" and "invented traditions" (2001: 41–42). Boym explicates the invention of traditions borrowing from Eric Hobsbawm, drawing on the chasms, ruptures, and discontinuities of the nineteenth century: invented tradition "builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective script for individual longing" (2001: 42). Hali utilises this longing for a glorious Islamic past as the source through which the future can be constructed (Hopf 2017: 162–65). In this (dis)continuum of progressive time, Hali's view of history and modernity echoes the gap between what Reinhart Koselleck terms the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'[118]:

> 'Who were you yesterday, and what have you become today! Just now you were awake, and now you have gone to sleep!' (1997: 102–3)[119]

The difference between past and present is shrunk with a sense of disbelief, to 'just now' or *abhī* and yet, separated with real-time centuries between 'yesterday' and 'today'. The gap between this yesterday and today, the past and the

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117  "'*Ġanīmat hai seḥat ʿalālat se pahle, farāġat maśāġal kī kaṡrat se pahle, javānī buṛhāpe kī zaḥmat se pahle, iqāmat musāfir kī riḥlat se pahle, faqīrī se pahle ġanīmat hai daulat, jo karnā hai kar lo ki thoṛī hai mohlat.*'" Shackle and Majeed refer this to a Hadith/*Ḥadīṣ* (sayings of the Prophet).

118  Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories." (2004 b).

119  "*Ki kal kaun the āj kyā ho gaʾe tum, abhī jāgte the abhī so gaʾe tum*".

present is deemed irreconcilable in Koselleck's separation between the two historical categories, the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'. When the previous experiences can no longer aid us in gauging the possibilities in the future, the stranded present then becomes the irreconcilable gap, denoting 'modernity' (Koselleck 2004b: xvii, 257, 260–61). But for Hali, although he recognises such a gap, the distance between today and yesterday, *āj* and *kal*, is apparently reconcilable with hard work and toil (following the Europeans), which would lead to haste so that the lagging caravan can catch up with the advancing one. Interestingly, Koselleck himself sees progress as a singular destination, almost echoing Hali's metaphor of *telos*, as an end to the journey of the now, the worldly understanding of mortal time, one that combined as well as defied the logic of 'experience' and 'expectation':

> Progress thus combined experiences and expectations, both endowed with a temporal coefficient of change. As part of a group, a country, or finally, a class, one was conscious of being advanced in comparison with the others, or one sought to catch up with or overtake the others. [...] progress was directed toward an active transformation of this world, not the Hereafter [...] What was new was that the expectations that reached out for the future became detached from all that previous experience had to offer. (Koselleck 2004b: 266–67)

This detachment that Koselleck sees as inevitably modern or new (*neu* in the *Neuzeit*) is seen by Hali as something that can be bridged again by reconciling with the simple tenets of original Islam, but also of European progress, of 'hard work and toil' (*kośiś va miḥnat*). The way to achieve this is by diagnosing and rectifying (*iṣlāḥ*) the present ignorance over the power of time amidst the Indian Muslims. For this purpose, Hali finds it extremely important to sever oneself from the immediate past to rectify one's 'space of experience' to influence one's 'horizon of expectation'. Shackle and Majeed draw our attention to the verse the first Introduction of the *Musaddas* begins with, which severs Hali, the 'contemporary' poet's past, from his presence:

> *I sing no longer with the nightingale*
> *From the poets and recitals, now I quail.*
> *For ever since you left me, living heart,*
> *No more do I recount your endless tale!* (1997: 89)[120]

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120  "*Bulbul kī caman meṉ ham-zabānī choṛī, bazm-i śuʿarā meṉ śiʿr khvānī choṛī, jab se dil–i zindāh tū ne ham ko choṛā, ham ne bhī terī rām kahānī choṛī*".

This determination is reminiscent of the last line in the epigraph to this section, where Hali pacifies his broken heart at the thought of 'the last glow' of Delhi and bids farewell to its lagging caravans, one by one. He then calls for a 'new' time or era, not one that looks back at the immediate past, but one that must look ahead to the linearity of time, the logic of the cycles of nature. Because the immediate past is a trough, an ebb (*jazr*) and a distant past is seen as a crest, the flow (*madd*), as it once flowed, it may flow again. Hali emotionally harnesses this possibility of progress in the restorative nostalgia of the distant past. His relationship with nostalgia is manoeuvred in a restorative form that calls for a revival, a renewal. In the *Musaddas*, he (re)invents traditions, as if in a continuum from those of the original teachings of Islam, embodied in notions of simplicity and morality of religion ("*Ad-dīn yusr*" Religion is easy).[121] This is also the central claim of the Islamic reformation led by Hali's mentor, Syed Ahmad Khan. In the poem, Hali constructs this simple, moral, and easy understanding of religion in strong opposition to three targets – first, the complex poetry traditions in Urdu that he describes as filthy (1997: 192–93); second, the young aristocrats and their debauchery (194–201); and the third, indolence, idleness, and a heedless attitude towards time (203).

### 2.3.2 The Pathology of Indolence and Poetry: Degeneracy and Sickness

In the prologue to the *Musaddas*, an unnamed person (*kisī ne*), in a manner of anecdote, is reported to have approached Hippocrates to enquire which diseases (*marz*) are fatal in his opinion. The Greek physician responds that there is no disease for which God has not created a cure; "[E]xcept for that disease which people think trifling (*āsān*), and about which whatever the physician says is (understood to be) nonsense (*ḥizyān*)" (Hali 1997: 103). This unnamed disease, the cause (*sabab*), and the symptoms (*ʿalāmat*), which are not taken seriously by the afflicted is gradually developed into the central problem of the poem. It is seen as having led to the degradation of the Muslim community, which is now at the edge of a dangerous situation, depicted in the immediate verse through the metaphor of a storm and whirlpool. While the ship, signifying the community, is about to sink, the "people in the boat do not even turn over, as they lie asleep (*paṛhe sote*) and unconscious (*be-khabar*)" (1997: 102–3). In the next stanza, he attempts to awaken the community by reminding them of their mighty position in the distant past and their pitiful degeneracy in the present (verse discussed in the previous section, on the distance between yesterday and today).

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121    For an elaboration of Hali's notion of ease in religion, see Hopf (2017), 151.

This disease, the fatality of which is depicted as about to annihilate the community, is shown to be a potent intoxication, a spell, invoking a pathological seriousness that should induce fear and trepidation in the audience.

This overarching theme of sickness in society and bodily illness of the poet is in continuum with the first Introduction of the *Musaddas* of 1789, "the inner turmoil he underwent as he was torn between the poetry of the past and the demands of the present", which Hali describes as fevers raging within (*bukhārāt daraunī*).[122] The severity of the sickness is contrasted with the arrogance and obliviousness of the afflicted: "But the obliviousness of that heedless community is still the same. Their contentment with their decline is still the same. […] Morning has come, and their comfortable sleep is still the same" (1997: 104–5).[123] The rest of the poem, particularly in its latter half, explicates the symptoms followed by the causes of this illness. Although the degeneracy of the Indian Muslims is intricately tied to the degeneracy of poetics, the mysterious illness itself is almost never spelt out or identified directly. A thorough reading of the poem makes it quite clear that the sickness in society that brings in periods of decay (like in pre-Islamic Arabia's dark period of barbarism and the present situation of Muslim society in India) is essentially that of indolence. Shackle and Majeed identify indolence as a partial referent with which the decline of Muslims in India is measured (1997: 56). But indolence and disregard towards the value of time, in fact, are interwoven to constitute the illness itself that Hippocrates describes as the 'fatal' (*mohlik*) and 'trifling' (*āsān*) disease, ignored by those who are afflicted. This is made clear by the single mention of the affliction in verse 122 (1997: 146–47), where Hali elaborates on everything that is wrong with the present state of society, including "sloth in our hearts" or a leisurely/idle temperament ("*mizājoṇ meṇ sustī*"). It is this disease against which Hali strives to awaken his community into recognition (diagnosis), and then action towards its rectification (cure), which he continues until the end of the poem.

The affliction of sloth is enhanced with arrogance regarding the value of time after a couple verses, where time is described as "that priceless capital which is real wealth" (*voh be-mol pūṇjī ke hai aṣl daulat*), whose value is not recognised (*nahīṇ uskī vuqʿat naẓar meṇ hamārī*) and which is dissipated "use-

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122    See Shackle and Majeed's analysis of themes of the *Musaddas*, of which 'The economics of time and bodily illness' are read together (1997), 55, 57–58. For reference to the fevers and sickness that Hali elaborates in the first introduction of the *Musaddas*, see Hali (1895), 7. See also (1997), 92.

123    "*Par us qaum-i ġāfil kī ġaflat vohī hai, tanazzul pe apne qanāʿat vahī hai, mile khāk meṇ par raʿūnat vohī hai, huʾī ṣubḥ aur khvāb-i rāḥat vohī hai...*"

lessly and for nothing" (*yūṅhī muft jātī hai barbād sārī*, 1997: 148–49). Immediately after this, the value of time for the advancing Europeans is contrasted in a section titled "The efficiency of Europeans", who "never sleep their fill" and "do not waste an instant uselessly". The contrast is heightened in the following verse where the inactivity, indolence, and uselessness of Indian Muslims are emphasised and compared:

> *But we, who are still exactly where we were, are a burden on the earth, like minerals.*
> *We exist in the world as if we did not. We sit so careless of the world*
> *That it is as if all necessary tasks had already been accomplished, and only death remains.* (1997: 150–51)[124]

While indolence is the sickness, it is depicted as being transmitted by the worst sections of the community, the wealthy elite Muslims, the poets, and especially, the younger generation of the aristocrats. The aristocratic Indian Muslims are admonished for their arrogance, ignorance and lack of skill, but more than that, for living in luxury (*taʿayyuś meṉ jīnā*) and for squandering their wealth on games and sports (*lavh va bāzī*) and infatuations (*ḥaẓrat-i ʿiśq*, 1997: 160–61). The children of the aristocrats are equally accused of wasting their time in vices like flying pigeons and quail-fighting, as well as addiction to opiates. They are described as further diminishing the nobility of their families by wasting their time (1997: 195). They are deemed as useless, unfit for any suitable employment (*nah khidmat-guzārī kā unko salīqah* 1997: 198–99).

The worst of the lot for Hali, are the poets of the times. Shackle and Majeed read the stanza about the degeneracy of Urdu poetry as the poem's most "vitriolic" passage. Indeed, the first stanza describing the poets is graphically exaggerated in such a manner as if to display the worst symptom of the disease, the "hectic fever": "Such is the place among other branches of learning of our literature, by which learning and faith are quite devastated" (1997: 192–93).[125] The degeneracy of poetry and poetics, described in the corruption of the poets, is directly linked to the disease in society as a symptom. Having himself gone through the fevers (as described in the first Introduction), Hali is determined to break this tradition of contemporary poetry as he reminds the readers in the

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124 "*Magar ham ki ab tak jahāṉ the vahī hai, jamādāt kī ṭaraḥ bār-i zamīn hai, jāhāṉ meṉ haiṉ aise ki goyā nahīṉ hai, zamāne se kuch aise fāriġ-naśīṉ haiṉ, ki goyā ẓarūrī thā jo kām karna, vo sab kar cuke ek bāqī hai marnā*".

125 "*Vo śiʿr va qaṣāʿid kā nā-pāk daftar, ʿufūnat meṉ sanḍās se jo hai badtar, zamīn jis se hai zalzale meṉ barābar, malak jis se śarmāte haiṉ āsmāṉ par, huʾā ʿilm va dīn jis se tarāj sārā, vo ʿilmoṉ meṉ ʿilm-i adab hai hamārā*".

subsequent stanzas that the gift of exalted poetry (like religion) had been handed down to his community from those mighty Arabs, and it has now festered in the decaying ailment of indolence in Indian Muslims. Continuing with this pathological image of contagion, his attempts at severing from poets and poetic tradition of this immediate past (whose boundaries with the present are continually blurred) are achieved in his rectifying measures, i.e., the writing of the *Musaddas*. In a symptomatic treatment, Hali identifies the disease, its causes, and its symptoms and, furthermore, foregrounds its cure (*davā*). The cure is in rejecting indolence (*fāriġ-ul bāl*), changing the customs and ways of life (*cāl aur ḍhāl*), and moving ahead/progress (*taraqqī*) (1997: 202–3).

In the final equation, the claim is that the gifts received from the glorious Islamic civilisation of Arabia – 'original' Islam and the art of poetry – have been carelessly squandered by the present generation of Indian Muslims. This indolent nature and attitude are responsible for degeneration in society. The sickness of sloth and its symptoms (the useless and immoral poetry) can now be cured by grabbing the opportunity offered by the advancements of Europe, translated in the "blessings of the British rule" (1997: 203). Hali's original claim for renewal and regeneration (to return to the golden era of Arab civilisation) does not hold in his eventual loyalty towards the British in India, as expressed in the penultimate section of the poem, where progress is now the monopoly of the British:

> The government has given you all kinds of freedom. It has completely opened up the roads to progress.
> From every direction these cries are coming, 'From prince to peasant, all men prosper.'
> Peace and security hold sway in all the lands. No caravan has its way blocked.
> (1997: 202–3)[126]

The path to progress following European advancements and its relationship to his ideas of revival and renewal remains unclear until the end of the poem, especially in the concluding section, where fortune is constantly subject to change. His attitudes towards the past(s) and the possible future following the flow and ebb of fortune also remain ambivalent. The strong dichotomy between progress and decay set out in the poem's first half is gradually seen to transform. The opposite of progress is later deconstructed as the indolence of aristocratic Indian Muslims and the degeneracy of contemporary Urdu poetics. The

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[126] "*Ḥukūmat ne āzādiyāṉ tum ko dī haiṉ, taraqqī kī rāheṉ sarāsar kholī haiṉ ṣadā'eṉ ye har simt se ā rahī haiṉ, ki rājā se parjā talak sab sukhī haiṉ, tasalluṭ hai mulkoṉ meṉ aman va amān nahīṉ band rastah kisī kārvāṉ kā*".

strong binaries, painted in "black and white" (Hopf 2017: 148) are enhanced with the semantics of counterconcepts, linguistic dualities, and techniques of negation.

Hali's construction of water-tight binaries is accomplished through the singular perception of the self and the other and how the other perceives the self. The protagonists of Hali's two stories (Hopf 2017: 159), the Muslims of past Arab civilisation and the decaying Muslim community in India, are united and identified through the legacy of Islam. He then deploys binary concepts in constructing social and political agency for the groups he refers to as 'they' – the others, i.e., the Arabs of the past and the present Europeans, and 'we' – the self, the present Muslims of India, which form the basis of these identities. Some of the central concepts are *taḥzīb* (civilisation), *jāḥīliyāt* (barbarism), *taraqqī* (progress) and *tanazzul* (decay), *miḥnat* (toil) and *sustī* (sloth/indolence). Koselleck sees the employment of such concepts as a strategy in defining community identities based on naming oneself by means of excluding another: "[a] political or social agency is first constituted through concepts by means of which it circumscribes itself and hence excludes others, and therefore, by means of which it defines itself" (2004 a: 155–56). Koselleck analyses these conceptualisations as an attempt to establish 'singularity' by writers of history, who often regard such general concepts as particularly inherent to the historical agencies. He explicates these binary conceptualisations as "asymmetrical" and "unequally antithetical" (Koselleck 2004 a: 157). History is seen to be operating through designed value judgements based on particular unequal footings with an estranged sense of reciprocity regarding the identity of oneself and the other. Only after naming the other does one group of people ascribe a name (in contradiction) to themselves. Hali uses the singularity of concepts to exclude communities he earlier united. He also then targets traditions (poetry) he had previously belonged to.

Hali's loyalty to the British government, his renouncement of the poetic traditions he once belonged to, and his critique of the way of life that was lost are all harnessed, although asymmetrically and ambivalently, towards the reformation of his community. He constructs this semantics of duality in the *Musaddas* to provoke emotions of shame (*śarm*) and disgrace (*zillat*), hoping to shake his community into wakefulness.[127] Shackle and Majeed identify the writing of the *Musaddas* as a cathartic process for Hali, "to heal and rejuvenate

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[127]  Osterheld, "Campaigning for a community" (2017), 45–49. She notes that passages from the *Musaddas* would later be "quoted by preachers in their sermons and by leaders of the community in their public addresses, always arousing strong emotional responses and floods of tears".

the worn-out body of both the poet and the Muslim community in India" (1997: 58). This metaphor of pathology that Hali uses falls in with his severance from the erupting nostalgia for the 'last glow of Delhi', the Delhi of Ghalib and Shefta. Disciplining himself as a 'nostalgic subject', Hali looks ahead, at the end of his poem, following the footsteps of the British. Hali's travels from one world to the other (painted by him as binaries) attempt to catch up with the *telos* of European advancement, reflected later in the mentions of European, especially English poets and writers in his *Muqaddamah* (1893), including the English utilitarian, T B Macaulay. The utilitarian impetus in Urdu literature is interwoven with the protestantisation of Islamic teachings in the works of Hali towards the reformation of Muslims in the aftermath of 1857 and its rupture. The days of leisurely past and their memory are regarded as emotional contagions, and their treatment is continued, as we shall see, by other writers of the time, through the semantics of pathology and the impetus for rectification or *iṣlāh*.

## 2.4 Conceptual Transformation in Urdu Prose: The Novel in the Making

While some scholars tend to argue that the novel was borrowed from or influenced by the English presence in India, such perceptions regarding its 'origins' have been adequately challenged.[128] However, the novel genre in Indian languages is seen to have flourished only by the middle of the nineteenth century. This may have been affected by Western influences. However, recent scholars have shown that the most significant influence on the burgeoning of the genre was the dissemination of print in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi's *Mirʾāt-ul-ʿUrūs* (The Bride's Mirror, 1869) is often considered the first Urdu novel, although these claims have been heavily contested.[129]

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128    The influence of English as the most significant on the Urdu novel is an idea shared among earlier scholars like Muhammad Sadiq and Shaista Suhrawardy among the literary histories in English. See Sadiq's *A History of Urdu Literature* (1964), 245–46, Suhrawardy's *A Critical Survey of the Development of the Urdu Novel and Short Story* (1945), 12–22. In Urdu, the same is suggested in ʿAlī ʿAbbās Ḥusainī's *Urdū Nāval kī Tārīḫ aur Tanqīd* (1944) and Aḥsan Fāruqī's *Urdū Nāval kī Tanqīdī Tārīḫ* (1951).

129    There are critical contentions regarding Ahmad's novels. For discussions on *Mirʾāt-ul-ʿUrūs* (not) as the first Urdu novel, see M. Asaduddin, "First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers" (2001), particularly, 91. Suhrawardy (1945) reads Ahmad's books as the "first real novel" in Urdu, 41. On the other hand, Ralph Russell identifies Mirza Hadi Rusva's *Umrāv Jān Adā* (1899) as the "first true novel" in Urdu. See Russell's essay "The Development of the Modern Novel in Urdu" (1970), 132.

Ahmad referred to his books as *qiṣṣa*s and did not consider his works as novels *per se*. On the other hand, his contemporary Ratan Nath Sarshar, the author of the famous *Fasānah-i Āzād* (Tales of Azad), claimed his long prose narrative (in four volumes) written and published in instalments from 1878 to 1883 to be a "*nāval*", albeit dressed in conventional and polite humour.[130] Several Urdu novels or narrative prose like Hali's *Majālis-un-Nisʿā* (An assembly of women, 1864) and Lala Gumani Lal's *Riyāẓ-i Dilrubā* (circa 1950) predate Ahmad's books. Furthermore, Hasan Shah's *hindustānī-fārsī* (Urdu-Persian) prose narrative/novel *Qiṣṣah-i Rangīn* (A colourful tale), originally written in the late-eighteenth century (c. 1790) and later translated in Urdu by Sajjad Hasan Kasmandavi under the title *Naśtar* (Lancet, Urd. pub. 1893) dismantles these claims and contestations, allowing us to reconsider the concept and meaning of the novel in Urdu.[131]

Several writers contend that based on generic qualifications, more than often, these examples do not approximate the novel, which usually leads to counterarguments regarding whether these texts necessarily need to confer with the 'English' examples of the novel. However, the novel has proven to be the most flexible of literary genres, and the fact that these texts continue to haunt discussions on the early Indian novels shows that they are not non-novels. They can be seen to inhabit processes of transition that bridged prevalent prose forms and the novel 'proper', as read by scholars following theories of the novel ranging from Ian Watt to Mikhail Bakhtin. Some of the uncertainty and ambiguity in these processes stem from what Meenakshi Mukherjee suggests as the influence of socio-political factors on literary expressions and innovations (1985: 3). The long nineteenth century being a period that witnessed social and administrative upheavals, the prose genres in Indian languages of this period have undergone processes of colourful, sometimes inchoate, often ingeniously innovative transitions before the novel is seen to 'come to its own'. These processes developed in conflicts and overlaps, rendering the early Urdu (like other modern Indian languages-) novel as a concept of change, as well as the vehicle that effected the change. Mukherjee discusses the re-invention of certain words to label the new

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130  Cover page of *Fasānah-i-Āzād, jild avval* (vol 1). 1949 [1880]. The cover announces, "is Urdu nāvil se nāẓirīn ko muhaẕẕab ẕarāfat ke perāyah meṇ ʿumdah ʿumdah aḵẖlāqī natīje ḥāṣil hote haiṇ" (in this Urdu novel, viewers/readers can gain meaningful lessons on morality in the form (dress) of polite/civilised wit and humour). See also Jennifer Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan Dreams* (2018), 35.

131  See Śamīm Ḥanafī's essay, "Pahla Hindustānī Nāval" (2008). Shah's novel was rediscovered by Qurratulʿain Hyder and translated under the title *The Nautch Girl*, published in 1992. Hyder claimed it to be the first Indian novel, generating a series of literary debates.

genre in the various Indian languages in the mid-nineteenth century – *upanyās* in Bengali and Hindi, *kādambarī* in Marathi, and *nāval* or *nāvil* in Urdu – to demonstrate the extent and diversity of various influences in these literary fields (1985: 11–13). She writes that the challenge of taxonomy in Urdu came to be resolved by rendering it as '*nāval*' due to the "approximation of sound as well as sense" with the English – the word *naval* meaning new/young or unique in Urdu/Hindi. The process of translating the concept, in this case, is far more interesting to consider it a mere semantic borrowing. It entailed a transfer of ideas and concepts, leading to different understandings of the word along the lines of what Jonathan Zwicker terms "terminological confusion" in the context of the development of new genres.[132] As Christina Oesterheld has shown, the name '*nāval*' was used by Urdu writers and publishers in myriad ways for various purposes, particularly aiming at commercial success, effecting not only a boom in the production of the novel but also an ambiguous understanding of the genre (2004: 189–91).

This section presents a brief discussion on the development of the Urdu novel as a process influenced by a variety of factors. Drawing from existing literary histories and debates on the early Urdu novel, the aim is to arrive at an understanding of the Urdu novel/*nāvil* as a concept, viewed from the perspective of emotional conflicts and responses of writers (and their audiences). Through such a reading, the idea is to understand the processes of the novel's development in Urdu beyond the two strands: Western, colonial supremacy and indigenous inventions. This is not to say that the Western and the indigenous influences did not shape the novel, but instead, to understand these influences through a focus on the conceptual shifts in the novel and the emotional atmosphere in which these shifts occurred. The argument is that in its attempts at novelty (*naval*), the early Urdu novel/*nāvil*, as a genre in transition between the old and the new, becomes a space for mediating emotions and temporalities. Several innovative factors in the development of the Urdu novel, as a prose genre based on expressions of reality, rendered it a mouthpiece for writers and their different agendas – in negotiating the past, the present and the future. As the novel became consolidated and standardised, it became a literary space in which remembrance and reflection upon the past became a significant theme, while the genre also grappled with the struggles of the present.

In standard histories of the Urdu novel, only a few early novels and novelists usually receive attention. Oesterheld has refuted such restricted historiography in her study of the several prose genres in print at the time and their

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132   Jonathan Zwicker, "The Long Nineteenth Century of the Japanese Novel", *The Novel* (2006), 573.

multiple influences on the novel. Asif Farrukhi's essay on the Urdu novel (2004) shares a similar view, stating that the novel has to be understood beyond mere plot and structure and invest in analysis through the lens of polyglossia and discourse as conceptualised by Bakhtin.[133] Oesterheld suggests that the late-nineteenth century was when Urdu novels had a flourishing phase and that the large chunk of "popular novels which were produced mainly for commercial reasons" have been ignored by literary historians (2004: 169). Some literary histories written in Urdu explicate this, while most reiterate the few chosen novelists.[134] Farrukhi refers to several significant novels of the time that have been overlooked, for example, *Fasānah-i Khurśīdī* (1886), *Afsānah Nādir Jahān* (c. 1894), and *Navābī Darbār* (1901). In her recent work on Urdu print culture in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Jennifer Dubrow has shown that the thriving print culture of the late-nineteenth century saw an explosion in prose narratives, especially the novel, often via periodicals, published in instalments (2018: 37–38). She suggests, like Oesterheld, that the short prose conventions of prevalent genres like *laṭāʾif* (humorous anecdotes), *zarīfānah mazāmīn* (witty compositions) and *naqliyāt* (fables, anecdotes) – expressions of reality unlike the fantastic *dāstān* – were often used by serious and reformist writers in the development of the novel (Oesterheld 2004: 169–70; Dubrow 2018: 38; Farrukhi 2004: 173). The long prose of the *dāstān* (fantastical tales of adventure) and the *qiṣṣa*[135] obviously served as the narrative models in the minds of writers when they approached writing in the new prose genre.[136] Another influence on the Urdu novel was translation and/or transcreation of Persian and Sanskrit classics at the Fort William College in Calcutta.

The most famous examples are Mir Amman's *Bāġ va Bahār* (1801) and Sher Ali Afsos's *Ārāʾīś-i Maḥfil* (1808). These books were especially written for Englishmen to educate themselves in the literature of 'Hindoostan' in a language that they could access, i.e., 'Hindoostanee', or Urdu. Nonetheless, they did eventually interest and influence the reading habits of the locals, although,

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133   See Farrukhī, "Ḥairatī hai ye Āʿīnah" (2004), 189–97. Farrukhi strongly critiques the marginalisation of several novelists of the time as "minor" by literary historians.

134   See, for example, the long list/*fahrist* of Urdu novelists of the time in ʿAżīm-as Śān Ṣiddīqī's *Urdū Nāvil: Āġāz va Irtiqā: 1857 tā 1914* (2008), 506–13. Many literary histories ignore this boom.

135   Meaning a story or a tale and earlier used interchangeably for short and long narratives, but now understood as referring to a short narrative.

136   This has also been suggested by Mukherjee (1985), 9. However, she emphasises the "conscious" influence of English writers like Scott and Thackeray on early Indian novelists.

in the initial period, the language in these books was reported to be ridiculed for the simplistic style by sections of Urdu readers (Russell 1970: 105; Asaduddin 2001: 80; Suhrawardy 1945: 15). The influence of English on the Urdu novel was not limited to these transcreations and standardisations. Access to the Victorian novel had opened the sensibilities of Indian readers and writers to different world views, which often provoked inspiration and imitations. Such ambitions also led to creative conflicts as the formula of the Victorian novel did not correspond to the social conventions of nineteenth-century India. Oesterheld argues that the practice of reading English novels among Urdu readers was far less common than among readers in other sections of Indian society (2004: 190). While this may be true for the lay reader, Urdu writers often had a more familiar relationship with the English novel, as is seen, for instance, in the influence of Walter Scott on the historical novels of Abdul Halim Sharar written in the last decades of the century.

A more direct influence that the British had on the trajectory of the Urdu novel, as has been signalled before, is the government's encouragement towards producing and disseminating *'useful' books in the vernaculars*, announced in the Gazette notification number 791 A in 1868.[137] C. M. Naim explicates that the Lieutenant Governor of the North-Western Provinces, William Muir, had announced in the notification that each year, the government would award the sum of one hundred Rupees each to authors of new books in the vernaculars, which would serve "some useful purpose, either of instruction, entertainment, or mental discipline" (Naim 2004 a: 123). In addition, the government would help publish and widely circulate these books. As Naim's essay elaborates, quite a few of these awards went to Nazir Ahmad's instructive tales, which were retrospectively seen as early examples of the Urdu novel. The influences on the development of the Urdu novel in the late-nineteenth century were thus numerous; they ranged from socio-political circumstances to interactions with Western literature, from direct influence of the government to inspirations from prevalent prose styles and genres, all made possible due to the flourishing print industry and the affordability of printed material like books and periodicals.[138] Many of these influences were in conflict and often overlapped. As Oesterheld asserts, tracing the boundaries between different types of prose narratives of this time is challenging. While the novel remains difficult to define through these transformative processes, it triumphed over all other prose genres (Oesterheld 2004: 205).

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137   See Naim's essay "Prize-Winning *Adab*" (2004 a) for a detailed discussion.

138   On the development of the book as a commodity, see Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books* (2007).

The four significant names repeatedly associated with the Urdu novel at this time are Nazir Ahmad (1830–1912), Ratan Nath Sarshar (1847–1903), Abdul Halim Sharar (1860–1926) and Mirza Hadi Rusva (1857–1931). While in agreement with Farrukhi that literary histories of the novel must refrain from repeating these four novelists' achievements, the aim here is to understand the emotional atmosphere in which the Urdu novel developed. For this purpose, a quick glance at the careers and works of these novelists is adequate, considering the scope of the chapter. Sarshar's *Fasānah-i Āzād* marks the most visible transition from the earlier narrative form of the *dāstān* to the novel, although it consists of more than three thousand pages. The plot (or the lack thereof) follows the hero's (Azad's) adventures, like in a *dāstān*. Its major difference from the traditional *dāstān* is the realistic depiction of urban and quotidian life. Transporting the formulaic battle of the *dāstān* (between good and evil) to contemporary times, Sarshar's picaresque hero is sent off by his beloved to fight in the Crimean War alongside the British in a gesture of post-Rebellion assertions of loyalty to the Crown. While Sarshar's "*nāval*" emerged out of serialised witty vignettes (*ẕarāfat* or *ẕarīfānah maẕāmīn*) in the periodical *Avadh Akẖbār*, Nazir Ahmad was merely writing tales or *qiṣṣa*s for the instruction of his daughters. These tales became hugely popular in his family circles, and he is reported to have included one in his daughter's dowry. They were later submitted to the competition announced in the Gazette notification. Several of these books, especially his quasi-trilogy on the instruction of young boys and girls – *Mirʾāt-ul-ʿUrūs* (*The Bride's Mirror*, 1869), *Banāt-un-Naʿś* (*Daughters of the Bier*, 1872) and *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (*The Repentance of Nussooh*, 1874) – won the award. These books were seen to fit the bill so perfectly that they were translated by Englishmen like Matthew Kempson and G. E. Ward and published in London. The books were praised for having handled the instruction of children and adolescents so skilfully that eventually, they were incorporated into school and college syllabi for Urdu students.

Abdul Halim Sharar was by far the most 'popular' novelist for his historical novels. Similar to Hali's *Musaddas*, although in an entirely different tone, Sharar takes recourse to the glories of past Muslim civilisations and their victories over Europeans. His books have more defined plots compared to Sarshar's lengthy tale, but the setting of the distant past and his painting of societies in black and white render them with a flavour of the *dāstān*.[139] Sharar's novels were published in periodicals, and he used his journal to inform his readers

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[139]  Major examples are *Malak Azīz Varjinā* (1889), *Ḥasan Anjalīnā* (1889), and *Florā Florinḍā* (1899).

that these books (once serialisation was complete) were, indeed, novels.[140] Almost all of Sharar's historical novels have the subtitle "ek dilcasp aur natījah-khez tārīkhī nāval" (a fascinating and meaningful historical novel).[141] Faiz Ahmad Faiz is repeatedly quoted for his description of Sharar's almost pornographic painting of Catholics as lustful, but his reading of Sharar's popularity at the time is significant. He describes the time as an age when the Muslims suffered from the realisation of their decline, and these "romantic tales helped them forget the bitterness of everyday life", as recollection of past victories "inspired them with self-respect" and "emotional solace".[142] Mirza Hadi Rusva's *Umrā'o Jān Adā* (1899) is regarded as the best example of the modern Urdu novel. A massive transformation is seen from Sarshar to Rusva, albeit several novels influenced the evolution. Rusva's novel is convincingly situated within the social context of nineteenth-century India. It deals with contemporary upheavals and skilfully develops an unlikely protagonist in the figure of the eponymous courtesan. Rusva's other novels also present social transformation, especially *Śarīfzādah* (1900), in which one sees the growth of a young man of aristocratic birth, reorienting himself to modern times.[143] What made Rusva's novels significant was their engagement with protagonists whose lives were being shaped by the upheavals of the time.

Several emotional influences and conflicts played central roles in the genre's development. While Nazir Ahmad's novels responded to colonialist critique regarding the education of young men and women, reading the novels themselves can direct us towards an emotional ambivalence in the author regarding the cultural past he criticised and the admiration for English values that his fellow reformers provoked. Ratan Nath Sarshar, based in Lucknow, responded to the turmoils of the time in a different manner. As Delhi's slow decline had begun in the former part of the nineteenth century, Lucknow saw its rise. By 1857, the city's language, culture and etiquette had become highly refined and distinctively famous. It had also become the locus of the emerging print capital,

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140    In 1887, he inaugurated his own periodical, *Dilgudāz*, where he serialised the historical novels.

141    See cover pages of his novel *Alfānso* (1926), published by Dilgudaz Press, Lucknow. See the front cover of *Florā Florinḍā*, published by Qaumi Press, Delhi. In his introduction to *Malak Azīz Varjinā* (1889), Sharar writes "hamārā jadīd nāval" (my new novel).

142    Faiz, quoted in Russell (1970), 132. Russell quotes an article in *Mīzān*, published in Lahore in 1862.

143    See Oesterheld (2018). She reads the novel as a significant text of the time concerned with the education and reform of Muslim men and finds the descriptions of labour and physical work in it as strikingly rare, 125–27, 130–31.

providing an entrepreneur like Sarshar with new ideas and impetus to refashion his literary career. Mindful of the need for reform and education at the time, he worked towards merging morality (*akhlāq*) with fun and taste (*mazāq*) and wit and humour (*ẓarāfat*), thus catering to "please the greatest number of potential readers-listeners" (Dubrow 2018: 38). This significance of the taste for novels among readers-listeners (*nāẓirīn*) is something that is also drawn attention to by Farrukhi, in the readers' taste (*bā-ẕauq*) and perception for the usefulness (*ifādiyat*) of the novel (Farrukhi 2004: 159). Sarshar enlarges his audience, catering to their various emotional needs in response to loss and defeat: *akhlāq* or a sense of morality to refute the colonial critique of decadence, and *ẓarāfat* or humour and wit, drawn from extant literary and cultural traditions that restored the colourful associations of the past, now rendered in a tasteful (*muhaẕẕab*) manner. Dubrow reads Sarshar's novelistic ambitions as running parallel to the reform novels produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Dubrow 2018: 38). Sharar becomes difficult to categorise in this equation: he was a staunch supporter of Syed Ahmad Khan and the latter's attempts at reforming Muslim society, but Sharar's works defy this reformist tendency. They hark back, instead, to glorious images of several pasts – ranging from the Crusades to Arab rule in Spain. Like Hali, for Sharar too, the image of the magnificence of distant pasts is a source to deal with the loss of the recent past. For Rusva, the present and the future are realities, and he claims to write from this vantage point. Nevertheless, the severed past and its depiction in his sober novel continue to be streaked with nostalgia and longing for the grandeur of *navābī Lakhna'ū* (aristocratic Lucknow), its culture of leisure, etiquette, and finery.

The early Urdu novel has been largely seen as a genre that channelled ideas of reform, morality, and education. Reorienting the reading of the novel as a process in transition under emotional conflicts, I argue that the early Urdu novel is also a genre of remembrance. It is invested in looking back as much as it is oriented towards looking ahead. In remembering and looking back, it attempts to express mourning and yearning for the past as it locates itself into the quickly transforming present. While memories of the past are presented as passionate and violent, rendered in pathological descriptions in the immediate aftermath of the loss defined by the events of 1857, in depictions after a couple of decades, these memories attain a more sober tone in conceptualising the past and in expressing emotions for it. The following two sections of the chapter focus on one exemplary novel by the two writers who seemed to write for the present and the future – Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi's *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (1874) and Mirza Hadi Rusva's *Umrā'o Jān Adā* (1899). For both writers, entrepreneurship, modernity, and the future held high values and their characters have often been read as mouthpieces for the authors' views. Furthermore, these novels allow us

to observe the treatment of the two intertextual socially interdependent figures, the young aristocrat and the courtesan, both stripped of their stations in life and hurled into a new world where they must adapt to survive. Their relationships with the past, in remembrance and severance, like those of their creators, remain ambivalent, and this ambivalence is echoed in their developments within the plots.

## 2.5  Nazir Ahmad's Novels: Reform and Remembrance

Born in Bijnor, Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi joined the Delhi College as a student and eventually became a Deputy Inspector of schools and rose to the rank of Deputy Collector in the province. Employment in the colonial administration brought him in close contact with government officials of the education department and broadened his knowledge of English. Influenced by his encounters with English utilitarian values and his Islamic education, Ahmad wrote short tales, or *qiṣṣa*s, with the purpose of instructing and educating his children. This sense of 'purpose' is the keyword in unpacking Ahmad's perception of modernity, reflected in the shift in conceptualising Urdu prose-fiction. Keeping the *qiṣṣa* as a narrative form in mind, Ahmad introduced new content to his tales, which "transformed the structure of his tales" (Oesterheld 2001: 27–28). The content consisted of reformative education and instruction but styled in a fashion that would appeal to young readers – his original audience. Besides his children, the novels appealed immensely to colonial authorities for their puritanism. In the Preface to the translation of *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*, William Muir writes that it is "only in a country under Christian influences" that "the idea of such a book would present itself to the Moslem mind".[144] The reformist zeal in it (and his other books) had a flavour of English Puritanism, which Ahmad synthesised with reformist Islam along the lines of Syed Ahmad Khan.

Nazir Ahmad was heartily encouraged by Muir, who believed there to be a lack of "useful and amusing" books in the vernacular languages of India. He saw Ahmad's books as an efficient means of propagating English and Christian values. "The tale", he writes of *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*, "is not the mere imitation of an English work, though it be the genuine product of English ideas" (ibid.). With this direct involvement of the colonial authorities in Urdu literary ethos, a split in the tradition of knowledge and education into the realms of ʿ*ilm* (science) and *adab* (literature) is witnessed (Naim 2004 a: 121–22). This literary-

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144  Preface by Sir William Muir, *The Repentance of Nussooh (Taubat-al-Nasûh. The Tale of a Muslim Family a Hundred Years Ago.* Ed. C. M. Naim (2004) [1884], xi–xiv.

educational split, reflective of the demarcation in temporality (a cut from the decadent, undisciplined past), was a social, administrative, and cultural force in the reformist poetry fashioned by Hali. Like his fellow reformists, Nazir Ahmad was torn between the two worlds. He wrote many novels following the government awards he won. Regarded as a British loyalist and reformist writer who majorly penned moralist books for the instruction of girls, Ahmad also engages with the trajectories of young men in this transitional period. One finds the writer caught in his cultural, temporal, and emotional dilemmas in such books as *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (1874) and *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* (1888). While in *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*, the conflict is between the past and the present, in *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* (literally, Man of his times), Ahmad is severely critical of blind followers and imitators of the British. Focusing on *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*, this chapter analyses the quandary between the past world of carefree, leisurely existence and the present world of discipline and control, reflective of a writer torn between inescapable nostalgia and the urgency of rushing modernity.

### 2.5.1 *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*: Repentance, Poetry, and Prison

*Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*, literally, the repentance of Nasuh, is the story of an upper-class Muslim man named Nasuh (meaning preacher) and the moral-religious transformations he and his family undergo. It elaborates on children's 'right' upbringing, shown as lacking in *śarīf* Muslim societies. Beyond mere didacticism, the central drive in the story is the conflict between Nasuh, once a man of leisure, typical of his class, and his eldest son, Kalim, who is unable to deal with his father's sudden turn to religious zeal and disdain for their leisurely lifestyle. The treatment of emotional conflicts in the main characters gets the better of Ahmad's didactic intentions. If the novel starts as a reformist tale, it turns into a tragic failure in bridging the gap between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. The story opens at the scene of devastation in Delhi, in the clutches of an epidemic of Cholera. Nasuh loses members of his family, including his father. As the epidemic subdues, Nasuh falls severely ill. Afflicted by fever, Nasuh reflects upon his wasteful life as he comes to terms with the possibility of death: so far, he has led a life of carefree self-containment (*āzād zindagī*). He falls into a prolonged slumber and dreams a dream that changes his remaining days.

He dreams of an impressive building that looks like a court of justice, making him feel stifled. Upon entering, he sees his late father waiting for the hearing on the impending judgement day to tally men's deeds on earth. Nasuh is shocked to find his pious father among others in the "House of Detention"

(2004: 5) (ḥavālāt, 1995: 35).[145] His father shows him his charge sheet and recounts his many sins: neglect of religious duties, lack of faith in the powers of god almighty, indulgence in a life of carefreeness, and false pride (1995: 35); he advises his son to be pious and dutiful in this life so as to not suffer in the afterlife. On awakening, Nasuh feels profound regret and wishes to repent for his otiose, wasted life, full of pleasure and idle leisure. He realises his sins exceed those of his fathers, for he has altogether disregarded religion. Nazir Ahmad's rather colourful description of Nasuh's hitherto idle, leisurely days spent in the urban hustle and bustle of the old city, painted in the local language of Delhi, albeit in a mocking, sarcastic tone, almost takes away from his reformist purpose.

> As to Friday prayers, Nasuh did occasionally venture to the Jamiʿ Masjid if his clothes were clean and the day was not too warm, or the sky not too cloudy, or if he wanted to meet his friends and acquaintance; and anyhow, the observance of Friday prayer was a matter about which opinions differed. He had never really taken to the five-times-a-day prayer ritual. Never in his life had he bothered with ṣubḥ (morning) or ẓuhr (noon) or ʿiśā (late evening) prayers, for these were simply times for rest and sleep. And as to the ʿa_sr (late afternoon) prayers, it was the opportune time to take the air (ḥavākhorī), wander in the bazaar (sair bāzār), meet friends and acquaintances and engage in all the other significant tasks in the world. Evening (maġrib) prayer was possible, but there was hardly any time for it. By the time he would return from his rambles (phir phirā kar), the rosy shades of twilight would have waned away. (Ahmad 1995: 35–36)

Ashamed of his indolence, Nasuh recollects his dream and fears to his wife, Fahmida, and they agree on the urgency with which they must try and rectify their children's ways and habits. She fears that it might be easier said than done, that it might be too late to set right the ways of their eldest daughter, Naimah, and the worst of the lot, their poetry and pleasure-loving eldest son, Kalim. As Nasuh discusses his sons with bitterness, he paints a picture of their idle lives, an image that echoes Hali's views on the "younger generation of the aristocracy".

> Observe that useless (nā-bakār) eldest son of ours! He obsesses over his appearance, strutting like a pigeon. His clothes are so tight that they appear to be stitched onto his body. [...] The younger one, ill-mannered and wicked

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145    All quotations referring to *Taubat-un-Naṣūh* are from the edition by Al Faiṣal Nāśirān, Lahore, 1995 [1874]. Translations are mine. Quotations from the English version are from Matthew Kempson's translation, *The Repentance of Nussooh (Taubat-al-Nasûh). The Tale of a Muslim Family a Hundred Years Ago*. Ed. C. M. Naim (2004) [1884].

(*nāḥanjār*), is up on the terrace flying pigeons as soon as he awakens. [...] In the afternoons, he is on the rooftop terrace again, flying kites. And in the evenings, the board of chess is set in all splendour. On Sundays, when he finally has the leisure, he amuses himself with quail-fighting! The youngest is a positive nuisance to the neighbourhood, beating and teasing others. They all behave like foundlings, with no home, no family, no manners – vagabonds (*āvārah*), ill-mannered (*be-adab*, *be-tamīz*) and foul-mouthed (*bad-zubān*). (Ahmad 1995: 57–58)

The story unfolds in the form of dialogues between characters – in retrospect as well as ongoing – a technique that Nazir Ahmad uses to advance the plot and unpack characters. Reflective speech presents emotional transformations within characters. Each dialogue forms a chapter, and chapter titles provide single-line summaries. The conversations between Nasuh and his younger sons, Alim and Salim, come as pleasant surprises to him. He learns that his sons, whom he believed to be idle, useless, and ill-mannered, have indeed turned new leaves behind his back. The youngest, Salim, has turned wise in the company of a well-mannered school fellow and the guidance of his grandmother. The second son, Alim, encountered a Christian missionary who lent him a useful book. After reading it, Alim got rid of the useless literature they were being taught at school as well as the immoral Persian classics like *Bahār-i Dāniś* that his older brother had recommended. Throughout the story, we read about Kalim's notoriety in these dialogues; he is described as a spoilt brat, a bully, and a problem child with a penchant for decadence. The list of his misdeeds seems never-ending. In the seventh chapter, we eventually encounter the character through the conversation between the three brothers and their mother.

At first, Kalim comes across as an arrogant, spoilt brat. However, as the dialogue progresses, Kalim's sound arguments begin to make sense. Kalim's characterisation is perhaps the most 'real' in this novel as we see not a decidedly good or bad persona, typical of reformist and didactic narratives, but someone who grows out of their destined position in the story to find affinity with the reader. Kalim is, perhaps, Ahmad's most 'modern' innovation. We see a chasm between the portrayal of his character as perceived by others and his character unfolding in his own words. Although it is commonly agreed upon that Ahmad's books are primarily 'improving tales', he is one of the first writers of simple prose in Urdu, who allows for the novelty of conflicting points of view in fictional characters. As his name suggests, Kalim is an elegant interlocutor of life's intellectual and aesthetic aspects – the foremost of these being poetry, the arts, and other leisurely indulgences. He is also the only voice with common sense to question Nasuh's sudden change of heart, solely based on a dream.

Frustrated with his father's sudden religious zeal, his mother's, and his younger brothers' blind adherence to the new 'rules', Kalim leaves home. In

anger at his son's rebellion, Nasuh barges into Kalim's quarters. He is stunned at his son's impeccable taste. However, in his uncontrollable rage, he burns down Kalim's most cherished library, stacked with expensive and beautiful copies of Persian and Urdu classics. This scene has been identified as one of the most heart-wrenching and mind-boggling episodes in Urdu prose of the time. It holds the key to untangling the tirade against the triad of idleness, sickness, and poetry, which reappears as central themes in literature of this time. This scene and its significance are discussed in the following section. After his reckless departure from home, Kalim wanders around and falls in with bad company, first that of his friend, Mirza Zahirdar Beg, and then of his ill-wishing cousin, Fitrat. Both misadventures lead him to prison, and eventually, his father comes to his rescue. In a brief stint in Daulatabad, he suffers a fatal shot, at last repentant and seeking forgiveness. This final supplication of Kalim contradicts his obstinate character, but then this was meant to be an instructive and improving *qiṣṣa*.

The conflict between Nasuh and Kalim is explored in the novel through their respective literary tastes and their passion for religion and poetry, respectively, in a tussle between the old and the new, the past and the present. This dichotomy has been elaborated as the conflict between "social usefulness" and "literary excellence" and between "realism" and "metaphor" (Naim 2004b: 120). The novel's temporal setting can provide some nuances within these binaries. Ahmad's opening line starts with the phrase "*ab se dūr*" (a long time before now) that distances the temporal setting of the novel from its readership's present (Ahmad 1995: 25). While Ahmad's original "*ab se dūr*" floats in a temporal vagueness, the English translation categorises it numerically with the subtitle "The Tale of a Muslim Family a Hundred Years Ago". The setting is reflective of the gradual social and administrative transformations in society. Kalim's eloquence and poetry do not land him desirable employment in this setting because the small princely states, like Daulatabad, are declared unfit for sovereign rule. They are usurped by the colonial authorities, demonstrating in likeness the start of the consolidation of the East India Company's landholdings, acquired through the usurpation of petty princely states. This process was fulfilled with the events of 1857. In these socio-political circumstances, the literary qualities that an eloquent poet like Kalim has to offer are anachronistic, deemed unnecessary and redundant by the newly appointed president/*ṣadr-i ʿaẓīm*, as he confirms: "in the current circumstances, we have no requirement for poetry in our state administration" (Ahmad 1995: 221). Shaista Suhrawardy points out that in most of Ahmad's works, the society he described is no longer one of decadence and opulence. Men of the elite classes cannot live on their properties and are searching for jobs. And yet, "a certain degeneracy among the younger gener-

ation was apparent"; she identifies Kalim as "typical of those indolent, lazy and pleasure-loving but suave and polished young men" of the past (Suhrawardy 1945: 42). Oesterheld also interprets Kalim's portrayal as reminiscent of "the leisurely ways of the old feudal class" (2001: 40).

The similarities between Hali's poem and Ahmad's prose are striking. The same vocabulary of sickness is used in Ahmad's tale to diagnose degeneracy in society, particularly in the protagonist. Nasuh's sickness is depicted as mysterious and inexplicable; it is only cured after he realises his sins during a feverish nightmare. Kalim's alleged decadence is once again symbolised by a conflation of idle and leisurely activities with a penchant for poetry. In Nasuh's contempt for Kalim's love of poetry, however, the author falls into his own trap. Nazir Ahmad was nourished on Persian poetry and earned a reputation as an orator. His love for classical poetry is uncontainable as it slips into the dialogues of his characters, even Nasuh, who rants against his son's love of immoral poetry. In Nasuh's reflective and repentant thoughts, he ends up quoting rhyming stanzas. Kalim is shown to be so skilful in formulating verses and so ardent in his knowledge of Urdu and Persian masters that he has a couplet on his lips for every occasion. As Kalim rightly explicates in the highly dramatised seventh chapter, it was his father who inculcated the love for memorising and composing poetry in him. Ahmad's prose, even in reformist content, continues to flow with the rhythm of poetry. Oesterheld lists the literary merits of his descriptive and reflective prose as "long sequences of similes and poetic images; the juxtaposition of synonyms or near-synonyms or antonyms; rhythm; sometimes also rhymes and quotations from the Qur'ān and from Persian classics" (2001: 29).

If Nasuh is the protagonist of a reformist improving tale, he is unconvincing in his emotional excesses. He had quickly judged all his children as equally vicious and ill-mannered, whereas his dialogues with his younger sons surprise him, revealing how little he knows his children. While Nasuh is repentant for his religious ignorance, he is hardly shown to rectify his misconceptions. If religious reform and the inculcation of Islamic and moral education of children is the agenda of this novel, Ahmad's mouthpiece for reform, Nasuh, is far too passionate and quick-tempered in contrast to the rather resolute antagonist, Kalim. Kalim undergoes several misadventures, imprisonment, and impoverishment. However, it is not until the last paragraph that he is forced to repent as his creator kills him, one may even claim, for he did not know what to do with such a strong antagonist. Nasuh's sinful past – that is, his idle and leisurely life – succumbs to the disciplining of the Benthamian prison of control and utility, depicted in the prisons (ḥavālāt) synthesised with the panopticon of the Islamic representation of doomsday/Court of Judgement in his nightmare. For Kalim, a signifier and reminder of Nasuh's leisurely past, such

discipline and punishment, even in the lived experience of imprisonment, does not seem to function; every time he is imprisoned, he manages to bail himself out. Within the logic of discipline, he is subjected to the violent burning of his priceless library, as his father's memories of sinful and pleasurable past must be purged.

## 2.5.2 Burning Books, Purging the Past: Disciplining the Nostalgic Subject

Persian poetry thrived in India long before the Mughals came to power. A significant process in rendering Persian as the court language was taken up during the reign of Akbar (1542–1605?). The emperor invited many Persian poets to his court and gave refuge to poets seeking a nurturing environment to cultivate their art. Akbar was the first Indian emperor to create the formal position of *malik-uś-śuʿarā* or poet laureate. Persian had become the language to be taught at schools and seminaries to children of the upper and middle sections of the society, with books like *Gulistān* (Persian, *Golestān*, Rose Garden) and *Bostān* (Orchard) of Saʿadi Shirazi as essential parts of the syllabus. Although Urdu/Hindustani/Rekhti was arguably the spoken language in the area, Persian had its supremacy as the language of high literature, poetry, and the court. Like Kalim, those interested in literary pursuits would require fluency in and possess the works of notable Persian poets to converse eloquently. Apart from poetry, Kalim also pursued the leisurely activities typical of his social class – playing chess, pigeon-flying, kite-flying, and acquiring beautiful objects, clothes, and books. Kalim spent much of his short-lived life in the pursuit of such books, of poetry and prose, volumes of *dāstān*, *qiṣṣa*, *dīvān* and *rubāʿī*. His library is shown to be a treasure trove of such books – beautiful in their subjects as well as bindings. His father's sudden charge of immorality and indecency in these literary works echoes S. R. Faruqi's elaboration on the colonial charges of Indian literature being immoral and the violent emotional responses to these charges.

As a lover of literature (at this time, signified by poetry), Kalim often advised his younger brothers on which poets to read and what books to acquire. From his quick retort to his mother when she asks him not to speak in riddles (*pahelī*, referring to his verses), it is revealed that Naimah, the household's elder daughter, would understand such 'riddles' (1995: 127). Perhaps Kalim even loaned some of his precious books to her. The magnificence of his library is depicted as glorious when Nasuh visits it for the first time. Kalim occupied two rooms – a luxurious drawing room for leisurely activities and gatherings that he called *takalluf khānah* (room of lavishness) and a library filled with his choicest books, which he referred to as *khilvat khānah* (room of

solitude).[146] Although he charges these books with indecency (*be-hūdā*), Nasuh spends a quarter of the day hesitating to destroy them, for he, too, would have grown up reading these books, the epitomes of high Persian literature. These are the very books William Muir found to be questionable and unfit for the reading of decent children. Nazir Ahmad seems to agree with Kempson and Muir and allows his protagonist to burn down an entire library of such books. But Ahmad's emotions – reflected in Nasuh's emotions – towards these books and their burning is highly ambivalent. Mirza Farhatullah Baig, one of Ahmad's students and later Urdu writer, recalls Ahmad's love for classical poetry in a memoir of his master.[147] Nasuh, too, recalls a past when he and Fahmida would spend time reading *Gulistān* (1995: 184). He also reminds Fahmida that he would cover up phrases and sentences that were indecent before she would read them. *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* is, therefore, also a book about books. It looks at certain books as exemplary and others as questionable. This book, which attained popularity as one of the first Urdu novels, directs inflammatory hatred against some of the most-loved books of the preceding generations.

Saʿadi's *Gulistān* and Inayatullah Kamboh's *Baḥār-i Dāniś* (The Garden of Knowledge) are some of the most highly regarded titles that *Taubah* attacks. Books that are praised are random, unnamed books on moral values and depicting the lives of religious men, projected as valuable and instructive, in the tradition of Samuel Smiles' *Self Help*.[148] In some ways, Ahmad makes a case for his own books, showing how new and useful books can change the lives of the youth. Alim turns a new leaf through the guidance he receives from a book given to him by the preaching missionary, and this is contrasted to the entire collection of verses that Kalim could produce anytime, etched in his mind and memory from the classics in his library. Asif Farrukhi criticises this episode of Nasuh's book burning in scathing terms, questioning the mixing and mimicking of books mentioned – from *Gulistān* to *Dīvān-i Śarar* – conflating real books and imaginary books, and that the books are claimed to have pejorative contents are also well-regarded books on ethical and moral values (Farrukhi 2013: 232). The anger inflicted on these books in the text is incoherent and unfathomable. This emotional turmoil, expressed violently in shades of sorrow, grief, and anger, is shared by both the character (Nasuh) and

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146    Kempson translates these as "Palace of Delight" and "Palace of Retirement", respectively.

147    In *Ḍākṭar Naẓīr Aḥmad kī kahānī, kuch merī aur kuch unkī zabānī* (1992), 49–50.

148    Smiles's book was hugely popular amongst reformed Urdu readers, following its translation by Syed Ahmad Khan and publication in his journal *Tahẓib-ul-Akhlāq*, under the title "*Apnī Madad Āp*".

author (Ahmad) at the rupture and decline of Muslim civilisation and society under colonial rule.

The collection of prized books as a possession, the cultivation of knowledge and wisdom in the form of Persian classics, and the maintenance of an elaborate and beautiful library have been nostalgically associated by scholars of Urdu literature with metaphors of *gardening*, harking back to the paradisiacal vocabulary of the *ġazal*. The titles of Persian classics mentioned here allude to knowledge as fruit and wisdom as rose. The metaphor of 'the Rose and the Nightingale'/*ġul va bulbul* is a staple to Persian and Urdu. As the garden metaphor projects, the business with literature was presumed to require patience, skill, and nourishment apart from leisurely time and space, thus rendering the investment in poetry an expression of otium. The time for such elaborate gardens was gone. As Hali already warned, the nightingales (poets) had no places to sing in, as time itself is split into dichotomies of progress and sloth/*taraqqī* and *sustī*, followed by the split in the understanding of literature in this milieu. Kalim's library is an image of that past, of the rose garden, with which Nasuh and his creator must cut their ties. When Nasuh visits Kalim's library, he is overwhelmed by its riches. His rage swallows his awe as he broods over these remnants of his erstwhile sinful life:

> There were so many volumes in the collection that an entire day would fall short if one sat down to list them. But whether Urdu or Persian, they were all the same kind: false tales, indecent content, perverse meanings, all equally shameless and irreligious. If Nasuh valued the beauty of the binding, the excellence of lithography, the fine quality of paper, the elegance of style, and the decorum of diction, Kalim's library would be priceless. But their contents were so degrading that they deserved to be burnt. He was caught in these quandaries until the afternoon had passed. At times he felt pangs of hunger, but he had no leisure for food. Frantically, he turned this book, flipped through that book, and eventually resolved that it would be best to burn them all. (Ahmad 1995: 179)

The books Nasuh throws into the fire are listed as Rajab Ali Beg Suroor's *Fasānah-i ʿAjāʾib*, Sheikh Aziz Ullah Bangali's *Gul Bakāʾolī*, Sher Ali Afsos's *Arāʾiś-i Maḥfil*, Mir Hasan's *Maṣnavī*, humorous witticisms of Niamat Khan Ali, Chirkin's odes, and the satires of Sauda among others.[149] As Pritchett puts it, this is "a selection generally meant to suggest frivolousness, immorality, and obscenity" (1994: 223). This range of literary gems, the list of books put together, ironically fits the garden metaphor of Persian literature. Also, significantly, several

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[149]  Sheikh Baqar Ali Chirkin is (in)famous for his notorious erotic and often scatological verses in Urdu.

of these classics were, in fact, chosen for translation at Fort William College, particularly for the education of Englishmen. The burning of these books in a work of fiction, published and circulated with the colonial government's support, reveals the magnanimous transformation in the emotional landscape entangled with the literary in India.

Nazir Ahmad's portrayal of this horrific book burning, with the phrase '*bismillāh*' (in the name of God), is a signifier of a specific war of binaries that had begun and was about to hold North India in its clutches – the war between literary and cultural ethos and morality and reform, was a war of necessity. While Nasuh burns the classics of Persian literature, Nazir Ahmad produces books that win awards, contributing to the radical (arguably inevitable) changes occurring in the literary scene in North India in the late-nineteenth century. From now on, according to reformist writers, books are not to be gardens of knowledge – metaphors for pleasure, delights in obscurity and long-drawn rhymes, leisurely digressions, adorned with gilded bindings, possessions of pride. They are to become guidelines for self-help in instructive and educative prose, published and distributed by the British Government of India. From otiose objects of aesthetics, beauty, pleasure and leisure, the book is now to be transformed into an object of utilitarian purposes that can help its readers towards an industrious life. However, this dichotomy is questioned, as has been shown earlier in the chapter, by the alternate conception of the book as it becomes democratic and affordable with the explosion in print culture, finding its place in people's drawing rooms and libraries, in the form of chapbooks and periodicals, texts of entertainment[150], beyond the disciplining of reformists and the government. In the case of *Taubah*, the burning of Kalim's books is more efficiently expressed in what Farrukhi terms as "cleansing" through the epidemic of Cholera. The burning of these books is symbolic of the purging of sins, referring to the eternal fires of hell that threaten the Garden of Eden, from which the believer can only deliver himself on earth by means of *taubah* or penitence, as is ordained in the Qur'ān.[151]

After the bloodshed of 1857, the garden has been lost, 'now destroyed'. Frances Pritchett aptly replaces the garden metaphor of Urdu literature with the metaphor of reconstruction of the manor that still stands, with the support of poets and writers like Hali and Ahmad. From books to gardens, from philosophy to religion, the shift is clearly manoeuvred towards utilitarian values of

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150    See Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure*: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India (2009), 1–5.

151    See Naim's reference to *Sūrah Taḥrīm*, verse 8, translation by Ahmed Ali. "Afterword" (2004 b), 139.

English puritanism that Spear claims is the reason why the English misunderstood the life and times of Muslims in Delhi in the mid-nineteenth century (1951: 50). This shift is upheld by several important writers of the time, through a synthesis of the Victorian sensibilities and reformist Islamic attitudes to life. Hali, Azad, Khan, and Ahmad accepted and embraced this change to sustain and preserve literary traditions even as they turned reluctant masons from enthusiastic gardeners. Nevertheless, they could not ignore the overwhelming emotions felt for the past, expressed at times in grief and at times in anger.

The mourning of the past in the nostalgic subject is also expressed in rage and anger, not only in sorrow and grief. Most of all, the self-diagnosis of the nostalgic subject in several attempts – through imageries of sickness, anxieties of imprisonment, purging of sins, and burning of books – is itself a sign of the immense emotional impact the past continues to have on the present. Naim's argument then that Ahmad was not nostalgic like the later generations of writers is to be reconsidered in the light of this discussion.[152] Referring to his rather beautiful and poetic prose, Ralph Russell wonders what Ahmad would do if he set out to write novels instead of improving tales (2013: 42–43). One may not need to wonder as even in his improving tales, Ahmad could not but give in to the 'temptation' of creating one of Urdu's most modern characters, Kalim, in remembrance of the old, leisurely ways. In Kalim's forced death and repentance, one can claim that the present is affected by the ever-powerful past with which the writer strives to sever all ties. This forced death of the tenacious character is an inevitable event in such a story. Kalim's death is Nazir Ahmad's necessity; it entails the tragic but essential demise of the leisurely aesthetics he embodies in his love for the poetics of the past.

## 2.6 Mirza Hadi Rusva: The Novelist of Modernity

As Delhi declined throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Lucknow became an urban cultural centre. In some ways, Delhi's decline contributed to Lucknow's rise, as writers flocked to the emergent cultural hub, seeking a suitable environment for the nourishment of their craft and for its thriving print network.[153] They also hoped, perhaps, for better chances of patronage in the reign of the renowned artist-poet-king of Avadh, Wajid Ali Shah. But like Delhi's last poet-king, Wajid Ali, too, eventually became a figure signifying loss

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152    Naim claims that Ahmad was "not given to nostalgia". See 'Afterword' to his translation (2004 b), 129.

153    Many famous poets of Delhi, like Mir, Sauda, and Soz, relocated to Lucknow.

and nostalgia following the events of 1856–57. However, the transformations of the time revealed new, multiple directions for writers. With the thriving print industry, authors now reoriented themselves to become entrepreneurs. Lucknow thus continued to nurture writers, fashioning itself as the city of literary luminaries. One such luminary was Mirza Muhammad Hadi 'Rusva', later celebrated as Urdu's 'first' modern novelist. Mirza Mohammad Hadi (1857–1931) wrote under the *nom de plume, Rusvā* – meaning one of little or no reputation, even ill-reputed. Born and raised in Lucknow, he was a lecturer in Mathematics, Science, Philosophy and Persian at the Christian College while also trying his hand, and rather successfully, at writing Urdu pulp fiction.[154] Gradually, he became a writer of 'serious' novels that embodied the social and literary transformations of the time. These novels deal explicitly with modernity, and they later came to define his literary career. While the novels *Šarīfzādah* (A man from a noble family, 1899/1900) and *Ẕāt-i Šarīf* (The son of a nobleman or noble family, n.d.)[155] are invested in the journeys of young men born to aristocrats in a quickly changing world, Rusva is most famous for his novel on the transformations in the life of a courtesan, *Umrā'o Jān Adā* (1899). While all three novels follow the transformation arc for the protagonists during the upheavals of the century, *Umrā'o* deals more seriously with the past, "painting a picture of life under the old conditions of court culture and patronage, celebrating the indulgence in poetry and music and the cultural space shared by the courtesans and their customers" (Oesterheld 2018: 115).

A novel centring the love of poetry, *Umrā'o Jān Adā* reflects upon shifting literary trends in Urdu while also presenting the female poet in her own voice, even if several times removed. Set in the middle of the nineteenth century, the story begins around two/three decades before the Rebellion. The events of the loss of Lucknow unfolded at the peak of Umrao's career while she was employed at the royal court.[156] The novel sees the past through two lenses: the past before the Rebellion, in reminiscing the high literary tradition of Lucknow, and the past following 1857, challenging the colonialist critique of the literary

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154    Some of his books in the popular vein are *Khūnī ʿĀšiq* (Murderous Lover), *Khūnī Jorū* (Murderous Wife), *Rūs kā Šahzādah* (The Prince of Russia).

155    Rusva plays with both titles, based on the concept of genteel, noble pedigree – or *šarīf*. The difference is emphasised in the treatment of the two men in the two novels – one hardworking and of sound character, the other lethargic, living off the diminishing riches of his family.

156    While referring to the character, I write the more readable and familiar spelling of the name, Umrao. Diacritics are followed while mentioning the name of the text, in which case it is *Umrā'o.*

scene.[157] Immediately after the publication of *Umrāʾo*, Rusva wrote its compan-
ion-book, *Junūn-i Intiẓār* (*The Madness of Waiting*, 1899). While *Umrāʾo* was
already radical in recounting the story of a courtesan (*told* to her fictional
friend and author, Rusva), Rusva turns the tables in this novella, making Umrao
the first narrator, who, furious with Rusva for publishing the private accounts
of her life, has written a novella to reveal intimate affairs of the writer's life.
With this double-edged performative in the narrative, he brought to life one of
the most significant figures of the leisurely past, the courtesan. Nevertheless,
Rusva's exploration of the courtesan figure began even before *Umrāʾo*, with his
first novel, *Afśā-i Rāz* (The revelation of mysteries 1896). Before they were
labelled as social outcasts at the hands of reformists and the colonial discourse
on the 'nautch girls', the courtesan, or *ṭavāʾif*, stood tall as a figure in society,
intricately entangled with the arts, cultural, and literary aesthetics (Oldenburg
1990; Sharar 1989: 145–47). Rusva's treatment of this remnant of the past, lead-
ing to its several reincarnations from the novel to the screen, can be said to
have reinvented emotions for the past. The fictionalised figure of Umrao Jan
Ada continues to evoke images of a past, aesthetically set in opulent halls, iri-
descent with candles and chandeliers, fragrant with the scent of evening, flow-
ers, and perfumes, resounding with poetry, music and rituals of etiquette deliv-
ered in impeccable and refined Urdu.

### 2.6.1 *Umrāʾo Jān Adā*: Between Modernity and Nostalgia

Rusva's literary works reveal him to be a man who adapted to the changing
times, although in a manner starkly different from the way reformists like
Nazir Ahmad or Hali had. He was aware of the various influences on Urdu
prose. Instead of imitating or resisting them, he crafted the novel towards a
synthesis in which literary tradition could be preserved and thrive. Rusva is
reported to have claimed his success in retaining the essence of Urdu in the
influences of the English: "I have suffused the English rose with the scent of
jasmine" (*Maṣnavī*, trans. Shandilya & Shahid 2012: 10). Unlike Ahmad's didac-
tic reformist narrative or Sarshar's winding and scattered plot, *Umrāʾo Jān Adā*,
its author claims, is a 'true story' of a courtesan in Lucknow, named Umrao Jan.
Notwithstanding the veracity of the claim, there is no reason for us to believe it
to be a biography; Rusva's book is a skilfully narrated fictional account. Critics
have often identified the novel as a work of "verisimilitude", a "faithful copy

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157   See Shandilya and Shahid, "Introduction", in Rusva's *The Madness of Waiting*
(2012), 11–12.

from life" (Saksena 1927: 342), a realism of the "here and now" (Kumar 2002: 239), a "realistic account of contemporary life" (Asaduddin 2001: 92). Rusva himself elaborates on the art of writing novels in the Preface (*dībācā*) to *Ẕāt-i Śarīf*, wherein he reveals reality as the subject of his novels.[158] Such claims need not be taken at face value, but what makes his novels 'realistic' is the finesse with which he portrays society. His plots are well-constructed, and his characters are credible. Nevertheless, Rusva's novels, or at least the one analysed here, are hardly a simple imitation or portrayal of reality. While inspired by reality, he depicted the life of old Lucknow as he knew and *remembered* it, recreating the tale of the transformation of the city in those of the courtesan's life (Asaduddin 2001: 92; Sharar 1989: 146). In her study on the lifestyle of the courtesans of Lucknow, Veena Oldenburg (1990) reveals the significant position held by courtesans before 1857. As one of the highest tax-paying communities, the courtesans were a social group that the East India Company had much trouble dealing with for their many economic and social subversions. The traditional role of the courtesan in society, in both Hindu and Muslim courts and communities, was to provide not only sensual pleasure but also educate young aristocrats in culture and etiquette, turning them into "an influential female elite" (Oldenburg 1990: 262), at odds with British understanding of societal hierarchies.

Many courtesans of the time were also noticeably influential in giving shape to the evolving classical style of *Hindūstānī* music, particularly in the genres of *ṭhumrī* as song and *kathak* as dance. Firmly positioned in the cultural centres of Lucknow, like the Chowk (*cauk*, square) and the palace in Qaiser Bagh, the courtesans performed and preserved literary-aesthetic culture in many forms. They were also often skilled in the art of composing and reciting poetry, and it was common among aristocrats to send their sons to reputed courtesans for instruction in art and etiquette as well as literature (Oldenburg 1990: 263; Sharar 1989: 142–46). Raziuddin Aquil has shown the perceived disjunct in women's love poetry as leisurely activity, not work; however, the disjunct is complicated in the case of courtesans, for whom, this was an "extension of their work" (Aquil 2023: 247). Rusva takes up the character of this indulgent instructor and keeper of refinement in cultural and literary aesthetics and turns her into the narrator of his novel, thus subverting the understanding of pleasure as an experience beyond the dichotomy of pleasure-provider and sybarite. He also subverts the scope of literary aspirations by endowing his courtesan-

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158    "Ham ne apnī taḥrīr kā yahī uṣūl qarār diyā hai ki jo cīzeṉ ḥamārī naẓar se guzar ga'ī haiṉ, aur un se hamārī ṭabi'at khud mutāṣṣar hu'ī hai, usī ko nāval meṉ likh dete haiṉ", *Ẕāt-i Śarīf* (n.d.) Lakhna'ū: Aśrafī Buk Ḍipo, 4.

protagonist with exceptional poetic talent so as to shine in the era of masters like Ghalib and Zauq (Shandilya & Shahid 2012: 10–11). He frames the story in retrospect, retelling a story within a story, deftly tying up all ends in a tight plot. The authorial and the narratorial voices merge as the frame narrator, Rusva, recalls being invited to a friend's apartment for a poetry recital. The rooms next door were occupied by a superannuated and reclusive courtesan, who could not help herself but extend gestures of applause as she listened to the recital. Learning that she is the long-famed courtesan of Lucknow, Umrao Jan, Rusva pays her a visit, and a camaraderie ensues between the two as Umrao recognises her old client, the poet Rusva. After several requests, Umrao joins their informal gatherings and recitals, or *muśāʿirah*.

At one such gathering, she begins to recount her life to Rusva and the host, and Rusva secretly writes it down. Umrao's speech is so refined that Rusva claims no authorship in the narrative, but only reportage. However, as he begins the story, Rusva introduces this process and pinpoints his narrative to ten or twelve years ago ("*das-bārah baras*" 1979: 15) – in the immediate past, a past that was still alive in collective memory and one with which readers could identify.[159] Before Umrao's narrative begins, Rusva's novel has a sub-chapter titled "*Muśāʿirāh*", which plays a significant role in the narrative, to which I return in the following sub-section. In fact, poetry and poems are recurring in this novel; the prose narrative is interspersed with couplets that set the mood of the narration or sum up events and their impact on Umrao. It is with one such couplet that Umrao begins her story, much along the same lines as her creator, Mirza Hadi Rusva. Although her claim is along the same lines as his in depicting *reality*, there is a marked difference in her claim with the question of depicting her/a life-story: "*luṭf hai kaun sī kahānī meṇ, āp bītī kahūṇ ki jag bītī*?" (Which story would be more enjoyable? Should I tell my own tale or the story of the world? 1997: 38). This consciousness in the protagonist of her place in the world and its story makes the novel a metafictional chronicle of the times, but more importantly, it sits firmly within the conventions of a novel proper (Kumar 2002: 233).

Umrao's story follows a linear progression as she recalls her childhood on the outskirts of Faizabad. The only daughter of a well-off employee in the royal offices, Amiran (her given name) belonged to a financially secure and content family. Struck by misfortune, she was abducted at the age of nine by the infamous robber Dilawar Khan, who sold her to a brothel in Lucknow. The head of

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[159]  All Urdu quotations from the novel are taken from the 1979 edition, published by Maktabah Jāmiʿah Līmīṭeḍ, Naʾī Dihlī. Translations are mine. Quotations will be referenced with the year 1979.

the establishment, Khanam Jan, changed her name to Umrao. She describes the carefree, enjoyable life in the household of Khanam Jan, spent with her daughter, Bismillah and her domestic assistant, Hussaini. She recounts the stories of other girls she had met in the establishment, their teacher Maulvi Sahib, the music teachers, the instrument players, and the notorious young boy, Gauhar Mirza, who becomes her lover for a time when they grow up. Umrao tells of her training as a courtesan in an environment of adequate learning; the Maulvi Sahib taught them Arabic, Persian, Logic, some Mathematics, Grammar and Poetry. Simultaneously, they were properly trained in classical music, singing and dancing. Khanam's establishment was spacious and grandly furnished, with plenty of servants, which allowed them to enjoy and appreciate the good things in life. She recalls, thus, growing up in luxury, surrounded by wealth and refinery, educated and trained, and living at a leisurely pace.

> We had the most delicious food – such food that I had never tasted before. We were given clothes so beautiful that I could never have imagined them. There were three other girls I could play with – Bismillah Jan, Khurshid Jan and Amir Jan. There was song and dance all through the day and night, musical evenings (*jalse*), concerts and shows (*tamāśe*), fairs to go to (*mele*), outings in gardens (*bāġoṇ kī sair*). What luxury (*'aiś*) was there that we did not have! (Rusva 1979: 57)[160]

The narrative advances in episodes of Umrao's initiation ceremony and entry into the profession, followed by several encounters with the men she entertained over the years. The most memorable for Umrao was her affair with the young and handsome Nawab Sultan Sahib, a man of nobility who shared her passion for poetry. This joyous period is short-lived and followed by a quick series of events that uproots Umrao from her establishment and Lucknow, taking her to Unnao, Kanpur, and back to Faizabad, where she is invited to perform. In her hometown, she learns of her father's death and hopes to reconcile with her mother and brother, who reject her to protect the family's reputation. Umrao leaves Faizabad deeply aggrieved. Her fame increases in Lucknow, and she is employed at the royal court. This splendour came to a sudden end in 1857 with the forced abdication of King Wajid Ali. She regains her position in court for a while when the British reinstates the disputed heir, Prince Birjis Qadr, in a political manoeuvre. Umrao attains great fame as the singer of mournful and

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[160]   For elaborations on this culture of leisure and entertainment typical to Lucknow, see Sharar (1989).

melancholic *marṣiyah* – a genre of Urdu poetry that elaborates on loss and lament, foreshadowing the inevitable loss of Lucknow.[161]

The story descends with the usurpation of Avadh, the tremors of which leave their world changed forever. Lucknow's decay is compared to the deterioration in a courtesan's life after she reaches her prime. The novel discusses the difference in how men and women love and the importance of education and hard work. Such contemplative observations take over the story that tells us towards the end that Umrao has finally found comfort in reading and writing. She began reading books like *Gulistān* and moved on to other classics, but soon grew tired of the "false flattery" (*jhūṭī khuśāmad*) in them. She then started reading newspapers (*akhbār*), keeping herself informed on news of the world (Rusva 1979: 266–67).[162] Gradually, she becomes a respected figure in her surroundings, remaining reclusive, reminiscing the past but keeping herself abreast of the times. Although Umrao repeatedly mentions the sins of her life and profession, she is hardly repentant, and her words of regret are more metaphorical in refined lip-service to modesty. Umrao is now her own mistress and does not intend to fit into a moralist societal or religious view of life. Although she prays regularly, she finds it unnecessary to observe *pardah* after a life of sexual exploits. She has great control over emotions; she displays the ones she chooses. Nostalgia is the mood she invokes while consciously locating herself within modernity. Far from the vocabulary of disease, her nostalgia is reflective and contemplative and displays acceptance, expressed in sighs and reveries. She finds herself in her old room in Khanam's destroyed house, reflecting on her emotions:

> I looked into the mirror and gazed at my reflection. The memories of those days flowed in front of my eyes. The faces of the people from those times emerged in front of me: the mischievous pranks of Gauhar Mirza, the foolishness of Rashid Ali, the love of Faiz Ali, and the handsome face of Navab Sultan. It was as if all those who had been in this room before now passed before my eyes. The room had turned into a kaleidoscope of my mind. The memory of one face would succeed the other, and it would all start over once again. At first, it was a rapid process, but later, it slowed down and gave me the time to reflect upon each of them. Every time I focused on one face, all the incidents connected to their presence in my life started playing one after another. (Rusva 1979: 237–38)

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161    Traditionally practiced among the Shiʿa Muslim communities, the *marṣiyah* is a song-poem recited to lament the death of Hussain, the Prophet's grandson, at the tragedy of Karbala.

162    "un se dunyā bhar kā ḥāl maʿlūm hotā rahtā hai" (1979), 267.

Sukrita Paul Kumar suggests "alienation" as an emotional constitution of Umrao in her later years, and her reflections of the past are read as narrated in a "cold indifferent tone" (2002: 238). Such a reading undermines the complexity of nostalgia. The novel glorifies the past through Umrao's emotions for the past; however, it skilfully situates itself between yearning and acceptance, between nostalgia and modernity, not in binaries, but in entanglement. It develops an aesthetic understanding of nostalgia beyond its depiction as disease. Umrao displays frequent recourse to reflecting the past, through Rusva's narrative strategy between biography and novel. She reflects on what was lost and what could not have been; for instance, when she recalls her first interactions with Navab Sultan, she recognises the feeling that, at that point, something was lost to her (*kuch chūṭ gayā*, 238). The loss of the past is painfully felt, but the nostalgic subject is also an adaptive, modern subject. Rusva allows Umrao to enjoy the leisurely ways of her past lifestyle in juxtaposition with her life's work: the treatment of pleasure and passion. The leisure Umrao experiences later in life is emotionally restful. While Umrao's life has changed drastically and sobered in many ways, her one passion remains and continues to make her curious – the passion for poetry. Poetry is retained as an extension of the past, giving her her present identity. Rusva's authoritative voice and Umrao's narrative voice successfully weave her story as a talented composer of poetry. She is known for posterity, not only for her life as a courtesan but also for her *nom de plume*, *Adā*, the poetess. Fascinated by poetry since her initiation at the hands of Maulvi Sahib, she had always tried to polish her art at any opportunity that provided itself – the peak of which was perhaps her relationship with Navab Sultan.[163] To drive the case for poetry, Rusva regularly interrupts the story with either a verse from Umrao or the character-narrator Rusva, often in long duets, pointing at not only Umrao's gradual and visible excellence in the art but also giving his readers a glimpse of the kind of literary camaraderie the fictional author shares with her. This maturity of Umrao as a poetess is witnessed in the verses that comment on the various incidents that took place in the latter part of her life, as the poetry becomes more refined with every loss she incurs. Rusva allows Umrao's love of poetry not simply as an expression but as her modus operandi. Through the performance of poetry and the past as negotiated, and the novel continues to remain one of the most widely appreciated texts in Urdu that invokes nostalgia for a past, depicted as leisurely, lyrical, and grand.

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[163] Umrao recalls that she and the Navab would write messages to each other in verses and spent much of their time together exchanging couplets, professing their love and admiration for each other.

## 2.6.2 Poetry, Performance, and the Leisurely Past: From *Muśāʿirah* to Cinema

Locating the amorous in the literary and the literary in the amorous – the complementary comparison of the poet and the lover – has been proposed to be a good way of reading otium in the context of Roman antiquity, particularly in the poetry of Catullus (Segal 1970: 28). Such a juxtaposition of the literary and the amorous can be observed in Rusva's novel, steeped in figurative language and stylistics of poetry and the philosophical treatment of the emotion of love. This juxtaposition and its entanglement with otium are already alluded to early, in the prelude to the novel, through the performative recital or *muśāʿirah*. The *muśāʿirah* emerges as an experience of otium, mediated through performance, poetry, and reflection. Traditionally, a *muśāʿirah* entails a poetic symposium, a contest. In the novel, it gradually attains the flavour of an informal assembly where poets come together to recite their verses amidst a poetry-conscious audience, fellow poets. This dual possibility of the *muśāʿirah* locates it at the boundaries of the formal and the casual, the performative and the literary, the rehearsed and the spontaneous, as it transcends the formal contours of such binaries.

A *muśāʿirah* is an emotional and sensory experience that requires adequate material arrangement to experience poetry in its literary and performative dimensions.[164] It demands a suitable physical space that can host the gathering. Munibur Rahman (1983) derives that perhaps the ritual emerged out of the custom of poets reciting eulogies in the royal courts or the houses of the nobles. Gradually, the *muśāʿirah* became a more democratic (although the essence of 'democracy' or a sense of sharing was already a part of it as is reflected in its etymology) and less exclusive institution, emerging into the literary space of free speech and opinion (Rahman 1983: 75–76; Mahmood 2018: Intr.). Its history unfolded along with the development of Urdu language and literature, as has been seen in the attempts at disciplining the *muśāʿirah* in the efforts of Holroyd, Azad and Hali. The *muśāʿirah* became a subject of longing, grief and nostalgia after 1857, reaching a height best embodied in Mirza Farhatullah Baig's novel *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Śamʿah* (The Last Radiance of Delhi, 1928). A *muśāʿirah* requires a host/patron with the social status and the means; earlier, it was mostly men of nobility and aristocracy who hosted them. Explaining the etiquettes of a *muśāʿirah*, Rahman writes, referring to Baig's book, of the "lav-

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164    See Rakhshanda Jalil's essay on the imaginary *muśāʾirah* in *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Śamʿah* (2023), 264–75.

ish and ceremonious" atmosphere. These well-mannered formalities remind one of "an aristocratic culture which has all but disappeared".

A single lit candle is used, which, when placed before a particular poet, signals his turn to recite. There is also a correct order for poets to present their work: the "first to recite are the lesser poets; then come the masters in the ascending order so that the poet considered the most important recites at the end" (Rahman 1983: 76). The *muśāʿirah* in Rusva's novel follows such etiquettes and attempts to re-enact the tradition while performing the sensory experience:

> There is no doubt that for today's gathering, Munshi Sahib had seen to every arrangement with careful attention and decorum. It was a summer's day; an hour or two of the day remained. The terrace had been sprinkled with water so that by evening, the floor would cool off. A carpet was spread and covered with a gleaming white sheet. New pitchers filled with water and *kevṛā* were placed on the ridges of walls. These were covered with clay cups. Ice had been arranged. Betel leaves wrapped in red cloth and scented with perfumes had been placed in paper pots; fragrant tobacco was strewn on the lids for chewing. Water was sprayed at the lower parts of half a dozen hookahs, forming wreaths of smoke around them. The evening was moonlit, and we did not need much light. A solitary *kaṇval* had been lit for the round. (Rusva 1979: 18–19)[165]

Although the opulence of aristocracy is absent from the arrangements, the provisions are made following the ceremonial decorum of a *muśāʿirah* hosted by the wealthy Munshi *ṣāḥab*. Attention is paid to the enhancement of sensory pleasures in creating an ambience that is conducive to the experience of leisurely sophistication and a sense of respite from the mundane, the urban hustle and bustle of the Chowk below. The atmosphere is rendered favourable to the immersive aspects of a *muśāʿirah*, the spontaneous flow of poetry. At the stroke of eight in the evening, all the participants, Mir Sahib, Agha Sahib, Khan Sahib, Sheikh Sahib, Pandit Sahib and the others start filing in, hinting at the necessity of formalities like punctuality to sustain this atmosphere of seclusion (1979: 19). Rusva maintains that this is a close gathering of friends and not a contest. Nevertheless, praising or commenting on each other's verses is what a *muśāʿirah* is, and the gathering in the novel is no different. In many senses, the *muśāʿirah* is "an antithesis to public life and suggests an elevation of the realm of the private" (Segal 1970: 25). Not only is it one of the "pursuits of privileged class of

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165  *Kevṛā* refers to water or oil extracted from pandanus flowers. It is a perfume used widely in northern parts of India. Earthenware cups are placed on top of the pitchers to help diffuse the scent into the air. *Kaṇval*, meaning a lotus, refers to a lotus-shaped glass lampshade that would hold the candle.

young men held together by common interests and tastes, and especially com-mon tastes in literature" (Ibid.), but also "the most common form of intellectual entertainment available in the prevalent urban setting" (Rahman 76). This dual possibility of the gathering is strategically used to frame the story. It is at a *muśāʿirah* that Umrao overhears and applauds Rusva's poetry. The leisurely lit-erary tradition of the *muśāʿirah* introduces Umrao into the story and turns the story into hers. The presence of women in *muśāʿirah* was still a rare event when Rusva was writing, but Umrao's profession, entangling poetry and per-formance, is an excellent device for the purpose. Having held and performed innumerable *muśāʿirah*s, it is only realistic that Umrao is invited and, after being coaxed, agrees to attend. Her familiarity with the gathering and her erst-while profession allows the other attendants to accept and praise her in the 'round'.

Performance and the performative are central to the novel; this is reflected in both Umrao being a performer and the performative of the narrative. Her story is recollected orally, claimed to have been secretly jotted down, and per-formed as a novel by her friend, the poet Rusva, who blurs the lines between character, narrator, and author. Sharon Pillai has argued that it is necessary to move beyond the aesthetics and analysis of "realism" in the novel and reorient the reading towards "a novel poetics of expression, a poetics of indirection" (2016: 112), focusing on the aesthetical aspects of 'play' and 'meta-story' in the novel. Particularly referring to Umrao's "rhapsodical reaction" to Rusva's nov-elistic narration of her story, Pillai claims that Rusva is engaging in training readers "by teaching them how to emotionally identify with and find pleasure in a new sort of literary experience", bridging a gap between earlier didactic novels and his own modern novels (Pillai 2016: 115). Rusva indeed balances the act between the old and the new. He demonstrates how emotions for the past can be reinvented in narrative and performative expression. Umrao's story is a nostalgic one, as is Rusva's. But the pain of loss, the yearning for a time gone by, are feelings mitigated through textual contrivance and emotional expres-sions. Umrao emerges as a performer par excellence, coaxed to reveal all, but the text insists that her intimate thoughts remain elusive and untouched as she straddles the past and the present, the public and the private. This unreachable part of her self is symbolised in the dramatic scene when, on returning to Kha-nam's house after years, she finds the five *aśrafīyāṉ* (gold coins) that she had hidden under her bed ages ago. On her servant's question, if Khanam's house was not looted during the Rebellion, Umrao responds, in character: "It must have been, but perhaps no one thought to look under my bed" (1979: 239).

In the design of the *muśāʿirah*, Umrao is the last poet in front of whom the candle is placed, clarifying that she is the most important of the poets present. Although the utterances of this last poetess transform into prose, it is not far-

fetched to read Umrao's recounting of her life as a *ġazal*.[166] Not only is the narration intercepted with verses and couplets as the prelude to each part of the story, but parts of the text also end in verses that sum up the preceding incidents. More significantly, the story advances in an episodic format reminiscent of the *ġazal*, traditionally composed of couplets in a series expanding upon the same theme. This is further ascertained in Umrao's reply to Khan Sahib's comment that her poetry reflects her own experience: "Whatever my individual experience may be, I have parsed a poetical composition" (1979: 21).[167] Pillai argues for reading the novel in its "poetics of indirection" as a "*mushaira* in narrative form". Her reading focuses on intertwining "*rekhta* and *rekhti*" (2016: 119). *Rekhta* or *rek͟hta* is the genre of Urdu poetry with a male speaker; it is also the older name of the language, meaning assorted and scattered. *Rekhti*/*rek͟htī*, on the other hand, was poetry composed by men in the voice of women, dealing with women's direct, quotidian and literalist concerns. Umrao's strained, skilled and controlled voice is similar to that of the 'allusive', 'ideal', *rek͟hta*, further claiming it to be the *rehta* of the *ġazal*, attempting at once a dexterity of polishing the craft of sadness as well as reaching the universal abstract 'indirection' of love and loss.[168] The *rek͟htī* voice, in turn, is claimed by Rusva in a deft subversion of "tones and tongues" (Pillai 2016: 120). So, to Rusva's repeated nagging questions about her sexual exploits, Umrao is consistent in her literal loftiness and responds with verses of ideal love, loss, and the pleasure of being helpless in love.[169] If we are to agree with Pillai's reading of the narrative as a harmony of *rekhta* and *rekhti*, we can extensively appreciate a harmony in the text, of the strands of bodily, sensual love that Umrao's social identity is enmeshed with, and of the strands of refined, metaphysical love that her literary persona is engaged with. A crafty exchange of the identical strands is embodied by the characters of the novel: the writer (a man of literary taste) desiring textual material on the sensual and the passionate exploits of a courtesan; the courtesan refusing to indulge in explicit descriptions, taking recourse to the art of recounting her experiences in the garb of poetry. Then "this fusion of literary interests and passion" (Segal 1970: 27) becomes central to the meaning of the narrative. At the same time, the meaning is mediated through the

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166 Sharon Pillai argues that the novel's "heteroglossia" is that of a *muśāʿirāh* (2016), 116–19.

167 "Z̲ātī tajarba jo kuch ho, hamne to ek śāʿirānah maẓmūn kahā hai".

168 See Faruqi on the voice of the *ġazal* in his essay "Conventions of love, love of conventions" (1990).

169 For elaboration on rekhta and rekhti, see Pillai (2016), 119–21. See also Carla Petievich (2003).

performance of these voices, emerging from role-playing between the first and second narrator – textually interdependent characters.

The scope of performance in the text is so suggestive that one could imagine Rusva writing for cinema if it were indeed possible to make such a suggestion. This reading possibly emerges from the playful aspects of the novel. The novel has been extensively explored to coax its performative potential in large-scale cinematic productions like the 1972 film by Pakistani film-maker Hasan Tariq, the more famous 1981 Indian film by Muzaffar Ali, and the most recent production by J P Dutt in 2006. What appeals to today's filmmakers in this classic Urdu text from 1899 is its perception of modernity as precarious, the modern protagonist as adaptive, and her negotiation with nostalgia for a time gone by. Umrao's success is in carefully treading this precarious position she has been hurled into, as it is Rusva's success, too. Rusva weaves a yarn full of disclaimers and pretences, contradictions, and conflicts – for example on the topic of *pardah* (veil), sin, morality, and colonial rule – in the voice of Umrao. This is in keeping with the voice of the performing courtesan and her skill in the art of *nakhra*/*nakhrā* or pretence. Oldenburg draws attention to the extensive training and rehearsals a *tavā'if* undergoes until "no trace of the pretense is discernible" (1990: 274). Umrao herself sums up the courtesan's pretence and manipulation of emotion:

> I am a whore by profession, and love is like a repartee for us. When we want to ensnare a man, we pretend to fall for him. No one can compete with us on how to fall for a man. Heaving deep sighs, weeping, and crying at every little thing, refusing to eat for days, sitting on parapets, dangling our legs, threatening to plunge down, taking poison – these are our tricks. However hard-hearted a man he may be, eventually he will fall into the nets of deception. (Rusva 1997: 125)[170]

Rusva explores Umrao's ability to feign emotions of love and play with narrative conventions and techniques. At the same time, Umrao is shown to capably protect herself through the change in government, lifestyle, and the times. The passing of time for Umrao is doubly dangerous as the passing of not only the tranquil and joyous ways of old Lucknow but the passing of her prime in a profession where youth is currency. Nostalgia for Umrao is a profound emotion, but her ability to channel it in a reflective strand allows her to aestheticise the loss in her skill and love for poetry, aptly signified by her pen name, *Adā* (style or grace). The "new flexibility" of reflective nostalgia, the "sensual delight in the texture of

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[170]    Oldenburg uses the Khushwant Singh and Hussaini's translation. I have used my translation.

time" (Boym 2001: 49), is aptly harnessed by Rusva, a writer of modernity, and projected on the individual and cultural memory of the Urdu intelligentsia through the ingeniously apt figure of the courtesan in her recollection of the past – of both herself (*āpbītī*) and of the changing world she inhabits (*jagbītī*).

Adā is shown to be a poet of great skill when she recites her own couplets, and Rusva, enchanted, enquires about the original composer. Umrao smiles coyly, claiming authorship of these exquisite verses. This is another narrative strategy of Rusva, the wistful poet and writer. The novel allows Rusva, a writer obsessed with poetry, to become, by extension, the poet he wanted to be. *Umrā'o Jān Adā* can be read as his masterstroke, preserving poetry in prose, pitting two friends as rival poets – the courtesan and the writer. In their experiences of love and poetry, they are bridged by experiences of reflection, longing, and *otium*. To return to Segal's remark, "though most men, *otiosi* or not, fall in love, only the *otiosi* ponder and analyse their experience and transmute it into art" (1970: 31). This art is transmuted through nostalgia in transforming the poet's dormant desire for fame, only to be able to do so as a novelist, a writer of the modern genre. *Umrā'o Jān Adā* is a novel of reflective nostalgia, in both its content as well as stylistic innovations, in setting as well as in what it establishes for future readers. It remains a text bearing the essence of Lucknow as a protagonist, its life and times, and the subject of many more nostalgic recounting of the same in literature and performance.

## 2.7 Chapter Conclusion

Nostalgia for the leisurely past is a significant emotion and theme that recurs in the writings of Urdu poets and novelists in the aftermath of the Rebellion. Effective as a rupture, the severance of the present from the past is envisioned as a transformation in temporal sensibilities. However, emotions for the past are seen to be expressed in different ways, for they are felt differently by different writers. In various expressions, nostalgia is negotiated as contrived and conflicted – sometimes as restorative, sometimes as reflective, but almost always as ambivalent. The socio-political transformations in the aftermath of the Rebellion and the ensuing colonialist critique create an emotional atmosphere of binaries, demanding adherence to reformism in education and literary culture or being left behind by the rushing speed of colonial modernity. Several Urdu writers, particularly in the reformist vein of Syed Ahmad Khan, Azad, and Hali, responded to the call to synthesise Islamic reformism with Victorian morality and utilitarian ethics in poetry and literature. Simultaneously, writers of the new form of the novel reinvented ways in which they felt and expressed the loss of the past. Through their innovative prose narratives, they trained

their readers to feel in new and different ways. The dissemination of print helped several prose writers play with and reinvent new forms of long literary prose, creating new literary platforms to parse emotions for the past. These two processes synthesised towards the conceptualisation of the Urdu novel. The novel genre may have started as a response towards the call for utilitarian literature and estrangement from the dominance of poetry. Nevertheless, it emerged into a modern genre where the past and feelings for the past (before 1857) became a significant theme.

This chapter has shown that nostalgia, in its ambivalence, looms large in the Urdu novel of the nineteenth century, even in so-called didactic and reformist narratives like *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*. While contending for a sharp severance from a past perceived as decadent and idle, the pain and longing for the very same past, embodied in poetry, is violently dealt with in the novel. The nostalgic subject is portrayed as trapped, and he must cure himself and his progeny from the sinful leisurely past and towards a progressive future. While Nasuh's repentance from his sinful past turns into religious zeal, Kalim's refusal to repent and give up his idle ways is seen to be so dangerous for the body politic that he must be disciplined, however violently and pathologically. After a few decades, at the turn of the century, emotions for the past are rendered in more sober notes, which allows the nostalgic subject to be critical as well. The Urdu novel comes to its own with Mirza Hadi Rusva's *Umrāʾo Ǧān Adā*, wherein the courtesan, a figure that belongs to a *passé* world of *navābī* courts is reinvented as the voice of modernity. Through a playful narrative performance, Rusva's novel achieves a critical distance from the past while training his readers to remain nostalgic. This nostalgia is expressed reflectively, allowing for new directions in reading, feeling, and looking back at the past.

The chapter reads nostalgia in a new and transformed world by focusing on the intertextual figures in Urdu novels – the young aristocrat and the courtesan – once interdependent characters. At the centre of these readings are the emotions in these texts towards the Urdu poetic tradition and culture. Changing emotions towards poetry (signified as the decadent/leisurely past) runs through the chapter in the close reading of Hali's *Musaddas*, a new and different poem criticising poetry. The new novels, Ahmad's *Taubah* and Rusva's *Umrāʾo*, treat poetry as loathed and loved. Rusva's novel is, in many ways, an antithesis, a response to Hali's and Ahmad's restorative nostalgia. A novel written in verses in the tradition of the *ġazal*, it acknowledges the new prose genre and the shift in literary ethos, nonetheless subverting this shift in reflective nostalgia. For the Urdu reader-audience, it reinvents the ways in which nostalgia can be felt, expressed, and performed in various textual and cinematic interpretations it has inspired over more than a century.

# 3 Enchantment, Topophilia, and Idle Leisure: Rabindranath Tagore and Literary Creativity in Modern Bengali Literature

> *One winter morning – we were visiting Dhaka at the time –*
> *one of my relatives entered the room and said, 'Here is your book'.*
> *Retrieving it from the pocket of a buttoned-up coat, he handed me*
> *a copy of* Caẏanikā. *Double-crown, sixteen-page format, pica*
> *alphabets; printed in The Indian Press. Writer, Śrī Rabīndranāth Ṭhākur.*
> *Publisher, Śrī Cārucandra Bandyopādhyāẏ. Once I got my hands*
> *on it, I was lost to Hem, Nabīn and Madhusudan. All the age-*
> *appropriate Bangla poems I had read before withered*
> *from my heart. Even now, half a century later, whenever I think*
> *of some lines by Rabīndranāth […] I see the double-crown*
> *sixteen-paged leaf, the pica alphabets, like an impeccable*
> *photostat. Even precisely, if the page was on the left side*
> *of the book or the right, I have still not forgotten.*
> Buddhadeb Basu[171]

Buddhadeb Basu's (1908–74) reminiscences of his boyhood days paint a picture of conceivable enchantment with Tagore's poetry and its appeal to young Bengalis in the early-twentieth century. Bengali literature received international attention, with Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. This eventful moment gathered various dimensions of modern Bengali literature, bringing an incredibly dynamic journey of the literary culture to fruition. A Nobel Prize meant great fame for the writer and the literary tradition he represented. Translations (of the *Gītāñjali*) into many languages were made available to readers across the globe, especially in Europe. Praising Rabindranath's poetic sensibilities, Ezra Pound wrote in the *Fortnightly Review*, "Bengal is a nation of fifty million people. Superficially, it would seem to be beset with phonographs and railways. Beneath this there would seem to subsist a culture not wholly unlike that of twelfth century Provençe.

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[171] *Āmār Chelebelā* (My boyhood days, 1973), 53–55. Hem, Nabin and Madhusudan are poets – Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Nabinchandra Sen and Michael Madhusudan Datta.

Mr. Tagore is their great poet and their great musician as well".[172] Writing about the Bengali language, he asserted it to be "an ideal language for poets", being "fluid" and "flexible", and a language of "precision". However, Pound and the rest of the West quickly lost interest in Tagore, his writing, and his language – if not as quickly as they were captivated by his genius.[173] Such sudden and widespread recognition for an Indian in the field of literature in the early-twentieth-century brings to question the nature of cultural encounters and their influences on conceptual transformations within the literary-cultural consciousness, especially in a framework of colonialism, now increasingly moving within the loci of national and political entanglements.[174]

Less than half a century ago, in the context of Urdu and Persian, the colonial administration had presented a scathing critique of the inferior quality of Indian literature. This judgement was extended to other Indian vernaculars in Macaulay's infamous speech. By the early twentieth century, political dynamics had shifted beyond colonialism through increasing and rapid global interactions on the one hand and the beginning of the disintegration of the European enterprise of empire on the other hand. Indian scholars have repeatedly discussed the strange and sudden fame Rabindranath inspired in Europe in the early twentieth century; equally surprising was the abrupt disenchantment voiced in what was considered his inclination towards a vague Eastern mysticism.[175] Rabindranath, too, expressed disdain at the sudden praise; he suspected

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172   "Rabindranath Tagore", *The Fortnightly Review*, originally published in March 1913. Later transcribed and provided as a part of the *Tagore Dossier* on the centenary of the Nobel Prize reception. https://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/2013/04/rabindranath-tagore/ accessed on 13th April 2021.

173   Amit Chaudhuri suggests that this disillusionment with Tagore in the West was equally astonishing as the great fascination he inspired, turning him into a global literary celebrity. See "The Accidental Tagore", *Guernica Magazine*, April 2011. https://www.guernicamag.com/chaudhuri_tagore_4_15_11/ accessed on 13th April 2021.

174   Entanglement here is used in the way Kris Manjapra explores the relations between different groups beyond the unidirectional historiography of colonialism and the charms of cultural encounters to specifically look for unequal relations between groups on unequal footing, who, nonetheless, need each other for political reasons. Such entanglements are often period-specific. Manjapra precisely locates 1880–1945 as an "age of entanglement". See *Age of Entanglement* (2014), 3–7.

175   See Amartya Sen's discussion of T. S. Eliot's and Bertrand Russell's disdain towards this alleged mysticism in Tagore, in *Home in the World* (2021), 86–87. Sen cites personal letters of Nimai Chatterjee as the original sources of these. See Sen's notes on page 414. See also Amit Chaudhuri's discussion of Philip Larkin's unabashed scorn for Tagore in *On Tagore* (2012), 4. For an authoritative reading of the (mis)understandings

an immense misunderstanding at play.[176] Apart from the gap in linguistic sensibilities in Bangla and the English translations of Tagore read in the West, this confusion was also effected by the gap of experiences in Europe (scarred by the crisis of the First World War) and India (where reinforced ways of voicing freedom and subjectivity were unfolding). While modern Europe at the time was steeped in feelings and experiences of disenchantment, Indian writers, especially Tagore, were invested in leading the Indian community (and a broader understanding of humanity) towards an emotional experience of enchantment amidst the inchoate conditions of modernity and global dialogues and relations.

The previous chapter focused on a rupture in the relationship between colonial authorities and Urdu intellectuals. In Bengal, while such strains of suspicion were not absent, a parallel relationship emerged between the colonisers and the colonised simultaneously. It was one of active absorption and assimilation of English and European cultural and literary thought by Bengali intellectuals. This impact, particularly throughout the nineteenth century, has been noted historically in the so-called 'Bengal Renaissance'. The early twentieth century saw not only Bengal but the mass of the Indian subcontinent in the throes of a renewed struggle for independence from the ignominies of British rule. Some of the most iconic examples of rebellious sentiments were expressed by Tagore; for instance, in the gesture of returning the knighthood bequeathed for services to literature, expressing his outrage at the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre of 1919 (R. Chaudhuri 2002: 191). Through the long nineteenth century, Calcutta had become a significant spot on the world map, known as 'the second city of the Empire'. Under the pressures of colonial modernity and the need to assert the significance of Bengali language and cultural heritage, writers, historians, and philosophers were hard-pressed to reinvent their intellectualism in a modern form, and "literariness played a especially significant role in the process" (Kaviraj 2014b: 84). The emotional conflicts and constitution of intellectuals at this time was complex: they were captivated by the literary culture of the West, and simultaneously, they began to harbour strong feelings of rebellion against the Empire.

The consciousness of subjectivity and freedom is seen to dominate the thought processes of Bengali intellectuals at the turn of the century. Such discourses had been gaining momentum through the nineteenth century, making

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that ensued between Tagore and the 'West', see Alex Aronson, *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes* (1943), especially "Introduction", xi–xii and 13–24.

176 Amartya Sen (2021), 88. See Martin Kämpchen's quotation of Tagore's letter to C. F. Andrews, *Rabindranath Tagore and Germany* (1991), 14. See also Tagore's letter to Andrews quoted in Aronson (1943), xiv–xv.

their significance felt in the minds and works of established writers like Bank-imchandra Chattopadhyay and the younger but renowned Rabindranath Tagore, among many others. Rabindranath stood at a junction in Bengal's history where he had the fortune of receiving the best of colonial interactions, a Brahmo education, and the social standing of an opulent *jamidār* family steeped in the arts and literary culture.[177] Yet, well-circulated anecdotes from his youth, like being a notorious school dropout and refusing to study law in England, stand at odds with the narrative of lucrative professional prospects provided by the colonial education system, as he repeatedly rejected such opportunities in search of what he understood as 'lonely leisure', the utmost necessarily element in creative processes. Through his global recognition and profound influence on Bengali literary culture, he came to represent the voice of modern Bengali literature. His emotional attitude towards literature was central to this modernity; literature could occupy one's mind at any time, anywhere. Amit Chaudhuri points out that Rabindranath insisted on the etymological significance of the word used in Bengali for literature, *sāhitya*, its root being *sahit* (to be with).[178] Rabindranath excelled in a multitude of genres, writing some of the most remarkable novels, short stories and plays. He was the most emphatic poet and songwriter of his time. He is also the most renowned Bengali writer whose volumes of personal prose and letters remain widely popular; they present comprehensive perspectives on literature and the literary in a most intimate manner. He taught modern Bengalis to feel and live with literature in many ways.

Equally significant is his conception of literature as entangled with the emotion of love and aspects of the leisurely, the quotidian. Leisure as idle freedom for the maturing of human consciousness and literariness became a recurrent motif in his philosophy. In a lecture titled "The Philosophy of Leisure" (1929), he locates leisure as an experience that is of utmost necessity for attainment of an aspect of truth from the Upanishads, i.e., the truth of comprehension (*vijñāna brahma*) and the truth of joy (*ānanda brahma*), "the realm of

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177  *Zamindār* is an administrative term, literally, a landholder. In nineteenth-century Bengal, a *zamindār* or *jamīdār* (Bng.) acted as a revenue-collecting landowner under the British Empire, managing peasants working on the land under the Permanent Settlement Act or Zamindari System introduced in 1793. Chitra Deb asserts that Rabindranath's family environment provided him with an expansive and liberal humanism that no other "great house" could have afforded. See "Jorasanko and the Thakur Family" *Calcutta* (1990 b), 64.

178  Chaudhuri, "The Accidental Tagore" (2011). This is reflected in several essays by Tagore, for instance, "*Sāhitya*" (1889), "*Sāhityabicār*" (1926) and "*Sāhityasammilan*" (1926).

wisdom and love", "where number and speed have no meaning"[179] This distinction between "action" pertaining to the West and "contemplation", wisdom and love representing the message of Rabindranath came to be built upon as gaps in the reading of his message in the West.[180] Referring to modern life of acceleration, progress, and speed, he refrains from reading leisure as the binary of progress, explaining the experience of leisure as the experience of "rhythm", "happiness", and "enjoyment" as indispensable (Tagore 1929: 617). The sensory and the emotional are intricately intertwined in his conceptualisation of leisure, humanity, and literature. At a time when writing had become a specialised vocation, with this conception of leisure, Rabindranath made the literary accessible and intimate. Referring to this intimacy and emotional appeal of his poetry, W. B. Yeats wrote in the Introduction to the English translation of *Gītāñjali* that "as the generations pass, travelers will hum them [Rabindranath's verse] on the highway and men rowing upon rivers", and they will be murmured by "lovers, while they await one another".[181]

Focusing on his conceptualisation of literature as quotidian, leisurely, and intimate, this chapter investigates the emotion of love as intricately linked with creativity in Tagore's personal prose. Love here is a wonderous emotion of enchantment or *māẏā*, a longing for and attachment to idle freedom, signified in the yearning for open, natural spaces. It is also the melancholic love for time, accepted in its fleeting nature, for the momentary and the everyday. Through these emotional approaches to space and time as loved, as yearned for, inspiring wonder – in their uncontainability – literary creativity can emerge in the form of a leisurely and intimate experience. The poet is delightfully flustered, inspired by a whim of poetry, for instance, as he enjoys the distraction caused by a buzzing bee:

> *What enchantment caresses me, making me forget my work*
> *My day(s) are spent weaving a web with the melodies of its song.*[182]

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179    Rabindranath Tagore, "The Philosophy of Leisure" (1996 a [1929]), 616–17. While *vijñāna* is commonly used to refer to science, it is used with reference to the Upanishads as pertaining to 'consciousness' or 'comprehension'. Tagore uses it to refer to the latter.

180    See excerpt from an article in *Vossische Zeitung*, dt. 16.10.1921, quoted by Aronson (1943), 23.

181    See Introduction, *Gitanjali*. Trans. Rabindranath Tagore (1917), xv.

182    "*Kī māẏā deẏ bulāẏe, dilo sab kāj bhulāẏe, belā jāẏ gāner sure jāl buniẏe*". *Gītabitān* (1932) 326. https://www.geetabitan.com/lyrics/G/gharete-bhromor-elo-lyric.html accessed on 30th May 2021.

Exploring the complexity in the abstract emotions of love, wonder, and enchantment, this chapter brings together the various aspects of leisure and literature in Bengal through a close study of the personal prose of Rabindranath, focusing on his collection of letters titled *Chinnapatrābalī* (A collection of torn letters/leaves, 1960). These letters written to his niece provide a rich source of his critical investment and emotional engagement with literature and leisure that influenced a conceptual change in the meaning of literature and the literary for Bengali readers. I first present a brief but necessary understanding of the modern phase of Bengali literary culture as context to the study. In the following sections, I elaborate on Tagore's parsing of the experience of enchantment and the emotion of topophilia, both of which can be seen as intricate extensions of love. Enchantment and topophilia as emotional attitudes are central to the philosophy of literature and leisure propagated by Rabindranath.

Along with the letters in *Chinnapatrābalī*, an earlier collection, titled *Ẏūrop Prabāsīr Patra* (Letters from a sojourner in Europe, 1881), his memoir, *Jīban¹smṛti* (Reminiscences, 1991b [1912]) and several relevant essays and lectures are consulted in the chapter. The chapter explores the understudied and complex relationship of leisure, freedom, and civilisation for the poet. It locates the recurrently expressed love for the rural and riverine landscape of Bengal and explores its significance in Rabindranath's love for idle, fulfilling leisure entangled with literature and literary creativity. In a final section, the chapter looks at these entangled conceptualisations of nature, love, enchantment, and leisure as deeply informing Tagore's project of educating children through the primers he penned, i.e., the four volumes of *Sahaj Pāṭh* (Easy reading/lessons, 1930 onwards) and his establishment of the institute of learning at Śāntiniketan in 1901. The aim is to trace the entanglements in love, leisure, and literature in Tagore's thoughts, from the days of his youth spent in rural Bengal to his vision for literary education in his advanced years. It also addresses the misunderstanding of this concept of enchantment in the West and Tagore's parallel reputation as the most beloved and enchanting writer for many South Asian readers, especially Bengalis, which arguably continues to persist.

## 3.1 A 'new race of men in the East': Developments in Modern Bengali Literary Culture

This section presents a context to the modern Bengali literary field with its centre in the urban space of Calcutta and its ongoing evolution before Rabindranath became a representative voice. The transformations in literature are closely linked with sociality and quotidian culture and thus, in many ways, with the leisurely. They are also intertwined with the consciousness of Bengali identity and

the creation of a 'high' modern Bangla. Like that of Urdu, Bengali literature's modern journey is also interjected with the demands of colonial modernity and responses to it by literary stalwarts and reformers. While reform may have been a significant player in the socio-literary field, it was the concept of a re-invention, retrospectively termed a 'renaissance' (*nabajāgaraṇ*) that became the most significant agent of transformation, at least in the elite sphere.[183] While Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) and Isvarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–91) struggled for a reformed social space for modern education and literary culture, Michael Madhusudan Datta (1824–73) and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–94) projected a sense of this modernity onto literary language. The emergence of Bengali literary culture is also inextricably entangled with the practice of writing in English by Bengalis and their profound encounters with the West. Most writers were captivated with English literature, and some, like Madhusudan and Bankim, wrote in English for some time.[184] Several writers, like Pearychand Mitra (1814–83), read English literature at university and became inspired by the influential teacher and poet, Henry Vivian Derozio (1809–31). Derozio's students formed a group of reputed freethinkers under the name 'Young Bengal', also known as 'Derozians'. Resisting Hindu religious restraints, they took to an anglicised view of modernity, signified by "freedom and beef steaks".[185] Armed with radical ideas and practices like consuming alcohol and beef, reading Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*, this "new race of men in the East"[186] emerged as the necessary harbingers of disruption and scandal in elite Calcutta society. Encounter with English and European cultures and the self-fashioning of modern Bengali literary culture were two strands that worked in parallel at this time.

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183    Several scholars have criticised this emulation of the European Renaissance as imitation and retrospective nostalgia by historians. In this context, two terms in wide circulation are 'renaissance' and its Bengali counterpart, *nabajāgaraṇ* or 'new awakening', referring to the dormant existence of an enlightened consciousness. See Sarkar, "Renaissance and Kaliyuga" (1997b). See also S. Chaudhuri, *Renaissance and renaissances: Europe and Bengal* (2004) and Surajit Dasgupta, "Nabajāgaraṇer Svadeś-bideś", *Nabajāgaraṇ: Bicār-Bitarka* (2016), 25–31.

184    Madhusudan wrote in English and converted to Christianity. Bankim, the pioneer of the Bengali novel, first wrote an English novel, titled *Rajmohan's Wife*, (1864).

185    Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Freedom and Beef Steaks* (2012), 1. See also Rajnarayan Basu, *Sekāl ār Ekāl* (1874), 26–29. Basu sees such practices as *nikṛṣṭa* (contemptible).

186    The phrase was disapprovingly used by Alexander Duff, a Christian missionary in India, in his report of how copies of Paine's *Age of Reason*, *Rights of Man* and Hume's *Essays* were dispatched to Calcutta in a cargo ship by a publisher from the United States of America, "taking advantage of the reported infidel leanings of a new race of men in the East, and apparently regarding no God but his silver dollars". See R. Chaudhuri, *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal* (2002), 23.

### 3.1.1  The Consciousness of Literary, Cultural, and Civilisational Superiority

The nineteenth century saw a variety of cultural transformations in Bangla, of which the focus here is on the *elite* sphere.[187] As the nineteenth century advanced, the emergence of the literary came to be definably located in aspects of lifestyle and sociality. It inhabited a complex juxtaposition of private emotions propelled by modernity and the public experience of participating in a socio-literary community. Private contemplation, intellectual entertainment, and the sociability of literature – such quasi-intellectual and quasi-quotidian associations became central to the new-found literary aesthetic in Bengal. Literature took over the previous public practices of leisure time, transforming it into a semi-private intellectual engagement. Eminent poet Isvar Gupta wrote in the journal *Saṃbād Prabhākar* of March 1853:

> We have seen an end of the old pleasures of kite-flying, chess, draughts and dice, of idle talk, of the tabla and sitar, of card-playing and pigeon-fancying. Young men now discuss virtuous matters like Bacon's Essays, Shakespeare's plays, Kalidasa's poetry, the verse of the Gita, the meaning of the Vedas.[188]

The parallels in the transformation of attitudes to old leisurely pastimes with the Urdu cultural field are striking. Like in Urdu, in Bengali, too, the literary had also inhabited the leisurely before this technological boom of the print and catalytic encounter with the West, as is repeatedly mentioned in the recollections of the times when poetic contests among poets/'songsters' known as *kabiyāl* were popular forms of entertainment, as were recitational arts like *kathakatā* and theatrical performances/*yātrā* (Banerjee 2019: 92, 114; R. Basu 1874: 12–14). These leisurely-literary engagements were typically social in nature, like the Urdu *muśāʿirāh*, experienced in public or in company. With the modern and technological transformations of the nineteenth century, literature began to take up the mode of private contemplation and practice while continuing its functions of sociality. Furthermore, the literary began to be engaged with expressions of one's consciousness of temporality. The proliferation of print culture and the imposition of clock-time – two ubiquitous factors of the nineteenth century – are seen to have stimulated ways of thinking about time and the literary, where

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187    For instance, scholars like Sumanta Banerjee and Sumit Sarkar have delved into the much-neglected popular, folk, and mass cultures of the time. See Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets* (2019) and Bandyopādhyāẏ, *Uniś Śataker Kal'kātā o Sarasvatīr Itar Santān* (2013). See Sarkar's "The City Imagined" and "Renaissance and Kaliyuga" in *Writing Social History* (1997 a & b). See also Śrīpāntha, *Kal'kātā* (1999).

188    Quoted in Chitra Deb, "The 'Great Houses' of Old Calcutta" (1990 a), 62.

the literary took up expressions of time, engendering texts that discussed the present and one's location in it (Sarkar 1997b: 186–88). The consciousness of temporality was echoed in the perception of time as useful and valued, under the drive of the colonial regime, experienced by the middle classes, as Sarkar and Sumit Chakrabarti have shown, in the job of a petty clerk (*kerāni*).

Several Bengali writers see the rapid and thorough absorption of Europe in Bengal through literary-cultural fascination in a positive light, while several others, for example, Rajnarayan Basu (1826–99), highlight the negative impact of these encounters. He refers to these as "*iṅrāji śikṣār aniṣṭa*" (the harms of English education).[189] Alternately, Buddhadeb Basu asserts that it was the literature of Europe, rather than its advancements in sciences and other fields "which, for the Bengali mind, had extraordinary, elixir-like qualities" (2018: 54–55). While both positive and negative perceptions of Western influence are seemingly natural in this context, more often than not, such perceptions were complex rather than simply falling into binaries; they were inherently contradictory. Referring to these varying perceptions regarding the West among English-educated Bengali intelligentsia, Tapan Raychaudhuri identifies the tendency among Bengalis, "an anxiety to assess European culture […] as something to be emulated or rejected", as almost obsessive (1988: xi). The growth of Bengal's literary culture was inclined to thrive with less direct, coerced interference from the colonisers; it was majorly steered by Bengali intellectuals, albeit taking active advantage of the social reforms, capital growth and the development of Calcutta as the empire's capital in the East. The Rebellion of 1857 (Bng. *sipāhī bidroha* or Sepoy Mutiny) that had proved to be a disastrous loss for Delhi and North India had a relatively less drastic impact on Bengal's relations with the British.[190] Whereas Delhi and Lucknow witnessed severe retributions from the colonial authorities, Bengal faced less severity due to its complicated relationship with the British. Sudipta Kaviraj sees the eighteenth century as a witness to a "rise of powerful indigenous mercantile interests", via which, the English slowly and steadily entered Bengal. This entry distinctly differs from challenging an older establishment like the Mughal dynasty. He sees this "peculiar character" of the entry of colonialism in Bengal as responsible for a rapid Western impact on Bengali culture and, conse-

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189  *Sekāl ār Ekāl* (1874) For him, the worst effect of English education is blind imitation of foreign values by young Bengalis, which has led to a misguided understanding of social values, 60–62.

190   This is arguable, to some extent. Scholars like Kaviraj and Chaudhuri suggest that while the Rebellion brought about a distinct rupture in parts of North India where the uprising originated, in Bengal, such breaks were not directly caused by the actual Rebellion. This is also reflected in sketches of the time, like Kaliprasanna Sinha's *Hutom Pyā̃cār Nak'śā* (2008 [1862]), 16.

quently, on the relations between the two. A significant feature of such a relationship was the remarkable enthusiasm shown by sections of the Bengali elite for the "new institutions and knowledges coming from the West" (Kaviraj 2014b: 76). Buddhadeb Basu explicates this Bengali enthusiasm for English tastes in literary culture through "an inner, a congenital affinity" between the Bengalis and the English, "an affinity which the accidents of history combined to make the best use of. The first contacts took place under extremely happy auspices. Both the Vaishnava romanticism and the Mughal courtliness having declined, Bengal was ready for a spiritual renewal which, at that moment of time, only an impact with the West could produce" (Basu 2018: 55).

These accidents of history enabled Bengalis to thrive and evolve towards an identity based on feelings of 'superior' intellectual and literary culture that was then strongly seen as distinct from other vernacular literary cultures. Kaviraj comments that at this junction, "Bengalis duly developed sub-imperialistic delusions about themselves and considered other groups within the larger territory of the presidency their natural inferiors" (Kavirah 2014b: 82). The latter were primarily non-Bengali speaking communities to the West of Bengal that were added to the presidency and the large Bengali Muslim peasant population. The community identity of (Hindu) Bengalis developed with the concept of *sabhyatā* or civilisation – a concept that gained immense significance in the nineteenth century. While the eighteenth century saw a zeal for the 'civilising mission' among colonialists, the concept of civility itself became a topic of enthusiasm among Bengali writers later in the nineteenth century. In her reading of the various straits of 'civilisation' and 'civility' in Bengal, Rochona Majumdar points out that "the meanings of *sabhyatā* were also inextricably linked to the emergence of a regional identity of being Bengali within the larger Indian nation". She further asserts that "Bengali language, whose development as a vehicle for modern literary and academic expression" was crucial to the "fashioning of a people as civilized or *sabhya*" (Majumdar 2015: 2). Emotions of pride and self-aggrandisement regarding the superiority of Hindu Bengalis as a civilisation were driving forces behind the Bengali "sub-imperialistic delusions" (Kaviraj 2014b: 82).[191]

In his brief essay titled "Bāṅālir Bāhubal" (The strength or prowess of Bengalis), Bankim repeatedly asserts that although Bengalis have historically never been physically powerful people, physical strength is not as significant. He

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[191]    Alternately, Bengali satires of this time often regarded the imitation of English 'civility' by the *bābu* as uncivilised, for it blindly imitated the colonial foreigner. See Chaiti Basu, "The Punch Tradition in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal", *Asian Punches* (2013), 123–24, 129–32.

compares the Bengali's lack of physical strength to the same lack in the English, who have now become masters of the Sikhs (referring to people from Punjab, historically reputed for their physical strength). If Bengalis can harness the emotional power to desire *jātīya sukh* (community-based/national gratification) and if this desire can drive them, it is not impossible to become powerful (Chattopadhyay 1954b: 213). This superiority is perceived to be achievable through self-training, hard work, and a disciplinary exercise in knowledge. Majumdar argues that with 'self-training' or discipline (*anuśīlan*) as central to ideas of civility, "such an explication of civilisation could only belong to a limited section of the Bengali populace" (2015: 3). The excluded sections from such identifications were Muslim peasants in Bengal, as well as the heterogeneous population accumulating in cosmopolitan Calcutta (Sarkar 1997a: 166–67). A particular way of demarcating this segregation in communities was asymmetrical counter labels of language identity such as *bāṅāli* (Bengalis) and *hindustānī* (entailing the population to the West of Bengal who spoke Urdu/Hindi/Hindustani), or *abāṅāli* (anyone who was not a Bengali/did not speak the language). While Calcutta gradually emerged as an urban metropolis teeming with heterogeneity in linguistic culture, the attempts at segregating 'outsiders' from 'Bengalis' became central to the question of civilisation in Bengal.

## 3.1.2 Towards a 'High' Bangla: Language Elitism in the Nineteenth Century

While encounters with English and European education, literature, and culture became "catalyst[s]" (Raychaudhuri 1988: x) that transformed the Bengali literary sphere, these transformations ran parallel to the journey of modern Bangla as a language. Bankim (among other established writers) argued for a difference in formal/written language (*sādhu bhāṣā*) and informal/colloquial language (*calit bhāṣā*) as extremely important for the proper evolution of Bangla. On the other hand, urban prose genres of the early-nineteenth century, including the Bengali *naksha* or *nak'śā* (often translated as a 'sketch') literature, demonstrate a language of the streets, representing the heterogeneity and local flavours of the city.[192] Referring to the richness of the language spoken on the streets, Sumanta Banerjee has adequately noted the remarkable differences between the folk/popular aspect of Bangla and the elite culture of Calcutta, commonly used for literary purposes in the nineteenth century (2019: 160). The diversity in this street language was in "sharp contrast with the literary style of the Bengali bhadra-

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[192]   See Hans Harder, "The Modern Babu and the Metropolis" (2004), 359–62, 376. See also, Harder, "Urbanity in the Vernacular" (2016), 442–43.

loks, who were trying at that time to shape a language heavily dependent on Sanskrit, and a style borrowed from European literature" (ibid.).[193]

Nevertheless, the loose popular genre of the century, which Banerjee describes as "farces, belles-lettres, picaresque novels, satirical sketches", is seen to be in close contact with the street language.[194] The trend of such satires or satirical sketches/*nakˡśā* was started by a Kaliprasanna Sinha, with his innovative urban prose, *Hutom Pyãcār Nakˡśā* (Sketches by the night owl, [1862]). Such sketches provided observations of life in the booming metropolis, emerging as an adequate style of urban prose, "printed in the city for the city and about the city" (Harder 2016: 442). The narrator in *Hutom* is the eponymous watchful owl, perched at a vantage point, observing the city below and retelling in the language of the streets. The following vignette is a narration of the events following the flight of Wajid Ali from Lucknow and his arrival in Calcutta as retold by Hutom, satirical in tone and rich in Persianate vocabulary:

> An exciting rumour (*"hujuk"/hujug*) erupted in the city: the king of Lucknow (*"lakhˡnauẏer bādˡsā"*) has arrived and settled at Mucikholā[195]; he will travel to England (*"bilāt"*). The king's costumes are flamboyant and feminine (*"bāiẏānā poṣāk"*), and his feet are painted. Some say he is lean and beautiful (*"chipˡchipe"*), just like an *apsarā*.[196] Some others say, "Not at all, the king is huge – like a water well (*"kupor mata"*) – he is broad and thick, but quite a talented singer". And some say, "Oh, what rubbish! The day the king crossed the waters, I was aboard the same steamer. He is dark-skinned and slender (*ekˡhārā*), wears glasses on his nose, just like our *maulabī sāheb*"[197]. Since the king of Lucknow was released from prison (*"kaẏed theke khālās"*) and began to live in Muchikhola, the city turned colourful (*"śahar baṛa gulˡjār haẏe uṭhˡlo"*). (Sinha 2008 [1862]: 102).

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193  *Bhadralok*, a compound noun formed of *bhadra* (gentle, civilised) and *lok,* people, refers to the elite community of educated 'gentlemen' in colonial Bengal, with certain parallels to the North-Indian *aśrāf.* Sumanta Banerjee describes it as a "respectable class", emerging from either the upper or middle strata of society, as "administrative employees" and "professionals" with "landed interests" (2019), 60.

194  See Banerjee (2019), 197. Harder also refers to these scattered 'genres' as "early prose narratives" (2004), 362–63.

195  An area of Calcutta near the docks, now called Garden Reach. The colloquial name of the area, Mucikholā/Muchikhola, literally translates as cobbler's or shoemaker's yard due to its leather industry.

196  In Hindu mythology, *apsarā* are described as celestial dancers, singers and musicians.

197  A learned Muslim man, often the leader of a community and/or the teacher of religious scriptures.

Observations of historical events (like the Rebellion/mutiny, "*miuṭīni*"), urban characters ("*bābu*"), festivities ("*rath*", "*durgot·sab*"), comments on human nature, and representation of street-talk, rhymes (popular songs/*gān*) and rumours (*gujab/hujug*) are what make these sketches an excellent form of prose to document the growing life and culture of the city. The rough, colloquial street language, vibrant with vivid metaphors, tinted intonations and provocative allusions, drew heavy criticism from prominent writers like Bankim.

In his essay "Bāṅālā Bhāṣā" (The Bengali language, 1878), Bankim asserts his position in the heated debate regarding the evolution of Bangla between those who proposed a strict adherence to Sanskrit in Bengali writing (for instance, Ramgati Nyayratna) and the opposing group who advocated the use of colloquial Bengali, the language of the streets. Although he seems to rebuke the advocates of strict Sanskrit followers in writing Bangla, Bankim creates an exclusive identity for Bengalis and Bangla literature based on this very linguistic adherence to Sanskrit, rejecting the language of *Hutom*: "[T]he language of Hutom is deprived, the vocabulary is bereft of richness. The narration is weak, it has no form, nor strength. It is not beautiful and although not obscene, it has no cleanliness, nor purity about it. It is not the language in which books should be written" (1954 d: 373). He differentiates between two categories of colloquial language for writing – one of *Hutom* (*hutomī bhāṣā*) and one as used by Mitra in his 'novel' *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* (*ṭek<sup>l</sup>cā̃dī bhāṣā*).[198] While the latter is more acceptable, the former should not be entertained. Such assertions were significant in the standardisation of the language as 'high' Bangla, accessible to an exclusive community (Banerjee 2019: 14). Influential decisions were made by what Sumit Sarkar calls the "high literati", creating a new elite, Hindu literary sphere (1997 b: 189). Simultaneously, with the rapid spread of English as an almost mandatory language, an erasure of Persian as a linguistic requirement in Bengal ensued. One of the significant factors in this change, apart from decisive adherence to moderate Sanskritisation, is the general role of the Brahmo Samaj. The association and its ideals served as the cradle for most elite writers who eventually became iconic figures of this literary sphere. They showed the way for '*bhadralok* etiquette';[199] and they played significant roles in refashion-

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198    Or 'the language of Tekchand', Tekchand Thakur being Pearychand Mitra's *nom de plume*.

199    Drawing on social etiquette entangled with the gentility of the *bhadralok*, Banerjee suggests four identity markers: residence in concrete houses, attention to sartorial choices, use of chaste Bengali spoken language and a fair knowledge of English language and manners.

ing literary language, borrowing vocabulary and flavour from Sanskrit and the literary-philosophical thought from English.

This collaboration of Sanskrit/Hindu and English/colonial ideologies is seen recurrently in Calcutta's emergent Bengali literary sphere. These conformations also influenced educators like Vidyasagar, known as the founding father of modern Bangla.[200] This is evident in the syllabus he designed for a "modern audience through institutionalized educational curricula", where he listed Sanskrit epics like *Rāmāyaṇa* and "highly aestheticized works by Kalidasa like *Raghuvaṃśa* and *Śakuntalā* along with Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*" (Kaviraj 2014 b: 89). In response to the general colonialist critique of vulgarity and degeneracy in the Vidyasagar's cultural and linguistic strategy refuted it with the illustrious Sanskrit classical canon, which, however, "was subtly reconstructed in a discernably Western style through the surreptitious filter of modern taste" (Kaviraj 2014 b: 90). Remarkably different from the exact colonial accusations hurled towards Urdu writers, in Bengal, we see a finely manipulated response. We also see enthusiasm for the influence of English education and institutions in the concept of a refashioning or 'new awakening', which nodded to Western inspirations and the richness of the classical traditions. To do this, Bengali writers, too, took recourse to the past – but the image of this past is more refracted as it also extended into the past of Europe.

> The Bengal Renaissance had to shape itself in the face of a politically dominant and culturally powerful adversary. To do so, it followed the trajectory of the adversary's own earlier history, imbibed in most part from that very adversary – as a direct historical model, but far more as the source of the educational, economic and technological factors determining the growth. The result was a remarkable epistemic affinity between the rulers and the ruled. (Sukanta Chaudhuri 2004: 18)

Hand in hand with the 'renaissance', the elite literary culture was supported by the social culture as propagated by the Brahmo ideals, which enhanced this exclusive sociability. Based on Rammohan's reinterpretation of the *Veda*s, the Brahmo Sabha originally aimed to rid Hinduism of what were seen as meaningless practices, like idol worship. After Rammohan's death, within a few decades, the Sabha (meaning a congregation) was revived by Rabindranath's father, Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) under the new name of Brahmo Samaj (entailing a more organised community), to seek spiritual freedom from age-old

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[200]    He highlights the significance of the "literature of Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Sir Walter Scott and others." See Jogendrakumar Chattopadhyay, *Smṛtite Sekāl*, quoted in Rosinka Chaudhuri (2018), xxvi.

rituals. The social-intellectual leanings of Brahmo ideals liberated elite Hindus, thus allowing them to explore and accept European/English ideologies and cultural practices. This liberation was expressed by elite members in their educational aspirations, sartorial choices, and material-cultural display, influencing notions of civility like *sabhyatā* and *bhadratā*. These upheavals brought a sharp, modern transformation in people's faith, practices, politics, language, reading habits, living conditions, dress, etiquette, and intellectual engagements. Literature/*sāhitya*, like a constant companion, was both an agency of this change as well as the vehicle of this change. Kaviraj describes this momentous process and the "significant role" played by literature: "a certain clarity of syntax, chasteness of vocabulary, refinement of pronunciation – all operations influenced by literary texts – became mandatory constituents of the modern Bengali sense of cultivation" (2014b: 84). It was in a family instrumental to this transformative process that Rabindranath Tagore was born and raised. Historians of the Bengal Renaissance regard Rabindranath as the final figure of this 'awakening', attempting to encapsulate these literary and socio-cultural transformations within the two names, Rammohan and Rabindranath.

## 3.2  A Modernist Enchantment: Tagore's Ideas of Love, Leisure, and Language

The Tagores inhabited one of old Calcutta's "great houses" (Deb 1990a: 56–63; 1990b: 64–67). Dwarkanath Thakur (1794–1846) was a successful entrepreneur, landholder, and wealthy businessman. He owned two English print journals, the *Bengal Harkaru* and *The Englishman*, a leading agency, and lived a life of opulence.[201] He reasoned for the settlement rights of British traders in India. His vision of colonial interaction was one that profited both parties. His vision was neither realised nor did his riches outlive him, leaving his son Debendranath in considerable debt. Debendranath, influenced by Rammohan Roy, his father's close associate, acquired a keen sense of moral uprightness and spiritual detachment. He was invested in the cultivation of Brahmo ideals in societal norms and education, especially of his children. Of his sons, Dwijendranath (1840–1926) was a philosopher and Satyendranath (1842–1923) was a Civil Servant. Jyotirindranath (1849–1925) was closest to the younger Rabindranath, encouraging him in his literary and musical endeavours. Jyotirindranath set up the literary magazine *Bhāratī* (1877) in their Jorasanko home, with their sister

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201   "[A]s evinced by the gargantuan banquets at his villa in Belgachhia". See Deb (1990b), 65.

Swarnakumari as an editor. Chitra Deb writes, "nowhere else in late nine-teenth-century Calcutta could we have found such a circle: so vigorous, so easy-flowing in its intellectual flare" (1990 b: 66). It was an institution brimming with literary and artistic-intellectual activities. The house had several libraries and studies, while regular literary discussions took place on the rooftop terrace, attracting a surge of elite and cultured friends.[202] Rabindranath writes of the advantages of this stimulating atmosphere which pervaded their home in those early days.[203] His initial efforts at writing were circulated within the family and gradually began to be published in *Bhāratī* (Deb 1990 b: 66). His first collection of poems titled *Kabikāhinī* (Poet's narration, 1878) was published when he had just turned sixteen. As Andrew Robinson summarises, by his late twenties, Rabindranath "had a deep and genuine appreciation of Sanskrit, Bengali and English literature, a similar grasp of Bengali and Hindustani vocal music and a wide knowledge of English and Irish songs, besides first-hand experience of many aspects of life in England". These interests had enabled him to write poems, plays, stories, novels, essays, operas and songs "that are still read and performed by Bengalis a century later" (Robinson 1991: 2).

Buddhadeb Basu, an ardent disciple of Rabindranath, tries to make sense of the poet's genius for English readers as Bengal's Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dry-den, and translators of the Bible; "[t]o describe him in terms of English litera-ture, one must name quite a number of authors, for he compresses in one man's lifetime, the development of several centuries. He has created language, both prose and verse" (Basu 2018: 4). Basu and other Bengali writers of his time, the generation after, strived to break away from his patterns in literary aesthetic for they believed that with the end of Rabindranath, an era had ended; lan-guage and literature needed to turn to the pressing realities, the looming feel-ings of "horror and boredom" (Basu 2018: 14). Nevertheless, they could not but marvel at the development of prose that charted the end of this 'renaissance'/ modern phase in Bengali literature, making an ambitious and enchanted leap from "Bankimchandra's stiff formalism to the diamond depths of Rabindra-nath's later prose" (Basu 2018: 4). Bankim's prose was more innovative and agile than such claims; however, at the end of the century, Rabindranath's prose had indeed achieved a maturity that transformed modern Bangla to "a fully developed and highly complex language" (Kaviraj 2014 b: 91). As Tagore writes in a significant essay titled "Bāṃlābhāṣā-Paricaẏ" (Introduction to the Bengali language, 1938), he inherited a dynamic literary-linguistic tradition,

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202  See Rosinka Chaudhuri, "Modernity at Home", *Freedom and Beef Steaks* (2012), 120–54.

203  *My Reminiscences.* Trans. Surendranath Tagore (1991 b), 20.

fashioned by masters like Rammohan, Bankimchandra, and Vidyasagar.[204] He repeatedly refers to the *calit* or colloquial language as *prākṛt*, drawing a parallel with the plurality of vernaculars to *saṃskṛt*/Sanskrit. Referring to European vernaculars to Latin, he emphasises the need to accept this colloquial, fluid, ever-changing language for literature to allow traffic among the inner and outer spatial demarcations (Tagore 1949 [1938]: 393–94). He writes: "[i]n languages of the Western nations, the distinction between this inner and outer forms do not exist. That is why literary language has developed a dynamic life, and colloquial language has acquired a thoughtful richness" (ibid.). The difference in Bengali, he asserts, is due to a formal discipline, not in the language's inherent disposition. He attempted to alleviate this distinction, encouraging a quality in the language that created equal space for both so that modern Bangla could move freely.

Rabindranath argues for a discourse of movement and fluidity as organic rather than disciplined. This discourse of dynamism pertains not only to language and linguistic evolution but also to his elocution of these linguistic formulations. He asserts free-style observation as the praxis of his intellection on language, in contrast with the renowned linguist Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay. As opposed to the latter's vast, geographical, and methodological knowledge of the language, Rabindranath proclaims his own familiarity as one acquired by footloose notes of an explorer, conscious of his feelings along with his observations, drawing affinity with the singing minstrels, the *bāul* cult of Bengal: "I have not accumulated knowledge like static settlers in the kingdom of science; I have roamed the streets, happy, like the *bāul*. Whatever has been collected in my bag of information, I have mixed it with and added my language of joy (*khuśir bhāṣā miliẏe*)" (1949: 391). This affinity with the *bāul*s has been most influential in his thoughts on writing and language and his most valuable contribution towards modern Bangla. He initiated a liberation of modern Bangla into a more fluid language, accommodating the flow of emotions and sentiments. The influence of the free and footloose *bāul* recurs in his literary thought and to borrow the phrase from Amit Chaudhuri, clears a space for emotions which he recognises as wonder or "*bismaẏ*" and happiness, "*ānanda*" or "*khuśi*". Several scholars like Sudipta Kaviraj and Sibaji Bandyopadhyay have identified a particular appeal to emotions, sentimentality, and sympathy as typical of Tagore's literary creativity (Kaviraj 2014b: 91; Bandyopadhyay 2008: 413). Reading Tagore's fiction as a cumulative craft of spontaneity and perception, Bandyopadhyay renders Rabindranath's writing style as "*kholā hāt-*

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204    See Rabindranath, "Bāṃlābhāṣā-Paricaẏ", *Rabīndra Racanābalī.* Vol 26 (1949 [1938]), 397.

*er khel*" or a play of loose/free hand (2008: 411). This does not entail a loss of discipline but, in fact, a reorientation of discipline within literary creativity. The reinvention of literary language and the ability to arouse readers' emotions are central to Rabindranath's art.

Two significant ways in which Rabindranath popularised the use of colloquial language as a literary language, thereby turning the literary experience as intimate, were in his rendering of poetry in music, as a song, and in his propensity to writing poetic prose, many of which are in fact, composed as personal letters. This chapter focuses on the collection of letters written to his niece, published under the title *Chinnapatrābalī* (first published under this title in 1960). I also briefly introduce his earliest collection of published letters, written from his travels in Europe. Composed in his adolescence when he was sent to England to pursue a career in law, these letters were edited and published under the title *Ẏūrop Prabāsīr Patra* ('Letters from a Sojourner in Europe') in 1881. This was one of the first books in Bengali written in a colloquial, intimate language (*calit bhāṣā*) as opposed to the formal language of books.[205] Later, while writing about his childhood days, he mentions this publication as an act of "youthful bravado" (Tagore 1991b: 115). Although these letters were not, by any means, examples of mature writing, their publication was an extremely significant event. That a collection of private letters written by someone so young, describing his impressions of travels and life in a different continent and culture, in the language of intimacy that one shares with family members, is a remarkable signifier of the shifts in Bengali literary etiquette. Such epistolary experiments are seen as "path-finding" innovations in the literary culture of the time (Majumdar 1990: 116). Notwithstanding that such publishing feats were more possible for Rabindranath due to his family's cultural-literary milieu, writing familiar letters with the thought of publication became a novel literary possibility, pre-empting his literary parsing of modern subjectivity. That such a book of familiar letters would be acquired and read by an unfamiliar readership also points at specific shifts in the concepts of literary subjectivity and writerly self.

Addressed to his niece, Indiradebi Chaudhurani, the letters in *Chinnapatrābalī* were composed during 1887–1895, when Rabindranath was between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-four. During these years, he travelled frequently to parts of rural Bengal and Orissa, in charge of his family's estates. Spent mostly in solitude, this period of his life has been expressed by him as the

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205 Andrew Robinson and Krishna Dutta eds. *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (1997), 7. Also see Swapan Majumdar, "Literature and Literary Life in Old Calcutta" (1990), 116.

"most productive period" of his literary life (Tagore *Glimpses* 1991a: Intr.). At this time, he wrote some of his best-known short stories and plays, edited the family-run journal *Sādhanā* as he lived in and travelled through places like Shilaidaha, Shajadpur, and Patishar. In the Introduction to the English translation, titled *Letters from a Young Poet* (2014), Rosinka Chaudhuri explains that Indiradebi had copied the letters and presented them to Rabindranath later, before he was awarded the Nobel Prize. A selection of these copied letters, along with letters to another friend, Srishchandra Majumdar, was published under the title *Chinnapatra* (torn leaves/fragments of letters) in 1912 and was translated under the title *Glimpses of Bengal* (1991a [1921]). Later, in 1960, only the letters written to Indira in this collection, along with a hundred and seven additional letters to her, were published under the new title, *Chinnapatrābalī* (A collection of torn leaves/letters). These letters offer an intimate understanding of his engagement with ideas of love, enchantment, freedom, the necessity of fulfilling and idle leisure and his thoughts on writing as literary and philosophical creativity. He writes that he does not believe in 'autobiography' (*jīban¹carit*). Instead, it is in these letters that he conveys the essence of his writing, his inner self, thus bringing forth a depth to the epistolary genre in Bangla.[206] These letters are repeatedly mentioned as crucial to an understanding of Rabindranath as a writer, a companion to his vast literary career. They also reveal his recognition of what Sudipta Kaviraj calls his "emotional intentionality" (2014d: 210).

Kaviraj asserts that by the time Rabindranath came to this literary field, modernity with its industrialised, utilitarian, and prosaic attitudes had caused a severe "disenchantment" in the internal lives of people (2014b: 92). As seen in the last chapter, with the pressures of modernity and the rise of print culture, prose had taken over poetry to make sense of a world that needed to prove itself capable of sober, commonsensical yet sophisticated expressions of modern life. Writing thus became an increasingly "specialized profession", "an extraordinary activity", writes Kaviraj: "Its task was to recreate enchantment in a world that had finally been desacralized and disenchanted. In social terms, this development paralleled the rise of a new concept of entertainment – in a lifestyle increasingly dominated by temporal regimes driven by work" (Kaviraj 2014b: 96). But modernity also has its enchantments. Admittedly, the usual understanding of modernity as a rupture sets it apart as a temporal entity, cut off from the past (which is more than often nostalgically seen as the horizon of possible enchantments). Nevertheless, scholars have demonstrated the broad

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206  *Chinnapatrābalī* (1993), 242–3. From here on, all quotes from this 1993 text are my translations. I have used Chaudhuri's translations from her 2014 edition for longer quotes.

spectrum of the enchantments of modern times.[207] These enchantments may be 'new', but the emotional experience of enchantment is grasped in what Jane Bennett describes most adequately: "to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday" (2001: 4). It is this possibility of feeling, to be captivated and struck with wonder amidst the quotidian, which is central to Rabindranath's conceptualisation of writing. Even without fully agreeing with Kaviraj's argument of disenchantment, we can nonetheless agree on the significance of the literary enchantment propagated by Rabindranath. This sense of enchantment stems from the importance Rabindranath attaches to the experience of the emotional within the literary, as wonderous and uncontainable. His concept of enchantment is modernist, located within the ephemeral and the momentary, inhabiting the quotidian (as easily triggered by the sound of a buzzing bee), rather than in the pre-modern and atemporal sense of enchantment as divine.

The concept of disenchantment (in German, *Entzauberung*, the undoing of magic) that scholars often borrow from Max Weber is based on his understanding of rational and industrial modernity as devoid of the mysterious, unpredictable powers that pre-modern life offered.[208] His understanding of pre-modern, possibly enchanted life is closely linked with religion. Bereft of the possibility of faith in any power higher than the human in modern times, he draws out disenchantment as the meaninglessness of death and life, in the feeling of living as alienation, as "tired of life"/*lebensmüde*.[209] Although disenchantment in the Weberian manner may not be as pervasive in the Bengali society of the time, a new form of emotional engagement towards literature and the arts was ushered in by Rabindranath's expansive literary and educational vision. While several aspects of his literary-educational vision may have been realised gradually with the turn of the century, it was in the last decades of the nineteenth century and his own youthful wonderment that these attachments took shape. The task of understanding Tagore's conception of enchantment in this light is a constricted one; firstly, because the discourse of cultural disenchantment in modern times is heavily repeated and internalised in Western scholarship, and secondly, because scholars who argue for enchantment in the modern times often tend to see it in the light of consumerist and technological allures. The

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[207]    See Jane Bennet, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings and Ethics* (2001). See also Saurabh Dube, 'Introduction', *Enchantments of Modernity: Empire, Nation, Globalization* (2009).

[208]    "Wissenschaft als Beruf", *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* (1992 [1917]), 86–87.

[209]    Ibid., 88. For the English, see Max Weber, *Charisma and Disenchantment. The Vocation Lectures.* Trans. Damion Searls (2020 [1917, 1919]) n.p.

literary enchantment of Rabindranath that this chapter explicates sits different-
ly with the concept-meaning of the English word. Nevertheless, I continue to
use the word because it is the most adequate English equivalent of the emo-
tional spectrum that Rabindranath addresses and engages with in his personal
and reflective writings. It also encapsulates the literary attachment for genera-
tions of readers, who, like Basu (see epigraph), could not resist the *allure* of
reading and committing to memory the experience of reading, once introduced
to Rabindranath's prose and poetry.

### 3.2.1 Emotions of Enchantment as Experiences of Otium: Love, Wonder, and Attachment in *Chinnapatrābalī*

This discussion is restricted to the emotional allure of literature that is so inte-
gral to Rabindranath's philosophy of writing and to the cult-like following in
his readers. The agenda here is to grasp this new or modern emotional engage-
ment with the literature that not only emerged out of the encounters and
entanglements of history but also left a long-lasting legacy that surpasses its
contemporaneity. This emotional engagement provides a threshold where the
literary, against the utilitarian flavour of modernity, is located within experien-
ces and characteristics of otium – in the literary activities of writing and feel-
ing.[210] I focus on the emotions in these experiences and approach otium as an
experience entangled with the literary in its emotional manifestations. While
the title of this chapter locates two emotional phenomena – topophilia and
enchantment – the basic emotion concept that connects the two is that of
attachment or love, in Bengali, *moha* and *māẏā*. This love is arrived at after the
experience of wonderment and through the feeling of attachment. These feel-
ings are often overlapping, and they remain deeply connected (Bennett 2001: 4).
Translating Tagore, Rahul Peter Das explicates how Bengali words for love –
for instance, *prem*, can also be entangled with "a whole gamut of expressions
for positive feelings" (2010: n.[13],177).

Experiencing love for life, an attachment to its fascinating and wonderous
aspects, and the wilful capacity to be struck by observations and emotions are
characteristic constituents of an experience of otium.[211] Jane Bennett explicates
the experience of enchantment as "a state of wonder, and one of the distinc-

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[210]   See Fludernik's and Nandi's explication of writing and literary creativity as possi-
ble experiences of otium (2014), 4. C.f. Richard Adelman's essay in the same volume
(2014), 186–89.

[211]   Discussed in Introduction and Chapter 1 of this study.

tions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound" (Bennett 2001: 5). She cites Philip Fisher's description of enchantment as "a moment of pure presence" to emphasise the feeling of time as static, or fading in the background, a temporal inertia.[212] Bennett defines enchantment then as an odd combination of somatic effects – "[t]o be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to be both caught up and carried away" (2001: 5). In this paradoxical arrest of thought and (in)action, the ability to be struck by something engaging and wonderous, as we shall see, remains central to Rabindranath's concept of artistic freedom, literary creativity, and idle leisure. The feelings of enchantment, enticement, and enthrallment – the sense of attachment or longing, in Bengali, *māẏā*- runs through the letters read in this chapter, connecting leisure, literature, and emotions.

The emotion of *māẏā* (translatable as both enchantment and attachment) had a significant role in Rabindranath's writings, bringing a nuance into the very word and transforming it into a new concept. In his works, it is often read and perceived as spontaneity, innocence, and lucidity of language, eventually becoming the keywords of recognition, locally as well as internationally, of his typical style. It was this sense of enchantment that Yeats and other poets in the West found so surprising and perhaps, perhaps, attractive in Rabindranath's works. Yeats writes in the Introduction to *Gītāñjali* of this feeling of being entranced, which he reads as "spontaneity", "innocence", and "simplicity", drawing a rather simplistic contrast to the cultural disenchantment of Western modernity:

> We write long books where no page perhaps has any quality to make writing a pleasure, being confident in some general design, just as we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics – all dull things in the doing – while Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity. […] An innocence, a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature makes the birds and the leaves seem as near to him as they are near to children. (1917: Intr.)

Apart from equating his writings with the entire Indian civilisation, this sort of (mis)reading of Rabindranath's conceptualisation of enchantment is perhaps

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212   "[T]he moment of pure presence within wonder lies in the object's difference and uniqueness being so striking to the mind that it does not remind us of anything and we find ourselves delaying in its presence for a time in which the mind does not move on by association to something else". Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (1998), 131.

what led to his iconic image as the saint-poet or the eastern mystic in the West. As has often been contended, Bengali readers and scholars, on the other hand, find this simplicity, this essence of spontaneity not in relation to any mysticism but rather in his absorption of the quotidian, the local, and in "his modernist love of the momentary".[213] This is, I argue, due to the linguistic turn the concept of *māyā* undergoes in Bengali at this junction, which remained untranslatable (to a great extent) for a European or even non-Bengali readership. Rabindranath's writings translate *māyā* to a new variation of enchantment that is not so much divine but modernist in the sense of private, experiential, and quotidian. It entails a break with the previous connotations of the word.

The Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary entry for *māyā* offers various meanings of the word: "art, wisdom, extraordinary or supernatural power", as well as "illusion, unreality, deception, fraud, trick, sorcery, witchcraft magic".[214] While these meanings carry a supernatural essence, other meanings of the word are "compassion, sympathy". Amit Chaudhuri draws attention to the two simplified, recognised registers of the word in colloquial Bangla. One is the "religious-metaphysical register, to do with the unreality of the visible world", the divine form of attraction (Chaudhuri 2008: 29). This corresponds to the meanings of illusion and unreality. The other is commonly understood as "a homely one, and refers to the almost irrational attachment that human beings feel for another human being or place". This is closer to the meanings of sympathy and compassion, especially in collocation with the word *moha* (love, attachment) (ibid.). Chaudhuri points out that the register of *māyā* which Rabindranath brings forth is a new one, "a subtly, but decisively modernist one: that of 'enchantment' – a celebration of, rather than a turning away from the visible world, as appearance is remade through perception, poetry, and language" (2008: 30). I would further argue that this new connotation draws on rhetoric of longing and desiring in an abstract fashion, expressed in being interrupted and distracted, or in Bennett's words, "transfixed". He introduces it to the reader through its recurrent appearances in his writing, especially in his poetry and songs. The Bengali verse/song "*e śudhu alasa māyā/ e sudhu meghera khelā*" (this is only an idle enchantment/ merely a sport of the clouds)

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213   See Amit Chaudhuri, *On Tagore* (2012), 127–28. Chaudhuri argues for reading Tagore's efforts at "intervening in and reshaping" his surroundings as an experience of 'total art', like the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but distinct from Wagner's "messianic vision", and absorbed with the everyday and the domestic.

214   Monier Williams Sanskrit-Dictionary (1899), printed page 771–72. https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/csl-apidev/servepdf.php?dict=MW72&page=0772-b accessed on 30th November 2021.

aptly explains this modern expression of being momentarily enthralled by something as ordinary as the sheer movement of clouds.

This emotion of enchantment is seen to be clearly something disruptive but also pleasurable and enjoyable. Like Bennett's definition of the experiential quality of enchantment, it is engaging on the one hand while simultaneously it renders one idle.[215] Rabindranath often uses *māẏā* in his verses to show a strong collocation with idleness or inaction, a leisurely mood that his writing embraces, assuring the reader of its positivity, rendering this feeling an integral part of living and the appreciation of life. His running argument in the letters of *Chinnapatrābalī* is the importance of acquiring the leisure to feel and value these emotions. For the poet, this is the work of life. While enchantment is expressed in the prose of these letters, the feelings it embodies are often revealed in variegated emotional vocabulary like wonder (*bismaẏ*), affection (*sneha*), attraction (*ākarṣan*) and most prominently in entrancement/rapture (*mugdha*). Joy and sorrow are woven together in the repeated use of the Bengali phrase *sukh-duḥkha*. Melancholy (*biṣād, biṣannatā*) is depicted as a contemplative feeling that gives rise to a desolate and helpless love. While enchantment is expressed in various emotional registers, it is arrived at only once freedom is attained. Freedom is sought from everything – work, duties, sociability, clutter, exuberance, but most of all, from civilisation. Freedom (*mukti*) from civilisation (*sabhyatā)* is integral to this emotion of *māẏā*; the call is to renounce the shackles of civility and love like the wandering *bāul*. A conceptual study of emotions requires a historical study of the same since emotions are historically shaped for particular communities. I do not delve into the historicity of all these emotions here, as it is beyond the present scope; nevertheless, the historical turn of these emotions that Rabindranath conceptualised is explored in the following sections.

For a writer like Rabindranath, aware of his impending, growing literary career, it would have been evident that these letters would become crucial for readers to feel a personal connection with the writer. The language of these letters is affectionate, familiar, and flowing. A strong presence of the poet's emotions flows through them, where he repeatedly expresses his many confused feelings, overflowing joys and sorrows, as well as the profound sense of an intimate relationship with nature. The overarching subjective narrative brings the reader to an unprecedentedly personal space shared with the writer. Scintillating humour, self-mockery, and delightful sensory descriptions help bring a sense of familiarity to the reading. Exploring the sensual and sensory aspects of these letters further explicates the emotional complexities the author addresses.

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215    See Jane Bennett's description of engagement, which coincides with this mood: "to be both caught up and carried away" (2001), 5.

They are written in a genuinely leisurely manner, as they testify, often composed in half-lying postures, in the "lonely leisure" of a "tranquil *Phālgun* afternoon", on a "beautiful *Śarat·* morning", while daydreaming, jotted down during prolonged periods of sitting quietly, staring out of the houseboat on the river.[216] The letters are engaging in their conversational style and aloof in their contemplative style. This style of mingling conversation and contemplation is also a form of communication the poet believes is central to a writer's task. Conceptualising Rabindranath's creation of a modern language and subjectivity in the essay "The Poetry of Interiority", Sudipta Kaviraj argues that Rabindranath draws on "earlier languages of the self" in attaining this modern subjectivity by employing familiar terms but simultaneously "displacing their meanings by carefully modulated untraditional use" (2014 d: 189). Kaviraj follows the semantic transformations of the first person singular pronoun 'I' or *āmi* and claims that in Bengali literature while the word *āmi* earlier referred to the grammatical 'I', similar to the prefix of *ātma* in *ātma-jībanī, ātma-kathā*, the 'self' of the new subjectivity brought forth by Rabindranath is a "free-standing noun", meaning the first-person-singular self or "the philosophic-psychological I" (Kaviraj 2014 d: 201). This reshaping of subjectivity engenders a shared space, like in his use of language, with the capacity to emote and reflect thoughts as well as feelings. In the intimacy of epistolary writing, the author shares the space with the reader – both the intimate and immediate reader and the distant and unfamiliar.

### 3.2.2 Attachment, Idleness, and Freedom: Subjectivity and Civilisation in Rabindranath's Letters

For Rabindranath, writing is an intimate, expressive exercise, a means to engage with his emotions, thoughts, and place in relation to the world. This engagement, however, is not without doubt and scepticism. He frequently expresses concerns about writing for an unfamiliar audience who may not understand him (Tagore 1993: 243). The act of writing then becomes a bifurcated experience – it remains a specialised craft while it becomes a vehicle for the feeling of being enchanted and being engaged with his intimate thoughts.

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216  *Phālgun* is a month in the Bengali calendar, roughly corresponding to mid-February to mid-March, seasonally signifying spring. *Śarat·* is a Bengali season signifying the end of rains and the beginning of winter. In these letters, it appears to be Rabindranath's favourite season. I transliterate it as *Śarat·* here, whereas in quotations from Chaudhuri's translations, I have retained her transliterations. The same applies to other Bengali words, wherever our transliterations differ.

These letters provide a glimpse of Rabindranath's thoughts about writing about his invention of subjectivity. The act of writing is seen not only as his daily work (for example, in editing the journal *Sādhanā*) but also as an activity (like jotting poetry) that comes to fruition in the state of *paripūrṇa ālasyaras* or what can be roughly translated as a 'fulfilling mood of idleness'. Writing these letters become "a delightful necessity" and "a form of literary extravagance" (Tagore 1991a: Introduction). Leisure is claimed to be an indisputable necessity for reflection and to *taste* the freedom to feel emotions that connect the self to the world. Such leisure, for him, is found in the pure enjoyment of reading an ideal, "lazy book", such as a "good travelogue". He writes that he would read such books not in the hustle of Calcutta but in the mofussils, where "it is very relaxing to sit down with that kind of thick book in hand on a completely secluded afternoon or evening" (Tagore 2014: 350). Rabindranath equates this state of leisureliness to the semantics of leisureliness of the Muslim ruling classes, the *nabāb*/nawabs: "There's something of the *nabāb* in my character" (ibid.). Rosinka Chaudhuri sees this *nabābī* as a "luxury of the mind" (2014: 19). In *Chinnapatrābalī*, Rabindranath weaves a complexity between enchantment/wonder as an emotional ability to be struck by life and the intimate, reflective act of writing. A sense of freedom and idleness is an indispensable necessity for the experience of both. However, this idle leisure not only remains a base, a requirement for these experiences of emotion and writing, but emerges as an end unto itself – to live the mood of leisureliness or *ālasyaras*. This philosophy of idle leisure is strikingly similar to what has been argued as "ideals of freedom" against the Enlightenment notions of humanity's greatness in progress and civilisation (O'Connor 2018: 2). Rabindranath expresses a persistent discomfort with these Western concepts of progress and civilisation and critiques the same with his love for a sense of freedom – both metaphysical (as idle freedom), but also political freedom.

Enchantment is expressed in continuous engagement with the sensory and the strong desire for emptiness and freedom. Sensory enchantment is articulated in joyous outbursts, "leaping like a schoolboy suddenly on a holiday" while describing the furious beauty of a thunderous rainstorm, while elsewhere, it is absorbed as "peace, dropping slow from the sky overhead, as if a golden stream of auspiciousness" that enters his heart through his "entranced pair of eyes" (Tagore 2014: 80, 133). It is felt as "intoxication", overtaking him as he hums and sings (2014: 202). It is what takes hold of his imagination as he walks on the sandbank in the moonlight (2014: 315). Along with enchantment, the craving for freedom runs through the various themes of emptiness, solitude, lonely leisure, an attachment to nature and the desire to create and compose literature and music. References to this sense of 'freedom' appear recurrently in his memoirs, *Jīban'smṛti* (1912 [1959]). It is recalled as the feeling while leaving his first

school to join the next one (1912: 33). While schools changed, his fixation regarding "fleeing from school did not change" (Tagore 1912: 34). The yearning for freedom is transformed in later years as one of utmost necessity, a desire for freedom from ties, a need for an immense emptiness. Rabindranath writes of this craving for emptiness in a letter to his wife in 1901: "My inner being awaits and craves a ceaseless emptiness. It is not just the emptiness of the sky, air and light, but an emptiness of the home, of arrangements and furnishings, […] no drawing room, no dining room, nor aristocratic exuberance/*nabābī*".[217]

Craving for emptiness is seen to develop in *Chinnapatrābalī* with constant engagement with the openness of the natural landscape, simplicity of rural life and a deep understanding of the relationship with nature. Emptiness is enjoyed in isolation and solitude; several letters in this collection celebrate these solitary, pleasurable, lazy days empty of worry, activity, and hassle, empty of the urgencies of modern life. But work and laziness are two sides of the same concept for him – a *līlā* or divine play, the divinity being representative of time beyond control. The business of men, their lives and times are deemed insignificant in the face of nature's resplendence and the play of time. Man's egotistic efforts are translated as civilisation, and the emptiness the poet craves, the enchantment with the world, is projected as free of the hustle of civilisation. He describes walking by the river on his own under the rise of a full moon of *kojāgor pūrṇimā* (an occasion for worshipping the Hindu goddess Lakshmi) when, in the absence of people and commotion, he felt like "the one and only last-remaining pulse of a dying world" (Tagore 2014: 104). He then creates a counter-image of the fuss of civilisation after a few lines: "And all of you were on another shore, on the banks of life – where there is the British government and the nineteenth century and tea and cheroots" (ibid.). Civilisation, the business of bound duties and all sorts of unhappy shackles of restrictions are conveyed in his dislike for Calcutta. In a letter dated 18th August 1892, he expresses the beauty of a *śarat·* morning in Shilaidaha, a day shimmering with sunlight after rain showers by the side of a full river. He imagines the "young and beautiful earth goddess" having an endless love affair with "some god of light" (Tagore 2014: 149). Freedom from the shackles of civilised society of Calcutta is expressed best in a letter written in May of 1893, writing from his boat house on the river Padma:

> Here, I alone am the master – no one else has any authority over me or my time. The boat is like my own dressing gown – entering it one can enter a

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217  *Ciṭhipatra*, (Correspondences, Vol. I) (1942) 55. I translate the Bng. *nabābī* as aristocratic exuberance.

> time of looseness and leisure – I think as I please, imagine what I please,
> read as much as I want, write as much as I want, and I can put both my legs
> up on the table and stare absent-mindedly out at the river and immerse
> myself as much as I wish in these days full of sky and light and laziness. [...]
> How differently one feels from Calcutta in the space of only one day! [...]
> What is sentimental or poetical in Calcutta – how real and true that is over
> here! (Tagore 2014: 184–85)

He repeatedly describes himself as someone crazy, wild, a vagrant – someone who is painfully at odds with the idea of civilisation. In a letter written on 13th June 1892, he rages against civilisation, beginning with: "I'm fed up with civilised behaviour (*śiṣṭhācār*) – nowadays, I often sit and recite – 'What if I were rather an Arab Bedouin!' What a healthy, strong, free barbarism (*asabhyatā*)!" After regretting that he is, unfortunately, a "nitpicky Bengali", he tries to sum up his emotions for freedom from civilised society: "As such by nature I'm uncivilised – I find the intimacy of people completely unbearable. Unless there's a lot of empty space all around, I cannot completely unpack my mind" (Tagore 2014: 129: Tagore 1993: 89–90).

For Rabindranath, the concept of civilisation was at odds with the contemporary discourses of the time, based on regional identity and its superiority, as analysed earlier in the chapter. Intriguingly, his figure stands tall over the turn of the century as "the ultimate civilized man" (Sinha 1990: 44). Rochona Majumdar explicates the "different" understanding of civility and civilisation that Rabindranath preached in his late years. His critique of civilisation is a critique of the emotion behind it – a national pride based on narrow-minded definitions – expressed "in innumerable essays, speeches, songs, and poetry" (2015: 28). While national pride is an emotion he struggled with (and this is seen to evolve gradually in his writings), simultaneously, his love for the rustic, rural, and free landscape of Bengal grew to unbridled leaps. Freedom and civilisation are concepts here that Rabindranath responds to as a modern, colonial subject with much rage directed against the unrighteous powers of the British in India, expressing his outrage against colonial prejudices and practices. For example, in a letter dated 10th February 1893, he reports a dinner conversation with an "uncouth Englishman", who said that "the moral standard in this country was low, people here did not have enough belief in the sacredness of life" (Tagore 2014: 160). This long letter expresses his anger and even physical discomfort at how colonial subjects are treated. He writes of the "sugary English smiles" and "polite English conversation" as empty, false, and "deeply untrue!" (Tagore 2014: 162).

Critical of narrow ideas of civilisation, Rabindranath projects an emotion of enchantment for the local, the natural, and the everyday. The time spent in these villages, where people had a "simplicity", expanded his creative powers immensely. Satyajit Ray, explaining the effect of this contact with the land and

its people on the poet, comments in his widely famous documentary on the poet:

> With a worldly wisdom unusual in a poet but characteristic of the Tagores, Rabindranath… set about in a practical way to improve the lot of the poor peasants of his estates, and his varied work in this field is on record. But his gain from this intimate contact with the fundamental aspects of life and nature and the influence of this contact on his life and work are beyond measure. (Ray *Rabindranath Tagore*, 1961)

Glimpses of this influence come to light in a letter written from Shilaidaha dated 4th July 1893. The overflowing river flooded the fields, and Rabindranath observes from his boat the activities of the poor farmers, "bringing back their unripe grains"; he "can constantly hear the sounds of lament". He acknowledges the cruelty of the world, of nature and that "the complaints of these hundreds and thousands of wretched innocents is not reaching anywhere". Undercutting these philosophical musings, he comments, "philosophical sorrow is one thing, and the sorrow of ripening grain getting submerged is quite another" (Tagore 2014: 197–98). Rabindranath's experiences of rural life in these parts influence two streams of thought about the Indian/Bengali village in his writings, as argued by Dipesh Chakrabarty: in one, there is "trenchant critique of society" in the village, depicting social evils, superstition, and oppression; and the other depicts the rural village "as a land of arcadian and pastoral beauty" (2000: 150–53). Chakrabarty locates the former in Tagore's reflection of the village in his short stories and the latter in his poetic compositions "(not always in verse)". These letters constitute the latter, poetic compositions that are the antithesis to the progressive and civilised world "outside of historical time" (Chakrabarty 2000: 153). It is through these "imagined" ways of seeing the nation that Chakrabarty explicates Rabindranath's ambivalence towards nationalism.

In these reflections, we are presented with a way of thinking, feeling, and desiring based on the basic tenets of human subjectivity in a pact with freedom in nature and an enchantment with the quotidian. This desire accompanied him until his final years, after the disillusionment of the national struggles, the Swadeshi Movement and the looming global disaster of the Second World War. Rochona Majumdar sees this desire as an intention to build a "civilizational humanism that would draw its resources from the rural and the popular cleansed of all abjection" (2015: 31). In this way of life, freedom and the leisure to feel think and be entranced are seen as indispensable. Rabindranath Tagore attempted to create a way of life to inculcate these feelings among children in the legendary school he built in 1901. These themes and emotions appear repeatedly in his pedagogical ideas. While he brought forth a modern subjectivity and an emotion of enchantment in his writings and songs, he also brought

Bengali literature closer to nature and rural Bengal, questioning to a certain extent the centrality of Calcutta in its then-contemporary discourse. His creation of enchantment with nature can be read as an attempt at re-enchanting nature (Bennett 2001: 91). However, the question of re-enchantment vis-à-vis nature is a tricky one. At the same time, in his representations of rural life in nature, the realities of oppression in village life come forth, far from discourses of enchantment. It is enough for the purpose here to focus on Tagore's shift of the source of enchantment in nature and the natural sublime through what Chakrabarty refers to as "imagination" beyond the difficulties of "realism" (2000: 149–50).[218]

In his view, nature as the source of enchantment encourages artistic contemplation in an immense space rather than in the possible enchantments of modern and urban Calcutta. This understanding of immensity in natural, open spaces, too, was an invention that informed his conceptions of subjectivity and the writerly self, entangled with his concept of contemplative leisure and the emergence of a free, thinking-feeling being. In this sense, Rabindranath's conceptualisation of idle leisure and otium highlights and critiques the shackles and context of colonial capitalism and Western concepts of civilisation that are seen as selective. For the colonised to express the political, metaphorical, and sensory freedom inherent to the concept of otium, Rabindranath turns to the centrality of emotions like love and attachment to nature. Nature is idealised not only as a source of leisure, idle freedom, and enchantment but also embodies a way of life steeped in the rhythmic and the sensory, beyond the constrictions and machinery of Western civilisation. Drawing on the idea of ecospirituality, Bennett (2001) reads attachment to nature as contributing to a certain kind of "enchanted materialism", distinct and separate from its representation as something divine. As for Tagore's modernist enchantment, it is not nature's divinity but the ability to be open to the enchantment of the senses and clear an emotional space for reflection.

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218    Chakrabarty argues that for this purpose, Rabindranath uses European Romanticism and Hindu metaphysics. Chakrabarty, however, ignores the deep influence of the folk components of Bengali (oral) literary and musical traditions on Rabindranath, for example, the influence of the *bāul* (2000), 150–51. See also Supriya Chaudhuri's reading of rural Bengal in Tagore's stories, "Imagined Worlds: The Prose Fiction of Rabindranath Tagore" (2020), 132–38.

## 3.3 Love of Space and the Discourse of 'Lonely Leisure' in *Chinnapatrābalī*

As Rabindranath spent more time in rural Bengal, he appreciated the bareness of village life and the sublime beauty of the natural landscape.[219] Although he travelled frequently during these years (some of the letters are written from Calcutta and London), it is the days he spent in Shilaidaha, Shahjadpur, and Patishar, amongst other mofussil towns and villages, living on and off the Tagore family's estates (and in his houseboat on the river Padma) that form the impressive backdrop of his writings at this time. Coursing through these letters, "like a ceaseless heartbeat, is Tagore's deep love for the natural splendour of Bengal".[220] Rosinka Chaudhuri comments on the significance of this space's physical landscape, roads, rivers, and waterways. Such aspects of nature perceived as lively and wonderous are constitutive of what Jane Bennett calls an "enchanted materialism" (2001: 80–84, 92). For Rabindranath, while nature is animated, it is instead the deep connection or relationship with the human consciousness through which the immense workings of nature can be fully explored. Chaudhuri explicates this in Rabindranath's "domestic" relationship with nature. The poet's relationship with nature concurs with Yi-Fu Tuan's definition of the increasingly significant term *topophilia*. Topophilia, originating in the Greek *topos* – place, and *philia* – love of, entails a strong sense of attachment to a place. It encapsulates the prowess of emotions or "the affective bond between people and place or setting" (Tuan 1974: 4).

Expanding upon the intricacies of Rabindranath's relationship with nature in the letters of *Chinnapatrābalī*, Rosinka Chaudhuri suggests an intriguing correlation between the various poetics of time and space he alludes to, in music, song, and image in relation to the time of day, annual seasons, and daily phenomenon like moonlight, breeze, the sport of clouds.[221] In conjunction with a feeling of deep attachment (joyful as well as melancholic), these elements constitute a kind of *enchanted materialism* that is not divine but located in the emotional, the affective, and the sensory. For Tuan, joyful attachment and emotions of pleasure, contentment, and assurance are central to the experience of

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219    As he also noted the complex evils of village life in his stories. Chakrabarty (2000), 149–53.

220    See the blurb of Chaudhuri's English translation (2014).

221    See, for example, Rabindranath's understanding of European music as the "world of the day", "coming together like a huge, forceful tangle of harmony", and "our Indian music" as the "world of the night", "a pure, tender, serious, unmixed *rāginī*". Chaudhuri's translation (2014), 260.

topophilia. In these letters, the descriptions of beloved natural spaces, sound, light, and air that nourish him are constantly referred to as life forces. In this section of the chapter, I explore particularly the relation between these natural elements and the poet's solitary, leisurely state as expressed in the emotion of love/longing/attachment (*māyā*) for the space, a topophilia for the expansive rural landscape of Bengal. Resisting all kinds of work, immersing himself in the detailed beauty of the surroundings, breathing in the light, the space, and the image of the lush waterbodies is a recurrent reportage in these letters. At times, Rabindranath writes that this inability to be engaged in any work is something that he has no control over; it is enforced upon him by nature. For instance, he admits to citing "the breezes of India as an excuse for rebellion against undertaking [his] duties" (Tagore 2014: 348). His love for these natural elements and the immense space fuels his literary creativity; the space, in turn, overtakes the rhythm of his daily life. He repeatedly admits – that today, this beautiful day, is not to be wasted in pursuit of mundane work. The love for this lush riverine landscape becomes a major influence not only in his feelings and writings but also in his growing desire to be free, become unbound, and be left alone with his daydreaming.

Supriya Chaudhuri suggests that the intimate relationship that the young writer develops with this space is perhaps akin to the European equivalent of "intimate immensity" (2020: 134), theorised by Gaston Bachelard in his phenomenological classic, *The Poetics of Space* (1994 [1958]). Bachelard expands on the term "topophilia" as "felicitous space" or "the space we love" (1994: Introduction). While topophilia originated as a poetic expression coined by W. H. Auden, it has been expanded upon by Bachelard and, more recently, by Tuan. The concept has transformed, acquiring a quality of love specific to particular cultural identities that reverberate in the experience of space. Tuan's study is based on the sensual correlation between the environment and culture and is considered a milestone in human geography. Following his definition in the study of Rabindranath's relationship with nature allows us to unpack the "vivid and concrete as personal experience" (Tuan 1974: 4). Bachelard's poetics is based on phenomenology, focusing on the study of consciousness, human experience and poetic image. Of his brilliant explorations, the one that echoes in Rabindranath's letters is the experience of immensity in the poetic image and the consciousness of daydreaming. Daydreaming is a significant state in these letters, given expression to in the flow of words, long sentences in streams of thoughts and shifting modes of consciousness. In the following subsections, I read the conception of nature as attachment, in the concept of love, as conducive to otium in its sense of work and leisure, where both are intertwined experiences merged with the human experience of being in an exploration of aesthetic contemplation.

### 3.3.1  Topophilia and the Cultural Construction of Nature as the Experience of Intimate Belonging

*Chinnapatrābalī* is one of the earliest modern Bengali texts of topophilia. Identifying topophilia itself as a palimpsest, a 'text' written over other texts, Anna Suvorova asserts that the "memory of a place" and its "mental reconstruction" are equally significant as "empiric experiment and rational analysis" (Suvorova 2011: 2). This identification concurs with Rabindranath's topophilia for the rural landscape of Bengal. The love for the landscape runs famously in his body of writings, memorialised in his amorous lyric "*āmār sonār bāṃlā*" (my golden Bengal). Composed in 1905 (when the first Bengal partition was declared), the song foregrounds an emotion of affinity, a shared love for the land and critiques separatist nationalist politics; later, however, the song was recognised as the national anthem of Bangladesh after its creation in 1971. The twentieth century, or its better half, witnesses various nationalist conflicts, not only in South Asia but on a global scale. The question of appropriation of the love for a particular landscape and problematic patriotism recalling the superiority of the motherland or fatherland is difficult. Dipesh Chakrabarty has addressed this problem for Rabindranath through the idea of complex "imagination", while Sudipta Kaviraj reads Rabindranath's love for the country in a secular light as "critical" and cautious (Kaviraj 2014c: 148–53; Chakrabarty 2000: 149–79). Both Chakrabarty and Kaviraj find Rabindranath's writings on the Bengali countryside overflowing with sentimentality. Addressing the complexity of this unexplored 'sentimentality', I address this love for the rural landscape of Bengal through the lens of topophilia of both place (Bengal) and space (open, immense space).

The love and longing recorded in these letters are addressed to the two intermingling entities of place and space. While the natural landscape of Bengal does encompass the open and immense space of the sublime, close attention to the letters also reveals Rabindranath's wonder with the immensity of open, abstract space. This wonder for abstract space can be seen in his earlier letters sent from England, collected under the title *Ẏurop Prabāsīr Patra*. During this English sojourn, Rabindranath stayed with his elder brother, Satyendranath and his children, Indiradebi (the recipient of the letters in *Chinnapatrābalī*) and Surendranath, in their home in Brighton. In a letter probably written to his sister-in-law, Kadambari, he compares the mild breeze blowing in the afternoons in Torquay and the noontime winter breezes in Bengal. He describes the trees and flowers and sheep grazing in the English countryside with a sense of wonder. Writing of the seaside, remarkably, he comments on the effect of nature on his senses – the scent of the sea is described as "invigorating" (*svāstha-janak*) and the sound of the waves a repetitive roaring (*hu hu śabda*), identifying the setting as "an appropriate place for spending [his] time idling" (Tagore 1960: 193).

Rabindranath's love for open spaces has to be read within the difference between what Tuan distinguishes as space and place: "*Place is security, space is freedom*"; one denotes attachment, and the other expresses longing (Tuan 1977: 3). The longing for freedom is expressed in topophilia of space while the attachment to the Bengali landscape is to be read in the love for place, with its cultural identity. Topophilia of space can be read, for example, in his desire for light, comparing it to that expressed by Goethe, and his longing for expansive space: "Goethe had said before he died: *More light!* – if I had to express a wish at a time like that, I would say: *More light and more space!*" (Tagore 2014: 279). Topophilia of space contributes to topophilia of place and *vice-versa*, as each requires the other to be defined. The immersive and idle state Rabindranath writes of is encapsulated in the simultaneous experience of space-time – space as freedom and time as ease.[222] Referring to this experience of freedom and ease in the open, natural landscape as contributing to Rabindranath's thought and literary creativity, Abul Ahsan Choudhury uses the term "*āsˡmānˡdāri*" or inhabiting the skies, poetically entailing a spirited and emotional/philosophical engagement, in juxtaposition to the mundane work of *jamidāri*, i.e., managing estates (Choudhury 2014: 30). Simultaneously, topophilia, especially directed towards the landscape of rural Bengal as intimate is constructed as 'golden Bengal', contrasted with the disdain for the urban hustle of cities. In a letter sent from London, he scorns the English rain, contrasting it with his exuberant love for monsoon rainstorms in Bengal:

> When it rains in our land, one can hear the forceful rainfall, see the clouds, the thunder, the lightning and the storm – there is a feeling of wondrous joy in it. It is not the same here. It rains in a monotonous pitter-patter of suppressed, continuous footsteps – a feeling of dampness all around. […] At times, one gets to hear that there was lightning yesterday, but apparently, the lightning has no voice of its own. Perhaps one needs a microphone to appreciate the sound of lightning here.[223] The sun is a subject of rumour. If it does show its face on a fateful morning, I remind myself that it will not last.

This experience is then contrasted with the memory of his love for natural elements in Bengal, and the comparison reveals how space and place affect his

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222   *Ibid.*, 118. See Feld, "Places Sensed, Senses Placed" (2014).

223   Lightning is almost always paired with a powerful sound of thunder in Bengal. The missing sound might appear a strange thing to emphasise for those unfamiliar with the thunder-lightning experience. This difference in perceptions of a local and a visitor is explained by Tuan in cultural attitudes to space and environment in *Topophilia* (1974), 63.

creative abilities, directing towards the construction of an intimate place through intimate experience:

> I feel my intellect and mental powers have become soft in this gloomy place. No writing seems possible – in fact, I cannot even write a proper letter. Whenever I think of writing letters or anything else, somehow, I start yawning. The memory of sunlight and moonlight of our land comes to me, as if in a beautiful dream. I have especially understood the significant value of the beautiful morning evenings and moonlit nights of our land after coming here.[224] (1960: 38)

Rabindranath's love for the landscape in Bengal is decidedly cultural-environment-specific, echoing Tuan's parsing of topophilia. In *Chinnapatrābalī*, he explores this love for the landscape of rural Bengal as one of security and attachment, of intimate belonging and home, of love, spatially described with the experiential in the sense of dwelling and resting, in otium, and at ease. This intimate place is constructed through the recognition of emotions for the space, for example, in the following letter written from London on 3ʳᵈ October 1890:

> When I come to this country, I really, truly think of that wretched, unfortunate Bhāratbhūmi of ours as my mother. She does not have the power this country has, but she loves us. All the love I have felt since I was born, all the happiness, is in her lap. The attractive spit and polish of this place will never be able to lure me – it'll be such a relief to return to her. (Tagore 2014: 60)

Sudipta Kaviraj compares the personification of nature, land, and country in Tagore's thought to that in Bankim's, bringing a sharp difference in them. Whereas the motherland imagined by Bankim in his song '*Bande Mātaram*' takes the form of a Hindu deity, the image of the motherland in Tagore is read as a critically conceived, "secular" one (Kaviraj 2014c: 148–52). However, for Tagore, the creation of the secular image of the motherland towards a conscious critique of aggressive nationalism is a much later conceptualisation after the hostile ultra-nationalism in Europe during the world wars. In the letters of *Chinnapatrābalī*, written much earlier, nature in Bengal is indeed an affectionate mother, full of the emotions of love and care, joy, and melancholy. He writes that as he strolled around the riverbank, he perceived nature as looking at him "with a deep, silent and tender melancholy of a mother looking at a sick child" (Tagore 2014: 101). Elsewhere he describes the day as lazy, lying around and turning, with an idleness that penetrates one's mind, rocking with one's

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[224] From *Ẏūrop Prabāsīr Patra* (1960 [1881].) All quotations from this collection are my translations.

thoughts, humming a tune and drooping one's eyes with sleepiness, "like a mother who sits with her son and rocks him on her lap with her back to the afternoon sun in the winter" (Tagore 2014: 63). This intimate bond with nature, akin to that of a mother and child is a recurrent theme in the representation of Bengali landscape.

Topophilia of place indeed emerges as a palimpsest through reconstructions of this fascination for rural Bengal. After Rabindranath, the novelist Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay and poets Kazi Nazrul Islam and Jibanananda Das have been noted for their foregrounding of nature in Bengali literature. Nazrul famously rendered this love in his songs. Like Rabindranath, much of Bibhutibhushan's love for rural Bengal emerges from his personal experiences living and working in mofussil towns. His novel *Pather Pãcāli* (Song of the road, 1929) came to represent this love for place in a way that became immortalised later in Satyajit Ray's 1955 cinematic adaptation, particularly in a single famous shot of a train, shooting through an autumn landscape with floating clouds in a vast sky and fields of *kāś* (reed). This attachment to and longing for open space and natural landscape is intricately linked to the intimate experience of idle leisure and otium for Rabindranath; it continued to inform his philosophy and literary creativity. In contrast, the hustle-and-bustle of life in the city – be it Calcutta or London – is expressed as exhaustive. In fact, in the previously mentioned letter written from London, he comments on the brevity of daylight and the madness of activity in London: "It is as if the days here arrive at 10 am to work in offices and take their leave at 4 pm. Forget about having some leisure after work – here, there is simply no leisure to work" (Tagore 1960: 38). Even early in his adolescence, leisure or the space, the time, and the opportunity of idleness are perceived not in their difference from but in their intricate connection with work. Later, in his essay on the philosophy of leisure, he uses the metaphor of sunlight and fruit and the significance of "surrendering" fruit to "caresses of sun-lit leisure" (Tagore 1996: 617). Much earlier, this understanding of the kind of work he believed was meant for him, i.e., the work of poetry and its entanglement with lonely leisure, achieved ripeness and creative productivity in the letters of *Chinnapatrābalī*.

## 3.3.2  The Work of Poetry as Idle, Sensual, and Lonely Leisure

The letters in *Chinnapatrābalī* express Rabindranath's reflections on work in two significant ways. There is mundane work like managing the estate that disturbs the delightful taste (*rasa*) of leisure, and this has to be resisted so that he can enjoy and immerse in leisureliness. On the other hand, there is the great work – the work of poetry, the work of contemplation, and the work of feeling,

for which, topophilia is necessary and conducive as is idle freedom and the very same leisureliness. In this kind of work (the work of the poet as a feeling-thinking person), the distinction between work and leisure does not exist, and Rabindranath can be seen to draw resources from topophiliac leisure as a lifeforce for the work of poetic composition and literary creativity. In a letter written on 6th April 1895 from Calcutta, he explains to Indira "a type of work which is composed in part in leisure, which sucks out the juice of leisure in vast quantities, or it cannot grow" (Tagore 2014: 348). In the following lines, he asserts that his "education and personality" make him feel that he was born for that kind of work (the great work of a poet). The letter ends with a confident assertion of the greatness of this work: "great work, by its very nature, demands, like a great tree, a lot of time and space – that is exactly what I call leisure (*ālasya*), renunciation (*bairāgya*), meditation (*dhyān*)" (Tagore 2014: 349; 1993: 302). In this translation, Chaudhuri uses the word leisure for *ālasya* (usually translated as laziness), signifying a conceptual entanglement perceived in its mood and affective rendering beyond the semantic difference. He extracts this leisureliness from his obsessive love for his environment, light and space, air and sky. The natural landscape of Bengal attracts him dearly, offering a sense of security in metaphors of motherhood and the intimate relationship.[225] At the same time, his love for this wild and free nature overtakes him; the great work of poetry is then described as not actively *doing* poetry but in *being* and *feeling* it. The letter mentioned above describes the idleness induced in him by the natural surroundings and his inability to do anything as he simply immerses himself:

> Motion, by itself, has an attraction of its own – the shore on both sides continuously keeps sliding away from in front of one's eyes; that's why I've been looking the whole day, I can't turn my eyes from it – I don't feel like reading, don't feel like writing, there's no work, I just sit silently here and look. It's not for the variety of scenery alone – there may be nothing on either side, only the bare line of the treeless shore – it's the continuity of motion that's the chief attraction. I'm not putting in any effort or work, yet the tireless motion outside envelops the mind in quite a slow, pleasant sort of way. It's the sort of feeling when the mind has no work, but no rest either. It's like sitting on a chair and absent-mindedly swinging one's legs. (Tagore 2014: 69)

Scholars in the West have read contemplative idleness as "aesthetic contemplation" after Friedrich Schiller's discourse of aesthetic education, but also later in the context of English romantics. The idleness associated with this aesthetic contemplation for Rabindranath is immersed in the sensory and the sensual,

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225    Tuan locates the parent as the child's "primary place" (1977), 138–39.

tactile experiences of the natural material. Reading this attachment to the natural elements as sensory perceptions of vision and sound, I propose that the affective subjectivity of such sensual experiences is inextricably entangled with the experience of fulfilling idleness and lonely leisure – what he writes of in Bangla as "*paripūrṇa ālasya-ras*" (fulfilling mood of idleness) and "*nirjan abasar*" (lonely leisure) (Tagore 1993: 279): "All around it's very quiet in the sun, the mind becomes very capricious – I pick up a book, but don't feel like reading. A kind of grassy smell emanates from the riverbank where the boat is tied, and from time to time, you feel the hot, steamy breath of the earth upon your body" (Tagore 2014: 83). He describes the paddy fields and their movement in the breeze, the ducks and the boats on the water, the gathering of people to board a ferry at a bank nearby, and his own engagement with it all – "I like to watch this coming and going of boats over a length of time" (ibid., 84). Seeing or vision is as much of a poetic activity as writing poetry, and the play of light is the constant inspiration for the poet. *Ceẏe thākā*, or to 'keep looking', is an (in)activity that appears repeatedly. Floating on the Ichāmatī river on his way to Calcutta, Tagore writes of the lovely, bright day: "you couldn't turn your eyes away from the scene on either side of the small river" (2014: 247). Consuming this light and space becomes indispensable for him, as shown in the phrases "I had drunk the first sunlight on this earth with my entire body" and "my hunger wants to spread its flame everywhere" (2014: 204). Visuality is strongly linked to the *intimate experience* of topophilia and the *rare experience* of wonder (Fisher 1998: 124–33; Tuan 1977: 161–62). Gazing and looking on, consuming the visuality of nature with wonder and love, Rabindranath's attachment to this landscape is also kinesthetic. The consciousness of his sensory experiences is heightened in his description of their intoxication with nature's materials. While the materialism of nature is alive and animate, the perception of place itself is a pause (Tuan 1977: 138), and this restful dwelling becomes a source for his lifework, poetry.

For the leisurely work of poetry, the light of the sky becomes a necessary, sensual intoxication, and its expanse is described in the Urdu word *sāqi*, or 'wine-bearer' in this letter written on a July day of 1895 in Shahjadpur:

> [...] the ceiling is quite a bit above my head and because there are two open verandas on either side, immense quantities of light from the sky keep raining down upon my head – and it's a very sweet feeling to write and read and sit and think in that light. [...] Every part of my room and my mind – my work and my leisure – is happy and satisfied, full of flavour and life, new and beautiful. [...] How I love the sky and the light with all my heart! The sky is my *sāqi* [wine bearer] holding an upturned clear-blue glass cup; the golden light enters my bloodstream like wine and makes me coeval with the gods. (Tagore 2014: 359)

Like seeing, the appreciation of sounds and immersion in rhythms are other obsessions in the letters. This is a period of his life rich in music; he composed many songs in his melancholic solitude with nature as he immersed himself in the sonatas of Beethoven and Chopin.

Poetic verses, lines from songs, and lyrical phrases emerge in his thoughts as naturally as the flow of water. In a letter written from Shilaidaha in April 1892, he writes to Indira of his inability to work, the many loose thoughts in his mind and of "this beautiful morning": "[a] lovely breeze has been blowing since morning. I'm not feeling like doing any work. [...] I remembered that song of yours, '*Pāẏeriẏā bāje jhanaka jhanaka jhana jhana – nana nana nana* '" (Tagore 2014: 110). The line is a description of the sonorous *jhana-nana* rhythm made by anklets. He writes, "in the sweet breeze in the middle of the river, my head resonates with that sort of *jhana-nana* sound of anklets, but only from this side or that – hidden – not letting itself be caught or seen. So I've been sitting quietly" (2014: 110). While songs and melodies keep him from his work, he is also strongly drawn to the sounds made by man and nature in unison. He describes such sounds and their effect on him with great adoration: "The few monotonous *ṭhak-ṭhak ṭhuk-ṭhāk* sounds of this place, the cries of the naked children playing, the high-pitched tender songs of the cowherds, the *jhup-jhāp* noise of the oars, the sharp, sad sound of the oil mill hitting the *nikhād* note, all of these sounds of work come together and are in a sort of proportion to the bird call and the sound of the leaves" (2014: 201). He wreathes these sounds together, perceiving them as a part of a long "dreamlike sonata full of peace and enveloped in pity, somewhat in the mould of Chopin, but composed and bound to a very vast, spread-out, yet restrained metre" (ibid.). In the very next letter, he writes of composing one of his songs, "*baṛa bedanār mata*" (like a profound pain), saying that its tune might not be "appropriate for a performative drawing-room gathering. [...] This sort of song should be sung in seclusion" (2014: 202).[226] While his time in the secluded natural landscape is a perfect opportunity for him to compose songs, in a letter written from Calcutta, he questions the connection between such enchantment of feeling and space, between the outdoors and the inner space of the mind. The letter questions if "this amazing realm of melody and feeling – is this only in the mind? Is there nothing like it anywhere else? Is it just a mirage?" (2014: 351). Such phenomenological observations and rhetorical questions refer to the modernist split in subjectivity that Kaviraj attributes to Rabindranath in his dual use of the self-pronoun, *āmi*.

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226    "*baṛa bedanār mata bejecho tumi he āmār prāṇe/man ye kyāman kare mane-mane tāhā manʰi jāne*" (Like a profound hurt, you have played in my heart/what my heart feels, my heart alone knows).

### 3.3.3 Contemplation and the Consciousness of Immensity: The Politics of Love

While enchantment makes him feel a loss of his immediate, intimate consciousness in his musings on poetry and aesthetic contemplation, Rabindranath seeks out a transformation within the self. Through the sensory perceptions of seeing and hearing, transforming to an alternate, empathetic self, his aesthetic contemplation gradually fills the spectrum of idle leisure and pleasure of poetry to that of awareness of his social consciousness.[227] In a beautiful letter written from Shilaidaha, he describes the blazing of sun, the shimmer of the water and the sounds of splashing boats, and a cool winter breeze while he strives for his immediate identity:

> If I were alone, I would be lying, engrossed, on a long armchair near the window – I would daydream, I would be able to hear the deep notes of the Bilāwalī rāginī that is within this sky so bright with sunlight, and I would feel my own existence dissolved, spread across, rocked in the waves of this sunlight, water and breeze – I would experience myself lying down on a bed of unfragmented, endless time – I would feel myself flow in the chatter and gurgle of the ever-rippling waterfall of life that wells up in the forms of grass and shrubs, leaves and creepers, birds and animals throughout this world – my own personal envelope of personhood would dissolve in this śaraṭ sunshine and become a part of this clear sky and I would be beyond time and place. (Tagore 2014: 383–84)

The letter ends abruptly, admitting, that in the current circumstances, it is difficult to immerse in such thoughts as he is someone's husband, someone else's father, a Mr so and so. The crucial phrase that reflects on the division of the self, "my own personal envelope of personhood" is written in the Bangla original as "*āmār nijer byaktigata nijatva-ābaraṇ*", reminiscent of the phrase "*āmār atīta se āmi*" (I which is beyond this-I) that Kaviraj mentions in his study of Rabindranath's concept of subjectivity (2014d: 215). Regarding the two selves, Rabindranath's philosophy is to lose the narrow, imprisoning self "to find that larger, fuller, more fulfilling self" (ibid.). Although in the above-quoted letter, the poet loses his larger self to the narrower self, there are many, in fact, too many instances where he attempts to reach for the larger self, losing the imprisoning, immediate self. In these letters, one of the most remarkable ways of doing that is to indulge in daydreaming. In the following section, I explore

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227    Adelman develops a reading of "aesthetic contemplation" in Coleridge as that of "moral consciousness" (2011), 130. Rabindranath's awareness of consciousness is not in relation to divinity but to subjectivity and sociality.

this experience of daydreaming to locate how the experience of idle leisure, topophilia and aesthetic contemplation eventually contribute to Rabindranath's spectrum of literary and political thought, emerging in the conceptual transformation of abstract love to political love.

"Daydreaming", writes Gaston Bachelard, "undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates grandeur. This contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world" (1994: 183). In case the outside world is already an "elsewhere", in natural surroundings, it is immense (Bachelard 1994: 184). The immensity of this natural grandeur is referred to again and again in these letters, in expressions of wonder and enthrallment. Rabindranath writes that he wants to write about the same thing every day – the afternoons, the light, the sky, and the air, because he cannot "surmount the attraction they hold" for him, turning the rare experience into one of allure and enchantment. He is keenly aware that the grandeur he visualizes may appear quite "ordinary" to anyone else. The effect of visual nature on him is depicted as insurmountable: "I cannot describe what the heart feels at this sight" (Tagore 2014: 135). This sense of wonder and bafflement is almost always accompanied by daydreaming, fits of imagination, and contemplation. The acts of consciousness he experiences as recorded in these letters vary from imagining, creating, and daydreaming. Curious about these various acts of consciousness, he asks why we "always compare what is beautiful to a dream?" He tries to answer the question: "perhaps in order to express the sheer extraordinariness of it, that is, as if it doesn't bear the slightest trace of the weight of reality" (Tagore 2014: 227). Daydreaming, for Bachelard, "is original contemplation" (1994: 184). Since "immense" is not an object, the experience of immensity is then directed towards "imagining consciousness", and works of art become "by-products" of this experience. The "real product" we are left with is the "consciousness of enlargement" (ibid.).

Immensity is a phenomenon already present in the experiencing person that flourishes most in solitude. This solitude of contemplation is what Rabindranath had found (or it had found him) in these years in the rural landscape, in his houseboat on the river. The immensity of these spaces experienced in such solitude does not leave the person once the experience is over. It grows as an expansion, an enlargement of the universe within the person. In a letter from Calcutta, he unravels the significance of this enlargement: "Unless one sits down alone under a free sky or on the shore of a vast ocean, one cannot experience one's own hidden inner mystery properly" (2014: 182–83). The immensity of the 'elsewhere', either under a free sky or on the shore of a vast ocean, is inextricably tied to the inner mystery of the self. Writing of the

vocabulary of the immense, Bachelard comments that "all the words marked for grandeur by a poet are keys to the universe, to the dual universe of the Cosmos and the depths of the human spirit" (1994: 198). For Rabindranath, such vocabulary is displayed in his repeated call for freedom in *śūṇya* (empty), *asīm* (infinite), *aśeṣ* (endless). Referring to Rilke's letters, Bachelard writes of the "immensity" through which the two kinds of space – the "space of immensity" and "world space" blend and that when "human solitude deepens, the two immensities touch and become identical" (1994: 203). This dual immensity is the poetic space, the phenomenological 'elsewhere', the search which continues to follow Rabindranath throughout his literary life and it is to this elsewhere that he directs his readers, celebrated in the flight of the *Balākā* (flying geese), "*hethā naẏ hethā naẏ, anya kothāo, anya konokhāne*" (not here, not here, elsewhere, somewhere else).[228] At the same time, the materiality of natural, universal space is used to present an immensity of space, large enough for humans to heal in the verses he wrote in Nuremberg (1926) in an effort to lift the defeated spirit in the aftermath of the Great War: "*āmār mukti ālaẏ ālaẏ, ei ākāśe, āmār mukti dhulāẏ dhulāẏ, ghāse ghāse*" (my liberation is in light, in this sky, my liberation lays in dust, amongst the grass).[229] An internalisation of the immensity of human consciousness vis-à-vis open, natural spaces gradually reveals the relevance of nature and enchantment for the poet and his humanitarian politics.

The emotion of love for the natural, rural landscape of Bengal is a love of space that evolves through sensory enchantments and freedom from civilisational modernity. This love is seen in its celebratory splendour in the lyrics of "*āmār sonār bāṃlā*" (my golden Bengal):

> *My golden Bengal, I love you*
> *Forever your skies, your breezes play the flute in my heart*
> *In Phālgun, o mother, the scent of your mango forests drives me insane*
> *In Agrahāẏaṇ, what have I seen in your lush fields, but the sweetest smile!*
> *What elegance, what shadows, what affection and enchantment!*
> *What shade have you spread under the Banyan, along the river banks!*

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228  *Balākā*, flying geese or cranes, is a significant work of poetry by Rabindranath, published in 1916.

229  There is much to be discussed on the perception of Tagore in Germany. Here, however, the reference is to the post-First World War "spiritual crisis" in Germany, where he was welcomed as a "saviour", "a Christ-like figure who would give moral guidance and spiritual succour to a demoralized and confused people". See Martin Kämpchen (1991), 17. This perception, of course, was challenged by many factions within the German press. Ibid., 18–19. See also, Manjapra (2014), 2, 12, 98–100.

*Mother, your words sound like nectar to my ears*
*When melancholy comes over your face, I flow in tears.*[230]

In her work on political emotions, Martha Nussbaum reads the love expressed by Rabindranath in the lyrics of 'golden Bengal' as "Tagore's capacious humanism, his aspiration toward an inclusive 'religion of humanity'" (2013: 2). In Nussbaum's reading of the song as inspiring "love", she finds that the politics of love that Rabindranath indulges in is personal rather than patriotic (2013: 243). For her, the song gives voice to the "image of the speaker – a representative inhabitant of Bengal", the *bāul* or wandering minstrels, who stand on the opposite end of society from the English-educated *bhadralok* (Nussbaum 2013: 13).

In this intriguing turn of literary art, Rabindranath came close to becoming a writer from the so-called high culture of the city whose songs and poems would be sung by minstrels and villagers. Although such a claim borders on exaggeration, as Rabindranath remains the poet and writer of the educated *bhadralok*, nevertheless, his attempts to decentralise *bhadralok* culture in his writings make him a revolutionary in many ways. Most significantly, free of the contours of social standing, caste, gender and sexuality, this inclusive identity of a feeling human spirit in the figure of his ideal Bengali reader is seen to have a long-lasting impact on his ideas of love for universal humanity, for the righteous duty (*dharma*) of humanity and his philosophy of education. Although his final essay, "Sabhyatār Saṅkaṭ" ("Crisis in Civilisation" 1996 b [1941]) on the eve of the Second World War reveals a deep sorrow for human predilection in "crumbling ruins", Rabindranath refused to lose "faith in Man" (1996 b: 726). Enchantment with life and the literary flourished through his career and legacies – as the most beloved poet/writer in Bengal, a humanist and philosopher, and a celebrated educator. In the following section, I turn to this influence of enchantment, the relationship between freedom and love for nature, in his principles of pedagogy for generations of Bengali children.

## 3.4 Tagore's Pedagogical Project: Making Space for Enchantment, Teaching Love

Rabindranath's idea of freedom, which Martha Nussbaum refers to as "critical freedom" (2013: 210), is based on the individual subject's ability to reach

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230  *Phālgun* and *Agrahāẏaṇ* are months in the Bengali calendar. *Phālgun* roughly overlaps with mid-February to mid-March and *Agrahāẏaṇ* with mid-November to mid-December. My translation.

beyond social and formal constructs and be able to exercise freely in individual emotions. With subjectivity, the immediate question that arises is of intimate relationships; for an individual to be able to love another individual is central to this idea of humanity. Simultaneously, the artistic or creative freedom of the individual is in "expressing the infinite".[231] While delivering the Hibbert Lectures in Oxford in 1930, Rabindranath recalls the time he spent in these parts of rural Bengal and remembers feeling that he had found his *religion/"dharma"* at last, "the religion of man", "in which the infinite became defined in humanity"; it required of him "love and cooperation" (1961 [1931]: 96). The lectures were later published under the title *The Religion of Man* (1931). He recalls how he stumbled upon this realisation "in an idle moment on a day in July, when morning clouds thickened on the eastern horizon and a caressing shadow lay on the tremulous bamboo branches, while an excited group of village boys was noisily dragging from the bank an old fishing-boat" (Tagore 1961: 98). The need for idle freedom becomes indispensable to his notions of not only artistic creativity but also for the education of humans in their duty or responsibility (*dharma*, inadequately translated as 'religion').[232] Around the same time, in the previously mentioned lecture, "The Philosophy of Leisure" (1996a [1929]), Tagore developed the idea of idle freedom and asserted that the most significant role of leisure is to sustain "the deeper life process of our being" as opposed to the superfluous "spirit of progress" which occupies our mind (1996a: 618).

The same year he delivered the Hibbert Lectures, Rabindranath published two Bengali primers for children, titled *Sahaj Pāṭh* (Easy reading/lessons), in two volumes. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay writes of Rabindranath's primer as a rebellious

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231    "And freedom in its process of creation gives rise to perpetual suggestions of something further than its obvious purpose. For freedom is for expressing the infinite; it imposes limits in its works, not to keep them in permanence but to break them over and over again, and to reveal the endless in unending surprises". See Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (1961 [1931]), 55–56.

232    *Dharma* is often written as 'religion', like Tagore does. However, the two are not equivalents in their usage. As has often been noted, the concept of the Indic *dharma* is broader, encompassing not only "law" or "ordinance" but also "justice" and "duty". See entry in Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, 1899. See https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/csl-apidev/servepdf.php?dict=MW&page=510 accessed on 15th June 2021. While *dharma* retains a strong adherence to the religious, in Tagore's formulations, it encompasses beyond particular religion, a more immense, universal humanity – the *religion*, *responsibility* or *duty* of man (as the title of the lecture suggests).

attempt to offer the child reader this freedom.[233] Previously, the commonly read children's Bengali primer was Vidyasagar's *Barṇa Paricaẏ* (Introduction to letters/alphabets, 1855). In *Barṇa Paricaẏ*, education is imparted to children through the dialectic of the representative Gopal and Rakhal, respectively, the good boy and the bad boy. "Gopal is a conscientious boy; he does whatever his parents tell him to do […] he does not play in the streets while going to school […] never neglects his studies […] All children ought to be like Gopal"; while "Rakhal is not inclined to be as responsible as Gopal. He does what he likes; […] plays on the streets on his way to take lessons. Rakhal is very inattentive when it comes to learning". The comparison ends in warning: "if one becomes like him [Rakhal] one will never learn how to read or write".[234] Before Rabindranath, other educators also came up with primers devoid of this disciplinary dialectic of good and bad – for instance, Jogindranath Sarkar's *Hāsikhuśi* (Gaiety/Jollity, 1897). The liveliness of *Hāsikhuśi* is due to its stark difference from previous primers like *Barṇa Paricaẏ* and *Śiśuśikṣā*, in tone ("*svar*"), in the composition of melody ("*surˡsaṃyojanā*") in sentences that created rhythm ("*chanda*"). But this sensory appeal, which was a mere tendency in *Hāsikhuśi,* became the norm in Rabindranath's *Sahaj Pāṭh* (Bandyopadhyay 2005: 90).

In Volume I of *Sahaj Pāṭh*, after a brief introduction to Bengali alphabets in rhyming couplets where the alphabets themselves have subjectivity, the first prose sentences are "Ram picks flowers in the forest. He has a red shawl around him and a basket in his hands" (Tagore 1930: 23). In the original Bangla, these sentences flow lucidly in a sonorous harmony: *Rām bane phul pāṛe. Gāẏe tār lāl śāl. Hāte tār sāji.* The narrator of the first volume leaps with rhymes and sounds through verses and prose that introduce her/him not only to the social world but the individual world of imagination, where (s)he dares to question, "Why does father go to the office and not to new lands?" (1930: 50). The child narrator has the authority to place his/her subjectivity to the objects around him/her, where (s)he imagines the light of the lamp, sitting down idly and wondering in an enchanted curiosity, "if only I could fly", and suddenly, growing wings one day, escapes the room in the form of a firefly! (1930: 52) In the second volume, in a beautifully absurd dream poem, the narrator dreams that the city of Calcutta cannot be contained anymore. In the midst of the dissolving chaos of crumbling urbanity, the child-dreamer's school is seen as running away. Grammar and math books run amuck as the maps on the wall flutter like the wings

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233   See Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, *The Gopal-Rakhal Dialectic* (2015). See also, Bandyopadhyay's "Cokh o Anubhab kare yena Chandabidyut·" in *Ābār Śiśuśikśā* (2005), 88–126, especially, 100–2.

234   From Vidyasagar's *Barṇa Paricaẏ*, quoted in Bandyopadhyay (2015), 1.

of a bird; the bell tolls and doesn't stop at anyone's command (1930: 39). Rabindranath liberated children's education from the disciplinary into a playful space where stimulating emotions of wonder, allure, and enchantment can be organically experienced. He also famously reinvented the language of children's rhymes (in Bengali, *chaṛā*), which contributed towards learning as an activity beyond the sombre disciplinary spaces of the study and the classroom, returning it to its intimate, sensory, and rhythmic orality and aurality. He recalls his poetic deliberation of verses from Vidyasagar's primer, "*jal paṛe*", "*jal paṛiteche*" (the falling of water/rain) and "*pātā naṛiteche*" (the trembling of leaves) as the simpler, melodious "*jal paṛe, pātā naṛe*" (it rains and the leaves tremble) – his first act of poetry[235]: "When I now remember the joy I felt that day, I realise the significance of harmony in poetry. Because there is harmony, the utterance remains incomplete even after it has been articulated – when its message has been conveyed, its music does not end; the harmony indulges in a play with the ear and the mind" (Tagore 1912: 3).

The four volumes of *Sahaj Pāṭh* are invested in imparting the child reader not with an introduction to learning alone but to initiate her//him to see, hear, smell, feel and acquire a taste for imagination and wonder that allows her/him to enjoy life and literature through cognition with sensory semantics (Noor 2021: 291–93, 307–13). The language in these primers is colloquial and easy-flowing, with a careful ear for richness and rhythm. The books were delightfully illustrated by eminent artist Nandalal Bose. Flipping through the pages of these primers is an absolute treat for a growing child. Quoting Buddhadeb Basu on *Sahaj Pāṭh* and its role in inculcating "a taste for literature", Bandyopadhyay writes that through the child narrator, the child reader has been given the power to imagine, respond, and sympathise (2015: 302). Immediately problematising this imaginative freedom of the child (and, to some extent, Rabindranath's pedagogy), he asks, "Does the child narrator really not have a specified social identity or standing?" (Bandyopadhyay 2015: 302). Like the child narrator of *Sahaj Pāṭh*, the mature narrator of *Chinnapatrābalī*, too, is an individual who learns in leisure. While fulfilling leisure and critical freedom of the mind are seen as absolute necessities for both imagining the world and learning about it for a child, as well as for the poetic exercises of a poet, such creative imagination and leisurely dalliance are not naturally accessible. The cooks, cleaners, and caretakers of the Tagore estate houses, the farmers, boatmen, and fishermen in *Chinnapatrābalī* are observed to be constantly working,

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[235] *Jīban'smṛti* (1959 [1912]), 3. See also Bandyopadhyay's reference to this poetic act in changing the descriptive verbs into an endless creative process infused with imagination and emotion (2005), 90–91.

as are the gardeners, the maids, and the milkmen in *Sahaj Pāṭh*. While the child narrator of *Sahaj Pāṭh* is deemed to come to terms with his upper/middle social strata, as growing up in society will teach him, he is nonetheless armed with the power of imagination and the emotion of sympathy. Through the development of these faculties, *a space is cleared* (to borrow the term from Chaudhuri and Tagore) for complex personal and political emotions like enchantment and love so that they may lead the growing reader to understand, respect and abide by the 'religion of man'.

Rabindranath's pedagogic project officially started with the establishment of his school, 'Pāṭhabhavan' (in 1901), and college (est. 1921, later turned into a central university after India's independence) named 'Biṣvabhāratī'. Biṣvabhāratī is often translated as India's communion with the world (but also, arguably, an Indian perspective of the entire world, to acquire a knowledge of the world entire). The institute complex, spilling over the local area, is called 'Śāntiniketan', the abode of peace and tranquillity. Located around a hundred and sixty kilometres from Calcutta, the pedagogical project directs education away from classrooms and formal and utilitarian education systems as imitated by colonial education systems. The agenda was to re-orient learning towards a process that was organic and close to nature, leading to the flourishing of imaginative capacities in students, an education connected to "life's totality" (O'Connell 2020: 294–306). Legendarily, the classes took place under the shade of large mango and banyan trees. The institutes of learning allowed students to freely choose their interests beyond the demarcation of fields and disciplines of study (Sen 2021: 93). In locating his school and college in the district of Birbhum, Rabindranath brought his passion for folk music through his fascination for the *bāul*s together with his pedagogical philosophy. He emphasises the aspects of freedom and love as acts of divinity in the religion (the way of life) of the *bāul* sect, "who have no images, temples, scriptures, or ceremonials, who declare in their songs the divinity of Man, and express for him an intense feeling of love" (Tagore 1961: 19). Unlike ascetics, the *bāul* do not believe in renunciation but in spiritual and joyful attachment.[236] Tracing Rabindranath's fascination and inspiration from the footloose, free, and wandering spirit of the *bāul*s in his pedagogy and poetry, Nussbaum explicates the hopes of the poet-philosopher of teaching the emotion of love to students of not only the school and university, but of life: "society must preserve at its heart, and continually have access to, a kind of fresh joy and delight in the world, in nature, and in people, preferring love and joy to the dead lives of material acquisition" (2013: 93). This

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[236]    See Kshiti Mohan Sen's appendix cited by Rabindranath in *The Religion of Man*, entitled "The Baül Singers of Bengal" (1961), 211.

enchantment with the *bāul*, too, is a cultivation of his days spent in nature, engendering a leisurely flavour in his writings, laced with love for humanity, and freedom from the constraints of civilisational modernity (Choudhury 2014: 30–31, 74).

## 3.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter explored the emotional aspects closely linked to otium and the leisurely that inform Rabindranath Tagore's literary creativity and ideas of humanism. While the emotions explored here are seen in their optimistic attitudes, the texts addressed also reveal a broad emotional intentionality, inviting readers to share a feeling of intimacy with the writer. These texts – often referred to as 'personal prose' constitute the genres of letters, memoirs, essays, and lectures. While Rabindranath's works have drawn immense attention from scholars, few studies have paid attention to these genres and the intimate platform they create for the study of his emotional explorations that support his thoughts on literary creativity and humanism. The most significant emotion that runs through his personal prose is that of love for the abstract, the quotidian, and the universal. The various connotations of love are seen as complex, and I have addressed them through the lenses of enchantment, attachment/longing, and topophilia. While enchantment is read as an experience he refers to in registers of wonderment (*bismaẏ*) and attachment (*māẏā*), it influences his thoughts on not only the grand and the quotidian experiences of life but also his fashioning of language as captivating and alluring. Addressing topophilia allows us to trace his love for nature in both a concrete construction of place as intimate belonging and in the abstract experience of open space as immensity. While topophilia of place, the sublime landscape of Bengal, is seen to inform his ideas on leisure, topophilia of space allows his thoughts on freedom to be developed into the phenomenology of immensity towards a political love for humanity.

The idea of fulfilling leisure (*paripūrṇa ālasya ras*) has been addressed through these studies of enchantment and topophilia, where love for nature and the wonder that it instils in the poet are projected on literary creativity for Rabindranath. Otium in nature is read as an experience that both allows him to work and distracts him from it, blurring the lines between work and leisure as distinct. The work here is the great work of poetry; and can only be composed in idle freedom, lonely leisure, and intimate immensity of spatial immersion. In the letters studied here, enchanted materialism of nature and the natural experience is contrasted with the civilised drudgery of urban modernity. Freedom, attained in this immensity of space, is also freedom of thought, in which the

literary and life philosophy of the wandering singers, the *bāul* sect of Bengal deeply influences the poet. These influences of enchantment, love of nature, and the leisurely, free spirit of the *bāul* can then be seen as influencing Rabindranath's pedagogical project, explored briefly in the last section of the chapter. Critiquing the colonial education system, Rabindranath argued for a way of approaching pedagogy that does not preach efficiency and utilitarian values but remains connected to emotions to nourish the human in the student. For this to happen, learning, for him, is connected to nature, idle leisure, and love. Fulfilling, idle leisure reverberates as a significant concept in his literary thought and ideas of universal humanity in the notion of political love.

This chapter argues that certain ideas of leisureliness are reinstated into modern Bengali literary tradition through the concepts of enchantment and topophilia in Rabindranath's verses and personal prose. The necessity of leisure entangled with critical freedom and a disarming love for the landscape of rural Bengal is embraced in Bengali literary tradition as the necessary condition for artistic temperaments to flourish and literary attempts to succeed. In successfully imbibing his writings with a taste for freedom and leisureliness, Rabindranath Tagore's lifework has instilled enchantment in the hearts and minds of generations of Bengali readers to come. Writing of his deep intimacy with these letters and the feeling of irrepressible longing experienced in idle moods and leisurely feelings in his mature years, Buddhadeb Basu writes in his memoirs: "Of all of Rabindranath's prose, I have read *Chinnapatra* the most number of times throughout my life. [...] Even today, if I need to flip through its pages – however busy I am at that moment – I cannot suppress my craving for reading two to four pages from it even if it is quite unnecessary" (1973: 58).

# 4 Colonial Melancholy and Post-Partition Nostalgia: Feelings of Dissonance in the Short Fiction of Saʿadat Hasan Manto and Qurratulʿain Hyder

> *They were fortunate, indeed*
> *Who believed love to be their life's work*
> *And those who loved their work*
> *I was otherwise occupied, all my life*
> *I loved a little, did some work.*
> *Work impeded the course of love,*
> *And love encumbered all my work*
> *In the end, exasperated,*
> *I abandoned both, half done.*
> Faiz Ahmed Faiz[237]

So far, this study has analysed the discourses of idleness and leisureliness in poetry, novel, and epistolary genres. Each chapter attempts to demonstrate how notions of otium are closely associated with ideas and attitudes embodied by various genres and styles. The stylistic elements of various genres – for instance, personal letters – being autobiographical are naturally more accommodating of discussions of a writer's leisurely disposition. Genres like the novel, on the other hand, having emerged from a vortex of social and literary reorientations, provide for fascinating reading of the negotiations of a topic as ambivalent as otium. In late-colonial South Asia, several of these genre innovations can be seen to have certain implications on how literature and otium transform as concepts. In this chapter, I focus on the emergence of the Urdu genre of short story at the beginning of the twentieth century and how the genre responded to or influenced ideas of idleness. On the one hand, the short story does not have the narrative expanse of the novel and the narrated time to immerse into leisureliness as a reading process; on the other hand, as we shall see, the genre innovations of the short story enable writers to depict time microscopically, sometimes presenting a *slice-of-life*, and always containing the possibility of a flash of

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237 Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Śām-i Śahr-i Yārāṉ* (1978), 74. Translation mine.

insight or a Joycean *epiphany*.[238] Both techniques are conducive to a sense of condensed appreciation and experience of time, allowing for reflection and introspection inherent to the experience of otium. The emergence of the European-American short story genre in the nineteenth century links it intricately to questions of modernity and social reality. The Urdu short story, too, was a response to burning questions of social reality and developed, as a staple genre, in the hands of a revolutionary group of writers with socialist views, who came to be known widely as the 'progressives'/'*taraqqī pasand*' (literally, progress loving). How did such a genre – so bound to social reality and social concerns – respond to discourses of otium? Can a genre evolving through dissatisfactions and disequilibrium of a time respond to emotions of idleness and rest? As the twentieth century advanced, the progressive wave of literary transformations in South Asia was interrupted by the violent partitioning of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. During its developmental stages, the Urdu short story witnessed the powerful changes of the earlier half of the twentieth century. It then went on to negotiate an independent but bifurcated future after the 1947 Partition[239]; the Partition, in fact, had some decisive impact on Urdu language and literature as it became the state language of Pakistan and gradually saw a debatable decline in India. Furthermore, the Partition has been famously captured in literature, particularly Urdu short stories. With such complex factors at play, what significant ways of reading otium can be traced in this genre in South Asia in the middle of the twentieth century?

The short story is, in fact, a fascinating genre for exploring otium, for its negotiations of temporality, especially in its condensed form that enables suspension of continuity. Michael Trussler proposes that "[s]uspending continuity, the short story intimates that the impulse to mold time into a sequential narrative is often incommensurate with our experience of temporality" (1996: 558). This chapter explores the significance of otium as a literary discourse in the emerging genre of the Urdu short story by addressing the negotiation of temporality in the works of two proponents of the genre, Saʿadat Hasan Manto (1912–55) and Qurratulʿain Hyder (1927–2007). The two writers seem to inhabit very different and dissonant spheres compared to each other and to the notions of progress embodied by the Progressive movement in Urdu. Their literary engagements represent two ends of the social spectrum of Urdu-speaking South Asia in the middle of the twentieth century: Manto is famous for his portrayals of the marginalised and the outcastes of society, while Hyder is known for her depictions of the affluent, the cosmopolitan, even the leisured class. Their conceptualisations of otium in the

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238   William Warde, "The Short Story: Structure of a New Genre" (1976).

239   'Partition' here refers to the partition of 1947, unless mentioned otherwise.

short stories read in this chapter provide a broad and even dissonant projection of emotional manifestations of leisure and idleness. However dissonant, these conceptualisations of otium influenced specific literary trends in modern Urdu fiction. These varying emotional explorations of otium also present us with ways in which they dealt with the crises that much of their writings draw upon. For Manto, the crisis is manifold as he voraciously wrote to come to terms with the devastating impact of colonial capitalism and the violence of Partition. For Hyder, Partition, national identities, and the duality of the future (as being either Indian or Pakistani) also emerged as conflicts that her literary investments explored throughout her career. This chapter analyses Manto's projection of idleness against the backdrop of colonial capitalism in the emotion of colonial melancholy and Hyder's formulations of leisure against these conflicts of the split and fissured self as post-Partition nostalgia.

Two significant factors shape the formulations of this chapter. One is the contesting, disparate nature of various temporalities conceptualised by Urdu writers, inextricably entangled with the abysmal loss of civilisational pride. The other is the repeated, disparate affective responses they have expressed in literary output. These responses vary from attempts at bridging the pace between the metaphorical ox cart (tradition) and train (modernity)[240], forming a more extensive, pan-Asian, even Afro-Asian, sense of community with suppressed Muslims in other parts of the world, to the forging of the largest literary movement of undivided India, the Progressive Writers' Movement, on the one hand. On the other hand, as this chapter will show, there is also a refusal to bridge the gap; in fact, there is a strong critique of the reading of this gap. It was a time of constant and consecutive struggles – the rise of nationalist, socialist, as well as sectarian sentiments, the fight for political independence from long-standing foreign rule and the unfathomable violence that came with the partition of 1947. Although it may seem irrelevant to analyse literary attitudes to otium in such circumstances, it is perhaps all the more relevant to do so. Otium is, after all, a function of the self and is not restricted to socio-political circumstances alone; it is experienced and expressed individually and collectively in various paradoxical situations.[241] It is all the more relevant to understand the

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240   This metaphor is referenced in detail in the following section. It is sufficient to clarify here that the contrasting images of a trudging ox-driven cart and a flashing train were generally used by many reformers and writers of modern South Asia towards emphasising progress (and reform).

241   In fact, the definitions of otium, as understood by the CRC, are based on paradoxical pairings: "tätige Untätigkeit" (active passivity); "produktive Unproduktivität" (productive laziness); "bestimmte Unbestimmtheit" (contoured freedom or limitless limitation). See Fludernik (2020), 17.

various formulations of a concept when it is contested against an influential counterconcept – that of progress or *taraqqī*. Although the concept of progress was highlighted in the mid-late nineteenth century by writers like Hali, as already discussed in Chapter 2, that call for progress was finally responded to in the early-mid twentieth century in recognition of nationalist politics and socialist struggles. Politically, this historical junction is highly significant from the South Asian perspective as it becomes eventually possible for the indigenous population to conceive of a free identity of the self, without which politically, otium cannot be conceived of (as it is intricately linked with the self, being a function of the self). However, the self, at this historical junction, as it attains political independence, also experiences a split in the body politic as colonial India splits into two distinct modern nations. This loss of the self or a loved part of the self and its grieving leads to an emotional experience of melancholy, while recovery, in the aftermath of the Partition, resorts to nostalgia once again. As this book argues, emotions are not felt and expressed universally, and the specificity of the colonial and post-colonial circumstances calls for attention to the specificity of contexts; I, therefore, focus on the variations of colonial melancholy and post-Partition nostalgia.

I read the negotiated formulations of otium against this volatile backdrop by focusing on alternate emotional attitudes toward temporality as depicted in notions of progress. These emotional formulations are manifested in portrayals of drift, idleness, and colonial melancholy in selected stories of Manto and in yearning for an unpartitioned past in the postcolonial and post-Partition nostalgia in the writings of Hyder. My choice is based on the writers' responses towards the PWM,[242] the flagbearer of progress. The movement's objective was to bridge the gaps between the two disparate temporalities: an indigenous pace of life and the impending high speed of life that was fast approaching. Manto and Hyder, in their own ways, resisted these attempts to bridge the gap through the linear trajectory of modern, approaching global 'progress' as propagated by the PWM. Instead, they formulated different affective responses to temporalities in expressions and feelings of idleness and leisureliness. The core writers of the progressive association began adhering to a rigid socialist ideology as an aim for the literature they produced, focusing on the miseries of the peasants, workers, and the impoverished. While Manto emerged as a notorious writer known for his literary engagement with the people at the margins of society, he refused to allow political ideology to determine his literary out-

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[242]  From now on, the Progressive Writers' Movement will be written as PWM and will refer to the progressive movement in Urdu only, unless mentioned otherwise.

put.[243] In this section, I draw the difference between other progressive writers and Manto by focusing on Manto's expression of temporal and emotional dissonance vis-à-vis the function of literature in society. These dissonances are formulated in his stories set in pre-Partition Bombay and their portrayal of idleness; they focus on variations of time as still, encapsulated in the moment, in drift, as aimless strolling/*āvārahgardī*. Manto refutes the acceleration and escalation associated with progress and takes up aimlessness, idle drift or *āvārgī* as a manifestation of colonial melancholy. I read *āvārahgardī* in these stories as distinct from *flânerie*, arguing for its source as the dislocation and despair of the colonial subject in the late 1940s and early to mid-1950s.

Writing a decade or so later, Qurratul'ain Hyder emerged as a literary 'star' but was rather quickly accused of harping on the idle lives of upper-class characters by influential progressives like Ismat Chughtai. A later criticism was her obsession with the past. Her celebrated novel *Āg kā Daryā* (River of Fire, 1959), a sweeping narrative spanning the duration from fourth century BC to post-Partition India and Pakistan, is arguably a masterpiece on re-imagining time; however, it is in her short stories that one can find the repeated quest for an alternate temporality, a quest that resists the impending futures of the two nations while negotiating nostalgia for pre-Independence/Partition with the predicaments of postcoloniality. I read Hyder's turn to memory and nostalgia as a nuanced, affective attempt at dealing with the monstrosity of the Partition, while inculcating an appreciation for the leisureliness of one's past and childhood. This analysis is further explored in a close reading of her selected post-Partition short stories that evoke nostalgia in the realm of childhood – not only through children as characters, protagonists and narrators but also in a metaphorical childhood of shared communities, representing an image of unpartitioned, heterogenous South Asia. Reading this nostalgia as a variation of postcolonial nostalgia, I analyse these short stories, told in the voice of a child narrator, as resisting binaries within conflicts of the past. In the final reading, both writers' attitudes to temporality are seen as essentially different from the mainstream narrative of progress. This chapter addresses these differences to understand the conventional narrative of time as a valued commodity; against this backdrop of accelerating formulations of time, I read Manto's and Hyder's dissonant emotional formulations of time that critique this utilitarian sense of value to locate the literary in alternative notions of temporality. These alternative notions of temporality are contrasted against the hegemonic and historicist

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[243] The Communist Party of India gradually began to have a strong hold on the functions and roles of writers and artists. For details, see Jalil's sub-topic in the history of the progressive movement, "Political Ramifications of the PWM" (2014), 340–61.

understanding of progressive temporality.[244] Simultaneously, the chapter unpacks the genre innovations in the short story or the *afsānah/kahānī* that inform these formulations of emotions and temporalities.

## 4.1 Literary and Socio-Political Contexts to the Urdu Short Story

Most literary cultures historically display some form of short fiction or tales, what Shaista Suhrawardy has aptly termed "the tales and fables of the world's childhood" (1945: 203). The genre of the short story, however, is a recent, nineteenth-century invention, developed as a "modern art form" that represents "our own attitude to life" (O'Connor 1963: 13). At the end of the nineteenth century, with the influence of 'realism' on literature[245], modern South Asian writings increasingly resembled and reflected people's attitudes to life. One significant impact of this strain of realism on the literary field was that Urdu, Hindi, and Bangla, among other vernacular literatures, saw a remarkable growth in the short story genre in the early twentieth century.[246] Although Urdu had its variations of short narratives in genres of *qiṣṣa* and *fasānah*, the re-evaluation of literary values, the proliferation of print culture in the late nineteenth century and the undeniable impact of the socio-political events in the early twentieth century provided the suitable circumstances for a new mode of short fiction to emerge (Jalil 2014: 41). The turn of the century saw an increase in translations of English texts into Urdu, exposing readers to Western literature (also French, and Russian literature). Dubrow refers to these global interactions of Urdu in the late-nineteenth century as relevant to the influences on literary developments: "Urdu speakers looked to England, France, Russia, Persia, and Arabia, and, within South Asia, to Bengal, for cultural and literary models" (2018: 8). Simultaneously, since the late-nineteenth century, print journals emerged as the collective platform where new prose genres were experimented with. They

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244     See Melina Munz's doctoral dissertation (2020), Chapters 1 and 2.

245     I write 'realism' with caution as such notions – 'realism' and 'romanticism', as Hans Harder has argued, are "classifications originating in Europe that have no easy application to South Asian conditions". See Harder (2022), 419–20. While Harder is accurate in asserting that realism as a literary factor can be witnessed to have firm bearings around the middle of the twentieth century in South Asia, nevertheless, the journey of realism's influence on the literary sphere already began in the nineteenth century. In the Progressive movement in Urdu, it became the clarion call in the late 1930s.

246     Although Bangla short stories were written earlier, at the end of the nineteenth century, with prominent writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay as pioneers of the genre. See Anima Bose, "The Bengali Short Story" (1983).

gave emergent writers an easier chance at publication than the full-length novel. Minault (1998), Orsini (2009) and Dubrow (2018) have elaborated on the Urdu print journals of this time as chief players in the determination of a modern literary expansion, particularly concerning the development of modern prose. These scholars also demonstrate that print journalism brought leisurely and enjoyable reading experiences into people's private and public lives in an unprecedented manner.

It is also through a leisurely attitude to prose that the modern short story in Urdu came to be, first, arguably, in the form of humorous sketches published in journals like *Avadh Punch*. The *Avadh Punch* of Lucknow was designed on the model of the English *Punch* (1841), and its motto printed on the first page said *zindagī zindadilī kā hai nām* (the magazine displayed the phrase "Life is pleasure" in English)[247]. The sketches published in it can be seen as the precursor to the short story in Urdu. These sketches tended to isolate a moment or an episode (especially in cases of festival vignettes) or a particular character and aimed at satirising the progressive changes of colonial modernity. They were reminiscent of courtly humour and the aristocratic attitude of the *navāb*s in a vein of "conservative" elitism.[248] The vivid sketches had a wide range, from festival vignettes to ridiculing the participation of women in conferences and meetings (Suhrawardy 1945: 206–9). Due to the elitist and satirical aspects of these sketches, several historians ignore their influence on the development of the short story. Gradually, with the emergence of realism in literature, short fiction began to portray the concerns of the common (wo)man as (s)he became the new subject of literature.

With the turn of the century, immediate political and literary developments had a remarkable impact on the knowledge and reading habits an average reader could acquire. International conflicts like the Russo-Japanese War and later the First World War brought about a political consciousness among people while increasing exposure to print material and Western literature in translation exposed the ordinary reader to a new, vast literary world and an awareness of India's place in it. Khizar Humayun Ansari (2015) directly links the Russian Revolution of 1917 to the emergence of socialist thought among

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247    See Mushirul Hasan's exhaustive study of the *Avadh Punch*, titled *Wit and Humour in Colonial North India* (2007). A variable translation of *zindadilī* could range from 'liveliness', 'happiness', 'cheerfulness' to meaning 'pleasurable'. The phrase stresses upon these joyous emotional states in living life/*zindagī*.

248    Harder warns us of generalised reading of satire in the colonial context since, in many cases, the satirists happen to be "conservative and even reactionary"; moreover, the class habitus of such satirical platforms like the *Punch* prototype is also quite complex. See Harder (2013), 10–11.

Urdu-speaking Muslims in North India. The rise of socialism amongst Urdu intelligentsia is neither within our scope nor necessary,[249] although it is sufficient to assert that the early decades of the twentieth century witnessed a turbulent reformulation in the socio-political thought of Urdu-speaking Muslims in particular. These turbulences had a lasting influence on literary attitudes and output. They formed the socio-historical background to the formation of what came to be known as the largest pan-Indian literary movement, the Progressive Writers' Movement, which took the literary imagination of the country by storm, spanning the decades of the 1930s – 50s. While the movement influenced other vernacular literatures of India, such as Bengali, Marathi and Telugu, it emerged out of literary debates in Urdu and left the most remarkable impact on Urdu literature. Jalil (2014), Ansari (2005), and Coppola (2017) propose that this difference was closely connected to the civilisational concerns of Urdu-speaking Muslims after the Rebellion and its seeds were perhaps sown by the early reformists like Syed Ahmed Khan, Hali, and Nazir Ahmad. Ahmad, in a lecture, reportedly urged people not to look back at the aristocratic past, laced with the pace of restfulness and slow life; drawing on the metaphor of an ox cart as opposed to a train, he advised, instead, to embrace progress:

> Think of the train as a symbol of the times (*zamāne kā namūnah*), and we, a drove of oxen. If we cannot appreciate the force of pace and wish to resist it, if we cannot keep up with its pace, or if we do nothing, the train will not spare us. [...] Now, you must recognise the velocity of time and identify the group you adhere to. Will you walk on to the train with the slow and measured steps in the style of Lucknowites, resist the train of time, fly away from it, or blindfold the eyes and stuff your ears with cotton? Or will you stand by, quietly, gazing as the train passes over you? (Ahmad 1895: 373)[250]

In the same paragraph, Ahmad also compares time with the technical image of a mill and people who cannot manoeuvre it as living in danger of being ground under the rotation of the mill. An awareness regarding the urgency of progress had already settled in the minds of Muslim intellectuals. The contrast between

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249    Numerous literary historians have elaborated upon these historical entanglements. Apart from Jalil, Ansari, and Coppola's elaborate histories on the movement in Urdu, see Suchetana Chattopadhyay, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmed in Calcutta* (2011) and Kamran Asdar Ali, *Communists in a Muslim Land: Cultural Debates in Pakistan's Early Years* (2011).

250    In a lecture delivered at the eighth anniversary of the Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam, Lahore, in 1893. Here, quoted (translation mine) from *Lekcaron kā Majmuʿah, jild avval* (1895). Jalil (2014) provides a parallel English translation, 37–38.

the two images – the slow ox cart and the shooting pace of a train – signals an irreconcilability. Ahmad's advice was heeded; multiple forces and factors worked together to bring about a consciousness of a pressing temporality driven by acceleration, looking ahead at the future so that the Urdu-speaking, Urdu-reading intelligentsia could match their pace with impending global modernity. The consciousness of pressing temporality is one of the significant factors that gave rise to the literary ethos of progressive socialism and utilitarianism, from which the Urdu short story emerged.

The modern short story in Urdu portrayed the early twentieth century's undeniable social and political conflicts. Few literary histories actually trace the evolution of the Urdu short story *vis-à-vis* print journals, apart from the early work of Suhrawardy (1945). This is perhaps because in its early years, the genre seemed to be, in the words of Muhammad Umar Memon, "sporadic" and "tentative" (2017: x). Sajjad Hyder Yildrim (1888–1942), Qurratul'ain's father, is often considered the first serious writer of the short story in Urdu. However, he penned what is termed "romantic" stories, like "*Ḥikāya-i Lailā va Majnūn*" and "*Khayālistān*". With Yildrim's stories, the Urdu story came to be called a *fasānah*, which then evolved into the modern term for it, *afsānah*.[251] Not too long ago, *fasānah* was the term used for episodical romance adventures written by Rajab Ali Beg Suroor, *Fasānah-i Ajaib*. The term acquired a rhetorical and stylistic change in the voluminous, serialised novel *Fasānah-i Āzād*, composed by Sarshar. The multiple ways in which Urdu writers often used specific genre labels to mean a variety of narrative genres and styles – as with the *nāvil* – is repeated to an extent for the *fasānah/afsānah*, too, but on a much lower scale, since the *afsānah* became standardised as genre label, to mean the modern short story. Khwaja Hasan Nizami and Rashidul Khairi also deserve mention before Premchand arrived at the scene with the modern short story, i.e., *afsānah/kahānī*, infused with an unprecedented streak of realism. The increased accessibility of print journals helped establish the genre. As it became possible for readers to experience a private activity despite a shared, cosmopolitan engagement, the short story claimed its place as a significant genre, "intended to satisfy the standards of the individual, solitary, critical reader" (O'Connor 1963: 14).

Most literary critics and historians like Memon (2017) and Narang (1973) see the genres of the Urdu novel and the short story as distinctly Western (foreign) and different from the existing prose genre of the *dāstān*. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (1973) claims that the short story is not as adept at expressing sub-

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251    See Jalil's chapter on the evolution of progressive prose: "From *Fasana* to *Afsana*" (2014), 305.

continental sensibilities as compared to poetry and perhaps the novel.[252] Christina Oesterheld makes an insightful point that more than a 'foreignness', it is the 'schism' between the existing narrative tradition and 'modern' literature which resulted in neglecting existing forms of the *dāstān* and the *qīṣṣa*.[253] She argues that writers introduced new content to existing forms, which then "transformed the structure" of their tales (Oesterheld 2001: 27–28). According to her, the changing content of the new fiction rooted in real, social concerns was the driving force behind the rise of new forms. This transformation is already discussed in Chapter 2. While writers like Nazir Ahmad and Hadi Rusva had already set the novel amid contemporary societal concerns, it was only a matter of time before short fiction would start to embody this pressing sense of reality. Premchand's stories set in rural contemporary India placed real human conflict and concern at the centre of the narrative, making protagonists out of ordinary people. While realism in theme was preferred in short fiction, the gradual but intense awareness of accelerated, escalated notions of temporality also found space in the genre. Narang makes a significant point in mentioning Bengali writers Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee while discussing the models Premchand had in mind as he revolutionised Urdu short fiction, besides the undebatable Western influences of Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Maupassant (Narang 1973: 113). In addition, the transformation in political thought among North Indian Muslim writers also profoundly impacted the rise of the genre, as we will see in the following section.

## 4.2 Towards Utilitarian Aspirations: Urdu Short Fiction and the Progressive Ethos

In the early 1930s, the modern Urdu short story emerged in a series of political controversies. These events were triggered by the publication of a provocative collection of nine short stories and a play under the title *Angāre* ('Live Coals' or 'Embers', 1932) authored by a handful of young writers – namely Sajjad Zaheer (1899–1973), Ahmed Ali (1910–94), Rashid Jahan (1905–52) and Mahmuduzzafar (1908–54). The book was loathed as blasphemous in content by both conservative Muslim society as well as the colonial government. Having caused an extraordinary furore, the book was immediately condemned and lawfully ban-

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252  See his essay "Afsāne kī Himāyat Meṅ", (1973), 187–94.

253  Although this paper mainly discusses the early novels of Nazir Ahmad, in the introduction Oesterheld addresses the 'alien-ness' that critics associate with modern genres of the novel and short story in Urdu.

ned.[254] Carlo Coppola traces the formation of the '*Angare* group' to Sajjad Zaheer's return to Lucknow from Oxford in 1930 and his meeting with Ahmed Ali. Both young men studied English literature and shared "an admiration for James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence [...] Chekhov and Gorky" (Coppola 2017: 34–35). Zaheer was based in Oxford, where student uprisings against imperialism and a drive towards communism were on the rise. Passionate about literature and social change, the two forged a friendship and discussed the publication of an anthology of their writings with Rashid Jahan, a friend of Ali. The trio were joined by Mahmuduzzafar, who had also returned recently from Oxford. The four writers contributed to the collection titled *Angāre*. The book contains five short stories by Zaheer, two by Ali, a story and a play by Jahan, and one story by Mahmuduzzafar.[255]

The agenda of this publication was not solely a literary one but one that demanded social relevance in literature. Later in life, Ali recalled *Angāre* as a "brave, adolescent book" (Coppola 2017: 56), and Zaheer mentioned it only in passing while writing his monumental memoir of the literary movement which he spearheaded (ibid., 45).[256] The young writers wanted to 'do' something to bring about a change in what they believed to be a literary decay in North India (Premchand was still the only influential writer of realistic fiction). The book was their provocative challenge to society and literature. The themes of these stories centred on the hollow traditions and customs of contemporary conservative Muslim society. They dwelled on conditions of poverty, the social, emotional, and physical oppression of women, and the pretension of piety amongst people. Almost all the stories addressed sexual attraction or oppression in direct ways, which caused most of the uproar. Stylistically, the writers applied various Western techniques: the stream of consciousness (particularly in "*Nīnd Nahīṉ Ātī*" by Zaheer), complexity in gen-

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254    The charges were that it "wounded the feelings of the entire Muslim Community by ridiculing God and His Prophets", quoted in a resolution passed by the Central Standing Committee of the All-Shia Conference, reported in *The Hindustan Times* newspaper of 21 February 1933 (*Angāre* was published in November/December of 1932). See Coppola (2017), 48.

255    For a detailed reading and analysis of the stories and play in *Angāre*, see Jalil's chapter "Analysing Angarey" (2014), 108–45.

256    Coppola (2017) refers to Zaheer's memoir of the Progressive Movement and Association, *Rośnāʾī (The Light)*, in which he hardly mentions or refers to *Angāre* and the Angare group's original intellectual ambitions in its publication. According to Coppola, Ali, on the other hand, was ready to discuss these intellectual and literary desires while writing for *Angāre* and resented the 'ideological interpretation' of these intentions after the first conference in 1936. See Coppola (2017), 54–56.

dering characters (in "*Dulārī*" by Zaheer, both stories by Ali and Jahan) and interior monologue (in "*Mahāvaṭoṉ kī Ek Rāt*" by Ali). These techniques seem to be heavily influenced by James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf (Jalil 2014: 114). Most literary historians concur that the significance of the collection lay not particularly in its literary quality but "in the fact that the book brought together and solidified a group of individuals who would lay the foundation for a movement in Urdu, the so-called Progressive Movement", which would eventually stand as the most influential literary movement in undivided India (Coppola 2017: 56). Another significant impact of the book was that it catapulted the short story to the forefront of Urdu literary consciousness and established short fiction as the genre of 'progressive' prose. While mass hysteria condemned the book, it had tapped into a desire amongst emerging writers to pen realistic and revolutionary short fiction. The movement soon realised and propagated this desire as it gathered momentum.[257]

Zaheer returned to England to continue his studies. Encouraged by fellow communists, he organised an association of Indian writers committed to writing socially engaging and politically motivated literature. A manifesto was drafted by Mulk Raj Anand to "formulate the aims and objects" of the association. Simultaneously, "little groups" (formed of young Indian writers) often seen to meet and talk in "cafes and garrets of Bloomsbury" joined together on 24th November 1934 and "formed the Indian Progressive Writers Association" (Coppola 2017: 78). While the movement was officially established in India in 1936, preceding events in Europe had a significant role in its formation.[258] Zaheer was in correspondence with Premchand, who had published a finalised version of the manifesto[259] in his prominent Hindi literary journal *Haṃs* in

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[257]   The Urdu progressive movement produced numerous short story writers, some of the most renowned names being Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chander, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, and Ismat Chughtai.

[258]   The events of Moscow (the first congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934), London (formation of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association in 1934) and Paris (Zaheer and Anand's attendance at the International Congress for the Defence of Culture held on 26 June 1935) are undeniable. This "European Phase", claims Coppola, is distinctly significant to the formation of the association in India and once again, Zaheer underplays these events and their impacts in his memoir.

[259]   Initially, there were two versions; one was published in the *Left Review* in London, which was revised to remove Marxist jargon for an Indian readership. There was also a third version of the manifesto, an amended version adopted by the second congress of AIPWA held in Calcutta in 1938. See Ansari (2005), Coppola (2017), and Jalil (2014) for details of these different versions.

October 1935.[260] He also presided over the first meeting of freshly formed All-India Progressive Writers' Association[261], held in Lucknow in 1936. His close involvement in the movement drew a large number of literary stalwarts and their concurrence with the principles of the movement.[262] I now turn to two documents related to the formation of the PWM that will clarify the practical contributions the association sought from its members. The fiery twenty-three-year-old multilingual scholar and writer Akhtar Husain Raipuri wrote an essay titled "Adab aur Zindagī" (Literature and Life) that was published in July 1935 in the esteemed literary journal *Urdū*. It is a remarkable documentation and can be seen as the source of the principles by which the movement was fueled. Drawing on 'ethical' theories as propagated by Tolstoy and Gorky, Husain's main argument was that 'true literature' is created by the class that advances the techniques of production. For the first time, literature was seen as an aspect of the economic life of a society or community.[263] He criticised writers of the past for lamenting over the impermanence of life and harping on feelings of helplessness, asserting that "though literature derives from the past and the present, what it pre-eminently seeks is the future". Coppola compares Premchand's inaugural speech at the first congress of the AIPWA, titled "Sāhitya kā Uddeśya" (in Hindi) or in Urdu, "Adab kī G̠arẓ-o-G̠āyāt" (The purpose and purview of literature) and draws striking similarities to Raipuri's essay (Coppola 2017: 135–42). The most important tenets of the movement, as addressed by Raipuri, were now voiced by the esteemed Premchand and established as the force behind the movement.

Another speech at this first congress, delivered by Ahmed Ali, titled "A Progressive View of Art",[264] also clearly shows the influences of Raipuri's essay while harking back to Nazir Ahmad's understanding of the temporal junction at which Muslim society in North India stood. Ali proposed that at present, society was "standing against a wall", witnessing a "fully equipped and mechanised army marching" towards it; "If we stand and stolidly stare at the black

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260 See Coppola for differences in these two versions vis-à-vis commitment to Marxist-Leninist principles and political rhetoric, wider appeal, etc. (2017), 80–83.

261 From now on, written as AIPWA.

262 Although there was reportedly a real difficulty in drawing Hindi writers to what was understood as an Urdu literary conference.

263 An abridged translation of the extended essay is provided by Adeem Suhail, published as "Literature and Life" (2010), 127. For a detailed discussion of this essay, see Coppola (2017), 118–35.

264 Published in Sudhi Pradhan, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: 1936–1947, Vol I* (1979), 67–83.

mass advancing on us, soon we shall be pounded to death. The only alternative is to brave the storm" (Ali 1979: 67). Proposing to "assess the value of art", he explicated that art is rooted in and derives from life; it acts by imparting powerful emotion, leading to action of the "progressive type" (Ali 1979: 67–68). Ali tried to define art and discuss the meaning of 'progress'; he critiques contemporary artists, especially Tagore and Iqbal, whose works he finds lacking social relevance. Defining "progressivism", he clarifies that it should not be taken to mean "revolutionary", but it entails "trying for the betterment of our social life", "banishment of mysticism and all that which stands in our way of attaining freedom". Tagore is criticised in the essay for the "defeatist and mystical tendencies" of his poetry, while Iqbal's poetry is assessed to be "Utopian" in his dreams of pan-Islamism: weeping, denouncing, singing of "the ancient Bulbul and the Rose" (Ali 1979: 79–80). Ali then expounded upon the need of the hour: "what we want today is progressive literature. We do not even want reformist literature" (Ali 1979: 80). He emphasises that India is *now* a part of the world market and that "it has got to come in a line with all the industrially advanced countries of the world". He highlighted the demands of advancement and acceleration, emphasising that "we cannot walk backwards; therefore we must go ahead" (Ali 1979: 79).

In briefly summarising these two influential documents related to the progressive movement in India, the aim has been to draw out a fair understanding of the futuristic, utilitarian aspirations for the core members of the association at this time. In its utilitarian possibilities, progress was understood as something that would improve the lives of the millions and bring positive social transformation. Progress had the appeal of an emotional concept; it linked writers to the larger population at a time when parallel struggles for political independence were at their peak. For the first time, social transformation, a drive to uplift the masses, was intricately linked to literature and the arts. This emotional attitude to progress is affectively expressed in the Urdu names of the association – *Anjuman-i Taraqqī Pasand Muṣannifīn*, i.e., an association of progress-loving writers. In its futuristic ambitions, the progressives saw time in the dialectic of the past and the future as a recurrent motif. Constantly conscious of having lost valuable time, in attempting to advance, to speed up and accelerate India's arrival on the modern stage of the (Western) world, progressive writers constantly marched towards an accelerated temporality. Urdu literature had a central role in this understanding of historicist time. It was seen as a major aspect of civilisation that would speed up the arrival of Muslim society on the global stage of modernity. The future demanded all attention and action, and the only way to do so, for them, was by hurrying the present so as not to be left in the "waiting room of history" (to borrow the phrase from Dipesh Chakraborty). I now turn to the criticism of this

progressive attitude to temporality, voiced by both Manto and Hyder in their formulation of dissonant emotional responses. These two writers posited alternate ways of conceptualising and feeling time. This is not to say that Manto and Hyder were against a progressive society, only that they did not see literature taking up the utilitarian task of causing that progress or transformation, neither in its utilitarian aspirations nor its futuristic ambitions. They explored, instead, the deep anxieties of melancholy and sighs of nostalgia for the rapidly transforming South Asian consciousness in the face of this utilitarian ethos and in the aftermath of the historic rupture.

## 4.3 Saʿadat Hasan Manto's Portrayal of Urban Idleness

Saʿadat Hasan was born in Ludhiana, Punjab, to a Kashmiri family. His father, Ghulam Hasan, was a lawyer and a strict follower of Islam; he took up the elementary education of his youngest son, Saʿadat, educating him in Arabic, Persian, English, and Urdu. Historian Ayesha Jalal writes that young Saʿadat could not forge an amicable relationship with his father. However, the figure of Ghulam Hasan loomed large over Saʿadat's life (Jalal 2013: 45). He began his formal education at the Muslim Anglo-Oriental High School, often failed his exams, and reportedly spent his time loafing around the streets of Amritsar, dabbling in photography. Growing up, he earned the reputation of "a slacker, gambler, drinker of alcohol, and inveterate prankster with an interest in occult, an entirely unworthy son of an honourable father" (Jalal 2013: 33). With rising anti-British sentiment in Punjab, Saʿadat was fascinated by the revolutionary figure Bhagat Singh. He later joined Hindu Sabha College, an institution infused with anticolonial enthusiasm since the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. Along with his school friends, Saʿadat dreamed of becoming a revolutionary (Jalal 2013: 36); the young men were also drawn to photography and cinema. These dreams and aspirations eventually proved integral to Manto's art of fiction, as his literary career became intertwined with his later adventures in the Bombay cinema circles.[265] He was an avid reader and spent much time surveying European fiction. This drift of youth was transformed when he met the footloose journalist and historian Abdul Bari Alig in 1933. A committed socialist, Bari inculcated a taste for politics in young Saʿadat; he also encouraged Saʿadat to write short pieces on films and translate Russian and French stories from English to Urdu. He translated *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* by Victor Hugo. Next, along with Abbas,

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[265] See Manto's sketches of celebrities in the Bombay film industry, *Stars from Another Sky* (1998).

he translated *Vera* by Oscar Wilde and was briefly imprisoned for the seditious posters of the same (Jalal 2013: 41). One of his early translations was published in the journal *Humāyūṉ*, and Saʿadat gradually began to be recognised in reading circles as Manto.

He was fascinated by the work of European writers like Gorky, Chekhov, Hugo, and particularly, Maupassant (Jalal 2013: 45). While years of translating European stories would have taught him much about writing in the genre, turning in regular pieces on films gave him insights into composing prose on visual art and cinematography. Manto's first original short story, titled "*Tamā-śā*" (Spectacle, 1934), a satirical recounting of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, was published in a weekly literary journal, *Ḵẖalq*. He also translated many Russian short stories from English to Urdu for the special issue, "Raśian Nambar", in the journal *ʿĀlamgīr*. Bari also persuaded him to compile a translated collection of Russian short stories, which was published under the title *Rūsī Afsāne* (1934). Influenced by Russian fiction, Manto's interest in the lives of marginalised people and his engagement with the sordid, harsh realities of life concur with the original thought of progressive writers, particularly the authors of *Angāre*. While Jalal dismisses the influence of the progressives on Manto, Rakhshanda Jalil and Khalilur Rahman Azmi categorize his prose as 'progressive' and suggest a strong link between his engagement with "low life" and "early exposure to Russian writers" (Jalil 2014: 311). Azmi quotes from Manto's essay on Gorky and highlights the particularity of style that Manto emphasises:

> Before writing his stories, Gorky looks all around him and observes the smallest, most trivial details as though it might be of use somewhere. The hotness of the sauce, the snow sticking to the man's boots, the snowflakes entangled in the hair of some woman, the woodcutter cutting wood, the coarse language of the farmhands, the drifting notes of a piano, the bestial glint in the eyes of a sentry, the dirt flying in the bazaars, and the black smoke billowing from the chimneys of factories – he notes down all this and more. (Quoted in Jalil 2014: 311)[266]

While inspiration from writers like Gorky and Maupassant left a lasting impact on Manto's writing, his decision to move to Aligarh and join the University in 1934 exposed him to the contemporary currents of the progressive movement. Aligarh was a hotbed of socialist and progressive discourses with the rise of the PWA. Akhtar Husain Raipuri, Asrar-ul-Haq Majaz, Jan Nisar Akhtar, and Ale Ahmed Suroor, to name a handful, were some of the enthusiastic and illustrious

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[266]   I have retained Jalil's translation here since it is close to my own, and English readers can easily access it in its context. For the Urdu original, see ʿĀẓmī, *Urdu meṉ Taraqqī Pasand Adabī Taḥrīk* (1984 [1957]), 188.

progressives already present at Aligarh. Leslie Flemming observes that although Manto did not participate in socialist or leftist politics directly, "the atmosphere there encouraged him in both his literary activities and his revolutionary inclinations" (1979: 7). His inspired early story, "*Inqalāb Pasand*" (Revolutionary or Revolution-loving) was published in 1935 in the ʿ*Alīgaṛh Maigzīn*. Soon, in 1936, his first collection of short stories, titled *Ātaś Pāre* (Sparks), was published. The impact *Angāre* had on his choice of title is indisputable.

### 4.3.1 A Critique of Progressive Temporality: Moment, Lingering, and Drift

In her micro-historical account of Manto's life and literature *vis-à-vis* the 1947 Partition, Jalal writes that the conflicting relationship he had with his father and affectionate mother "served as a catalyst for Saʿadat's rebellious nature" (2013: 32). Other scholars and reviewers of Manto's work have often found it relevant, even imperative to discuss his psychological traits as the key to his art (Hanafi 2012; Hashmi 2012). Manto famously wrote his own epitaph, sarcastically boasting that with him are buried forever "all the secrets and mysteries of the art of writing stories"[267] (Jalal 2013: 210), thereby challenging his readers and critics to unravel the psychological predicaments of his literary work. Records of social or professional, even familial encounters with Manto are also often personal in tone and emotional in nature, suggesting that his behaviour and mannerisms deeply impacted the people he interacted with.[268] These observations call for an emotional enquiry into Manto's works. His stories embody an emotional range that is unprecedented in Urdu fiction. The characters are fascinatingly complex, yet not as 'abnormal' as some critics and 'progressives' claimed; they are rather multidimensional and, I argue, also depicted as in conflict with the modern. In Manto's stories, the human is as much an object to modern life's subjugation as (s)he is a purveyor of her/his journey.[269] Intense emotions of love and hate, kindness and violence are depicted as felt and expressed by characters according to their precarious circumstances and explored in their extreme potentials within the singled-out *event* of the story. In vivid portrayals of the human as the almighty and simultaneously equally helpless, Manto presents his scepticism regarding

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[267]  "Us ke sīne meṉ fan-i afsāna-nigārī ke sāre asrār va rumūz dafn haiṉ".

[268]  See, for example, a collection of reminiscences and documents on Manto by his friends, colleagues and rivals, *Manto-Saheb: Friends and Enemies on the Great Maverick* (2018), translated from original Urdu letters and memoirs into English by Vibha Chauhan and Khalid Alvi.

[269]  Also see Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables* (2010), 124.

notions of collective 'progress' championed by the progressives. In his view, progress for all was desirable but was not the social reality; neither was a rush towards progressive temporality meaningful nor possible. Historians like Azmi and Jalil argue that Manto was a progressive of the highest order because of the socially engaged literature he wrote. I don't differ from this view; my argument is that Manto rejected the label and the ethos of 'progress' propagated by the association. His relationship with the lexeme as a concept and its semantic and rhetorical relevance are to be read with much nuance, in reference to his works. Rather than a singularly linear notion of progress that his contemporaries aimed for, Manto's ethos is conveyed in the portrayal of drift, in waiting, lingering in the moment. This is evident in his works, especially in the stories written during his conflicts with the PWM.

Much of this resistance to progressive temporality and utility can be unpacked in Manto's portrayal of protagonists, who refuse to become identified only as 'workers', one of the hungry and poor masses. Frank O'Connor claims that the modern short story does not have a hero, but instead, it dwells on "a submerged population group" (1963: 18). Flemming identifies Manto's characters and protagonists as belonging to this group (1979: 35) as subjects of low life in modern urban colonial-postcolonial circumstances, they seek and dream of 'escape'. Their lives are confined to the motion of idle drift; escape is mostly not an option. In the process of drifting, they stroll the streets idly; they reject accelerated formulations of time and fashion themselves and their own trajectories. They experience and reflect that solitary quality of modern life, in O'Connor's words, "an intense awareness of human loneliness" (1963: 19), vibrantly portrayed against the backdrop of modern urbanity. In these solitary journeys of his protagonists, made up of the 'submerged population', Manto writes of the recesses of modern urban alienated life, as Flemming aptly traces, in "another lonely voice".[270]

A detailed study of Manto's affective trajectories would require extensive research on the massive collection of his stories, essays, sketches, and letters. Such a study is beyond the scope of this chapter. For our purposes, it suffices to focus on the two complementary aspects of his work – a modernist drift and a lingering in the moment vis-à-vis a critique of progressive temporality on the one hand. On the other hand, an emotional manifestation of colonial melancholy in relation to idleness and indolence in some of his characters is undeniable. While the drift is both a recognition of a global, cosmopolitan, modernist predicament in the wake of the twentieth century that shares the critique of

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[270]    Reference to the title of Leslie Flemming's book on Manto, *Another Lonely Voice: The Urdu Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto* (1979).

European modernists like Joyce, Lawrence, and Hemingway, the idleness and vagrancy of his characters embody a melancholia symptomatic of the colonial subject with critical agency. An interweaving of both can be read in his pre-Partition stories, primarily set in Bombay. Writing the metropolis, Manto formulates sensual and sensory depictions as arresting in the urban hustle and bustle of the sprawling city, allowing his characters to dwell in the moment amidst the urban chaos, in what Julia Kristeva reads as the "melancholy moment".[271] In depicting human interactions as an extension of the 'self-fashioning' street, Manto responds to both the drift of urban cosmopolitanism as well as the solitary moment experienced by the individual. Excellent examples are the description of loners smoking and strolling aimlessly near Apollo Bunder in the story "*Bānjh*" (Barren). Sensory and visual narrations are masterfully achieved in descriptions of the street; the weather, atmosphere, and the titillating tactility of flesh for the young boy Masud in "*Dhūʾān*" (Smoke); and the intimate, crisp descriptions of the physical and emotional world of the sex-worker, Saugandhi, in "*Hatak*" (Insult).

In a masterful narration of a single night, a sensory, emotional, and psychological unravelling of the intensity and mystery of human desire is seen in "*Bū*" (Odour), for which he was charged with vulgarity. The story probes into the interstices of human behaviour, memory, and sensual desire in a complex narrative. The recently wedded protagonist, Randhir, is obsessed with the earthy scent of a low-caste girl he had once made love to, as he now tries to make love to his wife. Randhir is confused by this strange, intense, sensual desire he has never experienced before. The story explores desire and vulnerability in an intimate and curious tone, between flashback and flash forward, the pace being interrupted and magnified with the sensory – the memory of human scent and the commemoration of monsoon rains. The structure of the narrative is controlled by the sensory and the emotional. In "*Bū*", time is controlled by evoking the senses and the sensorial. The girl's scent is described as neither pleasant nor unpleasant but inexplicably powerful. In remembrance of the night, Randhir recalled the scent that had bound them together: "the two were merged into each other, into the depths of an animal existence, so that they lingered in a state of pleasure which was eternal despite being momentary; which had a transcendental intoxication but also a sense of quiet calm. Together, they had transformed into a bird flying so high in the sky that it seemed motionless" (Manto 1983: 55).[272] Such poignant narrations of isolated

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271 *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1987). Here, quoted in Trussler (1996), 564–65.

272 From the collection *Laẕẕat-i Sang* (1983).

moments, crafted against the backdrop of Bombay's chaotic din, make Manto an inimitable writer of the city, its people, and their emotional and temporal landscapes while capturing the stillness of their lonely lives.

Manto moved to Bombay in 1936, editing the weekly journal *Muṣavvar*. He also rekindled his interest in cinema and found employment as a writer of dialogues in several firms. It was a time of intense creativity, as he juggled editing journals, wrote dialogues for films and the radio (from 1940 onwards), and penned his early short stories. Bombay, at this time, was teeming with progressive luminaries. Manto was initially closely associated with Sardar Jafri; later, he had a circle of progressive friends – Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chander, and Ismat Chughtai. Manto's close friend and poet, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, was also a strong proponent of the AIPWA. Manto was never really a part of the official association due to his inability to commit to ideological impositions on literature. As the movement began to follow strict principles of socialism as the sole goal of literature and started impinging upon authors' creativity, many early progressives faced dilemmas in trying to retain a harmonious relationship between their art and ideology. Gradually, the terms progressive (*taraqqī pasand*) or progressive literature (*taraqqī pasand adab*) came to embody an exclusive ideological groupism, allegedly lacking self-reflection and self-criticism. These attitudes were far removed from the original conceptualisation of progress articulated by Premchand, Raipuri, Ali, and Zaheer.[273] Zaheer, Ali, and Jafri criticised Manto's work on 'obscenity' and 'perversion' charges.[274] Manto wrote an early satirical story titled "*Taraqqī Pasand*" (published in 1941 in the collection *Dhūʾāṉ*), which I now analyse to unpack his criticism of progressive writers and their notions of progress. Flemming asserts that it is not a serious criticism but a friendly rib at the association (1979: 46), while Jalil describes the story as "wickedly funny" (2014: 312). I argue that it is his early expression of discomfort and unwillingness to commit to the association. I analyse and interpret the story as his critique of the restrictive underpinnings of progressivism in both its utilitarian aspect and futuristic temporality.

The story is woven around the relationship between an aspirational young writer, Joginder Singh, and a senior progressive writer, Harindranath Tripathi. The deeper implication of this relationship is between realism and hollow, arrogant ideology. The haughty seriousness of Singh's conversations with Tripathi

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[273]   As mentioned before, even within the core members of the association, like Ali and Zaheer, discrepancies between the movement's aspirations and ambitions were apparent.

[274]   See Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light* (2006), 252. Also, see Ahmed Ali's essay in the collection *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature, Vol I*, (1974), 40.

are pitted against Singh's dismissive dialogues with his wife. A mere clerk at a local post office, Singh aspires to acquaint himself with serious progressive writers. He often invites them to his home; his wife overhears their conversations and notes that they frequently mention the phrase '*taraqqī pasand*'. On asking her husband about it, she is told in sombre tones that it means someone who likes progress, "It is a Persian word, and in English, it is called 'radical'". Singh's wife, Amrit Kaur, is crestfallen – she had imagined 'progressive' to mean something grand, something substantial. By contrasting and satirising these perceptions of 'progress' for the progressive writer and his wife, Manto sarcastically jabs at the ideological shortcoming of 'socially relevant literature' propagated by the progressives. That the progressive movement in Urdu was an overwhelmingly masculine one, and that women's equality was only theorised upon but hardly paid any real attention to, has been heavily critiqued by core progressive writers like Rashid Jahan.[275]

Singh invites Tripathi, whom he considers to be a great writer, poet, and traveller. Tripathi accepts the invitation readily and brings his wife and daughter as well. After intense discussion of each other's works for two days, in a comical description of the progressive passing of time in days, the narrator comments that until the fourth day, Singh is mesmerised by Tripathi's knowledge, his personality, his beard, and even his squint. On the fifth day, Tripathi reads his own stories aloud, and continues until the tenth day, when, finally, Singh is tired of listening to Tripathi's endless string of stories. When twenty days pass by and Singh becomes restless and impatient. Exasperated and missing the company of his wife, whom he had not seen due to his exaggerated hospitality, he decided to meet her in secret. He waits in the silent chilly field under a starry sky for time to pass, waiting for the clock to strike twelve, when he would go to meet his wife. Finally, on knocking on the door, it opens, and Tripathi responds, "You are early! This is wonderful! I have just finished writing a story; come listen to it" (from *Dhūʾān*, 1981: 33).

Critics have commented that this naughty joke was written to tease Rajinder Singh Bedi and Devendranath Satyarthi. Nevertheless, a critical and close reading of it can help us understand Manto's on-and-off relationship with the association and his scepticism towards progressive temporality and ethos. A critique of clock time, the binding notion of a hegemonic duration of time, and the futility of the linear, progressive passing of days seeking transformation are recurrent themes and resistive projection of temporality in many of his stories. Jennifer Dubrow has already asserted this critique of clock-time and

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275   Jahan quoted in Zaheer's *The Light*, 231. See also Noor, "Negotiating Nostalgia" (2020), 7–8.

"temporal regimes that underpin the nation" (2019: 2) in Manto's work. Dubrow's reading of Manto's criticism of this temporality emerges from her reading of the clock and clock time as a symbol of modernity. In "*Taraqqī Pasand*", Manto criticises progressive temporality by employing a deliberate countdown of the days after the visit of Tripathi as opposed to before it. In fact, the criticism is so blunt that it approaches the absurd in repeated counting of the progressing number of days vis-à-vis Joginder Sing's impatience and boredom, culminating in the count down to hours, minutes, and seconds; "*cār sard ghaṇṭe*" (four cold hours), "*do minaṭ*" (two minutes), "*pāṇc sekanḍ*" (five seconds) before the anticlimactic end. This critique is noticeable in his stories, where time is a profoundly emotional and individual experience for his characters. This individuality of his works was not taken well by his progressive colleagues, who rushed to accuse him of obscenity.[276]

Six of Manto's stories were charged with obscenity, three in India before 1947: "*Dhū'āṇ*" (Smoke), "*Bū*" (Odour) and "*Kālī Śalvār*" (Black Veil); and three in Pakistan afterwards: "*Khol do*" (Open it), "*Ṭhaṇḍā Gośt*" (Cold Meat) and "*Ūpar Nīce aur Darmiyān*" (Upstairs, Downstairs and in Between). Ironically, Zaheer and Ali, having authored *Angāre*, thought Manto's exploration of sexual desire and curiosity to be obscene and perverted. His stories are narrated with a quest to explore the mysteries of human life and emotions, presented in a style of modern prose that was unprecedented in Urdu. In these depictions, we see a palpable image of modern life, rendered with a deep sense of compassion, reflection, and an acknowledgement of the individual's temporal frames as intricately associated with their emotional make up. Flemming sums it up: Manto "believed strongly in the need for literature to reflect" realistically, the changing social conditions, although he did not accept the idea that "literature could provide solutions to the problems" (1979: 33). His close interaction with the progressives gave him a profound understanding of his views on literature. As he roamed the streets of Bombay, he saw the subject of his art as adrift as he was. Priyamvada Gopal and other scholars have read Manto's 'obscene' stories in the light of masculine sexuality. While sexuality has been a much-studied theme in Manto's stories, the psychological and emotional mapping of gendered bodies in his stories has hardly drawn enough attention. I now turn to some of his Bombay stories concerning idleness, uselessness, and colonial melancholy, an extension of the reflective and critical drift Manto portrayed as *āvārahgardī* or *āvārgī*, in the figure of his *āvārah*/wandering protagonists.

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276   See Flemming's reading of Sardar Jaffri's criticism of Manto's story "*Bū*" (1979), 28–29.

### 4.3.2 Colonial Melancholy, Social Critique, and *āvārahgardī*

> *"Es gibt zwar eine Melancholie ohne Muße, doch keine Muße ohne Melancholie"*
>
> Jörg Zirfas[277]

Melancholia has been explored as a politics of affect in relation to colonialism and empire in recent times. In her seminal work on psychoanalysis and colonialism, *Dark Continents* (2003), Ranjana Khanna derives "colonial melancholy" as a critical form of protest registered by the colonised as a response to unmourned love. Paul Gilroy, in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2004), argues that much of the political conflicts characterising contemporary multicultural societies can be analysed better in the light of overlooked imperial and colonial histories to address the grim realisation of unfathomable colonial atrocities. Both scholars understand melancholia from the works of Sigmund Freud and Frantz Fanon. Khanna also draws upon the works of Octave Mannoni and Antoine Porot in this context. Freud defines melancholia in relation to mourning and loss in his 1917 essay as unsuccessful mourning.[278] Both mourning and melancholia are responses to the loss of a loved one, of home (country), or of some ideal, like liberty. They are similar in symptoms of "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity", and a distinctive "lowering of the self-regarding feelings" (Freud 1971: 244). In the case of melancholia, however, the loss is of "a more ideal kind"; and although the loved object might not have actually died, it is lost as "an object of love" (Freud 1971: 245) and the one who loses, is often not aware of *what* has been lost. In melancholia, unlike in mourning, the loss can be "withdrawn from consciousness" (ibid.). The loss is then often suffered without any conscious association with the cause. Herein lies the disjunct and difference between melancholia and nostalgia – while nostalgia is a conscious grieving after loss, expressed in longing and yearning, a hope that is projected onto the lost past, melancholia, on the other hand, is an expression of hopelessness and dejection projected onto the present, emerging out of unsuccessful or unprocessed grief in the aftermath of loss. Freud and Khanna use the terminology of ingestion in response to loss. While in mourning, the ingested loss is slowly digested, the ego is absorbed with the lapse of time and the mourner is liberated after the work of mourning is done; in melancholia, the devoured loss is incorporated but not digested. It remains elusive, gives rise to a 'critical agency', and causes an

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[277] Although there may be melancholy without idleness, there is no idleness without melancholy. Wulf & Zirfas eds., *Muße: Paragrana* (2007), 146.

[278] "Mourning and Melancholia" (1971), 243–58.

impoverishment of ego. Mourning remains unsuccessful in the melancholic subject and may transform into 'mania'. The self is in conflict with the lost object, which has become a part of the self, and the critique is also directed towards the self. To turn to the emotional parsing of colonial melancholy, Khanna interprets it (from the concept of 'pseudo-melancholy' theorised by Antoine Porot) as a feeling in residual abundance in the colonies of Europe. She formulates this feeling as a "politics of affect" and "a form of individuated critique" that requires understanding psychoanalysis in light of colonialism, neocolonialism, and nationalism (Khanna 2003: xii).

Here, I tease out the critique of the aforementioned nationalist concept of progress, manifest in colonial melancholy; this is not a far-fetched notion, nor a contradictory one, as particularly in the historical junction of these stories, one observes several complex pairings; progress, in its developmental form, is paired with hopes of nationalist progress, attempting to match up to the 'global market', as suggested by Ahmed Ali. Simultaneously, the economic progress of metropolitan cities of the empire, like Bombay, was still driven by forces of colonial capitalism, and although colonial enterprise could be argued as retreating by this time, the forces of colonial capitalism after the bankruptcy of the world wars were responsible, to a great extent, for the precarious poverty and marginalisation of the poor in the erstwhile empire.[279] The potential of idleness or otium as a source of societal critique has been foregrounded in the dichotomy between social destiny ("gesellschaftlicher Bestimmung") and one's own subject consciousness ("eigenem Subjektbewusstsein") (Dobler 2020: 309). Leisure or the opportunity for leisure or idleness has also been attributed to the cultivation of art and discovery of sciences, even the "liberation of the oppressed" (Russell 1935: 26). Notwithstanding the significance of Bertrand Russell's essay, his emphasis on the curiosity of the few and the simplicity of the ordinary demonstrate a great gap in the perception of critique and its manifestations amongst the oppressed, especially those of the empire. Reading colonial melancholy in these stories leads to a deeper understanding of Manto's portrayal of idleness and vagrancy as expressions of deep-seated critique, narrated through the voice of an itinerant, seemingly *flâneur*-like figure with a roving eye. But reading Manto's portrayals of idle wandering in the colonial urban scape – in his terms, *āvārahgardī* – as *flânerie* is to take away from his formulations of the emotional make up of an itinerant wanderer, an *āvārah*.

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279 The number of Manto's stories that can be read against the backdrop of colonial atrocity and nationalist savagery is impressive. "*Tamāśā*", "*1919 kī Bāt*", "*Nayā Qānūn*", "*Tobah Ṭek Singh*" are only a few to name. On colonial capitalism, see Alatas, already discussed in the Introduction.

My argument stems from the origins of the *flâneur* in the streets of Paris, its source being the wandering European male gaze. In fact, an exploration of colonial melancholy in Manto's *āvārah* protagonist can give us a complex but necessary understanding of the *āvārah* vis-à-vis the *flâneur*. The *flâneur* has been hailed as the 'prince' incognito, who observes and reads the city in his idleness.[280] While I study the postcolonial negotiation of the *flâneur* in the figure of the Bengali bhadralok detective in the next chapter, Manto's protagonists hardly fit the bill for a Benjaminian, investigative pursuit of the city. Returning to the emotional exploration of melancholia in the works of Freud and Khanna, it is an emotion that suffers the loss of love, interest, and self-regard. Particularly against the backdrop of colonial capitalism, it would be a fallacy to read the *āvārah* of Manto's short stories in the vein of European notions of *flânerie*. The term *āvārahgardī*, a complex noun formed from the Persian lexeme *āvārah*, implies being "lost, annihilated; ruined; scattered; [...] an exile, outcast, vagabond, vagrant".[281] The compound '*āvārah śūdan*' means "to be oppressed, injured" and "*āvārah gardīdan*", "to roam, to wander" (Steingass 1892: 117). Likewise, "*āvārgī*" is vagrancy or wretchedness. Avishek Ray demonstrates the constructedness around the figure of the vagabond in modern India as historically ruptured, and that the negative cultural baggage associated with the figure to be a "product of a specific Western-utilitarian value system" and that its historical significance does not sit well with a universalisation of the concept (2022: 1–2). While *āvārahgardī* may have acquired a sense of cosmopolitan wandering in very recent times owing to the romanticism associated with multifaceted histories of South Asian cities like Lahore or Delhi, the emotional component of an *āvārah* is of desolation and displacement, which further ascertains the need to read colonial melancholy vis-à-vis *āvārahgardī*.

Recommending caution against reading *āvārah* protagonists of his fiction uncritically as *flâneurs*, I do not suggest that Manto is not one; despite his close association with many characters who people his stories, it is important to distinguish between the writer and the narrator. The argument here is that reading the *āvārah* of Manto's stories can substantially broaden our understanding of the practice of itinerant, footloose, and aimless wandering beyond the European lexeme. In reading the aimless strolling on the streets of Lahore, Anna Suvorova remarks that Lahore's streets are full of *flâneurs* "in spite of the fact that the Urdu and Punjabi languages [...] do not have a precise equivalent of this notion" (2011: 141–42). I do not argue that *āvārgī* is the equivalent, but simply that concepts like

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280    Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1983 [1969]).

281    Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (1892), 117.

*āvārgī*, or *āvārahgardī*, and other such expressions of vagrancy or travelling/wandering pack various kinds of mobility pertaining to the context of South Asia that have a wide emotional range, and a variety of contexts specific to region, language, and spiritual backgrounds.[282] In the context of the stories I read here, *āvārahgardī* embodies the manifestation of colonial melancholy through the physicality of idleness. In his cultural history of urban Bombay, Gyan Prakash writes of Manto's *flânerie* and depiction of montage in the streets of the cosmopolitan city: "He was a classic flâneur, writing about the everyday experiences of the people who lived in the neighbourhood. [...] he sketched modern urban life in sparkling prose" (Prakash 2010: 121). While Prakash's claims of Manto's *flânerie* are aided by his quotation from the story "*Mammad Bhāʾī*" (brother Mohammad; colloquially, 'Mammad'), the narratorial voice needs further investigation to ascertain such claims. While the opening lines of the story reveal an observant gaze, the narrator (named Manto) expresses an utter lack of knowledge – or even care – about several aspects and people in the neighbourhood, like what the Chinese inhabitants of the neighbourhood do or what rates are charged by the prostitutes. He also reveals that he has been unable to see Mammad Bhai because he leaves for work early in the morning and only returns late every night; he has no leisure. While this does not take away from Manto the writer's *flânerie*, it is imperative to differentiate between the creative *flânerie* of the writer and the portrayed aimless strolling and idle observations of his narrators and characters. I read the idleness of the protagonists of Manto's Bombay stories as manifested in colonial melancholy. This reading then helps us unpack the figure of the *āvārah* in its mid-twentieth-century context.

To unpack colonial melancholy, I now turn to Khanna's definition, which she derived from Porot's depreciative colonial-psychological terminology. Antoine Porot, a highly influential French psychiatrist working in Algiers, asserted that the brutal violence amongst native Muslim men in North Africa resulted from a naturally violent constitution they seemed to have that he reported as an odd form of melancholy, leading them to violence rather than suicide or introspection as it did in Europe. He termed this 'pseudomelancholy'. Porot and other colonial psychiatrists' work in North Africa has been discussed in a vaguely critical manner by Frantz Fanon (1964). In his essay "The North-African Syndrome", Fanon also elaborated upon the characteristic morbidity and melancholy of the North African/Arab with the loss of the ideal of home and country (1964: 15). Khanna builds upon this basis of psychiatry to address morbidity and melancholy in the colonies, using Freud's theory of 'critical agency' to assert that the "idea of

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282  See, for instance, a detailed exploration of the vagabond in Bengal's premodern, modern, and colonial history by Avishek Ray (2022).

pseudomelancholy can be read psychoanalytically against the grain to understand the affect of coloniality" (2003: 152). She claims that the works of colonial psychiatrists like Porot were in 'denial' of the affective expressions of "political rebellion", "protest", and "moral outrage at colonial oppression" (Khanna 2003: 178). She argues that this form of melancholy, "similar to that of the 'Westerners' losing a person or an idea, or expatriation, works slightly differently from the blueprint presented in the forms of psychoanalysis taken up by colonial psychiatry and psychology" (ibid.). Understanding literature in the appreciation of the psychoanalytic, and referring to Octave Mannoni, she asserts that "the literary is associated with the psychoanalytic "Other Scene", which allows insight into a real social problem through understanding the work of dreams, madness, and creative – particularly literary – production" (Khanna 2003: 157).

I propose a nuanced reading of a selection of Manto's works through this understanding of colonial melancholy as the emotional make up of his protagonists. In fact, some of his early works like "*Tamāśā*" (Spectacle) and "*Inqalāb Pasand*" (Revolutionary) are excellent stories to read colonial melancholy. Another significant story is "*Nayā Qānūn*". While scholars like Jalal and Dubrow have read Manto's Partition stories in the contexts of "colonial difference" (Jalal 27) and "particular violence of forms of colonial governmentality" (Dubrow 2019: 2), some of his stories of despairing men set in cosmopolitan Bombay require more attention. I read these under-studied stories, set in pre-Partition Bombay, as symptomatic of colonial melancholy for a deeper understanding of the emergent fictional character of the idle slacker, the useless no-do-gooder, also popularised in contemporary Bombay cinema as the figure of the displaced but honest vagrant/*āvārah*.[283] Before turning to the idle slackers, I wish to briefly analyse his early story, "*Inqalāb Pasand*", and address the question of the 'mad' man, often sharing close semblances with some of Manto's idle men, signalling, once again, the close link between idleness and melancholy, where madness takes up an expression of critique. The semblances are portrayed in their critical distance from bourgeois society, their solitude, and in their melancholic disposition; only for the madman, melancholy turns into pathological mania. "*Inqalāb Pasand*" recounts the narrator's friend Salim's admission to a mental asylum. A desire for revolutionary change in society drives Salim, who had repeatedly failed in his studies and earned the reputation of having an idle disposition (*āvārah mizāj*), being useless and incapable (*nālāʾiq*). The narrator claims Salim is knowledgeable and brilliant but never interested in his studies. His cheerful disposition changed overnight with his

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283    K. A. Abbas's films *Awara/Āvārah* (1951), *Shri 420/Śrī 420* (1955).

father's sudden demise. According to the narrator, Salim cannot express his loss and grief in words, and this inability explains his emotional and mental torture:

> He who can express his feelings to someone else can successfully lighten the burden of his conscience. The one who feels but cannot understand his emotions and cannot express them to others is like the person trying his best to remove something stuck in his throat that keeps sliding down. This is a kind of mental torture that cannot be expressed in words. (Manto, from *Ātaś Pāre aur Syāh Hāśye* 1984: 25)

Unable to digest – in this case, even ingest – his loss, Salim has already been admitted to an asylum. Salim proclaims that he is a 'revolutionary'. In reflecting upon Salim's use of the word, the narrator explains that his friend desired a radical change in the social *status quo*. He terms what Salim undergoes as mental or emotional acerbity (*z̤ahnī taʿaṣṣub*) (Manto 1984: 33). The growing desire for change resulted in Salim often asserting suspicion regarding his own identity – "perhaps I am not Salim" (1984: 34). Unable to separate his consciousness from that of the lost and loved ideal of social change projected onto the father figure, Salim begins harassing people with questions regarding social problems and is declared 'mad' (another word for harassment is *āvārah kardan*). He expresses his absolute denouncement of the inequality of wealth in society, rejecting allegations of madness. In a final meeting, the narrator is stunned to hear Salim talk endlessly, compared to his previous inarticulation, before he is sent to the asylum. Salim's 'madness' manifests as an inability to assimilate the loss of his ideal and mourn it. The story reflects certain autobiographical references. Manto's father had suddenly died, leaving him with an unresolved grief; he had failed his college examinations; this was also during his contact with the PWA. Manto identified with his protagonist Salim (in a prophetic fashion, he too was sent to an asylum in later years), and it is telling that he does not consider the movement (or even such a network, i.e., the PWA) as a solution or even a factor in the tragedy of his revolution-loving protagonist. This is an early indication of the growing emotional and intellectual conflicts Manto would have with the ideals of nationalist progressive politics.

### 4.3.3 The Critical Idleness of Useless Men in Manto's Bombay Stories

The resistance, at times inability to do productive work, the vagrant idleness of the youth of his generation, and the unhappy, melancholic disposition of hundreds of thousands of urban men and women in Bombay drew Manto to a different, contrasting aesthetics from the one of progress. Reflective of the subcontinent's complex socio-political and colonial predicament, a recurrent motif

in Manto's Bombay stories is the figure of the unemployed, idle young man refusing to work. Their portrayals are particularly fascinating in his Bombay stories like "*Pīran*" (1950) and "*Bādśāhat kā Khātmah*" (End of Empire, 1950). A general refusal to regular work is also seen in stories like "*Mammad Bhāī*" (where Mammad Bhai is a gangster), whereas a remarkable critique of child labour and excessive work is poignantly woven into the story "*Jī Āyā Ṣāḥab*" (Coming, Sir). In "*Pīran*" and "*Bādśāḥat kā Khātmah*", the refusal to work is seen almost as a pathological affliction. Set in Bombay, both stories narrate the predicament of protagonists who refuse to work and are rather oddly romantically inclined towards certain women. In these two stories, I read this persistent rejection of productive employment as a critical variation of idleness, an expression to register their protest against the social order of nationalist progress and colonialism-driven capitalism. The melancholic disposition of the characters is seen to be on the verge of being 'cured' with the initiation of pseudo-romantic affiliations, a glimpse of the possibility of hope. However, Manto's short stories, depicting colonial and post-colonial India (and Pakistan), remain far from offering salvation to anyone.[284]

In the story "*Pīran*", like in many stories, Manto's narrator is Manto himself. This is a unique feature in Manto's stories; with the writer's association with the narrative voice, a personal and realistic tone is imparted. Many of his Bombay stories share this characteristic, suggesting that Manto saw himself as a character in these stories. The penury-stricken narrator living in a dingy, over-crowded Bombay *caul* [285] is visited by his friend Brij Mohan every Sunday. Brij Mohan borrows some money every Sunday, enough for a train ride. He would ride to Bandra to meet Piran[286], a Parsi girl. At Piran's house, they would engage in idle talk, and he would give her the answers for the *Illustrated Weekly*'s crossword puzzles. Manto, the narrator, writes of Piran that she was neither beautiful nor worthy of his friend's attention, although he never said so to Brij Mohan and always managed to give his friend the cash for the ride. Instead, the narrator reveals his thoughts to his readers: "He [Brij Mohan] was

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284    In response to criticism against writing 'bad literature', Manto is quoted as saying, "How could I expose the bosom of society when it was already naked?" See Ayesha Jalal (2013), 169.

285    A *chaul* (*caul* in academic transliteration) is a housing situation most commonly found in Bombay. Accommodating a large number of people in one building where sometimes families live in one room and must share bathrooms, toilets, and communal spaces like balconies and courtyards (in case there is one) generally connotes penury, lack of privacy and a diminished existence.

286    Diacritics are used while writing titles of stories, and in the case of proper names if within quotations.

unemployed. All day he would wring his head to solve the crossword puzzle for Piran. He had even earned some small prizes, but Piran had taken them all" (from *Ṭhaṇḍā Gośt* 1989: 138). One Sunday, Mohan declares that he broke up with Piran since she brought terrible luck; whenever he spends time with her, he cannot find any employment! Piran argues that Brij Mohan is an idle slacker of the highest order. Mohan asks a film director for a job. Although he also believes Mohan to be a slacker, the director ends up employing him for two hundred and fifty rupees a month with a contract for the year. Mohan shows Manto an advance and expresses his desire to show off:

> I would really like to go to Bandra and show this cash and contract to Pīran. But I am afraid that Nanū Bhā'ī will fire me immediately. This has happened to me so many times – I get a job, I meet her, and then, for some reason or another, I am fired. God knows why this girl is such bad luck! I won't see her face for at least a year now. Anyway, I have very few clothes left. After I have some new clothes, we'll see what will be done. (Manto, from *Ṭhaṇḍā Gośt* 1989: 40)

Brij Mohan works regularly; he acquires everything that a bachelor needs to live a comfortable life when suddenly, one day, he receives a letter from Piran. The narrator suggests that he need not meet her, but Mohan argues slyly that it has been six months already, and he is tired of being employed. The next day, he meets Piran, and the day after, he loses his job; in fact, Nanu Bhai goes bankrupt and has to sell the studio. The narrator is stunned, and Brij Mohan calmly replies that it is inevitable. He lights a cigarette, picks up his camera and goes out for a stroll. The story is a mockery of progressive values of utilitarian time and opportunity, with Brij Mohan's fortunes tossed up repeatedly. Once again, he is a pauper, having spent everything he had earned. Once again, the narrator starts lending him money each Sunday. Eventually, the narrator, Manto, asks Mohan what attracts him to Piran. He answers that it is simply the bad luck she brings into his life. Mohan wishes to test this theory and plans to quit before he is fired. Manto pleads with him not to see Piran again, but to no avail. Mohan goes to see her with a drafted resignation letter. He waits in anticipation, hoping to control his own (un)employment. But on submitting the letter, his resignation is rejected, and he receives a raise! Mohan finally stops seeing Piran and loses all interest in her. Eventually, he confesses to Manto, "[a]s soon as she had ran out of bad luck, I got bored of her. I lost the most fascinating occupation I had. Now who will be responsible for keeping me idle?" (1989: 149)

Although the story seems implausible in the characterisation of Brij Mohan, irregular (un)employment was widespread. Thousands of men and women came to the metropolis to try their luck at some odd job. Unemployment, penury, difficulty in finding and maintaining jobs, and high living expen-

ses had made it commonplace for many men to have a dismissive attitude to the ups and downs of regular employment. Most people who travelled to the city arrived with the baggage of heavy losses. Social inequality, the glamour of the metropolis, and contemporary political mayhem deepened the sense of loss as portrayed in some of Manto's fascinating character sketches like Saugandhi in "*Hatak*", Mozelle in "*Mozelle*" and Naim in "*Bānjh*". A recurring refusal of employment, living at the mercy of friends and acquaintances, and finding shelter in the serpentine alleys of the city are depicted as common among young men in these stories. The poverty and precarity were effects of long-standing colonialism as well as sudden and rampant industrialisation and capitalism. In this social set-up, the reluctance towards and refusal of regular employment has to be read as a form of suppressed protest in the psychological portrayal of these men. They are portrayals of the millions who were not convinced of ideals and promises of progress, as practically, progress had taken the form of technological and capitalist advancements, not the socialist progress that the emergence of progressive ideals in the early twentieth century had evoked.

While in *Pīran*, the protagonist has an unusual desire to be unemployed and idle; alternately, in "*Bādśāḥat kā Khātmah*", the protagonist refuses to work because he refuses to 'serve' (*ġulāmī*) anyone. Service or *ġulāmī* is contrasted against authority/*bādśāhat*, and resistance to work is registering an affect of protest. A pronounced disillusionment towards economic advancements in the protagonists' lives is common in both stories. In *Pīran*, through the on-and-off employment of Brij Mohan, one arrives at his despair embodied in the loss of Piran's bad luck, which Brij Mohan held onto through periods of active idleness. Once her bad luck has worn out, his loss of interest in Piran reflects an impoverished ego with a critical agency, where actual loss is beyond his bounds of awareness and expression.

"*Bādśāḥat kā Khātmah*" is a more straightforward story but one with more complex psychological characterisation. The story is told in the third person narrative voice, directly introducing the reader to the protagonist, Manmohan. Manmohan is sitting in his friend's office; the friend is away for some time and offers the office for the protagonist to sleep in instead of the usual footpath. The telephone rings; a woman's voice on the line admits to dialling the wrong number and apologises. Manmohan returned to his book, although he has read it at least twenty times; it is the only book he has. The narrative voice can already be read as offering a biased focalization in sentences like "for a week, the office was under Manmohan's reign" (1985: 9). The narrator makes a case for Manmohan's refusal to work:

> He would lay around alone in the office. He abhorred employment. If he wanted to, he could easily get a job as a film director in any film company.

> However, he had no wish to serve anyone. He was incredibly reliable and relaxed, so his friends often agreed to handle his daily expenses. And what expenses, really? A cup of tea and toast in the mornings, two *capātīs* and a bit of gravy for lunch, a packet of cigarettes a day – that was all. (Manto, from *Bādśāhat kā K̲h̲ātmah*, 1985: 10)

Manmohan's only desire is to be loved by a woman. He proclaims to his friends that he will become a 'role model' employee if he finds true love. The clock strikes at noon, and the telephone rings again; it is the same voice. The woman confesses that she wants to speak to him; Manmohan is surprised and amused. He chats about his usual life on the streets and footpaths; when asked about his occupation, he casually responds that he idly strolls around (*āvārahgardī*) all day, and sleeps at night. He also explains that he has been living a lavish life in this office this last week. She finds his chatter to be absorbing. Manmohan, on the other hand, expresses no curiosity about her. She asks about his hobbies; he laughs at her, although he admits to his interest in photography. One day, she asks if he has eaten breakfast; he replies that he cannot since he has no money. In despair, she asks why he says such terrible things – is it because he is sad? Manmohan ponders for a while before responding: "Not really. If I had any sorrow in my life, I am now quite used to it."

Although Manmohan initially appears detached, in a few days, he begins to wait for her calls. He feels an unbearable restlessness if she does not ring according to the hour. They talked twice daily for a month, and Manmohan still does not have her name. Eventually, he receives a letter from his friend informing him that he will return in a week. Manmohan asks the woman to stop calling this number, and she suggests that on his last day in this office, when his kingly lavish life (*bādśāhat*) will come to a close, she will give him her telephone number. They plan to meet finally, but he develops a fever the next day. It keeps getting worse with each passing hour; his physical condition deteriorates rapidly. Unquenchable thirst, breathlessness, and delirious sounds of ringing telephones take control of his senses. When the telephone rings, he musters enough strength to move towards it and manages to utter into the receiver: "my empire has come to its close" (1985: 26). He splutters blood and falls with his face down as the woman on the line asks him to note down her number.

Narrated mostly through dialogues, both the telephonic conversation between the characters and the interface of the protagonist's outer and inner emotional selves, the story is symptomatic of Manto's scriptwriting experiences. In fact, the narrative is woven with such attention to the visual-aural-oral and dramatic aspects that it attains a cinematic quality in style. Manmohan's indolent, introverted, and impossibly independent life and his affective engagement with urban colonial modernity embodied in the woman's elusive presence are the two contesting realities of contemporary India that Manto's

protagonists are often seen to be struggling with. His confused attachment and detachment from her are associated with his poverty and attempt at living an independent life. The mocking allusions to authority or 'kingship'/'*bād-śāhat*' is a rhetorical twist on the idea of self and sovereignty, the burning question, not only for the individual but also for the nation. While *bādśāh* translates to king, it also means 'emperor'; this is a nuanced use of the term where Manto implies sovereignty but pits it against the ideas of both spheres – imperialism as well as progressive capitalist modernity – unfit for the sovereignty of an independent individual, who resists *ġulāmī* or subservience. Allusions to technology, like the clock and the telephone, stand at odds with the character's emotional and internal unity; they cause disruptions in his melancholy and idle flow of life. Dialogue, idle talk, anecdotes, lies, and the constant looming but dimmed soundscape of the cut-throat and trickster city are some of the elements through which Manto's stories stylistically differed from the progressive-socialist stories of this time. In these rambling interfaces of narration, Manto's Bombay stories negotiate a space for the solitary individual as idle and adrift in the glitter of the metropolis.

The practices of strolling, drifting, and idling in these stories can often be read as affective manifestations of modern, urban, colonial melancholy. The other affective manifestation of colonial melancholy is violence, which many of Manto's famous characters embody. While the manifestation of melancholy as violence is read repeatedly through various angles, the manifestation of idleness in his stories is grossly understudied. This emotional aspect of his work forms an integral social and literary background to mid-twentieth century India's emerging issues. Vagrancy, homelessness, and unemployment had become rampant as the country attained political independence from a long-lasting foreign rule, leaving the nation bankrupt. These issues received significant attention in the films of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, starting with *Awara/Āvārā* (Vagrant/Idle) (1951). The PWM could more successfully connect to larger masses (which was its original agenda) through the performing arts – cinema and theatre.[287] Many of the progressive writers wrote for cinema – from composing lyrics to script and penning dialogue. Abbas, a progressive director, popularised the figure of the vagrant, idle, but honest young man, a man of integrity (reflecting the looted nation with its spirit intact), in what Priyamvada Gopal calls the 'Vagrant trilogy' (2005: 126).[288] *Awara* did not only resonate with the massive Indian audience but was also a great hit in countries

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287    Mainly through its sister organisation, the Indian People's Theatre Association

288    The films *Awara*, *Dharti ke Laal* and *Shri 420* constitute Abbas's 'Vagrant Trilogy', according to Gopal.

like Turkey and Russia, signalling a particular ethos of resistance against capitalist drives (Gopal 2005: 128). In her study of Abbas's films, Gopal sees him bringing the figure of the vagrant to the limelight through the discourses of "subjectivity, agency and social transformation" (2005: 126), implied in national possibility. Like in Manto's stories, the vagrant in Abbas's films also signifies a national predicament. The difference between Abbas's and Manto's vagrants, though, is that Manto offers no resolution, thus enabling no particular "social transformation". His melancholic protagonists spend their narrated time in an internal conflict between subjectivity and agency (one being lost, the other being critical), unable to progress or transform in the "national possibility" that progressive literature aimed to bring about. In his short stories, Manto remained the lonely voice who recorded, captured, and echoed the suppressed, nuanced, and critical soundscape of the idle drift that the 'submerged population' of urban India experienced.

## 4.4  Qurratuʿain Hyder's Narration of Idyllic Pasts

Qurratuʿain Hyder was born to the elite household of Sajjad Hyder Yildrim and Nazr Sajjad Hyder (1892–1967). Yildrim, as mentioned before, was an early Urdu short story writer; he also translated Turkish literature into Urdu. Nazr Hyder was a significant name among early Urdu women writers, known for her novels and regular contributions to leading journals for women. Yildrim served in the colonial government and was posted in various parts of India, including Mussoorie, Dehradun, Aligarh, Ghazipur, Etawah, and the Andaman Islands. Qurratuʿain was born into this upper-class literary family and grew up in a cultured, liberal, and dynamic Muslim household. It was natural for her to take up writing; in her childhood, she reportedly wrote stories for dolls. Her first serious collection of stories was published in 1945 under the title *Sitāroṇ se Āge* (Beyond the stars), while some of her earlier writings were already published in various literary journals, including the esteemed *Ḥumāyūn*. Hyder was still pursuing her university education at Lucknow's Isabella Thoburn College when, at the age of twenty, in December of 1947, like millions of other Muslims, she fled with her family to the promised land of Pakistan. In 1947, while still in Lucknow, Hyder started to pen her first novel, *Mere bhī Ṣanamkhāne* (*My Temples, Too*); it explored the ramifications of the Partition on a group of young idealists and was published in Lahore in 1949. The impact of Partition was so remarkable on her psyche that she wrote her next novel, *Ṣafīnah-i Ġam-i Dil* (Ship of the heart's sorrows) on the same theme, almost in a continuation of her first novel. In the early 50s, she worked with Pakistan's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and made documentary films; she also started

writing for magazines and newspapers. She then travelled to England, working as a journalist for a few years with the BBC; she also wrote for *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Eastern World.* [289] In the late 1950s, Hyder began writing the novel *Āg kā Daryā* (*River of Fire*, 1959), which would become her legacy and bring back the novel as a serious genre in Urdu at a time when poetry and short fiction reigned under the pen of progressive writers.[290]

In 1961, she returned to India and settled in Bombay. She wrote for the *Imprint* and *Illustrated Weekly*, simultaneously returning to the genre of short fiction. She received the 1967 Sahitya Akademi Award in Urdu for a collection of these short stories, *Patjhar kī Āvāz* (*The Sound of Falling Leaves*). In 1989, she received the Jnanpith Award, and in 2005, the Padma Bhushan. Hyder's illustrious literary career reflects her profound interest in time, memory, and history.[291] These short stories, written in the 60s, form a separate assortment in her literary career; they signal a return not only to a genre but also to a time gone by. I read these stories, written in the aftermath of the Partition, as negotiating the profound emotion of loss through a postcolonial, post-Partition variation of nostalgia. Later writers of the subcontinent take up this variation of nostalgia to explore different layers of the past and the conflicting feelings towards these perceptions of the past, in entangled emotions of love, loss, grief, and guilt.

### 4.4.1 The Past as a Source of Fiction: Weaving History with Memory

Although nostalgia has been read as a significant emotional expression in Urdu literature in the late-nineteenth century owing to the loss of civilisational pride, the 'nostalgic' underwent various manifestations through the decades of the twentieth century. While some late nineteenth-century writers struggled with an ambivalent nostalgia, as seen in Chapter 2, the literature produced in the aftermath of the Partition revoked a renewed nostalgia, now not only based on loss of civilisational pride but also expressing the loss of linguistic significance of Urdu, an idealised notion of communal syncretism prevalent in the

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289   "Interview with Qurratulain Hyder by BBC Urdu". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmqdCOLHh3w&t=784s accessed on 13th May 2019. See also Jameel Akhtar's translated interview of Hyder, *A Singular Voice* (2017).

290   The progressive movement in Urdu produced impressive volumes of short stories and poetry, turning these genres into literary trends. The novel receded into the background until Hyder took it up again.

291   See also G. C. Narang's essay "Qurratulain Hyder: An Author Par Excellence" in Rakhshanda Jalil ed. *Qurratulain Hyder and the River of Fire* (2011), 47.

past, and for many whose families migrated, the loss of the idea of 'homeland'. This multidimensional loss drew various emotional responses from Urdu writers, particularly those who migrated to Pakistan. Manto's writing turned towards a more profound critical melancholy in his renowned Partition stories like "*Tobah Ṭek Singh*". Writers of the PWM who moved to Pakistan, although disillusioned[292], continued to aim for a progressive Islamic socialism that grew difficult to sustain following the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case of 1951–55.[293] Writers like Hyder and Intizar Husain turned towards an alternate notion of temporality, located in the communal harmony of the remembered past, referred to as the *gangā-jamnī tahẓīb* (the syncretic culture of Ganga and Jamuna, the two rivers representing the Indic and Islamicate aspects of India's civilisation). These formulations of alternative temporality accommodated the multiple losses in an affective response to re-live the past. Hyder is regarded as the pioneer of the modern Urdu novel, looking back at such syncretism that claims to be a predominant narrative of the subcontinent's history. *Āg kā Daryā* inspired several Urdu writers to express loss and grief, for example, *Udās Naslen* (*The Weary Generations*, 1963) by Abdullah Hussein, and to some extent, *Bastī* (1979) by Intizar Husain. Hyder's magnum opus narrates an incredibly stretched fictional history in a complex understanding of the subcontinent's multiple pasts, its cultural and linguistic heterogeneity and discrepancies, disruption and violation unleashed by colonial rule, leading to the tragic partition, of not only the landmass stretching from Afghanistan to Burma, but of the South Asian civilisation as an integral phenomenon.

On the other hand, her short stories initiate a trend of writing after the Partition, which attempts to access the past through reminiscences and nostalgia for 'simpler' times, manifest in the joys and idle curiosities of a childhood spent under the glory of imperial administration of the British Raj. Hyder responds to the loss of Partition with a nuanced crafting of pre-Partition nostalgia that over-

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292    For example, Faiz's poem of despair in the aftermath of Independence, "*Ṣubḥ-i Āzādī*". English translations include "The Dawn of Freedom" by Mustansir Dalvi and "Freedom's Dawn" by V. G. Kiernan.

293    The alleged Conspiracy to overthrow the government of Liaquat Ali Khan, the first president of Pakistan, was used as a false charge (unresolved) under which the two stalwarts of PWM, Zaheer and Faiz, were incarcerated. Many literary scholars like Coppola and Jalil see this as 'the last nail in the coffin of progressivism in Pakistan'. See Jalil's chapter "The Decline of the Progressive Writers" (2014), 339–401; Coppola's chapter "The Progressive Writers' Association in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970: Years of Decline" (2017). Other scholars like K. A. Ali see the ideals of the PWM and communism as having played a more prolonged and significant role in shaping Pakistan's early years (2011).

laps with postcolonial nostalgia. She presents the past in the image of a whole-
some childhood, in a heterogenous subcontinental cultural setting, rendering the
past as complex, beyond polarities of national and communal politics, thereby
resisting the binary of the collaborator and the resistor in the narrative figure of
the child. The collaborator and the resistor become ambiguous, often indistinct
categories in the context of what Denis Walder (2011) terms 'postcolonial nos-
talgias'. Walter understands this variant of nostalgia as a nuanced, "complex
form of representation for writers concerned to express their relationship with
the recalled or remembered pasts they identify with; in particular those whose
pasts have been shaped by empire and/or colonisation" (2011: 3). Postcolonial
nostalgias are ambivalent in nature, particularly given the memory of trauma,
genocide, and violence as legacies of colonisation. This ambivalence in Hyder's
narratives is manoeuvred through the child narrator.

Qurratulʿain Hyder foregrounds genre ambiguities in these proclaimed
stories, particularly in childhood stories, reminiscing an idyllic past. This
ambiguity is heightened through her references to her childhood memories,
uncannily similar to the stories she wrote. This overlap of story and memory
is partly reflected in the blatant, persistent class privilege of the characters in
her stories, but also, and perhaps more so, in the stylistic innovation of her
writing, especially in later works like her part-family chronicle-part autobiog-
raphy, *Kār-i Ĵahān Darāz Hai* (The affairs of the world go on, 1977). Hyder
reportedly labels the book as a "biographical non-fictional novel", while she
calls another later novel, *Gardiś-i Rang-i Caman* (Changing hues of the garden,
1988), a "semi-documentary novel" (Asaduddin 2000: 30–31). Such allusions to
her literary works as blurring the lines between fiction and reality, woven
with autobiography, memory, and history, add to these ambiguities. This is
also reflected in her short stories written after the Partition; for instance, the
story originally titled "*Ḍālanvālā*" (1990 a) in Urdu is later translated into
English by Hyder herself as "Memories of an Indian Childhood" (1994 a). Asa-
duddin writes of her stories that "they tend to be impressionistic pieces of
expansive and dispersed reflection" rather than "possessing tautness and brev-
ity which are thought to be the traditional hallmarks of a good story" (2000:
32). While his criticism is sound, this style of impressionistic, reflective prose
is to be read as signalling a way of negotiating the ambivalences of postcoloni-
al nostalgia, a recurrent theme in her short stories. A significant factor regard-
ing this style in her stories is the child narrator's voice embedded in loose,
reflective prose, merging narrative styles of diary-writing, memoir, anecdotes,
community and family gossip, and recounting overheard conversations,
among other oral interactions. These sources of fiction are aptly suited to the
personal, fragmentary, and unreliable voice of childhood and adolescence
rather than a tightly woven plot.

While the past is her archive for fiction, Hyder is widely known to be elusive about the specificity of past incidents, rendering the past in the lens of memory rather than 'history'.[294] In his book, A Singular Voice, featuring various interviews with the author, Jameel Akhtar (2017: Intr.) mentions her dismissive attitude to the present and her profound hold on memory. Raza Rumi claims that Hyder is, in fact, a writer of 'social history'; this perception of history is seen to emerge from below, from the voices of common people (2011: 53–54). In his essay on Hyder's relationship with the past as portrayed in her novel, *Gardiś-i Rang-i Caman*, Khalid Ashraf criticises Hyder for her nostalgia or "*māẓī parastī*" (literally, worshipping the past) (2017: 233). Nostalgia, recurrent returns to the past, and mourning the loss of a culture of syncretism are aspects that loom large over Hyder's writings. Her obsession with the past is perhaps best expressed by one of her protagonists in *River of Fire*, Talat, signalling this specific turn to temporalities, i.e., the relationship between the past, the present and the future:

> "But the past is present and the present is the past, and also the future," Talat replied. "See, this is also the Qoranic concept of Time, an Egyptian scholar at the Islamic Centre once told me. He asked me to read Mohyeddin Ibn-el-Arabi, the Spanish metaphysician. But how much can one know? Time is a juggler, it goes on persecuting me". (Hyder 1998: 355–56)

Although several essays and articles discuss Hyder's obsession with the past, they are mostly intended to unravel the complex temporality of her novel *Āg kā Daryā*. In this chapter, I read nostalgia as an emotion in her stories and propose that by probing into memory and history, even in weaving them together, Hyder attempts to introduce a way of dealing with loss in the aftermath of Partition in her short stories written in the 1960s. The nostalgia she portrays goes beyond the yearning or longing associated with the pathological understanding of the phenomenon – for longing in this context brings its political implications, especially in memories of a past under colonial rule. My reading proposes that in addressing this tricky aspect of longing or yearning, through the voice of the child narrator, Hyder not only initiates a renewed way of dealing with loss and negotiating these ambivalent aspects of postcolonial nostalgia but also pre-empts a dialogue with Indian English writing in the years to come.

While nationalist histories of both countries, after Partition, attempted to view the two nations as self-contained sovereign entities, exclusive of each other, writers like Hyder resisted these nationalist narratives and, consequently, the exclusive nationalist identities. They repeatedly pointed to the ruptures in

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294    For example, see Jameel Akhtar's Introduction.

the subcontinent's nations without the syncretic culture that flourished in the past. While she is bluntly critical of the British for bringing about such differences among the communities, she also considers British India a significant aspect of India's cultural heritage. What is most significant about her elite characters is that they refuse to be categorised into boxes despite their disparate socio-cultural backgrounds. Years later, Hyder is reported to have said that she had travelled to many parts of the world to know people, and that as she had expected, people are the same everywhere (see Hyder's BBC interview). For such universalisations, Hyder drew much criticism from prominent writers of the time, most of them stalwarts of the progressive association and staunch believers in the reality of class difference. Rajinder Singh Bedi, for instance, criticised her first novel for its descriptions of elite parties and social gatherings, while Ismat Chughtai wrote a long rant against Hyder's class (un)consciousness in an (in)famous essay, titled "*Pompom Ḍārling*" (c. 1952)[295]. Chughtai, one of the progressive pioneers exploring female sexuality and familial violence, apart from other socially relevant literary themes, mockingly asks Hyder, for how long would she "continue to be obsessed with Shosho and Fofo and Bharatnatyam and take dips in the swimming pool of the Savoy de la Mer?": "Why don't you come out and see what lies in the outside world?" (Chughtai 2000 [1952]: 116). Chughtai clarifies her position as belonging to a group of writers writing for "readers, not for their own enjoyment" (2000: 117). She further accuses Hyder of "fiddling around with the dazzling atmosphere of pleasure resorts and circuses" (Chughtai 2000: 123).[296]

Chughtai's critique of Hyder is based on her characters and their cultural milieu – people of a specific class who, according to Chughtai, do not have to face the social realities of the present. This is not entirely true of Hyder's characters; they belong to various classes, cultures, and backgrounds, and have considerably tricky journeys in their narrated lives. Jameel Akhtar compares her characters with the stock characters in mainstream Urdu fiction of the time: "In Ainee Apa's[297] stories, everything was different. She wrote of the upper-middle class, her characters were usually highly educated, English-speaking, globetrotting" (Akhtar 2017: xiv). He claims that Hyder's stories glorified "traditions of

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295    The original date of publication is not traceable, but the essay was published in a collection titled *Chūʾī Mūʾī* (1952. If "*Pompom Ḍārling*" was published before, it couldn't have been too long before 1952, as it was precisely around this time that Hyder was introduced to the Urdu sphere.

296    For the Urdu original essay, see Chughtai (1952), 148.

297    Hyder was affectionately addressed as ʿAinī āpā by many writers, critics, and friends.

feudal culture and civilization", writing about those who were born "with a sil-ver spoon in their mouths": "They were oblivious to their surroundings, free of cares and worries, lost in their own glittering world" (Akhtar 2017: xv). Hyder admonishes such categorisations of her characters and themes. She clarifies in the English Introduction to her collection of short stories, *The Sound of Falling Leaves*, 1994 (originally, *Patjhaṛ kī Āvāz*, 1965) the "sociological hinterland" (Hyder 1994) of her work, connecting her own life to her characters, once again weaving fiction with memory and autobiographical references. She describes her parents' literary and cultural activities, social circles, dinner parties, and the nationalist-reformist movements (the Aligarh Movement) that drove them. For instance, following a paragraph in which she mentions the accolades her moth-er received, she shares with the reader, somewhat abruptly, that "[t]he era of dainty afternoon teas in glazed verandahs and Chekhovian women strolling down rose-lit avenues came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of the Second World War" (Hyder 1994: x). She returns to her memories again:

> In the "bioscope" of memories, the tropical-colonial milieu becomes more vivid as we return to India and live in Ghazipur. The atmosphere was pure East India Company. On Sunday mornings Mother took her driving lessons around the magnificent tomb of Lord Cornwallis. In the afternoons the resi-dent Ustad taught her to play the sitar and harmonium. He also entertained our dinner guests with his superb music. [...] From Ghazipur to Dehra Dun – this other England, demi-paradise of retired Englishmen. (Hyder 1994: xi–xii)

When Frank O'Connor describes his 'submerged population' in relation to the subject of short stories, he uses examples of people pigeon-holed into catego-ries, trying to break free – "Gogol's officials, Turgenev's serfs, Maupassant's prostitutes, Chekhov's doctors and teachers, Sherwood Anderson's provincials, always dreaming of escape" (1963: 18). He clarifies that although it may be a characteristic of the group, the group is not merely defined by "material squa-lor", but rather, a sense of "defeat", "inflicted by a society that has no signposts, a society that offers no goals and no answers" (O'Connor 1963: 18). In a nuanced reading, Hyder's subjects can also be seen to form a submerged popu-lation who embody upper-class lifestyle and carefree ways but are defined by the restrictions of their socio-cultural predicament that offer no goals and no answers despite their worldly means. They are seen to represent a way of life that is in the process of being lost, negotiating a way of life that has to emerge. Simultaneously, their loss and their predicaments were subjects of ridicule at the time amongst Urdu literary circles. Hyder emerged as a "controversial" voice, drawing flak from the progressives for "glorifying the bourgeoisie". She claims: "It was hard to explain that mine was a tongue-in-cheek "Studies in a

Dying Culture", that all those who belonged to these classes were not ogres" (Hyder 1994: xiv). The idea of this dying culture is not merely a recurring theme in her works but the backdrop, the "social hinterland" of her fiction. The characters make repetitive, often futile journeys of 'escape'. It is also imperative to note that through the characters and the cultural milieu of Hyder's fiction, she brought to Urdu literature the concerns and predicaments of a class of people that modern Urdu fiction did not accommodate before – particularly women of upper classes, educated in the colonial English system, modern and global (or western) in their outlook but South Asian in their cultural setup. Writers like Nayantara Sehgal, writing in English, addressed similar themes in novels like *A Time to be Happy* (1958). This emerging class was a cultural reality that had become the subject of Indian English writing; Hyder was one of the first writers to address this milieu in Urdu.

Urdu, as a language in India, began to embody an aspect of cultural and civilisational loss (once again) in the aftermath of the Partition. Qurratuʿain Hyder grieved the loss of this linguistic richness, wrote, and talked about it repeatedly: "A language isn't just about words and printing them. Along with being published, it's also important for it to be used in everyday life" (Akhtar 2017: 65). Hyder foresaw the inevitable decline of Urdu in India, which would explain her decision to 'transcreate' her fiction into English in her later years. Hyder's novels and stories are taught in Indian Writing in English courses in universities, alongside the works of English writers from India, mainly because her texts are re-written in English. By rendering her published Urdu works in English, she attempts to bridge the gap that had started to widen between English and vernaculars, particularly Urdu literary output in India. Simultaneously, by allowing access to her own writings for English readers in India, Hyder broadened the spectrum of literature on what she terms a 'dying culture'. Unsurprisingly, the theme of her works after Partition is loss; many of her later short stories are invested not so much in the emotion of yearning and longing for what has been lost but rather in preserving the memories of their occurrence. I read a selection of these nostalgic stories as an attempt on her part to allow readers to revisit a time of "one's childhood which seems safe, intact and rosy" as a rest or repose from the precarity of the present (Hyder 1994: Pref.).

When these stories were written, Hyder's turn towards nostalgia was instrumental in making it possible for Urdu readers to reimagine and experience a temporality before rupture, before nationalistic narratives and progressive propaganda had taken over the public sphere. In these nostalgic narratives, childhood and youth emerge as the alternate temporality, fashioned against the 'coming of age' narrative of the new nation(s). The events of Partition or Independence are understated, if at all mentioned, echoing her telling description of

two words that formed a chapter in *Āg kā Daryā*: "*Hindustān, 1947*" (Ḥaidar 1989: 385). The sense of leisurely timelessness in these stories of childhood is an attempt at preserving time, as the narrator comments in "The Magic Mountain":

> Becket House is still there but the people who see it today would find noth-ing extraordinary about it. It is the usual sort of bungalow in the mountains. But you must believe me when I tell you that, in this colourless world of ours, there was once a time when a fairy from the Caucasus Mountains used to visit that house in Almora by the light of the fireflies. [...] And you must also know that childhood vanishes like the light of the fireflies, as though we had never been young and innocent once. But those children are perhaps still there, laughing inside that vine-covered bungalow. Because Time is a Tablet Preserved – on which time can have no effect. (Hyder 1994c: 238)

Time, however, is only felt to be preserved in the reconstruction of the past. The narratives of one's childhood are not yearned or longed for in these stories but suggest a re-living and remembering. Memory is used in the garb of fiction to signify the act of remembering. In an intricate reconstruction of the leisurely past, the nostalgic flavour flourishes with the appeal of sensory experiences and the innocence of a child's feelings, albeit recollected in seemingly simplis-tic short stories.

### 4.4.2 Childhood, Leisureliness, and Post-Partition Nostalgia in Hyder's Stories

The ambivalent nostalgia of the late nineteenth-century Urdu literary output was followed by the emergence of 'progress' (and utilitarianism) – *taraqqī* – as an emotion concept. It was resoundingly felt to be a suitable response to the loss of not only civilisational pride in the aftermath of 1857 but also the loss of an entire way of life. *Taraqqī* emerged as a rejuvenating concept, which provi-ded hope to Urdu-speaking communities in pre-Partitioned South Asia. It played a significant role in the national struggle for independence from foreign rule and forging ties and solidarities with a pan-Asian, and Afro-Asian commu-nity of Muslim writers and thinkers.[298] A decade after 1947, the decline of pro-

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[298]    Prominent Urdu progressive writers like Faiz Ahmad, Sajjad Zaheer, and Akhtar Raipuri were closely associated with Asian and African writers' group. Living in Beirut for some time, Faiz was famously one of the significant voices and editors of the Afro-Asian literary platform*, the Lotus* magazine (1968–91). For a condensed understanding of the Progressives' international links and solidarities, see Aijaz Ahmad, "The Progressive Movement" (2011).

gress and the disillusionment of Independence in the aftermath of the Partition provided a suitable atmosphere for nostalgia to resurface. In an attempt to unpack Partition as a literary trend in Urdu, Asif Farrukhi writes of three stages in Partition narratives, namely, "Partition as a story", "Partition as the frame of stories", and "Beyond the Partition" (2011: 104). In this third stage, he reads the works of Qurratulʿain Hyder and Intizar Husain as transcending the category by "taking it beyond Partition to a broader view of history, of which Partition is only a component" (ibid.). While Farrukhi uses Hyder's *Āg kā Daryā* and Husain's *Bastī* to elaborate his case, he leaves a hint regarding Hyder's stories, claiming that they cannot be regarded as "Partition literature". Their 'beyond'-ness is also temporally formulated through a nostalgia for pre-Partition India. They are retrospective narratives, looking back, beyond the rupture of Partition, to a childhood unscathed by sectarian violence and a time of innocence and leisureliness. Experiences of leisure and idleness are also reiterated in their recollection and retelling. The portrayal of childhood as a recurring theme that goes hand-in-hand with nostalgia in contemporary English novels from India is also observed by Monika Fludernik (2020: 24).

Childhood and its allusion to innocence have often been featured as a stage of 'purity' in contexts of colonised nations. For colonisers, this childhood of the baser/lower, alternately barbaric, and infantile nations is formulated as immature, waiting, not yet modern or incapable of self-rule – an allegedly valid reason for 'benevolent despotism'. Likewise, for a post-colonial nation, the infantilising attitude of the erstwhile coloniser draws on narratives of coming of age, maturity, and, literally, independence.[299] In the nostalgic narratives of childhood read in this chapter, a setting replete with colonial reminiscences of sprawling English-style bungalows and a fascinating array of characters and afternoon teas, Hyder brings a nuance to the emotion of nostalgia beyond the binaries of the meaning of childhood as portrayed by the coloniser and the colonised, and beyond yearning or longing. In her stories, I read this post-Partition nostalgia as an offshoot of Walder's reading of 'postcolonial nostalgias' (2011). In his identification of the plural 'we' for whom postcolonial nostalgia matters, Walder reiterates the significance of often overlapping communities of the coloniser and the colonised, the resister and the collaborator from the works of Ashish Nandy and Homi Bhabha. Replete with such ambiguities, postcolonial nostalgias can only be addressed with a continuing awareness of one's position, context, and role in the retelling of the past (Walder 2011: 13–14). He advocates "due caution", "critical sensitivity", and nuance in this understanding.

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299   Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1981) is a well-known example that questions this narrative.

I read post-Partition nostalgia in the context of the subcontinent as that ambiguous representation of the past before 1947 in the work of writers who acknowledge that fuzzy identity – the overlap between 'collaborators' and 'resisters'.

Several Urdu writers migrated to Pakistan, anticipating a new homeland, a second chance. Many writers expressed disillusionment towards the two-nation theory in the aftermath of the Partition. Manto moved towards depression and mania, while a writer like Intizar Husain stayed back, claiming that "being a stranger (*ajnabīyat*, or the feeling of estrangement) in this new country helped him write".[300] Hyder did not stay; she left Pakistan and returned to India after several years in England. She refrains from directly discussing Partition after her first two novels, almost in a refusal to verbalise its haunting memory. Writing these stories of a leisurely childhood spent in a culturally heterogeneous India before the rupture is a way of coming to terms with the present. Although the Partition is erased or underplayed as an event in these stories, its absence and, at times, mere mention of its occurrence looms over these stories. I read this treatment of nostalgia for a time 'preserved' as also a way of protecting the memory of leisureliness, of her own childhood, projected as that of the unified subcontinent's youth. This treatment of nostalgia is cautious about longing for the remembered past. Svetlana Boym sees nostalgia as cognitive, manifested in two kinds of longing – the 'restorative' kind and the 'reflective' kind, the first focusing on *nostos* or the past and its possible restoration and reconstruction, whereas the second "dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss" (2001: 41). Hyder's nostalgia is projected as neither. It does not desire to restore, nor does it long for what is lost; it only functions to narrate and preserve the past in an affective telling of history and expresses an emotional affinity with that which is remembered.

I propose that this emotional affinity is a function of post-Partition nostalgia that renders it impossible to yearn for the past, as the past is complex with memories of happiness as well as trauma, guilt, and regret. In these stories, Hyder addresses this dilemma and allows readers to experience otium through these remembrances of childhood that can be claimed to be her own (autobiographical, by her admission) and representative of pre-independent British India (culturally). Reading these stories becomes a leisurely experience of the present while returning to a leisurely past in its narration. I read a selection of three stories, all written in the 1960s. Two of these stories, "*Ḍālanvālā*" and "*Yād kī ek Dhanak Jale*", were published in the Urdu collection *Patjhaṛ kī Āvāz*

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[300] From a personal interview with Zahid Dar, a close friend of Husain's. Lahore, 2018.

(1965), while the third one, "*Jugnūʾoṉ kī Dunyā*" was published later (c. 1990) in a collection under the same title. However, in her rendition of these stories in English, Hyder includes "*Jugnūʾoṉ kī Dunyā*", which she translates or transcreates (a process Hyder claims with regards to her own translations) as "The Magic Mountain" in the English collection, titled *The Sound of Falling Leaves* (1994), along with the other two stories mentioned above. "*Ḍālanvālā*" (1990 a) is re-titled as "Memories of an Indian Childhood" (1994 a); "*Yād kī ek Dhanak Jale*" (1990 b) (A rainbow of memories) is transcreated under the title "My Aunt Gracie" (1994 b).

"*Ḍālanvālā*", the story, describes a place and memories of the place. Defying a plot, it is a rather scattered string of memories, connected through loose threads, unified because it all happened in one winter in Dalanvala and is recounted by a singular narrative voice. There are explicit assertions of the difference between the past and the present, and the singular narrative voice splits into two – the present adult recollects the story in the narrative voice of the intradiegetic child narrator. The narrator begins with describing the arrival of an "emaciated old man" to their bungalow. Mr Simon is a music teacher who has come to instruct the child narrator's cousin, Rehana, on how to play the sitar. Simon had a habit of looking for Resham (meaning silk), the cat since an odd friendship had ensued between the two. Each retelling of events is entangled with a range of diverse characters; the narrator repeatedly deviates from the main narrative with the events in the characters' lives. There is no central narrative; the several stories of various characters as connected to each other constitute the narrative, the story's structure reflecting its theme, the way communities were connected in this childhood paradise of the past. Like a community or neighbourhood, often called a "society" where different families cohabit, the story is peppered with stereotypical and recognisable characters, especially for a South Asian readership. There are cousins (Rehana Baji), cultured and haughty neighbours (Mrs Chatterjee and her *Rabindrasangīt* practising daughters), companions and maids (Ghafur Begum), lonely older men (Mr Simon), and servants (Faquira the houseboy, and Jaldhara, his sister-in-law). The scattering of Anglo-Indian characters aids the re-creation of a colonial hill town – Mr Becket (also called Pilipili Sahab by the naughty children), Diana Rose Becket, his daughter, and Peter Robert Fazal Masih, the '*pherīvālā*', who "grandly called himself a travelling salesman who traded in cloth and gossip". Several characters loom in the background of the narrative – the narrator's friends, her mother, and her circle of acquaintances. This range of characters inhabiting an idyllic, elite, domestic setting renders the narrative with a quotidian and familiar flavour.

The child narrator paints a lively picture of a small, tranquil hill town inhabited and influenced by English officials and families while harmoniously

accommodating characters from various Indian backgrounds, representing North Indian hill towns' multicultural heritage and heterogeneous population. Each of these historic cities, like Dehra Dun, Shimla, and Lansdowne, reflect an amalgamation of heavy English influences in their architecture, afternoon teas, and attire; this late colonial setting is juxtaposed with the apparently mysterious beliefs and lifestyles of the locals, the 'native' inhabitants of the hills. Finally, there are the travelling people of the subcontinent, who come to the hills for either work or leisure; they often find themselves bridging the two cultures, and to some extent, they are also consumers of both cultures. This third group also often embodies the narrative voice in stories set in the hills, observing the calm, serene, and slow-paced life. Hyder enriches the quotidian range of characters in Urdu fiction of her time by introducing the oft-ignored Anglo-Indian, the forgotten maids and companions, and the strangers and performers travelling through the town. After a few introductory paragraphs, she combines some of these threads and foretells the narrative gist for her readers: "A lot of things happened that winter. Resham broke her leg, Miss Zohra Derby, the Daredevil, arrived in town. Diana Becket was declared the Ravishing Beauty of London. Dr (Miss) Zubeida Siddiqui saw a black bog the size of a donkey at two in the morning. And Faquira's sister-in-law became a sparrow" (1994a: 3). While each of these incidents is singled out and explored as a microcosm, the focus given to them does not work to string them together. They also do not follow any sequential order.

The narrative is infused with a leisurely mood that is not interrupted by complications and developments, as the setting of an idyllic small town continues to pace out the narrative, and the minimum plot developments do not result in any emphatic transformations. The description of the setting invokes this atmosphere of leisureliness, juxtaposed with a colonial element of the retired and restful pace of life, away from the imperial hubs and metropolises like Delhi, Bombay, or Calcutta:

> Dalanwala was mostly inhabited by well-to-do retired Englishmen who lived quietly in their secluded, exquisitely furnished bungalows. Inside the peaceful houses, walnut tables displayed piles of *Illustrated London News*, *Tatler*, *Country*, *Life* and *Punch*. Bundles of *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* arrived by sea mail. In the mornings the ladies sat in their "morning rooms", writing home. In the afternoons, they had their high tea in the verandahs. The mantelpieces were crowded with silverframed portraits of sons who were engaged in further brightening up the Empire's sun over such places as Kenya, Ceylon, Malaya and so forth. (Hyder 1994a: 7)

On the other hand, the leisurely days of the narrator's childhood in the vicinity of her own community (beyond the binaries of Hindu-Muslim) are portrayed

through activities and movements that have no significant consequence or purpose from a child's perspective. The child narrator is employed as a strategic tool through whose eyes we notice minute details about characters, like Jaldhara's golden nose ring and her necklace. Secrets are revealed during gossip and small talk – like overhearing that Diana Becket had joined the travelling circus due to acute poverty, the narrator interrupts, saying, "But the Tommies gave her money, didn't they" (1994 a: 9). The adult narrator's observations often overshadow the child narrator's loose talk: "[I]n this comfortably smug and very English locality (Indians were accepted as "upper class" and civilized enough to live in bungalows), Mr George Becket of the "pale blue eyes was the only Anglo-Indian" (1994 a: 7). A direct influence of the early Urdu character sketch or _khāka-nigārī_ is discernible in the drawing of these characters.

The narrative advances with the arrival of the 'Great East India Circus and the Carnival Company Ltd.' Small-town gossip plays an important role in the story, and Fazal Masih, the peddler of garments and gossip brings news that Diana Becket has joined the circus. Taking advantage of her Anglo-Indian lineage, the posters declared her the "sensational European Belle, the Ravishing Beauty of London" (1994 a: 10). The idleness of the narrator is reflected in her role as the one who observes society with childlike curiosity and an ear for rumours and chatter. In an incident where Ghafur Begum is chatting with the severely ill and resting Jaldhara, the former asks the latter her secret to captivating young men. Suddenly, they notice the narrator's presence, and Ghafur Begum reprimands her, telling her to "run along and play" (1994 a: 11). She then visits her friends, Kamala and Vimala, and hears more gossip. The circus finally leaves the hill-town, and people begin to recover from the excitement.

Meanwhile, the narrator's family prepares to host a new guest for the winter, a family acquaintance, Dr Zubeida Siddiqui, and the narrative centres around her piety, her education, her life in England, and her prospective match. Jaldhara's illness turns severe, resulting in her death. Faquira reportedly collects her ashes in an earthen pot and having found footprints of a sparrow on the pot the following day, he begins to believe that Jaldhara has turned into a sparrow. The jilted Miss Zubeida Siddiqui leaves for Calcutta and marries a Hindu. Life goes on in this hill-town where nothing really happens, and another winter arrives:

> It was an exceptionally severe winter. [...] Carol singers went around the quiet roads of Dalanwala, singing "Silent Night" and "O Come Let Us Adore Him". As the night deepened the haunting notes of some lone Garhwali's flute were heard in the distance. The water in the "sparrow-cups" was frozen. Early in the morning ragged hillmen went about hawking coal. As the mist lifted the snow-covered Himalayas were lit-up by a weak sun. All day long blazing log rivers roared in the grates. (Hyder 1994 a: 16)

The narrative ends with the news of the death of Mr Simon, caused by the freezing cold. Resham, who had an accident at the beginning of the story, finally recovers and waits for the old man at the gate. The narrator ends with two significant lines: "All this happened during that winter in Dehra Dun. After which I grew up" (Hyder 1994 a: 17). This growing up gradually progresses to the growing out of a leisurely life and a syncretic, peaceful perception of the subcontinent. The story is a story, retold for recollection and reminiscing. The adult narrator does not express, even once, a desire for the past. This resistance to longing is highlighted in the curt full stop after the last words, "I grew up". The innocence of childhood is used as a tool to highlight the 'good old days' of leisurely, harmonious existence. A conflict is portrayed in Hyder's representation of a variegated, multicultural, heterogenous representation of India in her characters under a narrative titled "Memories of an Indian Childhood". However, she is careful to deftly weave in possible narratives of other Indian childhoods within her own memories. With such loose, impressionistic narratives of carefree, leisurely, and content pasts, a new shade of nostalgia is introduced in modern Urdu literature, in Hyder's words, to feel "safe" in the memory of days that seem "intact and rosy from this distance" (1994: Intr.).

This shade of nostalgia is repeated in the story "*Jugnūʾoṉ kī Dunyā*", set in another hill-town, Almora. Not as creative as "*Ḍālanvālā*" in its characterisation, this is a relatively short, simplistic impression of what the child narrator remembers during her stay with her cousins in Almora. The language is charming and unhindered, critical of "silly" adult things; the world is painted as a place full of "fun". Similar to Dalanvala, the description of Almora from the perspective of a captivated child sets the tone of the story. The narrator's cousins live in a grand old English bungalow, Becket House, built by an English colonel. The house inhabitants who feature in the story are Achho and Parey, the narrator's cousins in the same age group; Azra Apa, the eldest of the siblings, studying for her matriculation; Humaira and Zehra, in eighth and seventh standards, respectively; Achhey, who gets admission in a school; and Imtiaz Hyder, visiting from Calcutta. The story is replete with interactions and exchanges between the children and their imagined worlds, typical of a middle/upper-class subcontinental childhood spent in the company of cousins and family acquaintances, especially during school holidays. A later, celebrated example of this part solitary-part interactive childhood and idleness is portrayed in Amit Chaudhuri's English novel, *The Strange and Sublime Address* (1991). "*Jugnūʾoṉ kī Dunyā*" (1990 c/1994 c) achieves the effect in a condensed recounting of the unified temporal setting of a holiday. A story without a plot, it has a paced-out, leisurely mood, highlighted in the remembrance of youthful curiosities:

> From the verandah one could see the winding blue-grey road in the distance, with buses and cars crawling along like little toys and disappearing one after another into the mountains. Beneath the portico were massive drainpipes spanning a gorge. We aimed stones at the pipes – when they hit their mark, sparks flew. It was fun. The world was full of such strange, fascinating things. When Azra Apa combed her long hair, there were crackling sounds and sparks. (Hyder 1994 c: 229)

Incidents follow one another in a style of abandonment – the narrator's rival and friend Accho recounts her accidental fall down the slope of a hill, her advanced lessons are compared to the narrator's, the search for "fairy rings", the narrator's terrified waiting for the ghost of Colonel Becket to appear and ask for butter and sugar, as Humaira comes running, bringing "a lot of fireflies in her muslin dupatta" and her laughter, full of "the carefree abandon of young girls" (1994 c: 235). The days are filled with ramblings and make-beliefs, siestas after lunch, and many more adventures in the afternoon until "servants were sent out to search the surrounding hills and orchards for the runaways" (1994 c: 232). The narrator and her cousins believed that every night, they were visited by fairies – the English fairies live in mushrooms and the Muslim fairies in the Caucasus, and vibrant red flowers were "actually dragons with fiery tongues" (1994 c: 237). As the narrator puts it in one sentence, it was "a world of fireflies". The story ends with the hustle-bustle of a family photograph taken the day before they leave Almora. Everyone is dressed in their best attire, chairs placed in a row on the lawn for the ladies while the boys cluster around Chachajan (an endearing address for 'uncle'); the children still holding unripe peaches in their mouths when the photographer says "Ready?" As the narrative starts with the approaching view of Almora, it ends with the declining view, as they drive away: "after a few seconds, the banner and the house both vanished in the mist" (1994 c: 238). Like "*Ḍālanvālā*", this story, too, ends with an articulation of nostalgia and remembrance on the part of the adult narrator.[301]

Childhood memories and nostalgia are woven in a more intricate craft in the story "*Yād kī ek Dhanak Jale*", its English title being "My Aunt Gracie". The difference in the title reflects the focus of the narrative in the two versions. While the Urdu original follows the theme of memories and nostalgic recollections, the English version is fashioned to single out the character of a Goan *āyah*, Gracie, who worked for the narrator's father's close friend, Nasir Chacha (*cācā*, Uncle Nasir). The child narrator is on holiday, visiting Nasir Chacha's seaside flat in Bombay. Nasir Chacha hails from a glorious family in Calcutta,

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301   Already quoted. See the end of Section 4.4.1.

with its origins traced back to the *navāb*s of Patna. He is friendly, cheerful, and keenly interested in Urdu, Persian, and English literature. Since he is a widower, his son Asghar is brought up in the care of Gracie (1990 b: 94–95).[302] The character of Nasir Chacha is central to both versions of the story, although in the English version, Gracie's character takes centre stage. Gracie, a widow, has no family and works for Nasir Chacha to keep her promise to his wife that she will look after their son, Asghar. Gracie is described as a "sturdy but plain" dark woman who looks beautiful when she grins, "flashing her pearly white teeth" (1994 b: 56). Gracie is a fascinating discovery for the narrator, whose own ayah is a strict, polished, slim lady. As Nasir Chacha and the narrator's father are busy in each other's company, the narrator spends more time with Gracie and discovers the secret conversations Gracie has with the figurine of the Virgin Mary to help sort out her difficulties. These conversations often mix praying, pleading, and bargaining on Gracie's part; for example, one day, the narrator overhears Gracie saying to the statue: "Look here, you Virgin Mother, if you not find me store-room keys by eight o'clock Indian Standard Time, breakfast late, Nawab Saheb[303] cut off my head. What do you know. You never done work as ayah" (1994 b: 58).

Nasir Chacha sends Asghar to the best English school while Gracie speaks "*khicṛī zabān*" (mixed-up language), influenced by both her Goan origins and the Bombay style of unpolished speech. She is highly possessive about Asghar. While the English narrative begins with an introduction to Naisr Chacha, the Urdu original has an added first sentence that sets the temporal setting of the present, as the narrator recollects the past: "Whenever I see the fire extinguishers drive down the city-streets, I am reminded of Nasir Chacha" (1990 b: 94). The Urdu story is more reflective regarding the narrator's memories of these holidays as spent in a leisurely manner; as she looks forward to Sundays because on Sundays all sorts of newspapers and literary supplements contain special reports and colourful pictures to flip through. Some days, Nasir Chacha takes her to Juhu Beach and buys her comics and ice cream. The Urdu version's sense of personal reminiscence is extensive, whereas the English story has a tight plot. The Urdu story also projects further into the past beyond the temporal setting, to when Nasir Chacha visited the narrator and her family two years earlier at their house in Dehra Dun. On quiet evenings and long walks through

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302     Since the English and Urdu versions differ in certain aspects, I have used both versions in reading this story. The quotations with the year 1990 b refer to the Urdu version and 1994 to the English. Quotes from the Urdu version are my translations.

303     Gracie reportedly called Nasir Chacha 'Nawab Saheb' due to his lineage, although Nasir Chacha is rather humble.

the hills, the child narrator forms a bond of friendship with him. The memories of his visit to Dalanwala add another layer of remembrance of the past to the Urdu story.

That summer in Bombay, the wives of Nasir Chacha's friends and colleagues attempt to convince him to re-marry, and a chunk of the narrative is spent in rambling descriptions of this episode with preparations for the engagement ceremony. This rambling narrative style, particularly the episodes leading up to the engagement, has a feeling of listlessness and boredom about them; as narrated by the child, they appear long and tiresome, with no appeal or direct interest to the narrator. It must also be noted that unlike in the previously read stories, the child narrator here does not mingle with children of her age, but her holidays and even the enjoyable, leisurely aspects of these days are told around her curious but calm, almost mature relationships she has with Nasir Chacha and Gracie; the urban setting of Bombay also takes away from the leisurely atmosphere of the hill towns, but the narrator is also immersed in Gracie's world. This is also a trope often revisited in Indian fiction after the Partition, iconically in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* or *Ice Candy Man* (1988). The innocence of childhood and idle curiosity or fascination with the figure of the āyāh is contrasted against the unfathomable hatred and violence of the Partition, as the āyāh symbolises the violated mother/land.

This contrast is well-played out in "*Yād kī ek Dhanak Jale*" as the story moves ahead'– in a flash forward – to after the Partition. The child narrator, now an adult, writes that in 1948, she learned that Nasir Chacha left Bombay and now lives in Lahore (1990b: 126). A writer of some fame by now, the narrator goes to visit him in his "small desolate-looking bungalow". The passing of time is portrayed in the description of her first glance at him, sitting "under a bare tree. A few books and Urdu magazines lay before him on an unpolished table" (1994b: 65). He complains that her father left too soon, without notice. The narrator notes that he has grown "old and grouchy" and draws a correlation with the harsh winter: "It was a dreary winter morning. The wind was chilly and an anaemic sun floated listlessly behind the clouds. Nasir Chacha looked ill. He had covered his legs with a worn-out blanket. I was vastly depressed" (1994b: 65). During this meeting, the narrator comes to know that due to loss, loneliness, and grief, Nasir Chacha married Gracie, who delighted to see the narrator grown up, asks her to address her as *chachi/cācī*, or aunt. Later, the narrator receives the news of Nasir Chacha's passing away. Having married into an elite 'society' family that resents a Goan āyāh as a family member, Asghar sends Gracie off to Bombay. The narrator, now residing in Bombay, finds it impossible to locate Gracie. When she sees an older woman in a church praying to the Virgin Mary, she is reminded of her aunt Gracie and wonders what unimaginable loss she must have encountered.

The loss after the Partition, the stories analysed suggest, can only be dealt with by preserving the memory of the past. This return to the past is not a restorative return to the origin; neither is it longed for, but only revisited and remembered. In the case of postcolonial nostalgias, the dreams and desires of return are more nuanced in their relations with the colonial affiliations. For post-Partition nostalgia, too, these desires take on a strange shade of guilt as collaborators and resisters overlap. The last example analysed does not hold the event of Partition as responsible for the losses incurred; it holds the flow of time as an indomitable rival. This is recurrent in a few other stories of this collection, too, for example, the story that gives the collection its title, "*Patjhaṛ kī Āvāz*" ("The Sound of Falling Leaves") and "*Jin Bolo Tārā Tārā*" (the English title is "The Missing Photograph"; the Urdu title is a refrain from a song, in search of Tara). In "*Yād kī ek Dhanak Jale*", Gracie is the portrayal of the mother figure, in her lifelong devotion to Asghar and her profound faith in the Virgin Mary. She is also the symbol of undivided India, profoundly hurt by the violence of separation. In the Urdu version, the narrator makes this plain in the observation: "Even if Ali Asghar would be Gracie's own son, and even if he would have an instinctive love for her, he would have done the same. It is what is done to mothers; and Gracie was definitely a mother" (Hyder/Ḥaidar 1990b: 133).

The awareness of a collective, colossal loss makes it imperative for Hyder to hold on to the past before the rupture. With her post-Partition stories reflective of a nuanced post-Partition nostalgia, Hyder introduced the modern Urdu reader to not only a renewed way of dealing with this profound, inexpressible loss but also with Partition, bringing together the guilt of the collaborator and desire of the resister, later taken up by modernists like Intizar Husain, Abdullah Hussein, and others. In Hyder's nostalgia, the desire is expressed in fond memories, but only for the harmonious, syncretic leisureliness of the past, projected onto the portrayal of childhood days before the divisive lines are drawn – one can say, only for the temporality she explores. While Hyder's stories explore the past, the past does not seem to – in these stories – have an impact on the future or the present, apart from being remembered. This is also reflected in the post-Partition nostalgia she invokes without expressing her yearning for the past. With her pen turned to '*māẓī parasti*', Hyder was one of the writers who brought forth a new literary trend in Urdu, creating a space for readers to experience private and collective leisurely feelings, albeit in the memory of leisurely days and in reading about it. In Hyder's rendition, 'the good old days of leisure', a topic of constant contention in modern Urdu literary traditions, can be said to have arrived at a narrative junction where they are once again enjoyed and celebrated as told through the eyes of a child. In an emotional turn towards narrating the past, Hyder's rendition of the conflicted, collective nostalgia after Partition allows every reader to revisit and relive the time before the rupture,

foray into the childhood days, collectively spent in leisurely ways: "Time is a Tablet Preserved – on which time can have no effect."

## 4.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter explores the dissonant ways leisureliness and idleness are formulated in a conflicted socio-historical junction of the Indian subcontinent. With most writers – particularly Urdu writers – writing for national freedom, political agenda and social progress, narratives of idleness and leisureliness are read as contrasted against this socio-literary set-up. The genre of the Urdu short story – nurtured in an atmosphere of revolutionary politics – addresses the concept of otium in the works of writers who did not adhere to the concept of *taraqqī* as socio-political or literary objectives. In their different registers, otium, idleness, and leisureliness are addressed in dissonant notions of temporalities against the futuristic drive of progress. For Manto, this notion of temporality is explored in his focus on the isolated moment and the aimless, wandering drift – *āvāragardī* – of his idle but critical protagonists. For Hyder, the alternate temporality is oriented towards the past, in remembering and reliving the past in writing or *māẓī parastī*. Reading these temporalities as pitted against the utilitarian, sequential, progressive sense of temporality, this chapter unpacks the negotiation of otium in the context of the subcontinent's Partition – a fragmentation and fissure in the consciousness of the self.

In the disparate and dissonant parsing of these distinctive temporalities, modern Urdu literature gains access to two different ways of conceptualising temporality – the relationship with time. One of these is seen in Manto's pre-Partition stories set in the modern metropolis of Bombay, framing the lives of pimps, prostitutes, unemployed and idle men, told through the eyes of the melancholic wanderer. Manto's portrayal of idleness is more than mere urban rambling; it inculcates a deeper critical agency and distance as a function of otium, which I have read as manifested in the emotion of colonial melancholy. The other India, and one to remain in the public imagination for a long time, is seen in Hyder's post-Partition stories, claiming the narrative of an India of the author's privileged childhood, when time is ravished, almost tasted through the eyes of a young girl growing up in a social setting of apparent communal syncretism, comfortable lifestyle influenced by the colonial elite, bringing these together in a harmonious reminiscing of a tranquil past. However, Hyder deftly negotiates what nostalgia for a time before political independence can mean for a colonised nation. It has to be said that Hyder's stories defy several genre conventions of the tight modern short story, as they seem to merge with narrative styles that are suitable for reminiscing and reflecting on the past – like that of diary

writing, story-telling, and memoir. In their affective temporalities, both writers make it possible for readers to feel time in challenging and liberating hues. Through their distinctive craft of the short story, they release a literary space enabling readers to experience emotions of idleness, indolence, and leisureliness against prose narratives driven by socialist and progressive ideologies.

The registers of otium are also starkly different in the works of both writers. The melancholic idleness of Manto's unemployed and poverty-struck men projects a distinctly marginalised but rebellious voice of resistance against colonial capitalism and nationalist progress. The post-Partition nostalgic portrayals of leisureliness for Hyder's child narrator write about an elite world. Yet, in some ways, that world, too, is marginalised until Hyder introduces it to the Urdu literary sphere. As this chapter has seen, both writers bring a distinctive style in narrating otium in modern Urdu literature; this style is closely linked to their literary careers and remains the hallmark of the distinctive worlds they inhabited. In the differences of their literary worlds, their narrative styles, and their themes, Saʿadat Hasan Manto and Qurratulʿain Hyder, two unlikely writers read together (as this chapter does), share a resounding commonality concerning the Urdu short story of their times – they give the short story the "lonely voice" of the submerged population group, who seek and dream of escape. The progressive episode in Urdu literature remains one of great significance but escape from the drive of progress was also sought by writers within the association, as Faiz's poem in the epigraph to the chapter reveals. In their dissonance with this notion of progress, Manto and Hyder enabled readers – in their loneliness as well as in collective awareness – to feel time in different ways as unified British India transformed into partitioned nations.

# 5 Culture, Intellect, and Emotions: The Romance of Masculinity and Leisure in the Detective Novels of Satyajit Ray

> *Private Detective! So far, I have only read about them. I must have devoured at least a thousand stories of these leisurely detectives. If I felt the same devotion and dedication towards Jadab Chakraborty, K.P. Bose, and Nesfield's textbooks as I had for famous detectives like Byomkesh, Jayanta–Manik, Subrata–Kiriti, Blake–Smith, I wouldn't have lived in such misery today. But all this time, these truth-seeking, mystery-revealing sleuths lived in my fantasies. I could never have dreamed that they could be present physically in this mortal world – and that too in this city of Calcutta.*
>
> Sankar[304]

The association of childhood and leisureliness is a recurrent theme in modern South Asian literature. One aspect of this association is manifested in the emotion of nostalgia, where childhood is retrospectively perceived and remembered as a time of unhindered, idyllic, leisurely existence, particularly in the context of pre-colonial subjectivity, seen as free from the westernised divisions of work and leisure times. Another aspect of the association of childhood with otium, leisure, and idleness is expressed in the carefree nature of childhood, beyond the toils of adult life and its inevitable concerns with regulation, acceleration, and production. However, the latter remains open to the possibility of both disciplinary forms of education and the inculcation of an appreciation of fulfilling idle leisure, of being encultured through an adequately captivating pedagogical approach, as already demonstrated in Chapter 3. While Rabindranath Tagore's outlook on leisure and pedagogy addresses a significant discourse in the Bengali literary context (debatably a broader South Asian context), he was certainly not alone in these endeavours. Neither were these the first attempts at bringing about that enchanting, leisurely flavour to children's reading and learning in Bengal. In fact, Tagore has operated in parallel to other innovative literary endeavours to enhance children's learning in colonial Bengal within a pedagogical project that sought to educate and entertain.[305] Some notable names in

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304   Sankar, *Cauraṅgī* (2007), 17. Translation mine.

305   See Satadru Sen (2004) and Gautam Chando Roy (2012) for a detailed reading.

these endeavours are those of his nephew, Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) and the renowned Bengali poet and humourist, Sukumar Ray (1887–1923).

Sukumar's son, Satyajit Ray, extended the pedagogical project initiated by Sukumar's father, Upendrakishore Ray (1863–1915). Through generations, the Ray family posited themselves as a harbinger of a certain kind of education, carved carefully out of the concepts of culture and knowledge/intellect that emerged from their experiments with modernity.[306] The concept of culture in modern Bengal, as Andrew Sartori (2008) has shown, underwent various formulations, particularly in the twentieth century: it is seen to have "provided [the] framework both for the optimistic pride and the anxious pessimism of modern Bengali identity, as well as for Bengal's ambivalent relationship to conceptions of national and global modernity" (2008: 4). Elite Bengali culture evolved as a dynamic response ranging across several influential intellectuals of modernity; from Rammohan Roy's liberalism to Bankimchadra's call for a Hindu 'national' culture, and Rabindranath's universalist, aesthetic notion of culture, notably established in art and literature. Satyajit's conception of culture, as several scholars, including Sartori, have argued, resonated deeply with Rabindranath's notion of "aesthetic self-cultivation", which the latter championed as an exalted attempt, thus claiming the lexeme *saṃskṛti* (purification) over *kṛṣṭi* (cultivation) (Sartori 2008:3). This aesthetic self-cultivation gradually became the hallmark of the Bengali concept of culture/*kālᶦcār*.

Reading Satyajit Ray's popular detective fiction, this chapter locates this particular notion of aesthetic self-cultivation that evolved through debates in colonial modernity and post-Independence era of development, as intricately linked to notions of otium, especially in an escalating, capitalist, disciplinary setting. Culture, in this context and texts, has to be read as a concept entangled with emotions of pride and self-aggrandisement, as well as fear of loss, discussed and expressed in multiple ways, with its complex history as the "subjective moment of capitalist society" (Satori 2008: 232). In Bengal, the reified notion of culture is deeply entrenched in political historicity and consciousness of an intellectual social class – the *bhadralok. Bhadratā, i.*e., civility or gentility, becomes inseparable from the cultured Bengali subjectivity. Locating these peculiarities of Bengal's cultural-intellectual reverberations within a global cosmopolitanism, the aim is to understand conceptions of leisure in postcolonial Bengali literature. Satyajit Ray is a significant figure in this transitory and anxious period in Bengal – shifting from what was once understood as a prestigious position, expressed through "high" notions of culture and political-intel-

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306   Ashis Nandy (1995), here quoted and contextualised from Sengoopta (2016), 2 of 35, Introduction.

lectual rebellion during the late-colonial period to a precarious political sidelining in the aftermath of India's independence. Growing up and encultured during the late-colonial period, Satyajit became a public figure, almost as if he were India's cultural ambassador after Independence, winning accolades as one of the greatest filmmakers of modern times. Simultaneously, he became one of the most widely read and beloved writers in Bengal, seen by many as the last of the icons of the so-called Bengal Renaissance. One reason why Ray continues to feature among the most famous writers in Bengal is his figurative translation of the old world into the new through his beloved fictional characters in their tryst with a new national and global identity – detective, scientist, and raconteurs – who are entrepreneurs of culture and intellect in a fast-changing world. Ray's writing of this new world centres knowledge and adventure within an axis of leisure, enjoyment, and morality, continuing the educate-and-entertain pedagogic formula begun by his ancestors.

In this chapter, I explore Satyajit Ray's popular fiction, the detective *Pheludā* novels (novellas and stories, too), to identify leisureliness as a pedagogical element and method in twentieth-century Bengali literature. Located between genres of children's literature (although 'children' is a misnomer in this case) and detective fiction, the *Pheludā* series forms an essential narrative in postcolonial Bengali literature, addressing questions and dyadic concerns like past/history and present/postcoloniality, empire/metropole and nation/periphery, work/leisure, and idleness/engagement. In the post-Independence setting, an opportunity for adapting older traditions into innovative deviations opens up, where concepts of culture and intellect are seen to be inherently linked to the experience and ideas of leisure in these texts. However, they are more than merely cerebral concepts. As this chapter argues, culture and intellect are concepts deeply entangled with emotions (of pride but also others) in this Bengali context, firmly rooted in the history of the sentiment of *bhadratā* or civility. At the same time, in these narratives, intricacies of otium with culture, civility, and education/intellect are laden with an emphasis on masculinity, suggesting a highly gendered conception of leisureliness. The chapter returns to the topic of pedagogy and otium to unpack its recurrence in Bengali literary trends. Cutting through the various sections of the chapter is the idea of leisureliness that recurs as topic, activity, concept, method, and mood; this leisureliness, I argue, remains entrenched in the notion of *aesthetic self-cultivation*, propagated by both Tagore and Ray. At the same time, certain notions of masculinity seem to be inherent to this pedagogy and self-cultivation, directing us to a gendered and privileged variant of otium.

In the first section of the chapter, I provide a background to the 'educate-and-entertain' pedagogical project that began during colonial times, which Satyajit takes recourse to in his postcolonial writings. After tracing a genealogy

of his literary pursuits to his ancestors and his family-run magazine for children, I read the entanglements of the figures of the modern detective, the investigative *flâneur* and the historian to arrive at possible negotiations of the figure of the cultural-intellectual Bengali *bhadralok* of leisure. This approach then opens up a discussion on the relationship of knowledge and idleness, through which I introduce the fictional world of Ray's Pheluda as the postcolonial detective – a potential figure of otium. This claim is strengthened by the argument that his cultural-intellectual enterprise enables him to transform his work into leisurely pursuits while infusing leisure with scholastic interests. In section three, I address the concept of culture as entangled with emotions – and intricately linked to intellect – as central to the Bengali *bhadralok*'s identity. I also address the *bhadralok*'s relationship to the familial and the familiar; these relations are significant for the possibility of a leisurely and gentlemanly attitude to life. In section four, I read the leisurely and unfettered lifestyle embodied in these narratives by exploring the notion of masculinity with echoes in certain formulaic detective narratives. However, the masculinity in Ray's narratives continues to differ from theirs through the postcolonial Bengali variation of respectability and culture, as posited against colonial assertions of masculinity. In the concluding section, I return to questions of pedagogy but also to new directions of genre, capitalism, and production. How does the modern fantasy of detective fiction, located in the postcolonial-capitalist axis, negotiate thrill, calm, excitement, and alienation? How does the Bengali concept of culture and sentiment of social respectability respond to a scholastic and ascetic life of investigation in a world directed towards acceleration? What roles do emotions play in this journey of thrill and intellectual curiosity? These are some of the key questions this chapter explores to understand the mediation of otium in the context of escalation and growing precarity.

## 5.1 The Legacy of *Sandeś*: Contextualising the *Pheludā* Detective Novels in Postcolonial Bengal

Satyajit's grandfather, Upendrakishore, a pioneer writer-illustrator of children's literature, musician, painter and printer-publisher, was sincerely invested in the late-nineteenth-century project of renewing and reforming children's literature.[307] He opened his own printing and publishing house, U. Ray & Sons, and issued what became the most popular Bengali children's magazine, titled

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307    For a detailed understanding, see Gautam Chando Roy (2018).

*Sandeś* [308] (1913 onwards). He introduced the novelty of beautifully sketched and coloured illustrations for the texts he wrote for children. His son, Sukumar, having studied print technology in Britain, joined the project, editing the magazine from 1915 to 1923. Sukumar's literary genius found expression in the genre of 'nonsense' verse and prose, the most famous of these being "*Ābol Tābol*" (1923) and *Hayabarala* (1921). The significance of this family enterprise, the magazine *Sandeś*, as Upendrakishore claimed, was its approach to pedagogy: "through pastime pleasures, there is much to be gained and learnt, like through games and play, we can improve our body and mind".[309] Upendrakishore and Sukumar, unlike contemporary children's writers and educators, brought in an association of 'friendship' with those they sought to address, i.e., the child reader. They destabilised the stringent hierarchy between children and adults and the markedly moralising tone hitherto employed in children's literature, thereby modernising the genre through a blend of artistic intelligence and entrepreneurial genius.[310] Chandak Sengoopta (2016) sees the magazine as a culmination of Upendrakishore's multiple careers, "combining his literary gifts, artistic abilities, technological wizardry, and artisanal insistence on doing everything with his own hands" (2016: 6). They aimed at fashioning the subjectivity of "a new kind of child"; this new child would be one who would learn much through "pastime pleasures" (Dutta 2018). This reading is instructive in recognising the multifaceted and multiple formative ideas behind the detective series this chapter explores. Penned by Sukumar's son, Satyajit Ray (1921–92), the *Pheludā* detective series, initially published in the same magazine (revived by Satyajit in 1961), embodies the characteristic innovation and radicalisation that the Rays initiated in colonial Bengal as well as the familiar (even the familial) and the exciting, global trajectories of post-colonial India.[311]

This brief history helps unpack the literary (and entrepreneurial) project that Satyajit was invested in, which found expression both in his globally appreciated cinema and in his popular Bengali literary contributions, most

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308    The name reflects the typical puns and word games for which the Rays are known. While *Sandeś* is the name of a popular and widely consumed Bengali sweetmeat, it also means 'message' or 'news'.

309    In a piece titled "Kathābārtā", written by Upendrakishore in the magazine's first issue. Source: *Sandesh 100* (Documentary film) by Soumyakanti Dutta, 2018.

310    See Sengoopta (2016) Introduction.

311    Chowdhury reads the politics of this family-run magazine as instructive towards locating Satyajit Ray and his works, especially his detective fiction, the widely popular *Pheludā* stories (Chowdhury 2015), 110.

iconic of which remain the *Pheludā* series.[312] I read these novels as his literary contribution towards the discourses of work-leisure and idleness-engagement – discourses that Satyajit (as well as the Rays before him) was deeply interested in and invested in. As an artist of newly independent India, portraying a Bengali subjectivity in culture and sensibilities through the relatively new media of cinema at a global platform, an heir to the erstwhile Brahmo secular education and enculturation in colonial India, Satyajit was not only keen on discourses of postcolonial modernity, but he also expressed his attitudes to the changing values of this new India. For him, core concerns of such values were subjectivity and determination, central aspects of the concept of otium. While Satyajit's films can arguably provide for a fascinating reading of idleness, leisure and inaction, an exploration of his literary contributions, notably the detective series, can lead us to an invigorating discussion on the discourse of otium and leisure in Bengali literature after Independence; not least because as literary texts, these narratives and characters have now charted new journeys, adapting to transformations located in the global and the local.

With his first appearance in *Sandeś* in 1965, in a story titled "*Pheludār Goẏendāgiri*" (Pheluda turns detective)[313] Satyajit's young sleuth became the eponymous hero of a series of detective stories and novellas (35 in number) that ran until 1995.[314] The world of *Pheludā*, created by Ray, gained immense popularity in Bengali literature that remains unparalleled. Although Bengali crime and detective fiction have a long and complex history, most scholars agree that Western writers profoundly influenced the modern detective genre in Bengali.[315] Gautam Chakrabarti remarks on the Bengali *bhadralok*'s "anglophiliac leisure" and his invincible fascination with and consumption of Anglo-European detective fiction (2012: 256). The twentieth century saw a fresh emergence of detective fiction in Bengali, which reached its zenith with the Byomkesh Bakshi novels penned by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay (1899–1970). Although Byomkesh and Pheluda are vastly different in characterisation, Satyajit's Pheluda became

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312    Satyajit also created the popular genius-mad-scientist – Professor Shanku/*Śaṅku* – in his other literary series for children, often seen as a significant postcolonial science-fiction narratives in Bengali. Apart from these two long-running series, he also penned the stories of Tarini Khuro and a great number of short stories, many of which deal with mysteries, humour, the occult, and 'nonsense'.

313    Translated by Chitrita Banerjee & Gopa Majumdar as "Danger in Darjeeling". Ray (1996).

314    Satyajit passed away in 1992. Some *Pheludā* narratives, for instance, *Indrajāl Rahasya,* were published posthumously.

315    For a good discussion, see Sukumar Sen's extensive chronology in *Krāimˡkāhinīr Kālˡkrānti* (1988).

Byomkesh's successor in Bengali crime fiction and remains unvanquished. The *Pheludā* stories attained great popularity amongst Bengali readers due to their close resemblance to the postcolonial context and the appeal of the narratives amongst readers of all ages. Ray's narratives epitomise the familiar *bhadralok* sensibility, forging rational thought, global cosmopolitanism, and a Bengali appropriation of culture and intellect.

Shirking both white- and blue-collar jobs, the protagonist, typical of fictional detectives, represents a character interested in vast, excessive knowledge, intelligence, and an almost arrogant sense of superiority. In his appreciation of knowledge, the detective approaches the idealised occupation of a scholar of the world, ironically described on his business card as 'Pradosh C Mitter[316], Private Detective'. The stories have three central characters and a returning antagonist/criminal. The protagonists are the detective, Pheluda (Pradosh Mitter); the narrator, i.e., Pheluda's accompanying young cousin Topshe (Tapesh Ranjan Mitter); their friend, the celebrated writer of popular Bengali crime thrillers, Lalmohan Ganguly, a.k.a. Jaṭāẏu/Jatayu, a mythical bird, and his *nom de plume*. Topshe, the young narrator, represents Ray's ideal reader, the male Hindu Bengali adolescent. Lalmohan Ganguly serves as a strategy of self-mocking humour, ridiculed as the writer of commercial thrillers. The trio embodies a Bengali 'familiarity' and local flavour, unlike the formulaic duo of standard detective narratives like Holmes-Watson, Poirot-Hastings or Byomkesh-Ajit. Ganguly primarily serves as a foil to both Pheluda and Topshe, who are intelligent and intellectually stimulated. The villain, Maganlal Meghraj, a corrupt Marwari businessman, provides the figure of the 'other' in this familiar, pleasant Bengali set-up. Meghraj's character is designed around suspicion and fear. In contrast, Ganguly provides scintillating humour intrinsic to his nature, tying the strange world of crime and murder in a neat bow of enjoyable adventure enriched with friendship.

The idyllic world of *Pheludā* created by Ray is in stark contrast with growing unemployment in Bengal, reflected in contemporary novels of Sunil Gangopdhyay (1934–2012) and Sankar (1933–) – novels, some of which Ray adapted in his cinematic projects (for example *Pratidvandvī* [1970], *Jana Araṇya* [1976]). This seemingly naïve world of detective fiction, initially created with the child reader in mind, evolved into a nuanced, complex body of literature over the decades as its publication platform changed from *Sandeś* to the esteemed literary magazine, *Deś,* in what is now commonly known as 'crossover literature'[317]. Sandra Beckett points out that while not necessarily addressing a dual readership, crossover fiction tends to blur the distinction between two traditionally separate readerships –

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316   Mitter is a standard anglicised version of the Bengali name Mitra.

317   I thank Elizaveta Ilves for drawing my attention to this 'crossover' genre discussion.

the child and the adult (2009: 3). This holds for the *Pheludā* narratives; but, in this case, the intended readership is not the child but young adults/teenagers, in Bengali, *kiśor*. While the series brings forth the Ray family's contribution towards the 'education and entertainment' project[318], it also emerges as a socially relatable yet fantastical escape that appeals to readers from various age groups. A significant aspect of this appeal is the aesthetic self-cultivation that resonates with both young, curious readers, as well as the adult Bengali reader, for whom knowledge, intellect and a specific 'cultural capital' remain significant concepts, enmeshed with their Bengali identity and the emotion of pride. The first couple of narratives were admittedly loosely constructed and intended for children; however, Ray enhanced the complexities of the narratives as early as the first novel in 1966/7. They were now written for young adults and adolescents (gradually, as the child narrator's age increases but only within the limitations of early teenage years). Eventually, these texts found a prominent place within the mainstream literary tradition, having a broad emotional appeal among a 'crossover' readership. A significant aspect of this appeal is negotiating an acceptable modern fantasy of a leisurely life that resists mundane, monotonous, and manual work. This remarkable feat is achieved through a pedagogical approach where knowledge, curiosity, and intellect are perceived as ends unto themselves, resisting utilitarian results apart from the over-arching, ambiguous function of restoring balance in the world order and restoring pride in community identity.

In recent decades, detective fiction and children's/young reader's literature have undergone a critical wave, liberating them from dismissive and formulaic reading, enabling what was earlier marginalised at the periphery of literary traditions to claim a more central place in literary studies. For quite some time, modern detective fiction served as an equivalent to the fantasy-adventure genre in the West, for example, in the works of M. Riley, Dorothy L. Sayers, and even G. K. Chesterton.[319] Historian Parimal Ghosh points out the significance of 'extraordinariness' in the figure of the detective that makes the genre reminiscent of the adventures of yore (n.p. [Chapter 6]). The extraordinariness of such narratives places the detective in the position of the modern 'hero'. In portraying the detective's character, the modern hero is often described as a person of leisure who resists the monotony of manual labour, bureaucracy, and servitude. While a leisurely pace of life is associated with most detective narratives (Christie's *Marple*, even *Poirot*; Chesterton's *Father Brown*), the history of modern

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318    For a detailed overview of how *Sandeś* contributed to shaping children's or young adult's minds in the early twentieth century, see Gautam Chando Roy (2012).

319    See Chesterton, "A Defense of Detective Stories" (1923), 227. See also John M. Reily (1980), xi.

detective fiction is embroiled in the hustle of urbanisation. As urban centres and overcrowded cities spread out of bounds, the anxieties and disquiets of urban life gave way to the genre of deep and wide observation. Drawing on this unique and inherent contradiction within the genre, Walter Benjamin conceptualised the idle *flâneur*'s transformation into the "unwilling detective" (1983: 41). Recent criticism of detective fiction attempts to question earlier formulations and patterns of the genre to claim a more complex understanding of the epistemological formations of not just a society, but of societies and the intersectionality of nations, races, and cultures, "especially between imperial powers and their colonial territories" (Pearson & Singer 2009: 3). Drawing on these relevant concerns, I read the *Pheludā* narratives to claim a correlation between modern fantasies of a leisurely, rather autonomous, independent lifestyle in the postcolonial setting of Calcutta. Simultaneously, these fantasies of leisureliness are seen to have an emotional allure, equally among young and adult readers, towards intellectual prowess, knowledge, and the life of the (rational) mind.

## 5.2  The *Bhadralok Flâneur*: Knowledge, Production, and Cultured Leisure

Copious studies have been conducted on modernity's leisurely urban figure, the *flâneur*, since Walter Benjamin's reconstruction and rereading of this persona.[320] Although it is impossible to unpack the precise meaning of *flânerie* owing to its elusiveness (Tester 2015: 1), the various attempts to address the figure of the *flâneur* as an integral aspect of the experience of modern urban metropolis continue to open up many possible readings and interpretations of the 'myth' of the *flâneur*.[321] In their probing analysis of this urban figure, Janet Wolff, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, and David Frisby read the figure of the *flâneur* in its various portrayals of the privileged male of the bourgeois class who surveys the city (2015). David Frisby focuses on the links and overlaps between the detective and the *flâneur* through a reading of Benjamin's own methodology (Frisby 2015). For a serious study of the detective and the *flâneur* as symbolised in the same figure, he returns to the 'ambiguity' of the *flâneur*. This ambi-

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320   Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 1983 [1969].

321   By myth, I here refer to the simple meaning of the word and point to the possible deconstruction of the 'myth' allegedly engendered by Benjamin himself. See Martina Lauster's article on Benjamin's opaque, contradictory, even illogical portrayal of the *flâneur* (2007).

guity is not only the result of sudden historical shifts in mid-nineteenth century Paris (from where the modern European figure emerged) but also a consequence of the various (textual) interpretations (and reconstructions) of the *flâneur* in the works of Charles Baudelaire as well as Walter Benjamin. This ambiguity, fundamental to the *flâneur*, is depicted in the two contradictory and complementary aspects – "sometimes verging on that of the mere stroller, at other times elevated to that of the detective, to the decipherer of urban and visual texts" (Frisby 2015: 82).

In the previous chapter, I argued against inflating the idle, aimless strolling, the *āvāragardī* of Manto's marginalised characters with the practice of *flânerie*, so deeply entrenched – at least culturally and emotionally – in the European male gaze. The emotional make up of Manto's *āvārah* is laced with colonial melancholy and critical resistance against colonial capitalism; reading that itinerant state of mind and movement under colonial capitalism as an expression of *flânerie* is ironical, to say the least. This does not mean, however, that *flânerie* remains the prerogative of the European, nineteenth-century male. Bruce Mazlish has suggested that the *flâneur*, a figure of the *ruptures* of Western modernity, has given away, in his journey from an inward spectator to a shift outward "to a global terrain and its representations" (Mazlish 2015: 57). While one should remain cautious of reading different cultural expressions of idle observations in the tradition of European o even Parisian practice of *flânerie*, the expression is often used – and at times can be helpful – in exploring itinerant journeys and loose forms of investigation and their intertwinement with globalised notions of production. Here, I explore the tradition of European *flânerie* as profoundly associated with the philosophical project of the modern detective of fiction. Then, I analyse Ray's use of these associations located in European cultural nexus and their transformation to postcolonial urban India by adapting *flânerie* into the Bengali concept of 'culture'. This is the premise for the postcolonial detective to locate himself in a global terrain – his wandering and observant strain emerges from the modern Bengali context of knowledge, production, and culture.

Benjamin suggests that the *flâneur* "learns" to catch things in flight, i.e., a form of self-cultivation is crucial in developing the faculties that transform the idle *flâneur* into an invested historian or a detective in search of and hungry for knowledge. This knowledge is inadvertently a result of "logical construction" (Benjamin 1983: 41–42), enmeshed in the networks of *being* and *doing*. Keith Tester argues that the Baudelarian poet's ontological basis is in 'doing', even if nothing, not just in 'being' (Tester 2015: 5). Reading detective fiction as texts of *flânerie* as well as texts of collecting deep knowledge of historical and logical research, is simultaneously to read for leisure. The reading is oriented towards a more comprehensive understanding of how these fictional figures then embody the prototype of the 'hero' in modern texts, harking back to the figures

of the adventurer, even the hunter, in what Frisby calls "the oldest kind of worth that above all may be most closely interlinked with *idling*" (Frisby 2015: 93). What is common to these figures is the feeling of pursuit, a desire to satisfy a quest and an inherent potential of transformation through spontaneity. Although even idling is an action full of possibilities, the *flâneur* has always been depicted as someone not entirely purposeless but as someone who aspires to *retain* his purposelessness and autonomy against the rise of commercial utilitarianism. One difference between the idler and the *flâneur* is in their diverse spatial dimensions[322] – the *flâneur* needs the city, the crowd, society, something to frame and nourish his idling. Another difference is what this space represents: the modern, industrial city that is under the control of a governing state, technological encroachments, and capitalist forces. These differences are significant in appreciating not only the intersectional and translatable aspects of modernist readings of the *flâneur* but also the contradictory and paradoxical nature of idleness and otium.

Frisby argues that *flânerie* must explore the activities of observation, reading and producing texts (2015: 82). While supposedly passive observation and reading are still generally in sync with the idleness of the *flâneur*, what is stressed to the forefront is the more invested one of text 'production'. In this, the *flâneur* approaches the figure of the historian, the investigator looking for clues, connecting fragments of information and producing an archaeological text. The text is an investigation into the signifiers of the city, of its social fabric: like the historian, the *flâneur* attempts to "listen carefully to sounds, stories, scraps of quotations as well as search for clues amongst the 'dead data' of the metropolis – just like the detective", as someone who straddles both the past and the present (Frisby 2015: 93). The sensory investment of the *flâneur* then expands from mere looking to listening and even touching as he deconstructs and reconstructs texts (Frisby 2015: 93).[323] The detective of fiction, often created from historical figures, can also serve as a purveyor of history, through narrative production. The collage of "meaningful" images of "logical construction" collected by the *flâneur*, the fictional detective, and even the historian then turns into the production of the literary text. On the one hand, it originates in a seemingly non-utilitarian urge of activity, stemming from a spontaneous urge

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322   In the meanings of negotiations of everyday space or social space, for instance, in the writings of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre.

323   The comparable methodology for the historian and detective (or at least the detective of fiction) – collecting evidence, interpretation, and explications – has been explored extensively by Robin Winks (1978) and Ray Browne and Lawrence Kreiser (2000), among others.

to look, listen and observe, "catch things in flight". On the other hand, as a complete, finished, produced text, emerging out of "the ability of which the flâneur likes to boast", it ends up as a commodity itself, seeking a marketplace (Benjamin 1983: 40). Benjamin emphasises that the *flâneur* (and the fictional detective too), as a reader of the crowd of the city, which embodies an intoxication with commodities, "shares the situation of the commodity" (Benjamin 1983: 55). Only, his is abandoned by the crowd – an abandonment Frisby reads as "uprooted". As the *flâneur* partially turns into a commodity, *flânerie* is transported, too, towards a literary activity, of reading, of the interconnectedness of the text as city and city as text (Frisby 2015: 98–99).

We observe a fluid embodiment of the *flâneur* as well as *flânerie*, in relation to the production of literary texts – more precisely, the construction of the detective of detective fiction. Frisby suggests that the only possible direction *flânerie* after Benjamin can move towards is reading, thereby turning *flânerie* and the *flâneur* into literary commodities, taking them out of the confines of the mid-nineteenth-century Paris (Benjamin already discusses the *flâneur* in the context of Berlin and London). My aim in referring to and summarising these various takes on the *flâneur* is oriented towards a point of departure wherein we can locate the functionalities of the *flâneur*'s fundamental ambiguity beyond Western modernity and its European setting, most prominently as a representation that is a prerequisite to its character. All these aspects can be read together towards an analysis of the fictional detective beyond Western modernity, as he is, in the words of Baudelaire, "away from home" and yet feels "at home anywhere", "at the very centre of the world" and yet, "to be unseen of the world" (Tester 2015: 3). From this point of departure, I now introduce the fictional detective this chapter focuses on, and his uprooted context beyond the ruptures of Western modernity.

Pheluda, or Pradosh Mitra's story is located in the ruptures of modernity, reverberating through the nineteenth and twentieth-century histories of the Indian subcontinent. It is a story of being uprooted and abandoned, but also one of quest – aptly fitting to the "unruly" and "inchoate" "nature of 'India's experiments with the modern'" (Sengoopta 2016: 2; Nandy 1995: 245; c.f. 307). The narrator of the *Peludā* stories, the detective's young nephew, Topshe or Tapesh, reveals their family history at the beginning of the novel *Raẏāl Beṅgal Rahasya* (*Royal Bengal Mystery*, 2015 e [1974]).[324] Their fathers were four brothers who grew up in a village in undivided Bengal, specifically in present-day

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[324]   There are inevitable anomalies in this narrative of family origin, which eventually becomes central to a reading of this series. In the first story, Topshe mentions Pheluda as his mother's sister's son. Their surnames were different – Mitra and Bose (2015). Phe-

Bangladesh. The eldest brother, the estate manager of a *jamidār/zamīndār*, had a gift for hunting; he hunted tigers, deer, and wild boars in the forests of Madhupur. The second was Jaykrishna, Pradosh's father, who had great physical strength and prowess and a sharpened intellect; he became a teacher of Mathematics and Sanskrit at Dhaka Collegiate School. An early widower, he died a tragic, untimely death, leaving behind his nine-year-old son. The third brother renounced all worldly affairs, turned to asceticism, and travelled west. The youngest of the brothers, Tapesh's father, Binay, although not daring like his other brothers but "strong in convictions" (Ray 2015e: 376), followed the conflicted path fashioned by the ruptures of colonial modernity. Like millions of educated high-caste young men from the countryside, he landed a white-collar job and settled down in the metropolis of Calcutta, becoming a *bhadralok*. He took in his orphan nephew, who grew up to be a brilliant detective and a role model to his son, the young narrator.

This tracing of ancestral origins and an uprooted identity is significant in two ways: firstly, in making the stories utterly relatable to a significant proportion of Bengali readers whose families underwent similar uprootedness, journeys, and quests of civility through the tumultuous years of India's compressed, chaotic modernity, political independence and the two partitions of the subcontinent. Secondly, it helps trace the many aspects that constitute the oft-contested but resilient, over-arching identity of the Bengali *bhadralok* at this junction of Bengal's socio-cultural history. This story of origins, as is widely known, is strikingly similar to Satyajit's childhood circumstances.[325] Moreover, stories of family origins, moral and legal inheritance, relationships between father and son, and between the colonial and the postcolonial are recurring themes in these narratives. The family, the familial, and the familiarity (in the social history of Calcutta) of the *bhadralok* form the backdrop of these narratives. Attention has been repeatedly drawn to the almost exclusive *bhadralok* clientele that Ray's detective chooses to cater to – this being read as the detective's (and

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luda's surname was retained as Mitra. However, in the third story, "*Kailāś Caudhurīr Pāthar*" (Kailash Chaudhuri's gemstone), Pheluda introduces Topshe to his client as his paternal uncle's son (2015: 85). This grows into their familial standard narrative. These breaks in narrative construction are clarified in a late story, "*Ambar Sen Antardhān Rahasya*".

All quotations are from the collection, *Pheludā Samagra*, Vols. I and II (2015) published by Ānanda Publishers. Each narrative is marked according to the reference listed in the bibliography. All translations from the Bengali original are mine unless mentioned otherwise.

325    Sukumar died when Satyajit was nine. See Satyajit's memoir, *Yakhan Choṭo Chilām* (2005 [1982]).

Ray's) attempts at coming to terms with the contemporaneity of Bengal's history. On the one hand, this is played out in the decline of the landed, wealthy Bengali *bhadralok* class and, on the other hand, in garnering hopes for the future of the *bhadralok* of modest means and aspirational civility.

The *bhadralok* detective/*flâneur*'s story thus straddles these two horizons of history. In a fictional, critical letter written by Maganlal Meghraj, Peluda's arch-enemy, Kaushik Bhaumik asks: "So who is this Mr Mitter in the midst of the collapse of his own generation-in-class?" (2017: 248). The shrewd Meghraj offers an answer that is significant for our reading of these narratives and locating their response to leisureliness within this complex social backdrop. Mr Mitter, writes Meghraj (Bhaumik), is an extremely clever man who becomes a detective to dodge "all encounter with history – political and economical" (Bhaumik 2017: 248). He becomes, instead, a historian who is beyond the forces of history, in control of history and aims to manoeuvre history through his production of texts. Writing on Mr Mitter's (Pheluda's) portrayal in the two super-hit Ray films based on his detective, Meghraj compares him to the declining *bhadralok* class of this time, also repeatedly portrayed in Ray's films:

> In short, in becoming a private detective he avoided the fate of all the other heroes of his class in Mr Ray's films made around the time of *Sonar Kella* and *Joi Baba Felunath*, heroes who tried to make a living through jobs. I noticed Mitter's utter disinterest in money, only taking that much that he deserved/was enough for his genteel lifestyle. (Bhaumik 2017: 249)

However, his lifestyle does not remain so genteel after all. Pheluda's prosperity, as Bhaumik (in Meghraj's voice) comments, increases, and he gradually becomes almost gentrified, although not really wealthy. Spanning roughly four decades, these narratives are an intriguing read given the slippery political and economic situation in Bengal at the time. The narratives preempt the neoliberal, global economic shifts in Bengal before they occur. This hopefulness, this leisurely lifestyle, the idealised Bengali cultural masculinity embodied by the detective has only one secret: that of intellect, his "intelligent brainwork" – in Bengali, *buddhi* – as Meghraj points out in annoyance, that "form of work that is a fetish for you Bengalis" (Bhaumik 2017: 251). The figure of Pheluda acquired a cult status in the years of his literary production, boosted by the two films *Sonār Kellā* (1974) and *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth* (1979)[326], written and directed by Ray himself. As we will see in the final section, the *Pheludā* brand has now spiralled into many afterlives in the new millennium. What had started as a

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326    These are the years of the films' release. The novels were published in 1971 and 1975, respectively. All quotations are from the 2015 edition by Ānanda Publishers.

harmless detective adventure for children in the first story evolved into an intriguing text encompassing historical, social, and cultural debates about the Bengali *bhadralok* identity, gender, and trans-mediality. The potential to read these narratives in the light of leisure, labour, and the discourse of otium has always been evident and, yet, not fully realised so far.[327]

In their first appearance in "*Pheludār Goẏendāgiri*" (2015 a [1965]), Pheluda is twenty-seven years old and Topshe is thirteen years and six months. The cousins are travelling with Topshe's father to Darjeeling during the holidays. Reunited with old friends, Topshe's father spends the days in a leisurely manner, chatting and playing cards. We meet the narrator, a young Bengali male teenager who is observant, inquisitive, and confident. As we gather from his first mention of Pheluda, he is often infantilised and chided by his older cousin, but only affectionately. This bond between brothers becomes a central aspect of the series as it develops (later, from the novel *Sonār Kellā* onwards, the two are joined by the middle-aged Lalmohan Ganguly). In this first story, the characters are not finely chiselled. Written to give young readers a taste of good, harmless detective fiction, it is a simple, formulaic but enjoyable adaptation of the standard British detective fare that Ray would have been brought up on. The curious boys stumble upon a mysterious case concerning an elderly acquaintance threatened with nasty anonymous letters in blue envelopes. The cousins solve the mystery only after the culprit leaves Darjeeling. This delayed resolution is balanced as no actual harm is done, and the culprit sends a final letter to own his culpability and reason it with a childhood grudge. The flavour of a leisurely adventure set in Darjeeling possibly worked wonders with young readers. Darjeeling has been a favourite spot amongst Calcutta Bengalis looking for a few days of respite and fresh air of the hills. As the duo traverse the picturesque city, the reader is taken on a trip too: idling in the famous Mall, browsing through antiques in curio shops, drinking coffee and hot chocolate on the rooftop terrace of the legendary Keventer's restaurant, and all this, in the simple, enjoyable reading of a detective story, released just around the holidays.[328]

The resounding success of this first story must have inspired Ray to write the second, longer narrative – a proper novel following Pheluda and Topshe and their penchant for mystery, this time to the historical city of Lucknow, in *Bādˡśāhī Āṃṭi* (*The Emperor's Ring*, 1966–67). Significantly, this is the only narrative where Pheluda is reported to have a job in a private company. He had been working for two years and could join his uncle and cousin on a trip to

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327    Although it is off-handedly mentioned in Pujita Guha's article (2019), 381.

328    This first story was published and serialised from December 1965 to February 1966.

Lucknow for the Durga Puja holidays. We get an insight into Pheluda's character and talents: he plays a mean game of cricket, knows around a hundred board games, is good with card tricks, knows how to hypnotise people, has an astonishing memory, and is amazingly ambidextrous. Apart from these, what draws Topshe to Pheluda is the latter's ability to use his powers of observation and logic and his vast knowledge of foreign (Western) detective fiction. These interests and hobbies had turned him into a skilful, unprofessional detective through patient learning and prolonged self-cultivation. Attention must be paid to the Bengali phrase used in the text: "*śakher* detective". *Śakh* is a bengalicised adaptation of the Urdu/Persian *śauq*, with which the present study initiated its course, albeit in the context of Wajid Ali Shah's nineteenth-century Lucknow. This *śakh* – a desire or an urge to indulge in activities purely out of pleasure, in a leisurely manner acquired new dimensions of 'vocation' through the century, transforming the concept itself. The insufficient English translation of this later use would be 'amateur sleuth', which robs the phrase of the feeling of positive self-determination.[329] Influenced by a utilitarian outlook, the middle-class/*bhadra* society perceives Pheluda as whimsical and odd, owing to his fancy for these otiose activities and interests or *śauq*. He is considered eccentric (*ādhʲpāgʲlā, khāmʲkheẏāli*), even lazy (*kūṛe*), although few could match his intelligence/*buddhi* (Ray 2015 b: 21).

This eccentricity and laziness in his character are balanced with his sharp observation and intelligence to make Pheluda Ray's quasi-*bhadralok* hero in postcolonial Bengal of declining Nehruvian socialism, struggling communism, and impending capitalism. He trains and sharpens his faculties through his hobbies, is most productive in his idleness, and like the *flâneur* and the hunter, "catches things in flight". He becomes Baudelaire's *prince*, "who is everywhere in possession of his incognito" (Benjamin 1983: 40).[330] This incognito not only entails anonymity but also gives him access to vast knowledge and intellect that separates him from and makes him superior to the crowd. Pheluda's feats of investigative *flânerie* are presented masterfully in cases like *Gyãṭake Gaṇḍagol* (*Trouble in Gangtok*, 1970), *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth* (*The Mystery of the Elephant God*, 1975) *and Gorasthāne Sābʲdhān* (*Trouble in the Graveyard*, 1977) as the detective-*flâneur* takes control of the city in each case – Gangtok, Benares,

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329    The English word 'amateur', originating in the Latin *amare – to love*, has acquired slightly negative connotations over time, now used to mean not good/professional enough. This disjunct in doing what one loves and in doing it skillfully or 'professionally' itself reveals the disjunct of work and otium in modernity.

330    The prince analogy is also put forth by Chesterton; the detective story, an adventure in elfland (1923).

and Calcutta. When asked by Jatayu, in *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth*, if he had ever been to the city of Benares, Ray's sleuth answers with the flair of a textbook *flâneur*:

> One has to note certain scents while describing Kāśī [Benares]. The complex odour of burning incense, cattle excrement, and algae, along with the scent of human sweat, is characteristic of the lane leading to the Vishwanath temple. When one leaves the lane and approaches the main road along the riverbank, it is a relatively neutral, odourless experience. Then again, when one begins to descend the steps to the riverbank, the repulsive smell of goat herds becomes strong enough to cause nausea. But if you keep walking down the steps, you will be greeted with a pleasant scent, constituting the essence of earth and water, *ghī* and sandalwood, the scent of flowers and more incense. (Ray 2015 f: 431)

In *Bādʹśāhī Āṃṭi*, Pheluda lectures Topshe on the architectural delights of the city – the shrine of Bada Imambara, the mazes of Bhulbhulaiya, and the history of the Residency. He recounts their enchanting pasts, praising the architectural creativity and imagination of the erstwhile kings and *navāb*s. When they reach the city, they are received warmly by Topshe's father's friend, Dhiru Kaka/Mr Sanyal[331], an advocate who lives in Lucknow. The mystery revolves around the theft of an invaluable ring with a diamond and precious gemstone, which reportedly belonged to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. It was left in the safe-keeping of their host and goes missing. Pheluda takes up the responsibility of retrieving the ring and restoring Sanyal's image. As Pheluda and Topshe investigate, they roam the city, traverse the Bhulbhulaiya labyrinths, stroll around the market areas of Hazratganj and follow a suspect all the way to the railway station. Although the city is unknown to them, through swift observation and idle knowledge, they become the *princes* incognito, in control of the crowd and the city. Leaving Lucknow behind, they set out to travel to Haridwar and Lax-manjhoola and encountered the culprit in a forest on the way. At the end of the novel, after the culprit is caught and order is restored, Topshe claims Pheluda as the emperor of mysteries (2015 b: 82).

From this second narrative onwards, certain themes are set. An important and recurring theme is that of history, historical knowledge, constructing and deconstructing historical narratives, and the central role the past plays in solving the mysteries of the present. In almost all the narratives dealing with theft, the stolen object bears an immense relevance to the past, particularly to India's past – be it the precious diamond ring given by Emperor Aurangzeb to his rescu-er (*Bādʹśāhī Āṃṭi*), the invaluable Italian antique violin of Indranarayan inherited

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331  Kaka, or Kākā, is Bengali for a paternal uncle who is usually younger than one's father. The narrator addresses Dhirendra Sanyal in a familial manner – Dhiru Kaka.

from his ancestor ("*Bosʲpukure Khunʲkhārāpi*", Murder in Bosepukur, 1985), or the priceless ruby of Peter Robertson (*Rabārtʲsaner Rubi/Robertson's Ruby*, 1992).[332] The theft of these historical objects, antiques and artefacts, which belong to a more extensive pre-colonial past, and Pheluda's success in restoring them to their rightful owner(s), often to the postcolonial Indian state, has to be read in two ways. Firstly, here, the detective extends into a historian with deep and intimate knowledge that approaches specialisation. Secondly, and significantly, these narratives need to be read as postcolonial re-fashioning of the Western detective story, particularly against the colonialist narration of the Orient as the dangerous, impenetrable, and mysterious topos. While I explore these postcolonial re-writings and re-readings of detective fiction later in the chapter, I conclude this section placing Ray's figure of the Bengali/Indian detective at the crossroads of embodying these figures as mentioned above – of the *flâneur*, the historian, and the detective vis-à-vis the figure of the Bengali/Indian *bhadralok*.[333]

Not only are the origins of the *Pheludā* narratives located within a *bhadralok* social backdrop, but the readership of these narratives, embodied in the "politics of desiring the ideal child, the boy, as intrinsic to the formation of the subject in colonial Bengali literature for children" as shown by Sayandeb Chowdhury (2015: 111), is also a significant factor. With his intrinsic colonial subjectivity, this ideal child, the Bengali Hindu boy grows up to become the postcolonial, independent *bhadralok*. As with the identity of the postcolonial *bhadralok* (the world of the original, wealthy *bhadralok* being lost), the vantage point located by Ray for his detective figure too, is of a discontinuous origin – "neither too young nor too close to adulthood" (Chowdhury 2015: 113). The literary platforms where Pheluda thrives, i.e., *Sandeś* and *Deś*, are essentially literary locations that cater to the *bhadralok* readership. Even his fictional locations at the constructed peripheries of actual places in Calcutta are so-called *bhadralok* neighbourhoods. Parimal Ghosh (2016) provides an interesting reading of Pheluda's fictional addresses in the real city. While his initial address is noted as Tara Road, he later moves towards the south, from Rabindra Sarovar Lakes to Rajani Sen Road. What made Ray choose these localities for his detective's residence? "The answer could lie in the perceived ambience of the neighbourhood, in the mid-1960s, when the stories first began to appear", writes Ghosh: "The place was developed around the time of World War II, and, therefore, did

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[332]  For all English names of novels and stories, translated and published titles are in italics. For untranslated or unpublished narratives, titles are translated verbatim and written without italics.

[333]  The historical and contemporaneous identity of the *bhadralok* is explored in detail in the next section.

not have the weight of tradition behind it in the way north Calcutta had. Nor was it the exclusive upper class, select address that lay immediately to the south of Park Street." These neighbourhoods then had the "right mix of openness and adequate *middle class ease*" (Ghosh 2016: n.p. Ch. 8.).

Travel and mobility are other markers of a *bhadralok* identity that the fictional detective takes recourse to. Mobility, migration, and re-location are central to the identity of the Hindu *bhadralok*, who have migrated to the city of Calcutta from various parts of Bengal and later travelled abroad. In an Introduction to Benjamin's collected essays, Amit Chaudhuri (2009) refers to this mobility and migration of the *bhadralok*, asserting that his only 'possession', in lieu of land, is perhaps what Pierre Bourdieu "misleadingly called 'cultural capital', often materialized in 'a collection of books'" (2009: n.p.). Although there are many reasons to be sceptical of Chaudhuri's comparison of Benjamin to a *bhadralok*, what is significant in this comparison is embodied in this *cultural capital* that is romantically aspired and persistently constructed, embodied in factors such as 'introspection' and 'gentility'. Benjamin, or in this case, Benjamin embodying a thinker, a *flâneur*, an artist, is compared to the Bengali *bhadralok* through the histories of "cultural capital", "marginality", and "imaginative extravagance". What can possibly be taken away from this facile comparison is the contemporaneousness of the "self-defeating romance, the fantasy, of *bhadralok* pedagogy, learning, and autodidacticism" in marginalised contexts of subjugation, migration, and colonial history. I would argue that within these peripheries of identity, narrative, and society, the iconic status that Ray's *bhadralok* detective acquires resonates with the *bhadralok* romance of intellectual *flânerie*, but only if and when associated with cultural civility, or *bhadratā*, of the exclusively Hindu Bengali male. Through a fictionalised and culturally domesticated form of idleness, he can become an observer, hunter, and even a *prince*. However, although one of uprootedness, his inheritance lies in his social status, which defies the logic of marginality, at least in the context of Bengal. His idleness is derived from the tradition of self-cultivation and arsenal of self-training and acquiring knowledge (or what Pheluda calls *magajāstra* – literally, brain-weapon) in the era of fast-approaching economic liberalisation and globalisation. The romance of idleness is thus central to the *bhadralok*'s cultural profile, not simply in nostalgia for the decline of his social class but also balanced with *civilised* or *cultured* forms of wandering or *flânerie*.

## 5.3 *Bhadratā* and *Buddhi*: Bengali Concepts of Culture and Intellect

The social category of the *bhadralok* requires some discussion vis-à-vis concepts of culture and intellect as they are central to these texts. Exploring these

entangled concepts as formulating an affective identity in modern Bengal is central to understanding attitudes to otium. Furthermore, it provides an extensive understanding of the balance between leisurely freedom and disciplinary pedagogy inherent to the *Pheludā* narratives and their popularity in Bengali literature. While in the earlier stories, Pheluda is more of a *flâneur*, a lazy but intelligent individual, a quasi-*bhadralok*, his characterisation edges closer to a well-mannered, prim and proper, 'cultured' figure of the *bhadralok* as the narratives gain popularity through the celebrated novels and films, *Sonār Kellā* (novel 1971, film 1974) and *Jaẏ Bābā PheIunāth* (novel 1975, film 1979). Simultaneously, the discourses of work and hobbies, leisurely reading and acquiring knowledge emerge as deeply nuanced in these novels vis-à-vis his *bhadralok* identity. In the next section, I discuss the discourses of leisure and work extensively, locating work and leisure as discourses of a specific Bengali formulation of genteel masculinity. Here, I extend the *bhadralok* analysis based on the historically evolving central concepts of 'culture' and 'intellect' to then read the entanglements between these concepts for Ray's postcolonial sleuth. The discussion of the *bhadralok* will not extend beyond its relevance in the narratives since most existing research and debate on the *bhadralok* class tends to fall into the sociological study; my interest here, although linked to the social history of the category, is the concept of *bhadratā*, or civility, woven with ideas of regulated and cultured leisure in these narratives.

Culture and intellect or intellectualism (or its forbearer, education) have constituted the central *problématique* in readings of *bhadralok* identity for a long time. Studies by Andrew Sartori (2008), Tithi Bhattacharya (2005) and Hia Sen (2013) have shown that culture, education, and intellectualism are central concepts around which the identity, emergence, and decline of the *bhadralok* have been charted out. Earlier scholarship on the *bhadralok* sees the role of education as "the hallmark of *bhadralok* status" (Broomfield 1968). A synthesis of Western and Indian/Bengali aesthetic (literary, artistic, sartorial) culture as "material practices" is understood as the significant difference between *bhadra* (respectable) and *abhadra* (not respectable, others), rendering the *bhadralok* an *elite* status (Broomfield 1968: 6–8). This is not contradictory to Partha Chatterjee's (2015) claim that for the nationalist *bhadralok* under colonial authority, "the domain of intellect and culture", in his famous words, the "spiritual" domain, would emerge as a "sovereign territory", transforming into the nation's own "civil society" (Chatterjee 2015: 14). This spiritual domain was, in turn, created with the educational and reformist imports of the West (for example the puritan Brahmo reforms or the impact of Enlightenment). Dipesh Chakraborty (2000) discusses how through "associations with the literary and political groups" thriving in the city of Calcutta in the early twentieth century, the social practice of *āḍḍā* gained a certain "respectability", attaining the cultural-

intellectual characteristics of the *bhadralok* (2000: 194). Although Chakrabarty does address the "flaws" of *āḍḍā* as a *bhadralok* practice (2000: 181), his reading almost reinstates such practices of feeling "at home in modernity" as the prerogative of the cultured, literate, and intellectual community.

Sumit Sarkar offers a more nuanced argument concerning this seemingly direct relationship between education/intellectualism and culture vis-à-vis the *bhadralok*. According to him, the *bhadralok* is an elastic, heterogeneous composite of colonial Bengal, and their penchant for culture and intellect must be further analysed as more complex and contradictory than taken for granted (Sarkar 1997 c: 287). Hia Sen makes a pertinent point that towards the end of the nineteenth century, "the fine lines between class and status group become hazy" (2014: 62); the social identity of the *bhadralok* is, after all, one of self-definition. The *bhadralok* emerged first under colonial rule, with social status constituting the foundation of the community. Access to and adoption of English colonial education was further hoisted for the community in the emerging culture of print codified as materialised knowledge. While the rich *bhadralok* class declined through the nineteenth century, the *bhadralok* community began to constitute mostly of the middle/poor but respectable classes, often employed as clerks in the administration, serving under the practice of 'salaried job' as a largely middle-class livelihood (since their high caste had always had a denigration for manual labour).[334] And while the diversity in the social category has been emphasised, the colonial *bhadralok* is often tangled with the Bengali middle classes, particularly in the context of 'Bengali culture'.[335] In their scorn for manual labour and ambition for a better life, the *bhadralok* acquired Western education to fashion a specific culture (which also evolved as something indigenous, allowing the *bhadralok* to critique the West) as their own sustenance and arsenal.

The search for a socially recognisable *bhadra* (civil, cultured) existence drew this social class mainly to the city of Calcutta, thus entailing the migration and mobility from the village to the city as a significant part of the identity. While the significance of the trinity of education, culture and intellect remains undebatable in the identity markers of the category, there seems to be confusion in the classes occupied by them, even more pronounced in terms like

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334   Sarkar gives us a conceptualisation of the *bhadralok* as "a middle-class (*madhyasreni*, *madhyabitta*)": "below the aristocracy […] but above the lesser folks who had to soil their hands" (1997 a), 169.

335   Often characterised by an appreciation for science and education, love for literature, music and art, with strong convictions and political beliefs. See Hia Sen for a detailed understanding (2014), 66–68.

'bhadralok class'. Tithi Bhattacharya makes a significant intervention by assert-
ing that it is "essentially an ethic, or a sentiment, held for various reasons by
individuals from different class positions", which has been mistakenly read as
"a social whole, even as a single class" (2005: 52). But this sentiment is not nec-
essarily shared amongst Bengalis of various sections; Muslim Bengalis seem to
cause certain fissures in the definitions of the community, but such an argu-
ment needs more space.[336] I investigate the concept formative to the (Hindu)
bhadralok, i.e., respectability, civility, or *bhadratā*, characterised by culturalism
and intellectualism.[337] These characteristics are rooted in the aspirations that
gave emergence to the category in the first place, reached its zenith in the nine-
teenth century and remained as the *bhadralok*'s romance, in what Amit Chaud-
huri calls "the fantasy, of […] pedagogy, learning, and autodidacticism" in the
aftermath of freedom in the twentieth century.[338] The romance and brand of
culture and intellect allow the *bhadralok* to continue to shun manual labour
(the attributes of lower castes and rural Bengalis) with an ever-lasting scope for
further learning and intellectual ambitions. *Bhadratā*, then becomes an affective
conceptualisation rooted in histories of self-cultivation that Bankim formulated
as *anuśīlan* and Tagore championed as *saṃskṛti*, culminating in the bengali-
cised concept of *kālʹcār* (culture). I read this concept in its dual expressions in
these narratives – of intellect as reading practices and culture as genteel/
respectable mannerisms – both perfectly suited to the pedagogical project.

Satyajit Ray inherited the various tumultuous shifts that the *bhadralok*
identity has undergone through a century and more. In postcolonial, independ-
ent India, Ray carried his *bhadra* inheritance into his profession and, like his
father and grandfather, chose an 'odd' career, first working as a commercial
artist and then becoming a pioneer filmmaker. In his study of Ray's cinema, Chi-
dananda Das Gupta (1994), writing about the forces behind Ray's work in the
context of newly independent Bengal, rightly points out that "[h]is mentor was
not Marx but Tagore", establishing Ray as the last of the nineteenth-century
*bhadralok* intelligentsia (Das Gupta 1994: xiv). Nevertheless, Ray inhabited vari-
ous worlds. Although he grew up in pre-independent India, his work as an artist
evolved in and addressed the predicaments of post-independence India of Neh-

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336    See Tithi Bhattacharya (2005), 28, 31–32; Sartori (2008), 197–223; Parimal Ghosh
(2016) n.p. Ch. 4.

337    Rochona Majumdar (2019) has studied *sabhyatā* as civility/civilisation. While *sab-
hyatā* can be explored as civility on an intercultural level, *bhadratā* is the more affective,
quotidian practice of living with markedly civilised, cultured, genteel manners.

338    While the elite *bhadralok* class has gradually declined, the elite *bhadralok* culture
remains dominant in Bengal. See Hia Sen (2014), 63.

ruvian socialism and the condition of the *bhadralok* in that context. Not only is Ray's cinematic work invested in the trials and tribulations of this social category, but his literary production, both the science-fiction series *Praphesar Śaṅku* and the detective series *Pheludā*, as well as the armchair tales of the adventurer-raconteur, *Tariṇī Khuṛo* (Uncle Tarini), are all extensions of his engagement with the predicaments of this community. However, Ray's two media of production – cinema and literature – saw two very different approaches to the *bhadralok*'s conditions (Nandy 1995: 240). This difference is best played out by the very different conditions of the *bhadralok* youth as presented in his films in the 1970s and in the detective fiction he wrote at this time. A major difference is Ray's evocative treatment of the *bhadramahilā* (the respectable woman, the female counterpart of the *bhadralok*) in his films and their complete absence in his fiction (more discussion on this later in the chapter). Nandy refers to this split in his creativity as his heritage that harks back to his family's "aggressively rationalist, anti-hedonist" anglophilia, their fulfilling of the "civilizing role" stimulated by the modern institutions of the Raj. He also highlights the inner tension in Satyajit and the Ray family and their various exploits and contributions "between unfettered imagination" and "disciplined rationality". Nandy's essay explores the consequence of this 'split' in Ray's works, focusing on his fiction, of which he writes as "the second Ray", who is described as "pedagogic" and "masculine", "guided by an implicit concept of 'healthy pastime' or 'healthy fun'" (1995: 263). The concepts characterise almost all of Ray's fictional worlds, which deal with the *bhadralok* and his romance with culture and intellect, woven with his disciplinary, rationalising, regulated notions of civility or *bhadratā*.

To return to the *Pheludā* narratives, the series, taken together, is an impressive literary work in parts that studies the various kinds of *bhadralok* in their heterogeneity. Amongst his clients, we see mostly the landed gentry, established patriarchs who fulfil the role of sentinels of the declining wealthy class, like Ambika Ghoshal in *Jaẏ Bābā Phe*lunāth, as well as the honest, working-class *bhadralok*, for example Mukul's father, Sudhir Dhar in *Sonār Kellā*. While gradually, his clientele begins to narrow down to a more affluent community, Pheluda and his close acquaintances also portray various *bhadralok* characteristics. Amongst the central, recurring characters, we see two very different explorative portrayals of the *bhadralok* – the almost-ideal, extraordinary, quasi-*bhadralok* in the character of Pheluda, and the ambiguous, ordinary but identifiable *bhadralok*, Lalmohan Ganguly. Rochona Majumdar gives voice to the *bhadra* sleuth in a fictional letter written to Topshe on his negotiations of the *bhadralok* identity:

> I was (and am) a member of the modern Bengali middle class. But I am no bourgeois householder. I am committed to rationality and enjoy reading on

> various topics, though not in a goal-oriented fashion. I thirst after knowledge and prize a scientific temper. I am neither Holmes nor Hardless. (Majumdar 2017: 242)

His avoidance of a domestic life allows him to exist tangentially with the *bhadralok* identity, turning him into a quasi-*bhadralok*. Simultaneously, his attachment to friends and extended family place him at the centre of the genteel community. His *bhadratā* and his respectful mannerism make him an acceptable member of the community. His reverence for elders, for the unspoken norms of respectability in *bhadra* society strengthens this aspect. Despite his extraordinary intellect, he remains well-mannered; his only flaw remains his addiction to cigarettes.[339] He often carries a .32 Colt revolver but mostly relies on his grey matter. For solving cases and pastime pleasures, he is often narrated as reading, flipping through pages in various reclining positions, immersed in gathering knowledge in otiose forms.

The other *bhadralok*, Lalmohan Ganguly, is also portrayed through intellectual and literary exploits, although Ray's comic take of him renders him a foil to the actual intellectual, Pheluda. Ganguly makes many errors in his understanding of various topics; on their first meeting, he talks about his fascination with the camel and his exploration of the animal's capacities in his thriller set in the Sahara, *Sāhārāy̆ Śiharaṇ* (Shivers in the Sahara), where he mentions that the camel stores water for days in its stomach. Pheluda corrects him, explaining that it is not the stomach that stores water, but the fat in the camel's hump is oxidised to form water, which then sustains the camel (Ray 2015 d: 193). Full of admiration, Ganguly is thankful and concedes, promising to rectify the mistake in the next edition. Various types of *bhadralok* portrayals are scattered through the narratives. Topshe's father is the stereotype of the *bhadralok* householder. Another recurring portrayal of the *bhadralok* is that of Sidhu Jyatha, who is quite like Pheluda but even more knowledgeable. He is retired, having lived a fascinating and often idle life in his time. In their various depictions of the *bhadralok*, the narratives also address a variety of stages in the life of the *bhadralok*, ranging from Sidhu Jyatha to Tapesh, the *bhadralok* in training. The various portrayals in these narratives are balanced by both an idle, non-conjugal, adventurous life of free will and spontaneity as well as rigorous learning, intellectual investments, and constant but leisurely work (reading, writing, and investigating) – in short, aesthetic self-cultivation and an intellectual cosmopolitanism.

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339 Smoking is far more acceptable to a *bhadralok* society compared to the drugs Holmes was addicted to. See Lila Majumdar's essay, "Phelucằd", in *Pheludā Samagra*, Vol II. Also published in *Sandeś* Special Issue, *Pheludā Tiriś* (1995).

### 5.3.1 Reading as Leisurely Self-Cultivation

In *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth*, Topshe reveals that since there were no exciting cases for days, Pheluda had plenty of leisure, during which he read innumerable books, continued his regular yoga, reduced smoking, played chess, and watched quite a few films (Ray 2015 f: 432). Leisure is often the premise from which cases emerge. *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth* begins with Jatayu's whim to travel together to Benares to witness the wonders of the sensationally omniscient Machlibaba/Mach'libābā (the fish saint). Pheluda, sceptical of such supernatural powers of saints and godmen, is convinced to travel for possible inspiration during this leisure time: "You have no case in hand, and I have no plot in mind" (2015 f: 432). The world of *Pheludā* appears idyllic and leisurely, but this leisureliness requires constant engagement. The ability of the *flâneur* to catch things in flight is not only acquired through idleness in these texts but also through self-cultivation and discipline. However, this notion of work is – as already explicated, not opposed to otium. It is work done on one's own terms, with a deep sense of self-determination and self-fashioning. One significant and recurrent activity in these narratives is that of reading. Reading is oriented towards acquiring knowledge to solve cases, as well as aimless, leisurely, and pleasurable, for both Pheluda and Topshe.

Through the progressing narratives, Pheluda's knowledge grows, as does Topshe's education; his powers of observation are further sharpened as Topshe notices significant details in new cases. With almost every new case, the reader is introduced to a new aspect of India's history or a new geographical exploration within the new map of India, thus insisting upon a postcolonial *bhadralok* orientation towards knowledge of both the new and the old homeland. Pheluda and Topshe are portrayed as adventurous nerds and a thorough reading of their exploits is sure to add to every young reader's accumulation of general knowledge and intellect, all the while integrating a respectable, morally upright, and genteel response in relation to society, nation, and the inevitability of crime. In this section, I focus on three novels of the series – *Sonār Kellā* (*The Golden Fortress*, 1971), *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth* (meaning 'hail Lord Phelu', translated as *The Mystery of the Elephant God*, 1975) and *Gorasthāne Śāb'dhān* (*Trouble in the Graveyard*, 1977). This reading is directed towards the *bhadralok* portrayal of Pheluda, who sharpens his intellect with reading. *Sonār Kellā* surrounds the mystery of recurrent memories of Mukul Dhar, a boy of eight years old; Mukul describes memories of a past life, and his depictions of deserts and forts signal the landscape of Rajasthan. Mukul remembers peacocks flying, battles fought, colourful gemstones, and a golden fortress. This incident draws attention from the press, and greedy goons attempt to kidnap him. Pheluda travels to Rajasthan accompanied by Topshe to retrieve and rescue Mukul. On their journey,

the two meet Lalmohan Ganguly, better known as Jatayu, the famous writer of Bengali adventure thrillers.[340] According to Jatayu, his fictional hero, Prakhar Rudra, closely resembles Pheluda. From this adventure onwards, the trio becomes inseparable, which is displayed in Jatayu's reference to the group as 'The Three Musketeers'.

The novel begins on a delightfully leisurely note, bringing together the culture-intellect dyad of the *bhadralok* and his relaxing start to a Sunday morning. Pheluda had been reading. He slams the book shut, snaps his fingers twice, and wraps up with a magnificent yawn, pronouncing aloud, "Geometry". Topshe deduces from the brown paper-covered book in Pheluda's hand that he must have loaned it from their elderly uncle, Sidhu Jyatha.[341] Sidhu Jyatha loves books and is possessive about them. However, he always makes an exception for Phelu as he takes utter care of the books he borrows. Topshe receives a long lecture regarding the significance of geometry. Lighting his favourite brand of cigarette, Charminar, and exhaling two rings of smoke, Pheluda explains how life, atmosphere, nature, and everything surrounding us are geometrical. This long lecture is not really concluded in the Bengali text but ends with an ellipsis. For a reader, Topshe's recounting of Pheluda's monologue and drift and his shift in narration expresses an amusing mix of an adolescent's roving attention span, as well as a slight jab at Pheluda's nerdish instincts (2015 d: 182). Pheluda is described as an avid, voracious reader, sometimes reading several books simultaneously. His knowledge of most subjects, places, and discipline is acquired through reading. In fact, Pheluda picked up investigation as a hobby after a thorough reading of Arthur Conan Doyle's detective fiction. He demonstrates a keen interest in the works of Edgar Allen Poe and Émile Gaboriau in the story "*Ghurˈghuṭiẏār Ghaṭanā*" (The incident at Ghurghutiya, 1975). In *Sonār Kellā*, Pheluda reads up on parapsychology to understand scientific and psychoanalytical approaches to the elusive subject of reincarnation, the initial source of this case. His mentor figure, Shidhu Jyatha, heavily influences Pheluda's reading practices. A thorough *bhadralok*, a historian, collector, and literary *flâneur*, Sidhu Jyatha is also a raconteur. He is, in all senses of the term, an encyclopedia. And every time Pheluda is troubled while acquiring knowledge, he only has to visit Sidhu Jyatha's flat. Topshe remarks that Sidhu Jyatha reads so much that he never had time for a family: "he never married; instead of a wife, he has books for a family" (Ray 2015 g: 595).

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[340]  Ganguly's *nom de plume*, Jaṭāẏu, is taken from the mythical bird of the same name in Rāmāẏaṇa. Jatayu witnessed Ravana abduct Sita and attempted to fight Ravana.

[341]  Jyatha, or *jyāṭhā*, as opposed to Kaka, is Bengali for a paternal uncle older than one's father.

In *Gorasthāne Śāb'dhān*, Pheluda reads Charlotte Godwin's historical diaries from 1858–62 to arrive at a clue to the mysterious incident of the graveyard. In this novel set in Calcutta, the case's background is constituted by Pheluda's recent obsession with the history of Calcutta and his endless reading, viewing pictures and investigating maps. Simultaneously, an incident at the old Park Street Cemetery provokes his suspicion. The trio investigate, and Pheluda, with the help of Sidhu Jyatha and his knowledge of old newspapers and India's history, gathers clues to the secrets of an old English family, the Godwins, and a priceless artefact that may have been hidden in the grave of Thomas Godwin for more than a century. This is one of the few narratives where the Bengali *bhadralok*'s elasticity is extended to his colonial history, exploring the familial entanglements of Englishmen and women with Bengali Hindus. The two strands of the existing Godwin families are portrayed in an intriguing feat of social history as a mystery – one strand of the family is integrated into *bhadralok* society, with English-Bengali names like Michael Narendra Biswas, living in New Alipore, and the other, retained the English family name, Marcus Godwin, struggling with a penury-struck life in the shadowy location of Ripon Lane. Pheluda's obsession with reading and knowledge in this novel leads him to solve riddles constructed with abbreviations (2015 g: 603) that lead him to key clues like photographs of Charlotte Godwin and her beloved *bhadralok* husband.

Anindita Mukhopadhyay emphasises these reading practices as a traditional *bhadralok* attitude to intellectual stimulation, referring to Satyajit's concurrence with Upendrakishore's "understanding of literature as culture" (Mukhopadhyay 2019: 336). Pheluda's attitude to reading as aimed towards idle but vast acquiring of knowledge extends to reading Indian epics; their sacred value fades away, releasing them as texts of literary heritage and culture. Before I conclude this section on reading as an expression of *bhadralok* material culture, I want to draw attention to the most significant (young) reader and writer in these narratives, Topshe. Although Topshe is a school-going youth, his formal education and school-related activities are absent in these narratives. School, rather school holidays, are used strategically as a backdrop to many cases so that he can accompany Pheluda on their adventures without missing school.

Notwithstanding his formal education, Topshe is presented with a curious mind and a love for knowledge and reading. He has, for example, Pheluda's library, experience, and knowledge to fall back upon whenever anything interests him. He loves reading for pleasure. In *Sonār Kellā*, on meeting Lalmhoan Ganguly, Topshe is incredibly excited as he has already read a couple of Jatayu's novels. In the novel *Bāksa Rahasya* (*The Mysterious Case*, 1972), Topshe is enthralled after reading the adventures of Captain Scott. Like Pheluda, Topshe, too, reads aimlessly, endlessly, and leisurely. This culture of reading is the most significant pedagogical aspect of *bhadralok* culture in these narratives,

harking back to Ray's predecessors' earnest pedagogic endeavours to educate and entertain. Even when Topshe is not involved in reading, the otiose, quotidian time he spends with his older cousin is quite instructive towards the expansion of his knowledge:

> Pheluda's latest obsession is old Calcutta. While investigating a murder in Fancy Lane, he discovered that the word Fancy, in this case, is an anglicisation of the Bengali word '*phãsi*', to be hanged. Almost two hundred years ago, Nandakumar was hanged in this area. That is how the obsession began. In the last three months, the number of books he has read on old Calcutta, the maps he has explored, and the pictures he has seen are countless. Of course, this has been an excellent opportunity for me to learn a lot – particularly after spending two entire afternoons in the Victoria Memorial. (Ray 2015 g: 588)

The cultural-intellectual *bhadralok* project forms a central theme in these narratives that transform from a *bhadralok* sentiment and romance towards an instruction in training young Bengali boys to continue this tradition (of aesthetic self-cultivation). In their work on the enculturation of emotions and children's literature, Pascal Eitler, Stephanie Olsen, and Uffa Jensen argue that "emotions emerge as concrete effects of historical invention, as social products […] and as a question of practical knowledge" (2014: 3). For Tapesh, and intended young readers, reading these narratives spun around a *bhadra* society and an ideal *bhadralok* sleuth who champions immersive reading and aimless acquiring of knowledge does not only create emotions for intellect but also helps perpetuate this tradition of intellectualism, as an end unto itself. *Bhadra-tā*, the modus operandi of the *bhadralok*, is to be explored in the affective response of respectability and responsibility. This affective response is portrayed as Bengali culture, in which the *bhadra* sleuth is remarkably portrayed as different from the usual detachment of detectives. Pheluda is rational but also responsive and responsible. The Indian postcolonial detective retains and preaches the morality of his *bhadra* or respectable status.

## 5.3.2  Responsibility and Respectability: The *bhadra* Sleuth's Moral Feelings

In *Sonār Kellā*, Topshe recalls their visit to Sidhu Jyatha's flat before they board the train for Rajasthan; Sidhu Jyatha tests Pheluda on the history of finger-printing and its role in criminology. Pheluda winks at Topshe and responds, "I might have read it somewhere… cannot really recall at the moment". Topshe writes, "[o]f course, he remembered. He kept his mouth shut to please Sidhu

Jyatha" (Ray 2015 d: 192). This is only one of the many ways Ray portrays Pheluda as respectful towards his elders. The same respectful and respectable sensibility is conveyed on the many occasions where Pheluda shows respect and affection for Lalmohan Ganguly, although the latter ends up muddling things rather than solving them. Ashis Nandy writes of 'respectability' as something that nineteenth-century social reformers in Bengal added to the equilibrium of the East and the West, or what Nandy quotes Chidananda Das Gupta in referring to as the "Tagorean synthesis" (Nandy 1995: 247). Respectability is thus an associative affective expression for the *bhadralok* identity of the nineteenth century, which merged, as Nandy points out, "values of Enlightenment – scientific rationality, uncritical acceptance of the theory of progress, and secularism with aspects of Indian high culture" (ibid.). To further ascertain the Bengaliness of this civility, we only need to pay attention to the portrayal of Pheluda's enemy, the non-Bengali corrupt businessman.

Pheluda's middle-class Bengali genteel behaviour is showcased, almost flaunted, in his disinterest in money. Simultaneously, this is starkly portrayed against the material greed of his commensurate arch nemesis, the Marwari businessman Maganlal Meghraj. The non-*bhadra* stereotype of Meghraj is only too obvious; historically, the Marwari (originally from Rajasthan) business community constitutes a large section of Bengal's affluent classes. In *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth*, the sleuth encounters his antagonist, the corrupt and greedy Meghraj, while attempting to retrieve an exuberantly expensive statuette of the Ganesha/Ganeś on behalf of his wealthy *bhadralok* client, Umanath Ghosal. Meghraj is shown to take his inherent *abhadra* (disrespectful) notoriety as his pride in profession. He openly admits that he paid far less than its worth when he purchased the statuette. He attempts to bribe Pheluda, failing which, he threatens the *bhadralok* detective to stay away from his business.

Further, in a delightfully well-written scene, Meghraj, at his peak of uncivil behaviour, inflicts terror upon the timid Ganguly, making him the target of a sadistic and theatrical knife-throwing session. Meghraj returns in two other narratives, *Gyām̐ṭake Gaṇḍagol* (Trouble in Gangtok) and "*Golāpī Muktā Rahasya*" (Mystery of the pink pearl) and from this first meeting in Benares Ganguly develops an invincible fear of the villain. Meghraj mocks Pheluda for his honesty and refusal to be bribed, but also for his familial associations – with Topshe, whom he mockingly calls 'cousin' and Ganguly 'uncle'. The presence of *abhadra* (uncivil) criminals like Meghraj seem to threaten the leisurely and pleasant world of the narratives, which functions perfectly in their resplendent, civil, and undisturbed pace.

Although Pheluda, in keeping with the Western/British detective formula (as exercised in narratives of Hercule Poirot, Jane Marple, Father Brown or Endeavour Morse), is portrayed as celibate, single, and without any love inter-

est, he is certainly situated within the familiar and the familial; the familiar and the familial are significant aspects in the social world occupied by the Bengali/Indian postcolonial detective, strategised to express his civility and good manners. His close associations with the retired, eccentric Sidhu Jyatha and his deep friendship with the comical, warm-hearted Jatayu strengthen his ties with the familiar setting of the *bhadralok* society. Several aspects of the narratives establish the familiar and familial nature of this world of the Bengali detective. Firstly, the very name of the detective, who develops investigation from a hobby to a profession, is retained as a close acquaintance, the guy next door, by adding the suffix *dā*, a common Bengali abbreviation of *dādā*, referring to an older brother. This naming of the professional detective through a familial address has drawn the attention of scholars like Sayandeb Chowdhury (2015) and Suchitra Mathur (2006). Chowdhury sees this naming as a suggestive association with the Bengali *raconteur genre*, claiming a literary lineage from the stories of Ghana*dā*, the brotherly storyteller and his adventures, penned by Premendra Mitra.[342] Mathur reads this naming as a subversive mimicry of the colonial idea of selfhood, in which she sees Pheluda as an Indian reincarnation of Sherlock Holmes, but a reincarnation that complicates the "simple Western Self vs. native Other binary" (Mathur 2006: 91).[343]

The familial and familiar storyteller vibe lends a flavour of leisurely ease to this narrated world of crime and deception. For those in the narratives who do not call the detective 'Pheluda', the variations are Phelu (as used by Sidhu Jyatha and Topshe's father, the elderly extensions of family), Phelu Babu (as used by Lalmohan Ganguly to show both respect as well as affection; they also address each other as *maśāi*, comparable with 'mister'). There is also Phelu Mittir (the Bengali colloquial pronunciation of his name), which is used by certain Bengali rivals and gangsters. Meghraj is not a part of this Bengali familial or familiar sphere; the distance between them is shown in his formal, anglicised

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Chowdhury compares Pheluda and Ghanada in terms of their Bengali-ness and keen interest in knowledge. However, Ghanada is a more sedentary figure, an armchair storyteller, compared to the mobile, action-oriented Pheluda. See Chowdhury (2015), 120.

343 As Mathur asserts, the name Pheluda is not only a 'nickname' but also a deceptive one since it constitutes two parts – the nickname Phelu and the suffix *dā*. While *dā*'s familial connotations have already been addressed, Phelu is an unusual nickname for the character's real name, Pradosh. Pradosh means evening, nightfall or twilight, while Phelu/Felu, although a Bengali nickname, easily signifies the aural collocation of the English verb 'to fail'. Although there is no direct suggestion that Phelu is derived from the English 'fail', for a writer who loves puns, it is not too far-fetched to read this nickname as a teasing twist for someone who is outstanding in everything he does.

address – 'Mr Mitter'. Pheluda, likewise, is seen to address him with the formal 'Maganlal *jī*', where '*jī*' is the Hindi/Urdu suffix used to show respect to an older person or a person with authority. Of course, in this case, the '*jī*' is used satirically to rub the *respectable/bhadra* behaviour in rather than any actual acceptance of Meghraj's authority. Ray epitomises Pheluda's success in one of the most popular novels, *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth*, where Pheluda beats several antagonists and reveals their fraudulence, particularly that of the deceptive saint, Machlibaba. Pheluda eventually exposes the saint to be a money-laundering fraud. His defeat of the Baba (saint) and other adversaries, including Meghraj, justifies the title of the narrative, *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth*, literally hailing him.[344] Finally, the various familial, familiar, and endearing ways of naming Ray's sleuth are taken beyond the textual narratives to a readers' world by Ray's cousin and prominent Bengali writer of children's literature, Lila Majumdar, in an essay titled "Phelucā̃d". Majumdar writes, addressing the child reader of *Sandeś* (where this essay was first published), "Did you know, enthralled by his feats of intelligence, I secretly call him Phelucā̃d". The addition of the suffix *cā̃d* (Bng. the moon) is an expression of endearment for a young boy who deserves it and who proves to be a very good boy. These several approaches to naming someone whose profession is defined by his peerless intellectual prowess help the narrative create a Bengali sense of sociality, where sharp intellectual work does not require one to be detached or emotionally inaccessible.

The argument that, ironically, the family forms a central aspect in these narratives is also well-reasoned in the cases Pheluda solves in the set-up of his clientele. Exploring this aspect, Chowdhury rightly claims that most of Pheluda's cases are linked to crimes that signify "a pivotal moment of crisis in the familial archetype" (Chowdhury 2015: 123). Most cases involve a male family member gone wayward and is often involved in the crime (mostly theft of valuable family heirlooms and artefacts). Pheluda's job is also "a moral imperative to find closure to family fissures and restore order to a *naturally edifying bhadrolok* familial order" (ibid.), as demonstrated in several novels, including *Jaẏ Bābā Phelunāth* and *Gorasthāne Śāb'dhān.* It forms the backdrop of other adventures like *Raẏāl Beṅgal Rahasya*, *Ghur'ghuṭiẏār Ghaṭanā*, "*Bos'pukure Khun'khārāpi*" and *Ṭin'ṭoreṭor Yīśu.* This portrayal of the familial, however, is exclusively masculine. In fact, as most scholars have asserted, the entire world of Pheluda is strikingly singled out as masculine. The protagonists, antagonists, and clients – none of them seem to have any significant feminine presence in their lives, except for a handful of cases like "*Ambar Sen Antardhān Rahasya*"

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344  Adding the suffix '*nāth*' expresses Pheluda's authority and victory as the 'lord' and 'master'.

(The disappearance of Ambar Sen, 1983) and "*Ḍāktār Munṣīr Ḍāẏ'rī*" (Doctor Munshi's diary, 1990). Male servants, cooks, and gardeners tend to domestic needs – be it Pheluda's household or his affluent clients.

Young men in these narratives tend to remain unmarried, while older men are conveniently widowers. As Chowdhury's essay's title claims, Pheluda appears to be an "ageless hero, sexless man" (2015). Neither Pheluda nor Topshe, not even Ganguly, is ever shown to have any faint interest in any member of the other sex, nor are they, in any manner, depicted as homosexuals. Nevertheless, there is a deep sense of attachment, affection, and friendship among the trio. It is this missing element of sexual encounters and even essential feminine presence, combined with the respectability of *bhadralok* romance, which allows the narratives to become, in many ways, a depiction of a leisurely world undisturbed by the troubles of the heart and domesticity. This world order focuses on the woes and dilemmas of a section of the *bhadralok* in the absence of the *bhadramahilā*, where ruptures in familial relations between brothers or between father and son allow a problem to arise. Similarly, the absence of the feminine (and consequential entanglements and attachments) presents Pheluda and his gang with the opportunity or leisure to investigate. They then successfully restore the *bhadralok* world order with the employment of the self-reflectively desirable intellect and culture trope. In the following section, I explore and analyse this entirely exclusive masculine world of the detective and its centrality to a lifestyle where work itself turns leisurely and leisure time is adequately harnessed to acquire skills and knowledge in an otiose and enjoyable manner in the presence of the familial, but in complete absence of the feminine.

## 5.4 Leisurely Men, Lessons for Boys: Games, Masculinities, and Livelihood

In response to repeated questions on the absence of women in the *Pheludā* narratives, Satyajit Ray is frequently quoted from a letter written to a friend on this dilemma, where he does not justify the issue but explains that "[d]etective fiction written for young adults does have its limitations. Most crime elements are adult in nature and hence have to be left out" (Chowdhury 2015: 124). While Ray's claim that these narratives are meant for children and young adults is much contested today by scholars, the argument here is that the idyllic, leisurely world of *Pheludā* is made possible due to the absence of sexual or amorous intrigue, or simply, in the absence of women altogether. In this world, the pace of life is leisurely. The thrill and excitement of mystery, chase, and hunt are balanced with the slow pace of life, the patient pursuit of leisurely hobbies, and indulgence in the 'good life'. Pheluda knows of the best restaurants and cafes,

and he only smokes cigarettes of the Charminar brand.[345] This leisurely mood extends beyond the protagonists and is perpetuated by clients hailing from the 'leisured classes' of postcolonial India; these leisurely men have fascinating intellectual hobbies, like reading, writing, travelling, performing, and even hunting. This idyllic world is devoid of disturbances from the socio-economic or political unrest that was the lived experience of these decades in Calcutta and Bengal. Similarly, they remain undisturbed by the presence of women. But it would be wrong to presume that these absences are simply covered up; in fact, when read against Ray's portrayals of the times in his other works, these absences emerge as negotiated and require in-depth investigation. In this chapter section, I formulate two ways of reading masculinity in the narratives central to the gendered construction of a leisurely life. I first formulate how this leisurely lifestyle for the sleuth and his coterie is made possible through exclusively masculine homosociality. I then explore this particular 'Pheluda' brand of masculinity as a refined and emotionally active one against the backdrop of colonially asserted forms of the arrogant male hero.

### 5.4.1 The Intriguing Masculinity of Leisurely Lifestyles

The range of indulgent leisurely activities in the *Pheludā* narratives can be broadly organised into two categories. One is to be sincerely interested in artefacts, objects, and histories, like Narendra Biswas's fascination with old Calcutta and its colonial encounters or Dr Munshi's professional as well as personal interest in psychology and emotions. The other is a pronounced depiction of *wanderlust* and travel. Mobility, travel, and new geographical ventures constitute a recurrent theme in these narratives, like in *Ṭinṭoreṭor Yīśū*, *Bāksa Rahasya* and others. *Wanderlust* is not only the established well-to-do clientele's prerogative but also depicted as both the professional requirement and pleasurable excursions for Pheluda, Topshe, and Jatayu. Like the first story, many of the narratives begin with a desire to travel, leaving Calcutta for a change of air. The absence of women in the protagonists' lives allows them spontaneous, unhindered mobility. But this has to be read in Ray's other works outside the literary narratives of Pheluda. For example, in the novel *Sonār Kellā*, Topshe concludes that he, too, will travel to Rajasthan with his cousin in search of the kidnapped Mukul. A few lines later in the text, he mentions that when he informed his father about their upcoming trip, his father expressed enthusiasm and encour-

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345    The Charminar cigarette brand was originally produced by royalty in Hyderabad, the Vazir Sultan Tobacco Company, started in 1929.

agement (Ray 2015 d: 188). But in the cinematic version of the same narrative (also directed by Ray), Topshe's mother is given a voice, raising the question of missing school. Ray seems to suggest that the presence of women can potentially raise obstacles to leisurely and spontaneous mobility.

Travel, mobility, and geographical explorations, either for work or leisure, mark these novels as texts of transposing the erstwhile colonial-Western detective narratives set in the peripheries of the Empire to the postcolonial revisions and subversions of the native sleuth. In "*Laṇḍane Pheludā*", these travels culminate in the postcolonial sleuth's walk to Baker Street. Topshe writes that although there is no such address as 221B, Pheluda strolls towards a close enough number and pays homage to his inspiration, saying out loud, "*Guru*, I would not be who I am if not for you" (Ray 2015 j: 587). This salutation is also Ray's re-appropriation of Holmes' fictional references to the spectre of colonial India (most famously in *The Sign of Four*, "The Speckled Band", etc.), where he could not travel during his fictional life, as well as the incommensurate gap between the famous detective of the Empire and the postcolonial sleuth. While Pheluda travels to London to solve a case of lost identity, Topshe and Jatayu take immense pleasure in idle strolls around the streets of the metropolis. Referring to these various depictions of leisurely and adventure-seeking postcolonial *bhadralok* agency, Anindita Mukhopadhyay explores the portrayal of masculinity in these narratives. "Masculinity means hunting, travelling and nationalism", writes Mukhopadhyay in relation to her reading of these narratives as "children's games and adults' gambits" (2019). Harking back to Upendrakishore's pedagogical entanglements with 'play', these narratives, written with young adults in mind, offer a certain play on the original trope of idling and hunting. The recurrent theme of hunting as a leisurely indulgence for Pheluda's *bhadralok* clientele echoes big-game/criminal hunting for Pheluda and Topshe. Thus, *śakh* (activities of pleasure) and *śikār* (hunting) become central to these narratives of adventure, while travel, both historical and contemporaneous, local and international, becomes a rite of passage for the genre of postcolonial detective fiction to formulate subversive expeditions into the erstwhile colonial metropole. Addressing these strains, I read the romanticised masculine life of leisure in the novels *Raẏāl Beṅgal Rahasya* (1974), *Ṭiṇṭoreṭor Yīśu* (1982) and *Rabārṭsaner Rubi* (1992). Simultaneously, I refer to some of Ray's films to compare the portrayal of unfettered leisurely masculinity in these genres.

Hunting and idling as leisurely activities for the postcolonial detective come together in the novel *Raẏāl Beṅgal Rahasya*. Like several narratives, this novel also begins at leisure.

> 27 May, Sunday morning, 9:30. Temperature: 100 degrees Fahrenheit. It was during our summer holidays. After solving a recent murder mystery in For-

dyce Lane, Pheludā earned quite a bit of fame and cash and was enjoying his leisurely rest [*biśrām*]. I was adding a few Bhutanese stamps to my collection when Jaṭāẏu arrived at our place. (Ray 2015e: 374)

Jatayu proposed a trip to the forests around Dooars in north-eastern Bengal, near the Bhutan border. A famous writer-hunter, the author of the thrilling book *Bāghe-Banduke* (Of tigers and guns), Mahitosh Singharay, had invited him. The Singharays are a *jamidār* Bengali family, tracing their ancestral roots to Rajputana. At this point in the narrative, Topshe mentions with great excitement their collective family history of hunting as a leisure activity. Referring to Pheluda's fascination with forests and hunting, he mentions that his cousin's favourite novel is Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Āraṇyak* (*Of the Forest*, 1976). Although he has never indulged in game-hunting, he is a pretty good shot and, if required, can shoot a tiger unfailingly. The lack of masculine pastime activity of hunting game in this generation of the Mitra family is overcompensated by Pheluda's (and Topshe's) hunting down criminals, a metaphor for 'big-game hunting' (Mukhopadhyay 2019: 331). Topshe corroborates this by explaining Pheluda's philosophy of hunting: "It is much easier to understand and gauge the intentions of animals when compared to the complexities and entanglements of the human heart. Thus, hunting down criminals is no less an achievement than hunting a tiger" (Ray 2015e: 376). The mystery revolves around the Singharay family's tradition of hunting, a hidden family treasure, and the signs of a man-eater in the forests near their ancestral home. But hunting as an arrogant masculine activity is critiqued in this narrative; it is only appropriated in the metaphor of hunting down criminals to restore the world order and not to annihilate animals.

Another late novel on travel and adventure, *Ṭiṇṭoreṭor Yīśū*, or Tintoretto's Jesus, incorporates Pheluda's flair for knowledge of European Renaissance art and his fascination with Indian/Bengali artists. Once again, the narrative begins with the trio travelling out of Calcutta in Jatayu's car for a breath of fresh air. On the road, they meet Nabakumar Niyogi, who invites them to his nearby ancestral home in Baikunthapur for lunch. Struck by the mention of Baikunthapur, Pheluda recalls reading an article on the Niyogi family by Raja Bhudev Singh in the *Illustrated Weekly* magazine. The article focused on the artistic career of Chandrashekhar Niyogi, who travelled to Rome to study painting. Nabakumar introduces himself as the grandson of Chandrashekhar, his father, Soumyashekhar, the artist's nephew. Agreeing to join Nabakumar at Baikunthapur in a while, he informs his companions about the article on Chandrashekhar, detailing his artistic journey to Rome, his marriage to an Italian woman, his return to India after her death, and his turn towards an asceticism afterwards (2015h: 174). On their arrival at the Niyogis' two-hundred-year-old ancestral

home, Topshe is astounded by the aure of heritage, culture, and the family's affluence. Everyone gathers around a life-size portrait of Anantanath Niyogi, Chandrashekhar's father. A discussion follows on the artist's life, and it is revealed that there is indeed an Italian painting of Christ amongst the collections. However, Nabakumar does not know much about it since art is not his forte (his interest is in vintage cars), neither his father's (who is devoted to classical music) nor that of his younger brother, Nandakumar. They are also introduced to a visiting journalist, Rabin Chaudhuri, writing a biography on Chandrashekhar. Through this accidental encounter with the Niyogi household, various mysteries emerge, and the painting, identified to be an invaluable work by the Renaissance maestro Jacopo Tintoretto, eventually goes missing. Pheluda, Topshe and Jatayu travel to investigate. Their investigation takes them to Bhagvangarh in Madhya Pradesh to meet Raja Bhudev Singh and to Hong Kong, where the painting is supposedly transported to be sold to a foreign buyer. The mysteries are finally solved, and Pheluda retrieves the priceless painting from the clutches of the foreign art collector, albeit this time, with the indispensable help from Rabin Chaudhury, who is revealed to be Chandrashekhar's grandson.

Although both plots require Pheluda to travel, the lines between travelling for work and leisure are blurred as one may lead to another through spontaneous turns in the narratives. The financial costs of these travels – taken up by Pheluda himself in earlier cases like *Sonār Kellā* (since Mukul's father is only a humble bookseller), are compensated in the later narratives by his affluent clientele. While Kaushik Bhaumik comments on Pheluda's increasingly ameliorating lifestyle vis-à-vis his international travel and his fame amongst the Bengali community outside India, even in a novel as late as *Ṭinṭoreṭor Yīśū*, Topshe explicates Pheluda's financial uncertainties:

> By 'our car', I mean Jaṭāẏu's green ambassador. I am not sure Pheludā will ever earn enough to be able to afford a car. A private investigator's income in this country is insufficient to buy a car or a house. For some time, though, Pheludā had been considering leaving our flat on Rajani Sen Road to live on his own. My father had affectionately reprimanded him on hearing this. "Just because you've earned a bit, you plan to leave us! What will happen in case your income drops?" After this, Pheludā never raised the issue again. (Ray 2015 h: 171)

At the same time, Pheluda does earn well, especially in the later cases, when he becomes familiar with the Rajas and *jamidār*s in these stories. Sayandeb Chowdhury mentions Pheluda's preference for a certain kind of clientele – "mostly the gentry, part of a declining demography of a once-influential class, custodians of heirloom treasures and collectors of curios" (2015: 121). Although dotted by servants, gardeners, cooks and drivers, the clientele's household has

almost no women in them, or rather no feminine presence with any significant role in the mystery or its resolution. The same holds for Pheluda, Topshe and Jatayu. The two recurrent male non-*bhadra* presences in the narratives are those of Srinath, the household help at Topshe's parents' home, who is always ready with an unending supply of tea and snacks for Pheluda and company, and Haripada Babu, Jatayu's faithful driver.

Pheluda's fondness for this class of old, well-off, professionally successful men is reflected in his close friendship with Lalmohan Ganguly. Ganguly is depicted as a celebrated writer of cheap thrillers with ridiculous names like *Ārakta Ārab* (Bloodshed in Arabia) and *Haṇḍurasʲe Hāhākār* (Howling in Honduras). However, he earns much more than Pheluda does. Ganguly is always ready to help Pheluda, be it in accompanying him and Topshe on their adventures for sheer support or offering the services of his car and chauffeur whenever required. Hence, although Ray portrays Pheluda as living in a fantastic world where crimes are only limited to theft and, at the most, murder related to theft, the economic practicalities of living such a life are not entirely absent from these narratives. Admittedly, too many fortunate conveniences allow Pheluda to continue living a private detective's life in postcolonial India. Therefore, while a seemingly leisurely life is romanticised, the struggles of earning a decent livelihood are not treated as fantastically as Shankar's protagonist from the novel *Cauraṅgī* illustrates (see epigraph). Although Pheluda does receive a few fat cheques from his impressed wealthy clientele, he never asks more than he requires; he will never be rich enough to buy a house or a car. He remains a middle-class quasi-*bhadralok* who inhabits the sphere of the *bhadralok* but lives at a tangent through his playful, *flâneur*-like, challenging profession. And while spontaneous leisure could be enjoyed during an investigation and travel or after a case has been solved, Topshe observes that Pheluda always places "duty first" (Ray 2015h: 217).

Ray's depiction of a masculine, leisurely lifestyle in the *Peludā* narratives and films is in stark contrast with the growing unemployment, poverty, and alienation so vividly portrayed in his own films of the time. Most scholars of his cinematic works distinguish between his other films and his *Peludā* films based on children's versus adult films.[346] This is perhaps because the films were based on his own stories and novels of the *Peludā* series, which were often considered children's literature, admittedly by Ray himself. But this simple dichotomy of children's literature versus adult's literature, or children's films versus adult's films, is proven not to function when it comes to Ray's *Peludā*

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346 See, for example, Chidananda Das Gupta (1994), 112; Andrew Robinson (2004), 233.

narratives, be they literary or cinematic. I now turn briefly to comparing the masculine world of Pheluda, insulated from women, and the masculinity portrayed by Ray's other young male protagonists of his films. This comparison aims to help us understand the thin balance that Pheluda's character walks on in the socio-economic and political reality of Calcutta in the 1970s, where he thrived, the background to this leisurely pace of work-life conjunction. While the *Pheludā* narratives had become extremely popular in the 70s, Ray expanded their possibilities by making two charming films based on these novels, also in the 70s. This is also the decade when Ray made his Calcutta trilogy, constituting of the films *Pratidvandvī* (*The Adversary*, 1970), *Sīmābaddha* (*Company Limited*, 1971) and *Jana Araṇya* (*The Middleman*, 1976). All three films, too, are based on literary texts: *Pratidvandvī* by Sunil Gangopadhyay and the other two by Shankar. The common predicament of all three films is the tug-of-war between successfully landing a job (or, in the case of *Sīmābaddha*, getting promoted) and retaining one's ethical, moral, and amorous sensibilities.

Both Siddhartha (the protagonist of *Pratidvandvī*, played by Dhritiman Chatterjee) and Somnath (of *Jana Araṇya*, played by Pradip Mukherjee) have a difficult time trying to find suitable jobs. Both eventually land unsatisfactory occupations (of a salesman and a middleman, respectively). By then, however, they have lost something they treasured in their lives and personalities. After his father's death, Siddhartha, an outstanding student of medicine, must give up his education, his close friendship with Keya and his challenging life in Calcutta to take up a small, alienating job as a salesman in a provincial town. Somnath scores only moderate results in his studies despite being a brilliant student. Unable to find employment, he creates a job himself by working as a middleman; in the process, he loses his ethical integrity. Shyamal (of *Sīmābaddha,* played by Barun Chanda) has a well-paying job as a sales manager in a British manufacturing company based in Calcutta. But he must stoop to corruption and abuse deprived factory labourers to obtain a promotion. All three men have to take recourse to an ethical compromise. Their moral conflicts, humanitarian responsibilities, and ethical integrity are projected onto their relations with the women in these narratives: Siddhartha's only possible happiness in Keya's company is lost as he leaves Calcutta, Somnath is aghast when he realises that his work has led him to seek out vulnerable women like Juthika (his friend's sister), and Shyamal reaches the height of his career by robbing helpless labourers and falls in Tutul's eyes.

The usual jobs that the novels of Sunil Gangopadhyay and Shankar refer to are those of clerks and salesmen; the more successful ones are managerial positions at best. Suranjan Ganguly writes of Ray's Calcutta trilogy as "an artist's anguished response to the debasement of a whole culture" (2000: 114). "In it, he portrays a city without hope, where corruption is rampant, jobs are rigged,

mothers pimp for their daughters, and the unemployed wander the streets. His middle-class protagonists – all young men – are the victims of a dehumanizing rat race…" (ibid.). This is at complete odds with the portrayal of Calcutta in the *Pheludā* series, where progressive professionals and the landed gentry thrive. And yet, the world of Pheluda is not completely removed from reality. As mentioned, he too, despite his success as a private investigator, is not financially independent enough to live in a flat of his own. But unlike Somnath and Siddhartha, Pradosh does not hanker after employment; in fact, he leaves his tedious job to pursue a profession that interests him; in the process, he trains, disciplines, and cultivates the same skills in his younger brother. Like Siddhartha, he does not restrain from speaking his mind, but he is not forced to leave the metropolis. He travels only for investigation and leisure. The city is Siddhartha's adversary; for Pradosh, it is the 'arcades' of his *flânerie.*

Compared to the black-and-white brutal world of these job-seeking young Bengali men of the 70s, Pheluda's world is shot in colour in the films. And unlike the vulnerable, adamant, and melancholic females in the lives of Ray's other young men, Pheluda does not have to deal with women. Unhindered by romantic love and unperturbed by sexual passions, Pheluda, like multiple other detectives, particularly his "*guru*", Sherlock Holmes, remains at leisure to pursue his intellectual interests. The objects of his passion and desire are acquiring knowledge, solving mysteries, and setting the world order right. But unlike Sherlock Holmes's Victorian "toxic masculinity" (Morgan 2021: 538–40), Pheluda's postcolonial masculinity is a different brand of softened manliness – neither toxic nor emotionally vacant. His emotions and affections are expressed through respect for his elders, friendship, familiarity, and fraternity, and through his ability to communicate beautifully with children like Mukul and Ruku. Thus, the world of *Pheludā* remains insulated, even protected from the presence of women and possible obstacles from romantic or domestic life. Pheluda walks a fragile line beyond which is spread the precarious social reality of chaotic Calcutta. An unencumbered and affordable fantasy of a leisurely lifestyle is only possible with these negotiations of respectable and responsible masculinity. This lifestyle can only afford the time and space for self-cultivation and enjoyable pedagogy. Like Shidhu Jyatha, he, too, does not have the leisure for women.

## 5.4.2 Between Effeminacy and Hypermasculinity: Postcolonial Manliness

In narratives where masculinity is projected to the forefront, one can observe a sharp criticism of a specific type of toxic masculinity generally associated with male heroic figures. While certain ideals of masculinity are mocked in

these narratives, for instance, the exaggerated masculinity exemplified in Jatayu's fictional hero Prakhar Rudra, the *Pheludā* narratives also offer particular ideals of masculinity. However, the ideals critiqued in other characters are not entirely different from those depicted in the protagonist-sleuth. Similarly, while in *Raẏāl Beṅgal Rahasya*, the depiction of heightened masculinity through hunting as a manly pastime activity and demonstration of courage is eventually questioned, in an earlier novel, *Bāksa Rahasya*, the same activities of big-game hunting and travelling (albeit in the colonial era) of an illustrious Bengali, Shambhucharan Bose, is admired and appreciated. In this section, I demonstrate that the masculinity depicted in Pheluda's character is an intriguing balance of male heroic qualities and a protective, familial, even one that promotes a certain kind of ease or leisureliness – a postcolonial variation of masculinity.

Anindita Mukhopadhyay claims that although both hunting and travelling were "extant in elite practice in pre-modern India", their transmission into print as recorded encounters of victory against wild beasts and wild terrains is a "colonial development" (2019: 333). Ray responds to this colonial masculinity in Pheluda's postcolonial hunting of criminals in civil society rather than animals in the forest. Historically, the colonial assertion of masculinity has been projected in the binaries of the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali':

> The physical organisation of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour-bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds... (Macaulay 1888: 411)[347]

Unpacking the historically constructed categories of the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' propagated in the nineteenth century, Mrinalini Sinha (1995) argues for reading colonial power dynamics through the lens of colonial masculinity. This constructed image of masculinity is intricately tied with imperial social formations of the time and the various changes that took place vis-à-vis strategies of colonial rule and collaborations between indigenous elites and colonial authority. On the descending scale of masculinity, while the industrious and manly Englishman was positioned as the ideal, other forms of masculinity, especially the "politically self-conscious Indian intellectual", often represented in the not-so-industrious figure of the middle-class Bengali Hindu man, were deemed as "unnatural" or "perverted", and most infamously, "effeminate" (Sinha 1995: 2).

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347    From Macaulay's *Essays*, quoted in John Strachey (1903 [1888]).

These accusations of unnatural effeminacy and feebleness in the Bengali male were taken seriously and responded to by several Bengali intellectuals. Bankim responded to these allegations in several essays, for instance, in "Bhārat Kalaṅka" (the stigma of India) and "Bāṅālir Bāhubal". He responds to these charges of effeminacy and calls the Bengali man to rectify his reputation. On the one hand, Bankim defies the colonial logic of heat and climate as responsible for the Bengali's feebleness; on the other hand, he claims that it may be possible for Bengalis to attain strength and power, if not mere physical prowess. "*Udyam*" (enthusiasm and effort), "*aikya*" (unity), "*sāhas*" (courage) and "*adhyabasāẏ*" (diligence) are the four characteristics that can liberate Bengalis of these allegations of feebleness. However, Bankim notes, first and foremost, there needs to be a strong emotion of desire – "*abhilāś*", a fervour amongst Bengalis that will drive them towards effort and enthusiasm and give up the pleasures of idleness, "*ālasyasukh*" (Chattopadhyay 1954b: 213). Like the colonial rulers, Bankim, too, seems to associate these allegations of feebleness with laziness, idleness, and a sedentary life. In the nineteenth century, assertions of Bengali sedentariness and exuberant leisureliness have been further enforced and critiqued by both the '*bābu*' satires of the early nineteenth century as well as the later *bhadralok*'s affinity for *cākʰri* or office work/desk jobs. Through the nineteenth century, the Bengali effeminate man then emerged as two distinctive although at times overlapping categories – the landed gentry elite *bābu*/*bhadralok* and the middle-class *cākurījībi* or salaried *bhadralok*. Advancing into the latter half of the twentieth century and post-Independence Bengal, such categories and their typical masculinities are deemed redundant. Satyajit Ray proposes a different postcolonial conception of masculinity in his literary fiction. This concept of masculinity rejects colonial allegations of effeminacy in the sleuth's impeccable physical prowess; at the same time, it refrains from adhering to notions of hypermasculinity despite showcasing "physical strength and masculine markers such as enhanced muscles, broad shoulders, more-than-average body size".[348]

For narratives based entirely on the stories, events, and actions of men, the Pheluda narratives not only express an indifference to notions of hypermasculinity but also often convey a critique of it. Although Pheluda is admittedly inspired by Sherlock Holmes, in no way does he display the toxic masculinity projected in Holmes. See, for instance, Watson's description of Holmes's emotional inaccessibility with regard to women:

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[348]  See Hans Harder's reading of hypermasculine heroes in Bengali comics, "Hypermasculinity in Bengali Comic Books" (2020). http://www.tasveergharindia.net/essay/hypermasculine-bengali-comics.html accessed on 4th June 2021.

> It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen; but as a lover, he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. (Doyle 1960: 417)

While Pheluda has been arguably saved by his creator in not giving him the chance to feel love or not for a woman, he is never shown as devoid of emotions. It appears that the Victorian binaries of feeling and reasoning do not hinder the postcolonial detective who easily balances razor-sharp intelligence with an agreeable (even warm at times) personality. This twist on the emotional rewriting of his Holmes-inspired sleuth is arguably Ray's response to colonial constructs of masculinity, where the postcolonial sleuth does not rely on an empire-driven urge to hunt, usurp, and oppress or express machismo at the expense of the vulnerable.

Pheluda emerged from the contrasting, even conflicting notions of masculinity, morality, and cultural background, as divergent as fictional detectives like Holmes, Poirot, and Morse, real British detectives serving in the Empire, and the long line of Bengali literary detectives – Hemendra Kumar Roy's Jayanta, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's Byomkesh Bakshi, and Nihar Ranjan Gupta's Kiriti Roy. Pheluda is the culmination of all these inspirations and emerges as the first postcolonial sleuth in this setting, negotiating his colonial inheritance and inhabiting a world where he dares to critique colonial hegemony. Challenging the facile critique of Ray's works as devoid of 'ideological concerns', supplemented by 'humanistic richness', Chandak Sengoopta claims Ray was not only preoccupied with 'colonialism and nationalism' but that his later, more mature work (his films) "continued to combine a strongly anticolonial viewpoint with a shifting perspective on Indian nationhood and an unequivocal commitment to cultural cosmopolitanism" (2011: 374).

While cultural cosmopolitanism is significant in most of his works, Ray's strong critique of British colonialism is merged in many of these stories with a strong sense of indigenous nationalism and national pride, a signifier of liberated masculinity in these stories.[349] This complex postcolonial masculinity is recurrently portrayed through the detective's successful attempts to prevent Indian cultural heritage (in the form of historical artefacts) from being sold to foreign buyers, often depicted as greedy, wealthy and insensitive to Indian heritage and history. Sengoopta reads this in various films, particularly in one

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[349]  This is corroborated by several scholars. See Sengoopta (2011) and Mukhopadhyay (2019).

based on Ray's novel *Rabārt'saner Rubi* (2011: 385–86). While on a leisurely trip to Birbhum in Bengal, Pheluda, Topshe, and Jatayu encounter two young British men, Peter Robertson and Tom Maxwell. Robertson has travelled to India to return a magnificent ruby, which his ancestor looted while serving the East India Company. Tom Maxwell, on the other hand, the descendant of a brutal, murderous nineteenth-century indigo planter, is only interested in photographing India's poverty. Pheluda makes an exception in this case and downplays his feats by allowing a local inspector to deal with the crime. The inspector, a descendant of an indigo plantation worker whom Maxwell's ancestor killed, solves the case and avenges his family. Later, when Pheluda speculates on the case, he extends emotional support to the inspector, saying that he would have done the same. Sengoopta rightly remarks that this is a departure from the "strict moral norms" usually maintained in the detective series. Not only is Pheluda seen to curtail his masculine prowess and pride, but he also expresses empathy towards those who have been wronged.

Having already made his trilogy on flawed ideas of masculinity as projected in the films *Kāpuruṣ* (*The Coward*, 1965), *Mahāpuruṣ* (*The Holy Man*, 1965) and *Nāẏak* (*The Hero*, 1966), Satyajit Ray fashions his famous sleuth through negotiated ideals of masculinity. The Pheluda brand of masculinity is neither feeble nor toxic, nor does it display a hypermasculinity that is often a characteristic of strongmen narratives. This emotionally active, brilliantly intelligent, and physically invincible brand of masculinity is a deliberated and refined response to the historically persistent cliché of the effeminate, sedentary Bengali in his local setting, comfortable with his bookish, self-retrospective intellect. It is also a resounding response to the colonial construct of the manly Englishman in his penchant for adventure, travel, and hunting. The postcolonial homage that Ray pays to Conan Doyle is in contrast to Holmes' misogyny and Pheluda's affability. Pheluda displays emotions of wonder, friendship, love (although not romantic love), and national and cultural pride. His genteel behaviour, heightened sense of protectiveness towards victims, respect for traditions and the elderly and open-minded interactions with children soften his pronounced masculine traits of the *flâneur*, the hunter, and the adventurer. This softening of a potential hypermasculinity is negotiated in his lifestyle – his constant companions – Topshe is much younger than him, and Jatayu – much older than him. The affordability of a leisurely lifestyle in the difficult years of Nehruvian nation-building is romanticised, but it is simultaneously balanced with monetary parsimony. Even this austerity is highlighted as a positive masculine trait in contrast to the financial decadence of his arch-enemy. Through this Pheluda brand of postcolonial masculinity, Ray responds to the historical cliché of the "unnatural" and "effeminate" Bengali but also, perhaps, to Bankim's call for effort, unity, courage, and diligence. However, Phe-

luda is still missing a strong fervour or passion (*abhilāṣ*) for progress. This absence is possibly due to the constant feeling of leisureliness – in work and life – that is projected to be the hallmark of the *bhadralok* or, in Bankim's words, *ālasyasukh* – the pleasures of idleness.

## 5.5 A Pedagogy of Promise: Adventure, Comfort, and Leisurely Ease

In this final section, I address questions of genre, leisurely reading and consumption, textual reinterpretations, and the many afterlives of the *Pheludā* series to ascertain that these narratives open a new space for leisureliness in the post-Independence Bengali literary field. On the one hand, the ambiguity of genre helps enhance this leisurely sensitivity, as readers of all ages enjoy these novels and stories, supposedly written for a young audience. On the other hand, these leisurely feelings towards the texts allow several textual reinterpretations, resulting in a kind of textual *flânerie. Pheludā*'s many interpretations and adaptations make these texts both texts of nostalgia as well as texts of the future, turning them into texts of transgression. Multiple documentations assert that the *Pheludā* narratives were written primarily for children.[350] In an essay on the makings of *Pheludā,* Satyajit's son Sandip Ray recalls the oft-quoted 1969 conversation between his father and the editor of the literary magazine *Deś*, Sagarmay Ghosh. After reading the initial *Pheludā* narratives and Ray's first exploration of the sci-fi narratives of *Praphesar Śaṅku*, an impressed Ghosh had asked Satyajit to write a detective novel for the Durga Puja/Autumn issue of the magazine. Surprised by the request, Satyajit had initially brushed it off since he believed that he did not write for adults: "Eventually, bābā gave in to Sagar bābu's adamancy and said that he could try writing detective novels for young readers [*choṭoder*]" (Sandip Ray 2017: 54).

A significant predicament with such assertions and their interpretations is in translating the Bengali word '*choṭo*' into English (as 'children'). Although there is much debate around the "neat categories" that divide the emotional world of 'children' and 'adults', young people aged six to early teens are considered 'children' in most Western societies (Eitler et al. 2014: 3–5). Nonetheless, *choṭo* in Bengali, meaning little, small, or young, is essentially constructed around a relational notion; 'who is younger to whom?' is the definitive element in such descriptions. And it is this dilemma that the gradual narratives of the

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350 For example, Satyajit wrote to Saroj Bandyopadhyay in the letter, quoted in Chowdhury (2015), 124.

*Peludā* texts are spun around. Topshe is younger than Pheluda, who is younger than Lalmohan Ganguly, who, in turn, is younger than Sidhu Jyatha. Each '*baṛo*' (Bng. big, older) is also '*choṭo'* to the older generation. Therefore, while the initial stories were considered *choṭo-der*, due to Tapesh, the young boy lending his voice to the narrative, the intended reader's age group is widened as he grows older. Exposed to a world of crime, Tapesh's psychological and emotional maturity grows in leaps and bounds, unlike other young boys of his age. Although the crimes depicted are primarily concerning the theft of historical artefacts and a few murders, Tapesh is witness to an exceeding number of crimes, exploring the darker side of human nature. From being a young boy of thirteen and a half in the first story penned in 1965 – who is afraid of a mask in the darkness of the night – he turns into a young man (although with no significant difference in age – not even five years!), who is confident while shooting a revolver in *Ṭin'ṭoreṭor Yīśu* (1982). The sheer freedom Tapesh has, spending time with his older cousin, solving crimes, and adventuring around India and abroad, is hardly consistent with the life experiences of young boys of his age and class. He is also the author of this world of Pheluda – fulfilling all the activities of idleness, knowledge, and literary production. However, we hardly hear about the publication or monetary feats of Tapesh's writing, infusing these narratives with a kind of textual *flânerie* that remains indifferent to market production.

An appreciation of the *Peludā* narratives as belonging to the genre of children's narratives is perhaps provoked by the two cinematic adaptations by Ray (Das Gupta 1994: 112) where such a reading, as rightly pointed out by Kaushik Bhaumik, is possibly due to the two child characters, Mukul and Ruku, who feature as the figures of mystery in the two narratives. Scholars have commented on the young boys in Ray's films to formulate a better understanding of the space and role given to children in these narratives as well as to understand Ray's nuanced pedagogical project in relation to his depiction of boyhood.[351] As mentioned, Pheluda, like his creator Satyajit, has a charming relationship with young boys or children in general. In "*Ambar Sen Antardhān Rahasya*", his conversation with the young girl (there are only two mentions of young girls in the narratives), Runa, and his indulgence of her desire to trick the detective constitutes the central predicament of the narrative. Moreover, Ray gives excellent attention to Runa's readings of the narrative, where she accuses Tapesh of writing lies – referring to confusing Pheluda's identity as his maternal cousin in the first story and paternal cousin later. Pheluda addresses her questions and criticism by clarifying that it was a mistake since Tapesh tried to write 'fiction'/

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351   For a detailed reading, see Anindita Mukhopadhyay (2019), 343–51.

story/"*gapper mata bāniẏe*" (2015 i: 222–25). Pheluda's encounters with the young boys in his stories are fascinating. In the texts analysed in this chapter, and particularly the two films, his exchanges and understanding of little boys' worlds call for comment, even briefly. Both Mukul and Ruku are young boys, rapt in imagined worlds of their own. Pheluda treats these worlds and their meanings very seriously. Pheluda repeatedly encounters wondrous young boys with great imagination and talent. Nayan in *Naẏan'rahasya* (The Mystery of Nayan, 1990) is another example of an innocent but gifted young boy whose powers of understanding numbers tempt greedy and corrupt men. In each of these stories, the mystery surrounds the little boys and their imaginations and gifts, and they are finally able to live a freer, more normal life once the mystery is solved.

Thus, Pheluda becomes a surrogate guardian of these boys, a protective mentor, but also a friendly adult who believes in the boys' worlds. Like Ray and his ancestors, he forms bonds of friendship with these boys, which allows him to solve adults' crimes as well as the predicaments of young boys. Perhaps it is this fascinating relationship with the boys' world that turns these narratives into children's literature.[352] However, as is often the case with certain kinds of children's literature that are now called 'crossover' literature, these narratives do address "a diverse, cross-generational audience that can include readers of all ages: children, adolescents and adults" (Beckett 2009: 3). Although the term 'crossover' literature is a recent coinage with the *Harry Potter* boom and other fantasy genres that appeal to a broad age-inclusive audience, Sandra Beckett has shown that this is far from being a recent phenomenon: "one of the oldest and most universal forms of crossover literature is folk and fairy tales" (Beckett 2009: 4). While the on-and-off raconteur style of the *Pheludā* series does hark back to oral literary traditions, these novels and stories are very much a *reader*'s narrative, a modern, postcolonial fantasy, so to speak. It is rather strange that for a fantasy, Ray attempts to merge literature intended for young adolescents with the crime genre. Much of this fantasising is rendered as friendly and leisurely travel narratives and cultural-intellectual pedagogy in disguise. The pedagogical aspect does not come across as such, owing to the tones of adventure, leisurely travel, and a familial sleuth. These aspects allow the *Pheludā* narratives to formulate an independent and emotionally curious subjectivity, and retain the pedagogical enterprise in their 'healthy pastime' flavour. In the story "*Laṇḍane Pheludā*", Ray clarifies his earlier assertions of these narratives as children's literature when Dr Jyotirmay Sen recognises the trio in one glance:

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352 See also Chowdhury's notes on Pheluda's friendship and pedagogical values (2015), 120–21.

> 'You are Mr Pradosh Mitter!' the gentleman said, sitting on his sofa. 'Of course, you are better known as Pheluda. I understand this is Topshe, and this must be Jatayu. The narratives of your investigation are read by people of all ages in my household. You are like an acquaintance, someone we feel we know well. What can I do for you?' (Ray 2015 j: 573)

What is more common to the *Pheludā* narratives and crossover literature is the feeling of belonging, or 'fandom' that allows for various reinterpretations of these texts, from literature to other media.[353] Many of these novels and stories were adapted into radio plays on a popular weekly program titled 'Sunday Suspense'. Simultaneously, the *Pheludā* narratives were adapted as comics in both Bengali and English. As digital media took over earlier activities of leisure and consumption, the *Pheludā* narratives refashioned in the form of audiobooks, eBook reader apps, and a web series on the Bengali video-streaming platform, *Addatimes*. Pujita Guha remarks that the detective's "invitation into the contemporary also produces a concomitant undercurrent of nostalgia (2019: 381)". She emphasises that this nostalgia is particularly "a retro-fetish for the older mediatic forms with which Feluda is associated" (ibid). While she focuses on these digital adaptations and the *Pheludā* narrative's mobility across screens through a study of affect as 'bodily sensations', I argue for the other emotions produced through the reinterpretations as well as the nostalgia for the originals.

While this chapter has only focused on Ray's textual and cinematic adaptations of the narratives, we must acknowledge the various emotional ways in which Ray's sleuth captures the imagination of the Bengali reader/audience. The text transgresses temporal and spatial boundaries, crossing over not only reader's age groups but cultural settings too, as *Pheludā* is now a text also set in Dhaka, not just Calcutta, in a return of sorts, to his roots in undivided Bengal. Earlier, *Pheludā* was also adapted into a Hindi production, *Kissā Kāthmāṇḍu Kā* (The episode in Kathmandu, 1986), which did not work well.[354] The BBC also aired two episodes of the series – the celebrated *The Golden Fortress* and *The Mystery of the Elephant God* in 2007, as radio plays. The texts have now indeed travelled across languages, cultural settings, media, and multiple interfaces, growing in their commodification as objects of pleasure and leisure. Ironically, Pheluda himself, embodied in these narratives, approaches the "many objects

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[353]    See also references to this concerning the *Harry Potter* narratives in Beckett (2009), 1.

[354]    It has been argued that this was primarily due to Ray's charming narrations in the observant but modest voice of Topshe, infused with camaraderie and humour that could not be adequately translated into Hindi.

whose trafficking he had traced" in the originals to become a commodity (Guha 2019: 384).

As *Pheludā* ventures into various avenues of textual consumption, not too different from Benjamin's *flâneur*, the world of the sleuth retains its charm in the romanticised leisurely ease, quotidian and familiar Bengali sense of *bhadralok* comfort. Writing of the BBC adaptations and *Pheludā*'s travels to London, Abhijit Gupta predicts the texts' everlasting success:

> Posterity will be kind to the Feluda stories. [...] The stories will survive because they captured a time and a place perfectly, and created an illusion of changelessness. Feluda sleuthed at a time when the Cold War was coming to an end and an era of technological revolution about to begin. Yet, he appears untouched by these changes, utterly comfortable in the looseness of his baggy kurta-pyjama. Perhaps it is this sense of comfort that we crave—and find—in the Feluda stories. (Gupta 2007)

This infusion of crime with comfort and thrill with a leisurely ease, this romanticised yet realistic world of the postcolonial *bhadralok* sleuth introduced by Ray retains the title of the most famous detective fiction in Bengali. From Ray's memories of his mother translating stories of Arthur Conan Doyle to him as a child, the tradition of storytelling in the Ray family was taken to its zenith through Ray's *Pheludā* series, as homage as well as 'writing back' to his favourite author.[355] Satyajit Ray has, thus, completed the pastime-pedagogy project initiated by Upendrakishore and Sukumar while handing over the reins of creativity in the form of *flâneur* fictions beyond his family's prerogative. And although for Bengali readers, Pheluda manages to remain the *bhadralok* next door, he promises to return recurrently, in what Keith Tester explains in the context of the *flâneur*'s ontological bases, as *doing,* not merely *being*. While Ray's young middle-class male protagonists (in films, particularly of the Calcutta trilogy mentioned earlier) are often caught in the dilemma of what Suranjan Ganguly defines as "action and its antithesis – inaction" (116), Pheluda overcomes the dialectic of "thinkers and doers" by his subversive (in)action – he does (his job) through thinking. Pheluda transgresses history, socio-economic reality, and contemporaneity while ambidextrously holding onto *bhadratā* and *flânerie*. Nevertheless, he remains in nostalgia, as the purveyor of perseverance and pleasure, in his returns through an original medium of otium, stories.

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355   In his memoirs, Ray writes that he could never forget two stories by Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Terror of Blue John Gap" and "The Brazilian Cat" (2005), 15.

## 5.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the romanticised negotiations of leisureliness as a way of life for the postcolonial urban Hindu Bengali *bhadralok* in the figure of Ray's detective, Pheluda. While Pheluda remains extraordinary in his knowledge, physical prowess, and intellectual abilities essential to his leisure pursuit-turned-profession, he also continues to remain ordinary in a familial, familiar, and emotionally accessible manner. Both his extraordinary and ordinary characteristics are skilfully woven into the *bhadralok* concept of culture, *bhadratā*. At the same time, this concept of culture already consists of a privileged notion of intellectualism and aesthetic self-cultivation. Ray, an artist inhabiting several worlds, I have claimed, is inspired by the European figure of urban modernity, the *flâneur*; nonetheless, the investigative *flânerie* his detective indulges in is formulated in postcolonial reorientations of the figure. Not only *flânerie* and idleness but also leisurely activities like reading, hunting, and travelling are seen to be cultured and regulated, not necessarily towards escalated notions of productivity; this regulation can be traced, instead, towards a rendering of leisure as a disciplined pursuit of interests/*śakh*, and of work as leisurely, thus making the romance of a leisurely work-life equation acceptable.

Pheluda's leisurely lifestyle is supported by convenient familial relations, loyal friendships, and his affluent clientele. However, the leisureliness, although approaching levels of gentility in later narratives, remains within the bounds of austerity. This leisureliness is also enabled by the complete absence of women in the sleuth's life. The lack of sexual and romantic passions for Pheluda (as well as his companions) seems to breathe in an idle spontaneity that permits a mood of liberated, slow-paced, but enjoyable life, straddling crime and leisure, thrill and cool-headedness. The Pheluda brand of masculinity is based on a critique of colonial constructs of Bengali men as effeminate and feeble; simultaneously, it steers consciously clear of the toxic or hypermasculinity that is prevalent in strongman narratives. Although admittedly inspired by Sherlock Holmes, Ray's postcolonial *bhadralok* sleuth is not remotely misogynous. While this refashioning has been read in the chapter as a postcolonial critique-in-homage to the toxic masculinity of the detective emerging out of the Empire, Pheluda is highly critical of colonial domination in his cultured and informed portrayal of nationalism. It has also been shown that the leisureliness and ease embodied in these narratives render the postcolonial sleuth an affable, approachable, and emotionally accessible member of his community. He certainly displays emotions and feelings, even if they are rational feelings. I have also read his ability to communicate earnestly and affectionately with children as an integral quality of his logical and intellectual faculties. The chapter identifies a leisurely approach towards pedagogy in Pheluda's training of his young

cousin, who not only learns with enthusiasm and enjoyment through their shared adventures but also returns the favour in narrating their exploits in these texts of *flânerie*. The pedagogical project is infused with promises of adventure but also of safety and comfort in a shared sense of a feeling of community and the promise of leisureliness in the ways of living, learning, working, and feeling.

# Part III

# 6 Haunting, Resonance, and Requiem for Otium: Contemporary South Asian Literature

The previous chapter indicated that by the late twentieth century, negotiations of leisure and idleness had undergone severe transformations in the context of South Asia. It is not surprising that new formulations of otium – now even more sharply distinguished as leisure and idleness – tend to fall largely into narratives of consumption and consumerism, given the context of globalisation of free market trade and India's plunge into economic liberalisation in 1991. It is not that capitalism was not a formidable force before this decade. However, the sudden societal transformations due to the onset of the neoliberal economy witnessed new dimensions and possibilities – inadvertently related to the market – in concepts of indolence, idleness, and leisure. These economic shifts have already been projected in international travel narratives of the *bhadralok* cosmopolitan sleuth in Chapter 5. The socio-economic changes – at least in India – were followed by a psychological and emotional shift in how people thought of possibly free/idle time in terms of value exchange, leisure activities, and wasteful idleness.[356] This shift can be noticed in semantic transformations, too, mainly in enhancing the taboos on laziness and idleness – in contrast to notions of the good life as successful, treading the path of Western/American notions of success as economic success, and in the rise of leisure centres and activities as value goods and services. An inseparable aspect of these transformations was the augmentation of discrimination in society, especially class-based discrimination, with a shift in ideals and values of the aspirational Indian middle class.

The above discussion draws our attention back to the significant question of exclusion and otium, now located within a new axis of power relations in South Asia's post-Independence, postcolonial, globalised context. This new axis can be seen as derived from traditions of power and oppression, formulated in

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356   For a concise summary of the transformation of Gandhian and Nehruvian ideals in India after 1991 and how such transformations had a significant impact on a new characterisation of the Indian middle class based on consumption patterns, see Christophe Jaffrelot & Peter van der Veer (2008) and Christiane Brosius (2012).

what Tabish Khair reads as "Otherness", with reference to postcolonialism and Gothic, at once relating to the past but also to the present context of rigid demarcations of the self and the other (2009: 3–6). In this set-up, where forms of leisure become heavily commercialised and privileged, leisure experiences for certain sections of society are made possible, now increasingly, at the expense of other social sections. I first present a brief understanding of the contexts of othering and discriminating, within which, through emotional engagements, literature manifests otium – or rather, its metamorphosis. This metamorphosis is initiated as both a privileged politics of the past and a product of the bigoted politics of the present. The shift can be located in the recurrent feeling of being 'haunted' by the very idea of otium as a concept of the self: otium returns and recurs in the form of spectres addressing the self. While as a concept, otium undergoes massive transformation, it becomes a highly contested concept, wedged in the conflict between loss of significance as an emotional relation in the competitive, accelerated, capitalist era, emerging as a concept-tool of critique, in manifestations of the revenant, reasserting the severed past and unable to detach from the present. These hauntings render otium immensely relevant to the present and the future and the relations between them.

## 6.1 Otium, Marginalisation, and Contemporary Prose in South Asia

In this socio-economic context of augmented inequalities, the challenges of acceleration in a globalised world need to be attuned even more sharply with an understanding of the privileged aspect of otium as a social-personal capacity – *a function of the self* and an aspect of *self-determination*. These environments of exclusion reveal the urgent and increasing need to explore otium and its function in society. The present study, at this final stage, is not involved in tracing an exhaustive account of otium within this recent transformation; that will have to be a separate exercise which thoroughly investigates the socio-economic transformations following 1991 in India and in the subcontinent in later years and examine the impact of these shifts in detail. However, what this chapter will do, with some provocation and caution, is foreground the question of otium's relevance in this yet another transformative time. Therefore, in this Janus-faced final chapter, which looks back and looks forward at a new context, I explore some significant literary clusters, readings, and observations to wrap up this study and open space for further research on the topic.

The significant question in this chapter is in what direction(s) such conceptual and contextual transformations can be identified as reflected in contemporary literary texts. The question already presents a conundrum: what kind of literary surveys can be taken up at this stage to address such a question? The

answer is – retaining some fairness – to look at certain significant literary trends and transformations and explore a few select examples from the corpus of late-twentieth century or early-twenty-first century writers in both Bengali and Urdu. A recurring theme in several contemporary texts is the profound consciousness of the absence of otium as a function of the self. This absence is closely linked to socio-economic exclusion and various discriminatory practices. This conscious self is mainly embodied by the protagonist or characters in a novel, novella, or story, except, in some instances, the blurring of identities – as writer and character – is seen to occur, where the consciousness of otium's absence is expressed more directly. My observation extends to the understanding that in these texts, the quest of otium, or grieving its loss or absence, is projected in a spatiotemporal and functional setting that is often beyond the constraints of the purely human-physical world. The question of self is often projected onto the "other", where the other embodies the uncanny, supernatural, and the non-human. What kind of world(s) are formulated in this scenario where the focus of the self is rendered fissured? The depicted setting, in many of these texts, is a world inhabited by humans and non-humans, i.e., ghosts, vampire-like beings, spectres, animals, and natural environment as forms of consciousness, questioning the very idea of the self in its manifestations of the unsayable, the unknown, and the impossible. In these assertions of the self, the absence of otium is also signalled in the incommensurability of language to express the self, reasserting the urgent need to turn to emotions and temporalities.

These narratives of the uncanny are based on a starkly realistic depiction of contemporary society, addressing comprehensive questions of the self and subjectivity, especially in forms of exclusion, through a juxtaposition of real with spectral and social with surreal. In a sense, these narratives ask the question of otium that resonates, at least in idea, with Hartmut Rosa's concept of 'resonance' – i.e., *our relationship to the world* (2019). This proposed understanding of resonance in the examples I read is inherently linked with the question of what it means to be a human, and the question is asked, recurrently, by decentring the human as not the only, but as merely one of the inhabitants of the narrated world. This chapter argues that such assertions of 'non-human' consciousness are strategised to address, critique, and express emotions at the restrictions of a privileged, unfair, and exclusive notion of otium in a discriminatory society inclined towards material greed and "selfishness" (Jaffrelot & Van der Veer 2008: 18). My reading understands the shift in socio-economic values and their impact on the possibilities of otium as central to these literary reflections. It must be clarified that this selection is still minimal and microscopic in volume, meant to provoke a specific reading of otium in late twentieth/early twenty-first-century literature with its focus on the aspect of exclusion, which, as this book has argued, is as significant characteristic of otium as acceleration.

To explore these transformations as reflected in literature in a possibly systematic manner, the genres selected vary from short narratives, stories (short and long), essays and novels in both Bangla and Urdu. A selection of such loose-genre writings by Intizar Husain (writings from the 1970s – 2001) and a long story by Khalid Jawed, entitled "*Tafrīḥ kī Ek Dopahar*" (An afternoon of idle wandering, 2008 a) as read as significant contemporary texts in Urdu. For Bengali, the texts selected are Bani Basu's 1993 novel *Gāndharbī*[357], and Nabarun Bhattacharya's famed novel *Hārʰbārṭ* (*Herbert*, 1993), along with a selection of his short stories based on the fictionalised flying humans, *Phyātāṛu* (written in the early 2000s). Perhaps a brief note about the selection of authors is in place. While Jawed, Basu, and Bhattacharya are identified as 'Indian' authors writing in Urdu and Bengali, Husain is hailed as one of the most significant Pakistani writers of the twentieth century. Having migrated to Pakistan from India during the 1947 partitioning of the subcontinent, he often returned to India and claimed an identity rooted in the heritage of the subcontinent beyond nationalist categories. Selecting Husain as an author in this chapter is motivated by this understanding of a more significant subcontinental identity on the one hand; he also brings a contrast to the other authors, whose fictional settings are located in contemporary India. Simultaneously, the selection of Husain's texts demonstrates a transnational understanding of his narratives. On the other hand, I have refrained from focusing on narratives located in socio-cultural concerns of contemporary Pakistan, where possible. This caution, as has already been mentioned, is owing to a respect for the tradition of otium in Urdu literature in Pakistan, which I believe is slightly different than in the Indian context and needs closer attention than is permissible within the present scope. Moreover, because this chapter takes the rise of the neoliberal economy in India as an essential junction, I have been careful not to conflate it with concerns that may be relevant to the Urdu tradition in Pakistan. At the same time, Husain's writings also question and defy these nationalist fault lines and make a strong case for decentring national identity, so intricately tied to formulations of exclusion in the present times. Intizar Husain (1925–2016) is known for traversing genres, styles, and national associations/community identities; all these strategies were directed towards a sense of 'subcontinental syncretism'. His enormous oeuvre of writings, overlapping genre definitions like stories, fiction, even non-fiction and reportage, and literary essays, among others, are often overlooked compared to his novels. In this chapter, I tap into a selection of such

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[357]  *Gāndharbī* is a feminine reference coined by Basu for the skilled musician-protagonist of her novel. It refers to the class/group of mythical celestial skilled musicians, the Gandharvas (usually masculine) in Hindu mythology.

writings that contribute to the literary 'world' of Intizar Husain, where questions of otium, in my opinion, remain central to his ideas of literature. These questions attain expressions in narratives surrounding memory and haunting, alienation and exile, human and environment, and repeatedly, in the interweaving of living and storytelling. Husain's works present an exciting corpus for research on otium in South Asian literary contexts and towards reading otium beyond the limits of social constructs to signal the entanglement of the human with nature, environment, and the mythological.

Like Husain, Nabarun Bhattacharya (1948–2014), an extremely significant Bengali writer of recent times, is widely read, owing to several translations of his phenomenal novel, *Hār'bārt*. The poverty-ridden protagonist of the novel, Harbart Sarkar, communicates with the dead (as he believes), as urban Calcutta of the 70s and 80s is transformed with the haunting memory of the Naxalite insurgency and police brutalities. While *Hār'bārt* was radical in its context, located in the vortex of socio-political transformations, Bhattacharya's later writings, notably his *Phyātāṛu* series (of short stories), present a scathing critique of social and economic corruption, especially class-based discriminations in the 'India shining' context of political void. Bhattacharya's fiction is highly critical, arguably owing to his politics, and lends non-human consciousness as agents and voices of critique. His texts condemn human greed and selfishness bred in unjust societies. I read otium as a critical tool in his texts, where the absence of otium's possibilities for his protagonists manifest social discriminations on various levels, fuelled by class (also caste and gender) inequalities.

Bani Basu's (1939–) fiction addresses an incomparable versatility in the context of contemporary Bengali fiction. While her texts often address the struggles of women in the social context of contemporary West Bengal, her oeuvre is much more extensive. She is perhaps most famous for her magnum opus, *Maitreẏa Jātaka* (1996), set in the chronotope of Buddha's life. I chose to read the novel *Gāndharbī* from her collection owing to the text's treatment of the possibility and the absence of otium in the late twentieth-century context of Calcutta, especially for a woman in her constrained social structure. Not only does the novel allow us to reflect upon the gendered aspects of otium in this context, but it also reveals the evanescent and transcendental, as well as immersive nature of such an emotional experience. Otium, in this case, is explored through the character's ontological aestheticisation in musical compositions, rehearsals, and execution, where art (music) is deeply interwoven into the physicality and the sensorial aspects of the character. These experiences – compared to the other-worldly, fictitious nature of *gāndharba*s (celestial singers from mythology) – are presented in conflict with the socio-normative gender roles set around the protagonist's grim narrative reality. The novel explores otium in crisis while addressing its dimension of art in a conflicted world.

Khalid Jawed (1960–), a contemporary Urdu novelist and literary critic, is well-known for his novels *Maut kī Kitāb* (The Book of Death, 2011) and *Niʿmat-Khāna* (The Paradise of Food, 2014). Two collections of stories titled *Ākhrī Daʿvat* (The last invitation, 2007) and *Tafrīḥ kī Ek Dopahar* (2008) constitute his earlier works. Jawed's fiction is known for addressing existential philosophy in a contextualised contemporary South Asian/Indian setting. I chose to read his long story (or alternately, novella), "*Tafrḥ kī Ek Dopahar*", which directly addresses the topic of idle wandering and indulges in a kind of Benjaminian, investigative *flânerie*, but that is also Derridean in its spectrality. Concerning idleness and hauntology, the story pushes our understanding of otium and freedom beyond the limits of living in the physical human world. Is this 'idle wandering'/*tafrīḥ* then actually idle and aimless, or is it, in fact, in quest of idleness itself? How are these attitudes and relations to otium expressed in emotions in these texts? What roles do feelings have in these narratives with respect to otium, haunting, and resonance? A common theme in these recent texts is the overlap in the absence of otium experiences on the one hand, particularly as enjoyable, as the freedom to act (or not) as one will; and on the other hand, the use of intradiegetic otium related (in)activities – like immersion in music, or idle wandering, wasting time, recalling memories, or indulging in scenes of *āḍḍā* and verbal socialising – as subversive forms of otium, used as a critical-conceptual tool. Before delving into the texts, I discuss a point of departure in reading otium vis-a-vis hauntology.

## 6.1.1 Hauntology, Discrimination, and Subjectivity: Towards a Departure in Reading Otium

Discussions on the convergence of topics like haunting, time, and capitalism are hardly new to academic explorations since they were impressively brought together in Jacques Derrida's concept of 'hauntology' (Frn. *hantologie*), initiating the so-termed 'spectral turn' (*Spectres de Marx*, 1993). The concept of hauntology was coined from the constitutive elements of haunting and ontology (for him, to be is to be haunted). Concretely, it developed from the idea that the legacy of Marx's thought or ideology continues (and will continue) to haunt Western society and thought – as a recurring, returning question, as "*revenant*".[358] The theory was proposed in response to the looming question of 'whither

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[358] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New* International (1994), 4. "The revenant is going to come"; the pun on the French – *revenir* – is typical.

Marxism?'[359] and Francis Fukuyama's famous claim of "the end of history" with the collapse of communist governments across maps, the rise of free-market economies on a global scale and the following "malign" as well as "benign" transformations.[360] However, Derrida's formulations of deconstructing Marxism and retaining faithfulness to "a certain spirit of Marxism, to at least one of its spirits" (1994: 75) have been severely critiqued.[361] Inspired by the first line of *The Communist Manifesto*[362] – "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism" (Marx & Engels 1969 [1848]: 14) Derrida draws on the plurality and the repetition of this spectrality in his title. His concept of hauntology, to explicate the rather obvious, is not regarding belief in ghosts and spectres, but instead to argue "beyond the opposition between presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life, of thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility" (Derrida 1994: 13). As an analytical tool, it opens ways of theorising and reading multiply and uncertainly, acknowledging the dilemma of a future that will not be but will also not be extinguished, and a certain acceptance towards ideas of trans-temporality. This openness to uncertainty and fluidity in conceptualisations of temporality has brought hauntology to the proverbial academic table. Moreover, Derrida's (and others after him) preference for the use of the lexicon 'spectres' (the original German in Marx and Engels' manifesto (1848) being "*Gespenst*" – which also translates to an apparition, a phantom or a ghost) has had a significant role in this transformation. This has been aptly summarised by editors of *The Spectralities Reader*, María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren: "Specter" and "spectrality" do not only have a more serious, even "scholarly ring to them, but specifically evoke an etymological link to visibility and vision, to that which is both *looked at* (as fascinating spectacle) and *looking* (in the sense of examining), suggesting their suitability for exploring and illuminating phenomena other than the putative return of the dead (2013: 1–2).

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359    Reference to the conference title – "Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective" held at the University of California in 1993, at which Derrida was invited to confer the plenary address, the lecture that emerged into his famous book.

360    Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, Editor's Introduction, *Spectres of Marx*, viii.

361    See essays by Antonio Negri, Terry Eagleton, Aijaz Ahmad and others *in Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*. Ed. Michael Sprinker (1999).

362    Sourced from Marx and Engels, *Selected Works, Vol. One.* (1969). https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf accessed on 12th November 2021.

Spectrality or, ghosts or the return of the dead are still often perceived as taboo, in many ways, within scientific/humanities studies. Research and knowledge traditions, particularly in modern Europe, have attempted to banish the ghost from all talks seriously academic. The growth of scientific knowledge, inventions like photography and X-Ray, and later the fascination with forensics and DNA, in many ways, enhanced and heightened the arguments towards scientific rationalism and evidence-based knowledge, as we have seen in Chapter 5. And yet, the uncontainable fascination and interest in the subject, particularly in literature from the late eighteenth to the early-nineteenth century, in the fantastic and Gothic elements, but also in specific *orientalist* versions of Romanticism (popularised by poems like Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* [1816]), have always kept the supernatural deeply associated with literary engagement. Tabish Khair has drawn attention to the proliferation of Gothic literature in English with its deep roots in the centre-periphery nexus owing to the colonial enterprise for Englishmen/Europeans (2009: 8–9). Simultaneously, the boom in psychoanalysis and scientific studies of maladies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was seriously invested in exorcising the ghost from social discourses in Europe. Nonetheless, deep interest and investment in the unknown within the self can be witnessed in the rise of organisations like the Society for Psychical Research (founded in 1882) and the British National Association of Spiritualists (1873), among others. In South Asia, too, the import and intensification of European scientific knowledge through colonialism and reform led to a rigorous purge of societal superstitions (or rigorous attempts were made, to say the least). The occult, the uncanny, and the supernatural have long been present within South Asian literary traditions. For example, the pre-novel Urdu genre of the *dāstān* or the *qiṣṣā*, like the *Dāstān-i Amīr Ḥamzā* and *Qiṣṣa-i Cahār Darveś* (among others), foreground the relations between humans and non-humans like *jin*s, fairies, and supernatural tricksters and characters. Also, the world of the non-humans – gods/goddesses (in the shape of super-humans, animals or morphed beings that are both), mythical creatures, animals, plants and forests – have had a prolonged bearing in South Asian knowledge traditions that are recreated over time.[363] The tradition, diversity, and plurality of ghostly apparitions in the subcontinental oral literature, folklore, and myths also present a *problématique* for linking the occult specifically with the colonial and the postcolonial.[364] Most subcontinental narratives of uncanny, where humans and non-humans interact, do not necessarily share a

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[363]  For example, the medieval genre of tales/poems of benediction (*Maṅgalʰkābya*) like *Manasāmaṅgal* and its several renditions through the centuries.

[364]  See Katarzyna Ancuta, "Asian Gothic", *Modern Gothic* (2014), 208–9.

genealogy with what are considered 'ghosts' in the modern sense. The genealogy of ghosts and supernatural entities in South Asian literary traditions is deeply entangled with religion, nature or natural terrain, social beliefs, spirituality, myths and legends and must be a work of immense scope and scale.[365] Not only do manifestations of ghosts and phantoms and super-human/supernatural entities vary within geographic-cultural regions, religious-spiritual thought, and literary and linguistic traditions, but they also often have knotty origins with influences from spaces that could be as varied as Persia, Arabia, purgatory or the bottom of the ocean.

Although not expounding upon the genealogy of the uncanny in South Asia, the attempt here addresses the remarkable recurrence of narratives regarding otium with supernatural agency and existence in contemporary, late-twentieth-century literature. This recurrence is a manifestation of an uncomfortable, unhappy, and insurgent response to the triumph of capitalism and the resultant drastic transformations in society. These transformations left an unsettling impact on ideas of the self and subjecthood as class divisions became unbridgeable in an unprecedented manner. While these contemporary representations of ghosts or supernatural beings tend to be closer to more widely recognised modern/Western modes of (non)being, they often defy distinctions between the phantom, the fairy, and the ghost. The origins of these gothic elements are as chaotic as their (in)abilities, and for our purpose, they can be noted as functioning in three ways. First, they offer themselves as analytical tools in keeping with the theories of spectrality. Secondly, and closely related to the first, they lend themselves to an exploration of the emotion of being haunted and haunting. And finally, they provide as agents of resistance, even insurgence, against the human-centric formulation of the world in activities of progress and development, rampant industrialisation, and eradication of forests, leading to unequal societies based on capitalist forces. Their positioning against all efficiency and utility relevant to 'smart' societies is a subversive form of otium. At the same time, the emotion they provoke – being haunted – emerges as a dissonant, asynchronous, and reflective manifestation of mourning the absence of otium. In these texts, haunting expresses a requiem for otium that deals with and delves into spectrality, aesthetics, idleness, and uselessness. The motif of haunting facilitates contemplating and critiquing the abrupt and unjust collapse of emotions (how time was felt) and temporalities (the relations between the past, the present, and the future). Through the experience of haunting, the requiem for otium, literary narratives, as analysed below, enable

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365    See, for example, the recent publication *Ghosts, Monsters and Demons of India*, Eds. J. Furcifer Bhairav & Rakesh Khanna (2020).

a space for repose and rest against "the experience of modernization", which also emerged in the last few decades as the "experience of acceleration" (Rosa 2013: 21). Haunting, ghostly presences, and the 'gothic' then needs to be read in a "semiotic turn" beyond the logic of language, as a "process of signification" (Ancuta and Valančiūnas 2021: 4).

## 6.1.2 Otium, Temporalities, and Emotions in South Asia

Otium is often manifested in emotions of loss and absence. Through these emotional manifestations, otium is presented as a reflection upon lost times, lost homes, and lost beloveds/objects of love, enabling emotional experiences while dwelling in the memory of loss and attachment. While nostalgia and melancholia are both emotional responses to loss or 'unfinished business', haunting demarcates itself to be different in its *persistence* of that which has faced death or a kind of unnatural and unjust extinction. In haunting, a certain kind of temporal transcendence takes place, where it is not just the past that is still left as undealt, but also the mourning of a future that could have been but will not be – a future of the past that interferes with the present – the (im)possible future's past. While nostalgia accepts a severed past and its presence in the present, and melancholy does not accept the past in the form of loss, haunting persists in the future, as not present but also not absent. In fact, as Derrida claims, mourning is work itself, "the trait by means of which one ought perhaps to reconsider the very concept of production" (1994: 121). Mourning follows trauma to be processed, enabling one to move through work, through effort, towards production. Haunting, or unfinished trauma, is the absence of the work of mourning and dwelling in the memory of trauma. While this may also be a feature of melancholy, haunting differs from melancholy in its awareness of loss; it addresses both trauma (in its unjust past) as well as a certain kind of utopia (in its imagination of and hunger for a future that cannot/will not come to pass). Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock aptly sees the late 1980s as "the beginning of heightened interest in ghosts and hauntings in cultural and literary criticism" (2013: 62). He links this 'spectral turn' towards the end of the millennium to the "recent preoccupation with 'trauma' in which the presence of a symptom demonstrates the subject's failure to internalize a past event, in which something from the past emerges to disrupt the present" (Weinstock 2013: 63). While trauma and haunting are necessarily interwoven, haunting's agency in the future allows it further analytical possibilities that can be applied to the present. It is obvious and has been expressed fairly often that injustice, discrimination, and abuse, often on the basis of racist, sexist and capitalist subjugation, are seen to re-emerge in the return of the ghost who was denied a

present and a past. This strain of hauntology, also in many ways the crux of Derrida's reading of Marx's spectres on class struggle, is central to our context of otium (or its absence) in contemporary South Asia.

Haunting, spectrality, and ghosts can also entail different meanings in terms of temporality and trauma in the context of South Asian literary-narrative traditions. Ghosts from the past often inhabit the present and the future as cohabitors, as memories and as companions in several literary contexts. Although history is acknowledged in its linearity, at the same time, these subjectivities are often located within conflicting traditions of multiple temporalities – both a cyclical understanding of time (reincarnation, rebirth) as well as with ideas of a *telos*, a fate/destiny and that the past had already decided the future. The boundaries between the past, the present and the future are often understood to be more fluid in these traditions. Arguing for a renewed reflection on "temporal relations", i.e., the relations between the past, the present and the future, Margrit Pernau (2021a) has raised the question of a possible synchronicity between them:

> What if the present, the past, and the future already existed in synchronicity, and the work of modern subjects was directed to establishing their difference and guarding the boundaries between them, preventing the past and the future from spilling over into the present? What if it was not asynchronicity that was the given, the natural state to be overcome by synchronization (Jordheim, 2017), but the overcoming of a synchronicity, which could no longer be accommodated in linear thinking? (Pernau 2021a: 8)

In this light, the presence of ghosts from the past and the future can allow for a re-synchronisation of anachronistic feelings towards time, now felt 'out of joint'. For Pernau, such a re-synchronisation is possibly felt through the concept of 'resonance' – the recognition and acknowledgement of which she identifies as "a strong emotional experience, an experience of community" (2021a: 9). Can such an emotional experience address the disintegration of community in the dystopic context of contemporary South Asian fiction? Can resonance and haunting correlate to address the emotional crisis regarding the absence of otium?

Reading the blurring of borders between the dead and the undead, the past and the present in Nabarun Bhattacharya's novel *Hārʲbārṭ* (1993), among other examples, Hans Harder identifies such fluidity as 'magic realism' or "*jādubāstab*" in Bengali (2018a: 947). Tracing the development (and sometimes decline) of such a style in modern South Asian literary contexts – in Bengali, Urdu, and Hindi – he identifies recent criticism of magic realism or supernatural literature as divided between the so-called spiritual east/global south and material west/global north in contemporary scholarship. Instead, Harder argues that literary

styles or patterns such as 'magic realism' cannot be confined to the narrow compartmentalisation of literature and that much of European literature continues to remain *haunted* (Harder 2018 a: 954).[366] In agreement with Harder, one may still argue that while magic realism, the supernatural, or haunting are indeed literary traits that have more global resonance and are shared than regionally exclusive, how they function can be observed to differ. In other words, how haunting is conceptualised may be represented differently in regionally demarcated literatures, which may (or may not) be linked to their religious-spiritual, emotional-temporal and linguistic-literary traditions. In the link between temporalties and emotions – "the relations between the past, the present, and the future as imagined and experienced by the actors", (Pernau 2021 a: 3) Pernau likewise argues for the need to read these emotions at the core of temporalities "from a global perspective" (2021 a: 4). While such emotions do not necessarily mean and feel the same, they can still be identified through certain resonating, universal "tropes" (ibid.).

### 6.1.3  The Sensory Semantics of Otium and Haunting

Considering these cross-cultural or global aspects of emotions and literary traits vis-à-vis temporalities, I propose a deep connection of otium with haunting through a literary analysis of contemporary texts in Bengali and Urdu that this chapter reads. Elsewhere, I have suggested in contexts of asymmetrical power nexus between communities, where formulations of otium are under 'taboo', a study of the affective and sensory semantics of otium through reading "resistance expressed by or projected onto the body" can help us unpack the linguistic and semantic asymmetries in such ambivalent concepts (Noor 2021: 307). My proposal, therefore, is not only supported by the literary-conceptual analyses that follow but also through a reading of the semantic networks surrounding haunting and otiose activities or forms of mobility in these languages that signal the affective beyond the descriptive in language, like '*bhaṭaknā*' in Hindi/Urdu and '*ghāṛe cāpā*' in Bengali, among others. Cutting through these semantic nets and expressions, haunting is to be read, *inter alia*, as inhabiting a threshold emotional experience with regards to otium – it expresses an impossible desire for it while it also allows, in the absence of the work of mourning, a persistent dwelling in the hung present, formulating a mood of release and rest

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366    Emphasis mine. I translate Harder's Bengali phrase, "*ghāṛe bhūt cāpā*", directly as 'haunted'. The Bengali original entails the perching of a ghost on one's shoulders – which can adequately be translated as 'haunted' or 'possessed'.

constitutive of otium. Paradoxically, this immobility and rest is also a form of restlessness, an inability to achieve resolution, facilitating a temporal fluidity.

Haunting is perpetual and eternal wandering. While '*bhaṭaknā*' is the word in Hindi and Urdu usually used to describe haunting (*bhaṭaktī ātmā*/ haunting soul), the word actually connotes this restless, idle wandering. These registers of aimlessness are not necessarily associated with haunting but entangled in the semantic networks with lexemes associated with idleness like *āvārah ghūmnā*/*āvāragardī*, aimless wandering, deviating from a course or route, with its origins in dislocation (discussed in Chapter 4). *Bhāsā*, or floating, signalling a lucid fluidity, enabling transgression, is also often used to refer to the movement of ghosts in defiance of gravitational forces; in Basu's novel, the allusion to transgression is expressed in this lexeme to refer to both the movement of a *rāga*, as well as of the singer's consciousness, into the celestial realm. Likewise, *uṛe beṛāno* or flying about, parses mobility signalling resistance and transgression in Bhattacharya's stories. *Ghāṛe cāpā* – literally, perched on someone's shoulders is associated with taking possession of someone; it is also a phrase often used in collocation with ghosts, *jins*, *vetāla*s, and spirits to imply possession. Ghosts are, therefore, represented as perched on or latched onto someone and as rambling and wandering, drifting, flying and floating; these formulations of transgressive mobility are closely associated with haunting. In the texts analysed later, these manifestations of resistive or deviational mobility are often depicted in contrast to the speed of accelerated capitalist society. This reading of the sensory semantics of haunting enables us to perceive ghosts as allowing for a specific temporal synchronicity and a pace that allows one the opportunity to be, to experience emotions, and to feel – arguably, only after release from the business of living (in an unfair world). The commonly intelligible word for ghosts in South Asia – *bhūt* – is itself a synonym for the past or occurrences, while the Sanskrit word *bhūta*, literally the perfect participle of *bhū*, "to be, to become", i.e. "been", refers to meanings of both senses – the past/ "gone" as well as "being", and "become".[367] Tracing these semantic networks and reading expressions of haunting as an analytical tool to protest against the discriminatory depiction of societies, I argue that recent literature in the vernaculars presents haunting and being haunted as an emotional manifestation of otium (or its absence).

In the following sections, I read haunting as a requiem for such possibilities of otium by shifting the focus to the marginal. The literary discourses on

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[367]    Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, 1899, printed edition, 761. https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/csl-apidev/servepdf.php?dict=mw&page=0760 accessed on 17th May 2022.

otium that this study has focused on are largely mainstream and of 'elite' stat-ure: the socio-literary context has been the nineteenth-century Urdu intelli-gentsia and elite sections of cosmopolitan Muslim society in India, idylls in nature for Tagore, and the cultural-intellectual negotiations of the declining Hindu *bhadralok* of post-colonial, urban Calcutta. The marginalised idle – the *āvārah* of Manto's colonial Bombay is the only figure that allowed us to under-stand how otium is addressed and manifests itself in the context of the non-elite, the masses at the peripheries. This chapter will revisit the periphery to contextualise otium in a highly unequal society shaped by capitalism, rampant industrialisation, and depletion of natural, harmonious spaces. An underlying commonality in the selected texts is a sharp critique of the contemporary social (dis)order in the subcontinent, with oppression and subjugation in divergent sections of society.

Portrayal of contemporary society in these texts is discriminatory, even dystopian, and otium – for the marginalised, fissured, unfree self – represents a vision of utopia, a future that was not allowed to unfurl. Haunted by the oblit-eration of that possible future and the anachronistic present, these voices depict haunting as a subverted manifestation of what could have been experiences and emotions of otium, artistic creativity, restful leisure, and idle freedom. Such emotional experiences, in turn, become activities and encounters experienced only by those characters who *transcend* their restrictive societal context. This transcendence can range from an intense, surreal, immersive experience with music to the sudden, almost post-human ability to sprout wings by an oppressed population in the act of subversive criticism of political society. What emerges is the deep connection of social reality with haunting, contem-plation, and otium, as so aptly explicated by Avery Gordon:

> Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premo-dern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phe-nomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it. This confrontation requires (or produces) a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of produc-tion. (Gordon 1997: 7)

This mode of production of knowing and reading through ghostly presences has a long tradition in the subcontinent's cultural-literary spheres. It draws from the traditional, sometimes spiritual aspects of discourse. The texts read here are directed towards a critique of accelerated and exclusionary social life, making a case for the urgent need for otium, idleness, and leisurely states of being to fulfil the self and subjectivity. A common practice of otium prevalent in South Asia is the telling, the oral rendition, of ghost stories or occult narra-tives in gatherings; against the backdrop of alienation and acceleration, these

communitarian literary impulses take recourse to forms of narrating the occult, to not only mourn the absence of such experiences, but also use the ghostly to read, confront, and critique social reality. In the following discussions, I identify two seemingly contradictory ways of reading otium – as aimless and as a quest. As already discussed, this contradiction lends to the inherent ambivalence in otium. The concept is neither bound by a productive goal nor conceptualised as absolute abandonment. This chapter explores this paradoxical nature of otium in an alternate context, in relation to the uncanny other, within a spatiotemporal axis beyond the constraints of the strictly physical, homocentric universe. How are emotions projected in this setting, and what roles do emotions have in constructing such a setting? Arguing that narration itself is inherently linked with the feeling and expression of emotions, let us turn to the correlation between haunting, otium, and narration.

## 6.2  Idle Poets, Narrating Ghosts, and Vagabond Stories: The Writings of Intizar Husain

Hailing from the town of Dibai in Uttar Pradesh and having lived most of his life in Pakistan, Intizar Husain (1925–2016) identified as someone whose heritage belongs to the larger subcontinent and its history (memories of his hometown in India are ubiquitous in his works). In Pakistan, he is often accused as a Hindu-/Indian sympathiser and criticised for writing within Buddhist and Hindu traditions, following the *Jātaka* tales, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. He located himself within what he calls the 'enmeshed' culture of the subcontinent, "in exile", wandering between "Ayodhya and Karbala", representing the two emotional spatialities of the Indic and the Islamicate traditions of the subcontinent.[368] In this section, I read the significance and function of otium in Husain's 'loose' genres of writing, where story, memory, essay, and criticism merge in styles of storytelling. In Husain's works, story, i.e., *kahānī* or *afsānah*, is considered the most significant element for humans to live in a fulfilling way. Reflections, reportage, and fiction overlap even within and in between stories. In these instances, the narratives attain a texture of orality, executed in forms of remembering, retelling, and conversational, alternately drawn from subcontinental storytelling traditions. Characters, places, and events from various narratives return and persist in other narratives, and these recurrences defy the logic of continuity, taking recourse to a technique that uses the *revenant* as method. In the final outcome, narrative – as story – is the most significant space for reso-

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368  Alok Bhalla, "Introduction", *Story is a Vagabond* (2016), x.

nance to echo in an otherwise indifferent world. Husain sees stories as ghosts, wandering and idle, free and dislocated, as vagabonds, and assigns them an agency beyond the human aspirations of discipline and regulation.

Intizar Husain's narratives reflect a fluidity in temporalities, where the past, present, and future flow seamlessly. Many of his works dealing with the past have been read as nostalgic; however, I would argue that the sense of longing he expresses is not for a definitive imagination of a historical past but rather for a world where humans are aware of their sense of responsibility with relation to the world they inhabit. Such a world is inadvertently imagined as located in the pre-modern past. Admittedly, his fictional world is obsessed with the past, but this obsession is far from being portrayed as 'hankering after the good old times'. The past he envisions is akin to a literary understanding of deep time, often claiming its inheritance to pasts as far as *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, of Buddha, and Hasan and Husain. Not only is his conception of the past enormous, but in his works, the past haunts the present and the future. This past is, in the words of Muhammad Umar Memon, "the provenance and determinant of the present and the future" (Memon 1981: 73). We can observe two ways in which the past is depicted in Husain's works. Certain aspects of the past are presented as simpler times, and this depiction of the past is often contrasted with the recent industrial developments, nuclear threats, and accelerated society based on speed and competition that lead to dissonance and alienation. In this aspect, the depiction of the past approaches a nostalgic, even romanticised appreciation of history. The past is able to heal humans through its retelling, where stories embody the history of humans in relation to other cohabitants of the earth. In the latter function, the past does not remain 'of the past' anymore but flows into the future, embodied in the emotion of a persistent, impossible hope.

Typically, Husain's narratives are firmly rooted within several storytelling traditions of the subcontinent, as demonstrated by his wide range of styles. Entangled with myths, legends and folk tales, literature, for him, is intricately tied to the identity of 'story' – in Urdu/Hindi, *kahānī*, which is fluid and footloose, unbound by structural constraints.[369] Stories are seen as untameable, trans-temporal and beyond imposed categorisation.[370] The unstructured, wild

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[369]    Husain seamlessly uses both words – *kahānī* and *afsānah/afsāna*. While *afsānah* is written as such, and I have remained consistent in this transliteration, Husain often writes it as *afs ānā* in his titles.

[370]    Alok Bhalla, Intizar Husain, "In Conversation with Intizar Husain: Some Remembered, Some Imagined", *Story is a Vagabond* (2016). See also, for example, the short story "*Śaharzād ke Nām*", translated as "The Death of Schehrzaad".

and wandering power of stories, for Husain, allows humans to heal, make sense of their worlds, and enables them to feel and respect their relationships to the human and the non-human world, urging for a certain kind of peace, or *śāntī* in Urdu These strong emotions associated with the power of stories are comparable to Rosa's sociological discourse of 'resonance' (*Resonanz*) when he writes: "love, respect and esteem … our axes of resonance" (2019: 9). They have, perhaps, also a close affinity with what Pernau refers to as the strong emotional bonds within a community. For Husain, the concepts of literature and emotions are also based within the community. However, his understanding of the community is also more comprehensive than that of linguistic, print, or religious communities. For him, the community ranges from the ancient and traditional, handed down from generation to generation, thereby constructing the concept of a community based on acknowledgement, affinity, and feelings. His literary community then includes his ancestors, myths from the subcontinent, and Chekhov and Maupassant.

Husain's fictional world – often flowing into his factual, immediate world – is arguably broader than the subcontinent's traditions, embodying a "complex and pluralistic wholeness".[371] His literary conceptions provoke the question, 'What does it mean to be human on this Earth?' Husain's writings question the relationship humans forge with their landscapes, fellow humans and non-human cohabitors of the planet, pre-empting what is now identified as the 'Anthropocene' in literary studies. In Husain's narratives, these questions are embodied in representations of spectrality. The ghost in his fictional world is the necessary ghost, the fluid past; it is the friend and the neighbour who cohabits the planet. The ghost is also often associated with nature as the consciousness that led humans to fashion stories and literature. In a Derridean understanding of hauntology, the ghost in Husain's narratives enables the acceptance of the uncertain, the unknown, and the other, in contrast to a purely human-centric world. In his essay "Bikram, Betāl aur Afsāna" (King Vikram, Betal, and Story)[372], Husain criticises modern, accelerated society in terms of emotional dissonance:

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371   Charles Taylor, quoted in Alok Bhalla, 2016 a, vii.

372   In the English anthology of Husain's translated works, translators and editors Alok Bhalla and Frances Pritchett loosely translate *betāl* as vampire; but this is a problematic translation, perhaps inspired by Richard Burton, who famously translated/trans-created the Sanskrit original, *Vetālapañcaviṃśati* (Twenty-five tales of Vetāl) as *Vikram and the Vampire* (1893). However, a *vetāl* (Urd. *betāl*) is distinct and different from a vampire and is now usually written as *betaal* or *vetaala* or *vetal*. See entry "Vetal" in *Ghosts, Monsters, and Demons of India* (2020).

> The fear a man knows in the forest is different from the fear he feels in the city. It is fear of the unknown. The fear of the unknown creates depth in a person's character. But now, the fear of the unknown has disappeared. Now, we are absorbed by the fear of the known: fear of war, civil unrest, language conflicts, fear of death in traffic accidents, fear of being attacked by criminals. These forms of fear are humiliating, and such deaths, terribly undignified! (Husain 1989a: 125)

Resisting the processes of modernisation and industrialisation, Hussain's stories about humans are admittedly based on the past. Memories of places and people in his adolescence, of their everyday leisurely chatter and verbal socialising around a sweetshop – Qayuma's shop – recur through his several writings. "*Qayūma kī Dukān*", a story that resurfaces in and haunts his other pieces like "*Dā'irah*" (Circle), dwells on the quotidian idleness and reflects the slow pace of life in small towns before the Partition riots. Idle, leisurely conversations are rendered narrative modes in his stories where one story leads to another, and parallel narratives emerge by the end of one story. His stories are haunted by memories of growing up in small towns of the subcontinent, in the shade of the banyan trees and empty ruins of old houses, of kites flown on the rooftop terraces, and afternoons spent listening to stories of ghosts and *jin*s and hauntings. These stories merge with his literary journalism, essays, and criticism, resisting genres and formulating a world of its own, recognised by the people of the subcontinental north. These ways of life, the locations, the people, and the narratives he returns to are also recognised as the literary world of Intizar Husain. Stories and their ability of inducing a leisurely state of mind blend together in Husain's understanding of otium. As such, the topics of stories – the past and idleness – recur in his writings, enmeshed in each other.

In a part essay-part sketch entitled "Mādho, Oblomov aur Zāhid Ḍār" (Madhav, Oblomov and Zahid Dar, 1989b [1982]), Hussain traces the necessary idleness of Dar, a man of literature, a true poet, who resists the notion of doing literature and embodies literariness through living idly, sporadically, in drift. Dar lived a literary life of idleness, hanging out in coffee shops, reading books, and smoking cigarettes, identified as the last 'beat poet' of Lahore.[373] His early youth was spent writing poetry, which was radical in its coarseness, simplicity, and emotional clarity. The poems were published under the pseudonym 'Mādho' or Madhav – one of the names of the Hindu god Vishnu, but more famously of his incarnation, Krishna. In several other sketches by Husain, Zahid Dar reappears again, like in "Fāltu Ādmī" or 'useless man' (1996) and "Pāk Ṭī Hā'us"

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373   See Farah Zia, "The Dar side of Lahore", *The News on Sunday* https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/796575-the-dar-side-of-lahore accessed on 25th April 2021.

(2001). Dar's significance is, according to Husain, everlasting due to his idle existence, the narrative of living. "Mādho, Oblomov aur Zāhid Ḍār" begins with the past and its future: "For Maulana Hali's good information, he must be notified that despite his advice and warning, a useless Urdu poet has emerged, who only writes about women" (Husain 1989b: 221). Husain clearly expresses disdain towards ideas of 'purposeful' literature, as championed more than a century back by writers like Hali, who attempted to formulate the literary with utilitarian ethos. In contrast, the otiosity of Dar's poetry, philosophy, and lifestyle are commended as necessary for both literature and society to survive in meaningful ways.

Several essays are written in the form of stories, emerging from conversations, and they constitute the physical setting of Husain's writing as liminal, recurring spaces of idle dwelling and literary *āḍḍā*s/*naśist*. These spaces haunt his literary world and re-emerge in their persistent resistance, refusing to be obliterated from memory. They resurface – sometimes as fictionalised versions of Qayuma's little sweetshop in Dibai, sometimes as the actual Pak Tea House before it was shut down in 1999, and sometimes as the legendary 'Rupnagar' (imaginary town). The extinction of such spaces, not only of quotidian, conversational, and intellectual experiences of otium but also of ruins of empty houses and idyllic small towns (*basti*s or *qasba*s), is a concern that recurs in the writings of Husain. In the essay titled "Pāk Ṭī Hāus: Cāẏ ke Mez se Fūṭpāth tak" (Pak Tea House: From the Tea Table to the Footpath, 2001), Husain laments the changing world outside the Tea House that knocked on its door and eventually forced the Tea House to shut down. It was replaced by a factory for manufacturing motor tyres. Recalling the last leisurely gathering with his friends at the Tea House, he writes:

> "Perhaps this, today, is our last cup of tea here," I said.
> "Rather like the Last Supper", added Masud Ashaʿar.
> At that time, a team from BBC had just arrived, equipped with cameras and whatnot. Perhaps Tea House was waiting for this hour all the while. It breathed its last in the glitter and glamour of BBC's cameras. And after that, there remained no light in the lamps. (Husain 2001: n.p.)

The crowd of the Tea House then moved on to the footpath and continued their itinerant gatherings. The memories and stories of Pak Tea House, Intizar Husain, Zahid Dar, young writers, and the literary group *Ḥalqah-i Arbāb-i Ẕauq* have now become inseparable from Lahore's urban myths and legends, haunted by the absence of those locations and days of leisurely literary gatherings. They reappear in discussions about and references to Husain, on his book covers and in the literary discussions in Pakistan's and India's Urdu circles. Through his repeated references to idleness, idle people, and places, Hussain brings the quo-

tidian and the anthropological dimensions of idleness to literature; at the same time, literature remains at the heart of idleness and leisure in his writings.

For Hussain, idleness and leisure are also philosophically associated with hope and resonance between humans, non-humans, and the world they inhabit. For this hope to be realised, the relation between stories and the past is argued to be of utmost significance. This interdependency is embodied in the fluid temporalities of Husain's narratives, like "*Mornāmah*" or "A Chronicle of the Peacocks". References to traditional grandiose genres (as titles for his short narratives), for instance, chronicles (*nāmah*), memoirs (*taẕkirah*), and epic (*razmiya*) demonstrate the intentional temporal lapse and flexibility in his narrative discourse; they make for reflective, immersive, as well as critical reading. For example, in "*Mornāmah*", characters from the epic *Mahābhārata* flow into the narrator's memories of travelling in the city of Jaipur and his sighting of the beauty of peacocks. These memories of his recent trip to India lead him down the alley of childhood memories – of listening to his grandmother telling him the story of peacocks, birds exiled from paradise. These remembrances are shown as triggered by the news of an atomic explosion in Pokhran (in Rajasthan), due to which a pride of peafowls was terribly disturbed. Frightened, the birds flew up, crying loudly and scattering in different directions. For Husain, this was an unbearable instance of man's cruelty towards his cohabitants – animals and birds – who witness time's flow. Such cruelties formulate hindrance to the possibility of otium:

> I had reached Shravasthi late in the afternoon. Mahatma Buddha had lived there a long time ago. The vihara where he used to stay with his monks during the monsoons was now in ruins. Only a few scattered bricks mark its place. The peacock on the hill was, perhaps, the last of the survivors from the day of the Buddha, and still carried images of those days in his eyes. Because of the presence of that one peacock, Shravasthi seemed a place of great tranquillity. (Husain 2016 b: 160)

The peacock is identified as a bridge between the past and the present, having witnessed and remembered time through its passage. Peacocks, trees, and ghosts – inhabitants of Husain's literary world – have been silenced by the 'monologues' of humans and their barbaric concept of civilisation. Not only are they necessary for humans to understand the world, but they are also shown to be rightful cohabitors of the planet. Only through a deep understanding of and respectful relationship with them can humans heal and live a life of peace again. As he returns to his house in Pakistan across the border to write his 'chronicle' of the peacocks, he is haunted by the cursed character Ashwatthama/Aśvatthāmā of the *Mahābhārata*. Aśvatthāmā had wrongly killed the children of the Pandavas in the battle between the two clans and was cursed by

Krishna to wander alone in the forests for three thousand years. Such numbers – in years – turn to eternity, and past curses transform into metaphors and determinants for future impediments. The ghost that haunts Husain's writing is that of footloose, wandering stories, and literary vagrancy engendering the experience he terms "*vāridāt*" (occurrence), which Husain and Memon translate as a "spiritual experience".[374] Connecting reality and its experience, Husain explicates the multiple layers of the concept:

> To me, *vāridāt* has much more meaning. The external world possesses a type of reality for me, but I want to know what lies behind that reality, what are the sources of that reality. For me reality consists of layer after layer of truth. Let me give an example from my childhood. In talking about trees, I mentioned that I used to pick the fruit of tamarind trees and look longingly at the mangoes hanging on the trees. But behind these trees were the stories and legends I was told as a child. In a certain tree there lives a headless man whom I never did see. I heard from others that behind another tree there lives a ghost of a woman. Where was the headless man? Where was that ghost? Where was the genie who lives in a tree and who could catch you if you passed under it on a Thursday evening? (Husain in Memon 1983.)

The vagabond, wandering stories in Husain's literary world are then in search of those layers of realities of being that enable humans to feel. As Bhalla sums it up, the "historians and dervishes, storytellers and epic poets, Bodhisattva and Sufi singers, peacocks and ghosts" in Husain's writing are wandering the sorrowing earth in search of another gate – "the gates of peace" (Bhalla 2016b: 373–74). Although otium as peace and tranquillity remains abstract and unattainable in this dystopian and sorrowful depiction of the modern world, it can embody a possible experience, according to Husain's narratives, in the resonance between humans and the non-humans who share the world. For this "alternative form of relating to the world" of resonating with the other, the narrative power of stories needs to be acknowledged and accepted as expressions of emotions, as a requiem.[375] It is through stories that humans can resonate with themselves and with others on their journey, much like King Vikramaditya, who listened quietly to the stories narrated to him by the supernatural *betāl* in the legendary tale of *Betāl Pacīsī* (traced back to the 11th century). In

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374   See Intizar Husain and M U Memon, "A Conversation Between Intizar Husain and Muhammad Umar Memon". Trans. Bruce R. Pray (1983), 160–61.

375   Rosa mentions the extensively varied but identifiable ways of relating to the world in different cultures, where specific ways of relating are read as more responsive relation to each other. (2019) Chapter IV, section 3. "Cognitive Roadmaps and Cultural Worldviews".

Husain's writings, otium emerges not only as an individual experience located within the self but as an experience that can be made possible through a relation of resonance between individuals and characters, i.e., in acknowledgement of others, the rights of others to cohabit and share the life-world of human beings, so that we can live in harmony, as feeling communities.

## 6.3 Immersion, Music, and Transcendence in Bani Basu's *Gāndharbī*

Moving away from the narrative to the sonorous and sensorial aspects of resonance, I now turn to the experience of immersion as otium. In Bani Basu's 1993 Bengali novel, *Gāndharbī*, otium is to be read as explored through artistic contemplation and immersion in music, within the constraints of a societal structure that is not conducive to creative freedom or leisurely pursuits for a young woman of little means. The social reality of bodily experiences is contrasted with the transcendental bodily experiences of an artisan, a mythical, and heavenly creature. The persistence of the artistic and the non-human haunts the social and societal constraints. The protagonist, Apala Mitra, hails from a lower-middle-class family in Calcutta in the early 1990s. Living with her mother and brother, Apala's story is narrated within the constrictions imposed on her by the family patriarch, the strict and conservative, elderly and widowed uncle/*jeṭhu*. Apala's devotion and dedication to her musical talents and her intense desire to pursue a life of music are thwarted by her uncle, who does not find such pursuits 'respectable' for their family's status; for him, music is, at best, a hobby that he has allowed her to take up since childhood. After her outstanding performance at a platform for talented young musicians, Apala is offered a scholarship and a chance to pursue a musical career by a great *ṭhumri* singer from Lucknow, Naznin Begam; however, *jeṭhu* warns Apala of such lures for he considers a profession in music to be the fate of courtesans and prostitutes (Basu 2014: 36).

The complexities of societal, gender, and class restrictions imposed on Apala in the story are finely contrasted with the contemplative voice of the narrative that allows us glimpses into Apala's emotional space as she experiences the sensuality of music. These clues to emotional interiority demonstrate immersive experiences of otium, aesthetics, and contemplation amid the very real hindrances to a fulfilling life, as the narrator describes, in Apala's voice, "*ārām, āśraý, abasar bal'te kichu nei*"/there is no rest, no shelter, no leisure, 2014: 28). As Apala resists being succumbed into a joyless and mundane life abiding societal demands of respectability, it is her immersion in her music that allows her to feel the emotions of an artist, as a person beyond the claims of societal norms and proprieties:

It has been a while since it stopped raining. A moist breeze infused with the scent of jasmine wafts into the room on the rooftop. This is *dādā*'s room.[376] But Apu [Apala] often laid equal claims to the room. Presently, *dādā* is strolling along the rooftop, smoking cigarettes; this will continue for a while. That is how he enjoys his nocturnal distraction (*rāter bilās*). The smoke will disappear in the breeze on the rooftop, *and mā* and *jeṭhu* will not notice, or at least that is what he likes to think.

[…]

Resting her chin on one knee, Apala becomes oblivious to the room, the house, Kirti Mitra Lane. Her mind travels to Rabindra Sadan and its crowded hall. The lights in the auditorium are dimmed. A row of judges is seated at one end of the stage. Concealing part of her face behind the *tān'purā*, Apala sings; she goes on singing. Suddenly, she feels that a multitude of voices join her, singing to her tune. (Basu 2014: 15–16)

The narrative abounds with many such episodes where Apala immerses herself in the thought of music or in music itself. Music, song (*gān*), and melody (*sur*), as the above passage reflects, form a separate, parallel world that she inhabits; this world is presented in great contrast with the constrictions of her harsh social setting. These contrary worlds meet when the protagonist engages in her art and feels a transcendental experience of otium. Such transcendence is also observed by sympathetic characters, for instance, Apala's friend Soham, who remarks, "When she holds the *tān'purā*, Apala Mitra no longer remains in the world of mere mortals" (2014: 24).

While music, particularly within Indian traditions, has already been theorised as an aesthetic activity associated with otium in reading contemporary English novels from India[377], emphasis has been laid on the association of music with memory and nostalgia rather than on reading the complementary relation between the aesthetic experience of immersion in music and the transcendental quality of otium. In this section, I explore this relation by reading Basu's novel. The association between the aesthetics of classical Indian music and experiences of otium rests in the culturally prevalent perception that classical music has deep roots in the other-worldly, higher realms beyond the mortal world. In Indic mythology, this realm is referred to as *gandharbalok* or the realm of the *gandharbas*. Much more than a questionable belief, such a perception is a culturally persistent emotional attitude towards creative forces and

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376 *Dādā* is an affectionate address for an older brother. The omniscient narrator associates with Apala's voice and context by addressing her brother as *dādā*; the narrative is internally focalised. In the above context, it also addresses Apala in the affective Apu, as her brother would have.

377 See Fludernik, "Nostalgia for Otiose Leisure" (2020), 23. See Munz, "The Promise of Purposelessness" (2020) diss—chapter 3.

aesthetics, often claimed to be *felt* by music practitioners. The most widely used instances of such attitudes can be observed in suggestions that skilled and adequate singers and composers can use music and melody – if appropriately performed – to transform the weather. Such cultural myths are mainly popularised in the case of *rāga megh* and *malhār* (*rāgas* associated with clouds and rain), performed to call upon the clouds during monsoon.[378] These myths, often a matter of devotion to art for practitioners, are generally ridiculed by laypeople; in the text, Apala's brother accuses her instructor, *ostādʲjī* [379] as responsible for the sudden rain, teasingly suggesting that he must have sung an unparalleled form of *meghamallār* (2014: 14–15).

Apala's music instructor/*ostādʲjī*, explicates the notion of spirituality, aesthetics, and creative desires early in the novel, in the concept of *gandharbalok*, the transcendental, creative-spiritual realm, from which the novel's title is derived. He explains to Apala: "For whatever aesthetic prowess and pleasures humans possess, there is a separate realm. That is the realm of the *gandharbas* (*gandharbalok*).[380] In that world, the *deba gandharba*, Biśvābasu protects the pristineness of sacred music (*saṅgītāmṛta*); in that world, creativity flows and flourishes in blissful joy (*ānande*)" (2014: 12–13). Basu's novel spins a gender dimension to the figure of *gandharba* (Bengali)/*gandharva* (Sanskrit) since they are usually conceptualised as masculine, while female celestial performers,

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378    The legend goes back, at least, to the time of emperor Akbar in the 16th century. Akbar's court musician, Tansen, is believed to have fallen ill due to the excessive practice of *rāga Dīpak* (associated with light and heat). Courtiers looked for artists of *rāga Megh* (cloud) to call upon the clouds to pour and calm Tansen. Miyã̄ Tānsen, as he was honoured, then developed the *rāga* now known as *Miyāṉ kī Malhār*. See Richard Widdess, "Raga as a key Concept" (2006). For further reading on monsoon *rāgas,* see Laura Leante, "The Cuckoo's Song" (2018), 255–90. See Daniel Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India* (1980), 65–68. For a reading of intermediality in the emotions evoked by the onset of monsoon and its relation to music, cinema, and visual art, see Pernau & Rajamani (2016), 62–64.

379    *Ostādʲjī* is a bengalicised denotation of the Urdu/Hindi *Ustād-jī*, a respectful address for a teacher, especially of music, emerging from *ustād*, roughly equivalent to 'maestro'.

380    Gandharba or Gandharva (Sanskrit) usually refers to, at least in contexts of literature, art, and music, "the celestial musicians or heavenly singers who form the orchestra at the banquets of the gods, and they belong together with the Apsarasas to Indra's heaven, sharing also in his battles". See entry 'gandharva' in Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary (1899), printed on 346. https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/csl-apidev/servepdf.php?dict=MW&page=346 accessed on 17th June 2022. The *Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary* explicates 'gandharba' as "one belonging to a class of demi-gods proficient in music and war"; it also refers to "a natural musician, a born musician"; 'gandharbalok' is "the land or abode of the Gandharvas" (2006), 298.

especially dancers, are seen to belong to another group of celestial beings, the *apsarās*.[381] *Apsarās* are often defined as wives to *Gandharvas*, especially since the *Ṛgveda* mentions an *apsarā* coupled with a *gandharva.* In recent times, several artists have evoked the title of a *gandharva* for a female artist as well (even if through literature and film), especially as singers, while traditionally, the honorific suffix of 'gandharva' is given to exceptionally talented male singers like Sawai Gandharva (1886–1952) and Kumar Gandharva (1924–92).[382]

A parallel myth claims that the art of a *gandharva* is a curse of the gods – the curse is to spend his/her time on earth as an artist devoted to the feminine pursuits of beauty, skill, and emotions (*bhāv*). The ambivalent nature of such intense creative prowess, intertwined with the enhanced emotional capacity to feel and manifest feelings through art can be observed in contradictory readings of the same curse as a blessing, an ability (*abhiśāp*, Basu 2014: 12; *jādu*, Kaul 1989). The curse (or alternately blessing) of music and song for Apala cannot dictate her fate in Basu's novels, for the societal demands on a character like Apala are shown as indefatigable. But her art and insight haunt her social setting and are shown to shape the way Apala manoeuvres through the harsh reality of her setting, transcending the boundaries drawn upon her life, be it her ability to calm the affective illness of her friend by singing *Darbārī Kānhaḍā* (Basu 2014: 67) or in protecting her own space as an artist in an unhappy marriage and her demands for a room of her own to sing in (2014: 131–31, 99–100). The narrative presumes the temporal fluidity where *gandharva* nature is not just Apala's past but her true nature. In contrast, her present

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381   Monier-Williams explains the 'apsarā' as transcending waters, "*ap* + √*sṛ*"), 'going in the waters or between the waters of the clouds', a class of female divinities (sometimes called 'nymphs'); they inhabit the sky, but often visit the earth; they are the wives of the Gandharvas and have the faculty of changing their shapes at will". Page 59,3. https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/csl-apidev/servepdf.php?dict=MW&page=59 accessed on 17th June 2022.
See also entry in Encyclopaedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/apsara accessed on 21st June 2022.

382   C.f. Mani Kaul's biographic-performative film, *Siddheśvarī* (1989), on the acclaimed Hindustani classical singer Siddhewshwari Devi (1908–77) of Banaras/Varanasi. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBfY-vHSjlw accessed on 23rd May 2022.
The gendered aspect of musical art and performance in modern Indian societal restrictions have been also dealt with in this film. Through a retelling of the life stories of two exceptional singers, Kesarbai Kerkar (1892–1977) and Dhondutai Kulkarni (1927–2014), *The Music Room* (2007) by Namita Devidayal explores the conflicted nature of women singers of classical Hindustani music perceived on the one hand as endowed with celestial blessings and on the other hand, as fallen women, outcastes in society.

human and social life is merely an alternate projection of temporality, haunted by her true nature.

Otium, as an experiential immersion in music, turns into a transcendental experience in the narrative, acting as a link between the two realms Apala inhabits – the one where she is a celestial singer and the other where she is a struggling housewife. This transcendental experience is not only felt by Apala as she sings and enables the experience but also by other characters with a deep sense of music, who can resonate with this experience, for instance, Soham (2014: 75–78) and *ostād^jī*/Rameshvar Thakur (2014: 101–4). Music is repeatedly woven with sensual signifiers like the scent of flowers, the gentle touch of evening and morning breezes, and vibrations of the mindful body during acts of singing, taking the narrative experience to a complex spatiotemporal level. The aural (in the form of *rāgas*) and the sensory embodiment of Hindustani music create an alternate sense of space beyond the physical presence through what Steven Feld reads as the "complex and multiple presence and absence of the body", where sensory experiences co-mingle and "blur into synesthesia" (2005: 180–81). Temporality is rendered fluid through the duration of a *rāga* and performance[383], flowing into memory and into the alternate spatiotemporal level of the celestial realm of *gandharbalok*. For a listener, and perhaps, for a singer as well, such musical renditions can lead to an experience of "contemplative engagement with (and through) music" (Clayton 2000: 3). The narrative also opens up such experiences to the knowledgeable reader.

In the novel, the experience of a *rāga* sometimes spreads over several pages to signal the immersive element of music (Basu 2014: 75–77). The transcendental quality of the experience (listening or singing) also enables a healing effect in several episodes in the story, for Soham, for Apala's son Rano, but also Apala herself, as she sings:

> As the night darkens, her music, too, grows in depth. '*Mandarba bāje re*' – with the words '*bāje re*', Apala creates an ocean of *sur* (melody); she does not venture exhaustively into *tāna* or *laẏakāri*.[384] She rests in the *bhāb* (emo-

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383   On temporality and performance, see M. Clayton, "Introduction", *Time in Indian Music* (2000), 1–7.

384   *Mandarba* or *mandar* is a percussion instrument; the phrase '*mandarba bāje re'* is a refrain in this song. While *sur* is equivalent to tune or melody, *tāna* is a prolonged, repetitive work on the melody in the form of an extempore; a *tāna* is defined as that which "spreads a Rāga". *Laẏa* or *laẏakāri* (the craft of *laẏ*) is the composition of intervals within two *mātras* or beats. For a detailed understanding of these terms, see Bimalakanta Roychaudhuri, *The Dictionary of Hindustani Classical Music* (2000), 59, 140.

tional range).[385] Travelling from *bhāb* to *anubhāb*, she increases the pitch, uttering '*ānanda raho*' (rest in bliss). She begins her descent, working through each minute variation of *kalyāṇ rāga*, spreading like the intense sweet scent of magnolia. When melody penetrates her vibrating heartbeats, she does not feel grief or joy; she has no worries. She feels like she is following a strong, mighty but intangible figure of love. What sweetness, what composure, what glory this journey entails! But it is a path full of twists and turns, at times impassable and obstructed, and at times, it is a great river – a grandiose, beautifully carved road. On both sides of it, armed with benediction and blessing, stand numerous invisible *gandharbas*. As if at the threshold of an estuary, the prolonged melody of her *kalyāṇ* flows like a powerful stream into the ocean of music. (Basu 2014: 61)

Despite her exceptional talents, Apala is unable to make a career in music owing to her gender and class restrictions; on the other hand, Soham, hailing from an upper-middle-class, 'cultured' family, follows the musical career that Apala could not pursue. Apala eventually agrees to marry into a family with no taste in music. Although her husband and in-laws are not opposed to music, they do not understand or appreciate her relationship with music, which, for Apala, is what she loves the most in life (2014: 32). While Apala manages to remain in touch with her music – on and off – throughout her life, the narrative reaches a climactic stage in chapter 25 (2014: 178) when she is confronted with an unbearable crisis as she loses her voice. For Apala, the reality of her unsatisfactorily mediocre life was balanced by her ability to sing, which set her free – even if momentarily – from the mundane world. Unable to contain her swelling emotions as she becomes voiceless, Apala immerses herself in expressing her music visually through painting: "Can you not see, I am performing the *ālāp* for *darbārī*!" (Basu 2014: 184–85) Although the plot of the narrative may be read as tragic, the immersive experience for Apala as an artist is transferred into the experience of reading – as if reading music – for the reader in Basu's rendition. The novel then becomes a text of immersion, where the mind's absorption into the fluidity of music successfully transforms the reader and the characters. In a narrative twist, the frame narrator is revealed to be, in fact, a character in the story – Apala's daughter, Sohini. In Sohini's confession on the last page of the novel, the narrator reaffirms Apala's other-worldly nature, asserting her to be a non-human, a celestial artist amid mortal beings, who transcended beyond the conflicts of her dual (human and non-human) manifes-

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385    See Chapter 1, c.f. *Rasa* theory of *Nāṭyaśāstra.* In the context of musical experience, *bhāb*/*bhāva* is explained as "the mental change brought about by the perception of sentiment or emotion known as Rasa", i.e., the range of emotional transformations in the performance of the song (Roychaudhuri 2000).

tations – *mānabī hṛdaẏ<sup>l</sup>bṛtti* and *gāndharbī prakṛti* (Basu 2014: 188). In this novel, otium is not addressed in its positive experiential qualities like immersion, contemplation, and creative bliss but in the agony of the human condition, the madness of the artist, and the transcendental experience of art. The primary emotion of otium is haunting in the persistence of the other-worldly and its access to experiences of otium that interrupts the social and societal unhappy spatio-temporality of here and now.

## 6.4 Conversations with the Dead and the Undead: *Hār<sup>l</sup>bārṭ*, *Phyātāṛu*, and Insurgent Idleness

In this section, I read otium in formulations of subversion for the alienated individual who feels marginalised and is deemed a failure in this 'fast' and 'smart' (accelerated/technologically advanced) world. Simultaneously, otium (or its absence) is consciously used to critique social discrimination. While in Nabarun Bhattacharya's 1993 novel *Hār<sup>l</sup>bārṭ*, otium is interpreted in the sense of alienation and melancholy for the protagonist, in the *Phyātāṛu* stories, it is experienced and enjoyed in a subversive sense, along with a feeling of uselessness as well as playful (and yet serious) revenge towards an ideology of justified insurgence. However, the subversive agency of melancholy in *Hār<sup>l</sup>bārṭ* should not be overlooked. Both Harbart Sarkar and the *phyātāṛu* haunt contemporary society that has dealt them a fate of abuse and injustice. In this discriminatory scenario of increasing material greed and ensuing corruption, the insatiable aspirations of the rich, consequent dehumanisation of the lower classes, the loss of political and ethical resonance in society and the suffering of the marginalised, otium is conceptualised through subversive agency. This subversion manifests in being haunted and haunting, expressed in scathing and satirical critique of the *status quo*.

Harbart Sarkar (a bengalicisation of Herbert) grew up an orphan with his cousins in a lower-middle-class household in Calcutta. His few belongings consist of his curl-handled umbrella, his uncle's handed-down Ulster coat, and two books from his grandfather's collection, entitled *Tales of the Afterlife* (*Paraloker kathā*) and *Mysteries of Afterlife* (*Paralok-rahasya*). He hangs around with a group of lazy, idle men from the neighbourhood; together they spend most of their time drinking hard liquor and cursing. While growing up, Harbart is gradually influenced by his reading of the mentioned books and becomes emotionally isolated and deeply concerned with death. This engagement with death escalated especially after the murder of his nephew, Binu, in a case of police brutality during the Naxalite insurgency of the 1970s in Calcutta. Harbart comes to believe that he can communicate with the dead and eventually starts a

business enterprise called 'Conversations with the dead'/"*Mṛter sahit kathopa-kathan*". Claiming that he can help people connect with their loved ones who have departed, Harbart begins to make some money before he is threatened and hounded by the 'West Bengal Rationalist Association'. The novel is witty, full of dark humour and satire, and is narrated in 'filthy language', full of slang and cuss words.

This raw, so-called 'filthy' narrative is punctuated by many recurrent moments of poignant solitude; these constitute Harbart's reflections and memories and descriptions of dwelling in an elaborated, fluid, elastic sense of time (moment), especially when he finds himself alone on his rooftop terrace. Dreams and reality (the distinction being blurred) are recounted, often in the form of surreal scenes, sometimes only witnessed by lizards and cockroaches; sometimes, they are narrated as unobserved. Some of these scenes reveal the protagonist in contemplation and recollection, in isolation, smoking on the terrace, which acts as a space of rest and contentment in his otherwise miserable life. The rooftop terrace becomes a subversive space of freedom for Harbart; from the vantage point of the terrace, he could see the flying kites, the expanse of the sky and the city spread in front of him (Bhattacharya 2010: 25–26). From there, he could watch Buki, the girl who drew his interest. It was his own, intimate space ("*cilꞏchādꞏṭāi chilo Hārꞏbārṭer jāẏꞏgā*"); it is where he dreamed: "The astonishing dream that had empowered him social status and fame; but that had also, eventually, lead him to his end. That dream, too, he had dreamt here" (2010: 24).

This dream was of his ability to communicate with Binu, whose final words continued to haunt Harbart (2010: 36). Through Binu's involvement in the Naxal insurgency, the spectre that haunts the narrative is inadvertently that of the communist revolution, signalled in the dialogue between Binu and Harbart about personal sacrifice and social justice (2010: 31). The dream led Harbart to explore his abilities and start his 'business' of communicating with the dead. Harbart's dreams, thoughts, and hallucinations attain a fluidity in the narrative, steeped in a mood of surrealism. A blue-faced fairy conjured up by Harbart recurs throughout the narrative, attempting to touch his life of despair, symptomatic of the enigma of life's fulfilments. Such moments are described and narrated as happening in a parallel present or an (im)possible future. These episodes punctuate the narrative, resulting in a temporally fluid plot. Starting with descriptions of Harbart undergoing a terrifying emotional and physical experience, the narrative unfurls into the past – the past that was his childhood and the already scripted future of that past – Harbart's growing up and his eventual suicide, interjected by comments and visits from his dead parents. The narrative returns at the end of his life and goes on to narrate a haunted future that may or may not come to pass:

> Perhaps many days after this, or perhaps many, many years later, some little boy will run, letting go of his parents' clasping hands, towards some antique shop, willing to stay entranced as he gazes through dusty windowpanes at the fairy holding light in her hands. When his parents would have brought him home against his will, perhaps his lips would quiver in hurt pride. Perhaps this may not come to pass at all.
> But if it does, perhaps, even later, when the small boy begins to shiver in his sleep, no one would have noticed it at all. These things happen all the time.
> Even later, perhaps some severed kite will have floated across many skies, to eventually rest on Harbart's rooftop terrace. Perhaps no one will know about it. In the morning mist the terrace is very unclear, very obstinate. (Bhattacharya 2010: 80)

Harbart's socialising with idle men is contrasted with his alienation and the quest for a semblance of resonance in the quietness of his solitude on the terrace and in the desperate claims of conversing with the dead. The presence of the dead looms large in his life, enabling a subversive sense of communication that he does not seem to find amidst the living.

Written roughly around ten years later, situated in the twenty-first century, the *Phyātāṛu* narratives are formulated within a dialogic, interactive social set-up where people who are considered utter failures in society are recruited by their leader, Madan, to become a *phyātāṛu*. A *phyātāṛu* is neither dead nor a ghost but a repressed and morphed human being with the supernatural ability to fly whenever he/she wants. The name draws on the onomatopoeic *phyāt·*, a quick, flapping sound, possibly denoting the flutter of a wing, and the *āru*, a reference to the ability of flight. In Bengali, *oṛā* and *uṛu* are often colloquially used as suffixes added to a noun denoting someone or something in flight and may not be reliable or graspable. As Nabarun Bhattacharya himself explicates, "all they do is fly around" (the Bengali phrase he uses is "*uṛe beṛāno*" – casually describes someone roaming around idly) and "generate ruckus here and there" (2015: n.p.).[386] The *Phyātāṛu* narratives are Bhattacharya's deeply political response to the loss of any sense of social ethic in current society in West Bengal; "... but *phyātāṛu* is not just a matter of politics," he clarifies, "*Phyātāṛu* is an attitude towards politics" (ibid.). However, in contrast to the hyperlocality of *Hār'bārt*, these stories are located in broader networks of contemporary society, "simultaneously global and local".[387] They problem-

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[386] The quotation is from a page of comments underlined as "Nabāruṇ Bhaṭṭācāryer Nānā Sākṣāt·kār Theke" (from various conversations with Nabarun Bhattacharya) in Bhattacharya's book titled *Phyātāṛu Biṃśati* (2015). It is not paginated and precedes the table of contents.

[387] Editors' Introduction, *Nabarun Bhattacharya* (2020) n.p.

atise the local and urban society of contemporary Calcutta in the stories "*Suśīl Samāje Phyātāṛu*" (Phyatarus in civil society), "*Baïmelāẏ Phyātāṛu*" (Phyatarus at the bookfair), "*Rabīndrajaẏantīte Phyātāṛu*" (Phyatarus at Tagore's centenary). They are also located within international narratives of chaotic globalisation, in "*Āipiele Phyātāṛu*" (Phyatarus at IPL cricket match) and "*Globāl Ṭerrore Phyātāṛu*" (Phyatarus amidst global terror).

The three *phyātāṛu* characters who recur in the stories are Madan, a sort of leader of the gang; DS (or Director's Special), an unemployed share-market tout; and Purandar Bhat, the budding but socially excluded, marginalised poet. The three men are utter failures amongst others in the present competitive society. Madan's and DS's wives have left them for other men with lucrative jobs, and no one pays any attention to Bhat or his poetry. Bhat's character (arguably a satirical poke at Bhattacharya himself) is ironically utilised to mock Calcutta's self-representation as a city of culture and literary merits (particularly, in stories *like* "*Kabi Sammelane Phyātāṛu*" (Phyatarus at the poetic symposium) and "*Rabindrajaẏantīte Phyātāṛu*"). Although Bhat is a usual surname, here, Bhattacharya wields it satirically to hint at his own name and the uselessness of Purandar's poetry – *bhāṭ*, in Bengali, rubbish or nonsense. The three regularly meet and drink liquor sold on the black market; they criticise social norms and rituals, contemporary society and life. At other times, they are seriously committed to generating chaos at social gatherings. Their dialogues, written in slang and cuss words, often hold profound sociological, philosophical, and psychological truths.

These miscreants, though in many ways anti-social and responsible for instigating chaos in the city, do not cause any real damage; neither do they engage in meaningless theft or robbery. They hang around idly or fly to various places, hatching plots to punish society through these subversive activities. Idleness, for them, is the rebellious possibility of flying across fields and rooftop terraces to chatter away, drink, and smoke cigarettes. Spatial opportunities of idleness for people from lowlife are rendered inaccessible in Calcutta's capitalised urban space. Geared with the powers of their supernatural wings, their subversive spectrality enables the *phyātāṛu* to cross class restrictions. The narrative does not turn them into invisible beings; spectrality within the narrative enables them to fly in plain sight, causing astonishment and shock amidst onlookers. The *phyātāṛu* fly, when they want, to the banks of the Hooghly River, over people's terraces and fields, to places where they would otherwise not have been allowed entry. They mess around these spaces and urinate here and there to avenge class discrimination but more so to express an anarchic sense of freedom, engendering idleness as an agency of insurgency. The spaces of leisure, which are now transformed into markets of consumption, are particularly under attack; the *phyātāṛu* primarily target "pleasure resorts", entertainment

locations, and restaurants like "Floatel" (Bhattacharya 2015: 12–13).[388] Further critiquing the discrimination surrounding spaces of leisure and idle freedom, Bhattacharya allows the *phyātāṛu* one free space of their own, where they gather to hang around and discuss anti-social activities, without flight:

> The 'park' is the tiny triangular field near DS's house, half of which is for general urination, and the other half, a children's park; there is a single bench without a backrest – and nothing much. Purandar and DS were sitting on it. DS was playing a game of Ludo on a board torn in the middle, laid out on the top of his briefcase. He had set up the red and the yellow squares, and only one red token was out. […] Purandar was reading out aloud from a handbill-like newspaper. And in between his reading, he stole side glances to observe a haggard crow perched on a branch, trying to itch its beak with one of its feet. (Bhattacharya 2015: 127–28)

Bhattacharya's subversive attacks on society are directed against its indiscriminate consumerism and its glorification of capital at the expense of human suffering and social justice. The portrayal of contemporary urban Calcutta depicts a wasted rat race in a dying city: people compete against one another, chasing (commercial) success. In his essay "Fyataru as Political Society", Anindya Purakayastha identifies Bhattacharya as "one of those writers who vigorously fumes against class elitism of the civic space" (2020, n.p.). The "political war-cry" of the subaltern *phyātāṛus* – "*phyāt·phyāt· sãi sãi*" – the chant that enables them to fly is, in fact, directed against the *leisure class* that has turned society into the sham that it is. Through stories that strip society's self-image as educated, cultured, literate, and significantly 'civil' (*suśīl*), Bhattacharya posits the "*fyataru-fic(a)tion*" of Calcutta, narrating the spectre that haunts the consumerist, greedy, (un)civil society, which he identifies as '*hārāmīr hāṭ*' (market of cheats). The uncanny wings of the subalterns are designed to haunt the cruel elite and generate justified fear among them. However, it must be remarked that there is no attempt at getting any prudent message across to this social disorder – the *phyātāṛu*, like Bhattacharya, seem aware that society at large is unchangeable, and the *phyātāṛu* have no future. This demolition of a possible future or a decent life robbed from the masses results in the haunting of civil society. Haunting is expressed in the demolition of property, defecation, and urination in private and public spaces to engender chaos and anarchy. Behind this haunting is a desperate cry for otium – deemed and doomed to remain unattainable for the subaltern post-colonial poverty-struck masses – be it in the lonely

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388    An event space and restaurant in Calcutta, a floating hotel on the river.

despair of Harbart's surreal clairvoyance or the subversive, collective insurgence of the spectrally-winged *phyātāṛu*.

## 6.5  The Spectral *Flâneur* and his Idle Afternoon: "*Tafrīḥ kī Ek Dopahar*"

Concerning idleness and hauntology, Khalid Jawed's long story/*kahānī*, "*Tafrīḥ kī Ek Dopahar*", is particularly relevant to our reading of haunting as a signifier of the absence and quest for otium. Narrated by a ghost, the story is, in fact, a long-drawn-out philosophical monologue. The ghost communicates the narration through a medium – a living, contemporary writer. The writer wants the story to fit into a narrative formula or at least have a plot, but the ghost resists, rendering the story through several dissonant temporal techniques. Rejecting words, language and meaning, he wanders the world searching for what he identifies as the 'melody' ("*lai*") of the narrative/his thoughts.[389] He knows that he will have to venture into an abstract, surreal chronotope to look for the music, where the designs of human civilisation, history, culture, and moral codes do not exist (Jawed 2008 a: 116). The four-part story first discusses what it means to be a ghost, drawing distinctions between ghosts and demons based on the Urdu concept of haunting and idle wandering, both signified in the narrative as *bhaṭaknā*. At the same time, idle wandering or strolling is also described as *tafrīḥ*, and *bhaṭaknā* has other connotations besides haunting.

The ghost-narrator claims that only those are turned into ghosts who cannot tolerate the pain of an unjust death. Caught between two worlds, ghosts do not belong anywhere; they must exist, haunt and drift eternally. The haunting of the ghost is deeply associated with its intense emotions; in fact, haunting attains the physical manifestation of the emotion. If one wishes to extinguish a ghost, he claims, one must first stop it from haunting. Discussing haunting itself, the spectral narrator links it directly to the activity and state of wandering aimlessly or strolling – in Urdu, *tafrīḥ*. The second part of the narrative revisits the ghost's memories of a time of innocence and hope that still haunt him: memories of going to the cinema with Apiya and Baiju – his sisters; of Parvin – a young girl to whom he was attached in his youth; of a friend who reminds him of Dostoevsky's character Ivan Fyodorovich Karamazov/Vanya, who dared to return the ticket of life's drama/spectacle (*tamāśā*) to god. The

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389  Jawed's concern regarding the dissonance between language and story is also reflected in critical essays written at the same time. See *Kahānī, Maut aur Ākhrī Bidesī Zabān* (2008 b), 65–84.

narrative links spectrality (haunting) and spectacle (*tamāśā*) with cinema, and it is the ruins of the previously frequented cinema hall where the ghost continues to idle during the narrated afternoon. Idle wandering and haunting are woven together as resistance to the dystopian nature of contemporary life in the city of Delhi, where commercialisation, competition, and poverty have taken over the possibility of a fulfilling life (and/or death). All the characters are depicted as having an aura of innocence in the past that was snatched away from them: Apiya died a cruel, early death due to illness, Baiju turned towards obsessive religious devotion, and Parvin – who had wanted to educate herself – led a ruined life with asthma and poverty. Frustrated with the meanness of life and pangs of poverty, the unnamed friend murdered his wife and then took his own life.

Throughout the narrative, there are several comparisons contrasting madness and logical wisdom, high art and 'cheap'/ "*sastī*" feelings, the freedom of wandering and the traps of the market. A sharp and outraged critic of rapid economic and industrial transformations in the city, the narrator identifies haunting/wandering and being haunted as the only way of existing; even in death, he is trapped in idle wandering/*bhaṭaknā*/haunting. Here, the spectral narrator directly addresses the dilemma of otium and haunting. At the beginning of the narrative, he asserts that death is completely devoid of any possibility of wandering/otium. In the story, wandering or *tafrīḥ* is akin to its implications of otium in its ambivalence and complexity. Both *bhaṭaknā* and *tafrīḥ* are wandering, but *bhaṭaknā* is depicted as trapped, although adrift, and *tafrīḥ* (from the Arabic root *f-r-ḥ*, implying pleasantness) is wandering in an enjoyable, pleasant, free manner. The narrator claims that not only is a free sense of wandering implied by the lexeme (*tafrīḥ*) but that this idle and free wandering also allows for contemplation and insight ("*baṣīrat*"). As the narrative progresses, albeit in flashback episodes, the narrator dwells on the freedom of wandering that haunting allows him after death. Devoid of life's narrow restrictions, like Bhattacharya's flying humans, Jawed's narrator, too, can fly at any time and roam around idly as and when he desires. However, the conflict between the two kinds of idleness – *bhaṭaknā* and *tafrīḥ* – remains. *Tafrīḥ,* the narrative seems to assert, is the joyous, recreational, free idling of the living, whereas *bhaṭaknā* is the alienated drift of the dead who did not have the freedom of otium in life.

The theme of cinema/spectacle/visuality is central to this narrative, where cinema is a metaphor for the dramatic narrative of life, and the desire to watch films symbolises a willing participation. While several impediments have repeatedly deterred the narrator from enjoying films freely, after his unjust and cruel death, the desire to watch, with invested emotions, is transformed into an arena of distant spectatorship, associated with the melancholy of haunting

(passive, unliving). The repeated act of watching a film only until the interval and then selling the ticket off to someone else for the latter half of the show gradually evolves to the theme of *returning* the ticket; this theme is later stretched to symbolise Vanya's returning of the ticket in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Another allegory is formulated in the demolition of the haphazard, old, and beloved cinema hall with its intimate pasts and the establishment of the multiplex shopping mall that promises life to be an easy act of strolling but in the glory of false, fake moon-light. This destruction of the remnants of his past life is witnessed in despair by the spectral narrator, who sits perched on a nearby *pīpal* tree. The social reality of the present is described as sitting in an empty cinema hall where no films are being shown, and no emotions – no catharsis, no relief – are experienced. The emotions here are, in fact, directly linked to otium, while wandering or *tafrīḥ* itself is also described in the narrative as a *jaẕba* (an emotion, a feeling), and wandering as an experience of otium is then depicted as a form of haunting – it is identified as the narrator's sole enduring interest (*śauq*):

> Wandering has its mysterious freedom. It feels like taking off one's heavy baggage, flinging it across the street, feeling lucid in one's limbs and drifting aimlessly through the lanes. It is the joy of having the courage to walk on the wrong side of the lane at times with a sheepish smile and a content heart. Like a twisted state of mind, it also renders one's heart full. It is a perpetual trap, a labyrinth indeed, this aimless loitering and wandering. (Jawed 2008 a: 126)

Eventually, the narrator details the circumstances of his unjust death and reveals the identities of collaborators in his murder. The betrayal is located within the social, intimate, and societal; life transforms into a dystopian film for the cinema lover. Idling, wandering, and haunting are not only semantics associated with otium in this text but also indisputable signifiers of subversion and social criticism. Like Bhattacharya's flying humans, Jawed's ghost indulges in the trope of idling as a subversive drift as well as the rhetoric of criticism towards the discriminatory present, mourning a haunted future. However, unlike Bhattacharya's characters, who associate idle freedom with political revenge, Jawed's haunted *flâneur* prefers wandering as a passive alternative to revenge. As a staunch advocate of idle wandering, more so in death than in life, he asks the rhetorical question of how and why experiences of otium, like idle wandering/*tafrīḥ*, are still misconceptualised in society as insignificant activities. He emphasises the urgency of wandering and strolling – as philosophy and praxis – to counter the discriminations of the world order, devoid of any sense of beauty, emotions, or melody. At the same time, this aimless and idle wandering occurs only as the past of the narrator's predicament of haunting

and remaining haunted forever. While this idle wandering is Derridean in its hauntological predisposition of existential interrogation, the wandering in this narrative can also be read as Benjaminian *flânerie*, owing to its investigative and observant nature. The ambivalence of the spectrality in *flânerie* here can be seen to elicit the question: is this equation of wandering and haunting then aimed towards the necessity of what Brian O'Connor terms 'idle freedom', and that by itself, idleness "is meaningful and real enough to deserve protection" (Jawed 2018: 3)? Or is idleness/haunting used as a critique of discriminatory society? I unpack this question in the following concluding section of the chapter to explore the relation between otium and resonance.

## 6.6 Chapter Conclusion: Otium and Resonance

The recurring trend of highlighting dissonance, alienation, and disenchantment – processes that signify an absence of otium – in contemporary South Asian texts corresponds to the theme of a "resonanceless" world depicted in modern literature in Europe.[390] Hartmut Rosa locates this requiem for resonance in modern literature as "characterized by the radical disruption and destabilization of man's relationship to the world" (2019: Ch. X., n. pag,). While Rosa's assertion of the causes of this lack of resonance is historically recognised, his broader claim that resonance is the answer or the apt response to the problem of acceleration (2019: 1) needs some deliberation. Acceleration and the high speed of modern society have been seen as opposing forces to both resonance as well as otium. It has also been established early on by several scholars (c.f. Vickers) that otium is not the opposite of work, but of *officium*/obligations/ efficiency in work– translated by Rosa as acceleration/escalation (2019: "In Lieu of a Foreword"). When we think of otium beyond semantics and language and attempt to understand it as a concept in social history and human experience, depicted and discussed in literature as a function of the self and subjectivity, it becomes clear that understanding otium means understanding relations between people, between ourselves, and to the world we inhabit; precisely the theory of resonance that Rosa puts forth. Otium, therefore, can be read and identified through a relation of resonance and the emotions through which resonance is enabled and expressed. But what are the hindrances to realising and experiencing otium?

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[390]    See Rosa, *Resonance*, Chapter 10, section 2. See also *Alienation and Acceleration* (2010), 13–14.

What needs to be resolved in order to champion otium and experience states of otium, as the above readings of contemporary texts from South Asia seem to suggest, is the axis of discrimination and exclusion in society, not only those of pace and speed on which we formulate notions of globalisation today. The problem of inequality, which Rosa himself asserts is integral to the relation of resonance – as *cause* and *consequence* – is also seen to cause and lead to the inaccessibility of otium. The recurring reference to haunting, so inherently located in resistance to accepting injustice, demonstrates that haunting and otium are deeply connected concepts of the self – of otherness and subjectivity, respectively. Haunting then highlights the privilege dimension of otium, the "discourses of recrimination against the excluded other" (Fludernik 2014: 131) – as both individual and social experiences. Emotionally, haunting is directed towards both expressing grief through mourning and hope through persistence, return, and recurrence. In the texts read in this chapter, leisurely states of being and artistic subjectivity pertain to the pursuit of the leisurely, free, idle (as worthy in itself) subjectivity (O'Connor 2018: 179), as well as a critique against discrimination that creates obstacles in accessing that subjectivity.

Simultaneously, a recognition of the urgent need for otium for individuals as well as communities can decentre the demands of a capitalist, homocentric world where unjust and alienated labour paves the way for an allegedly successful/fulfilling life, or rather to inaccessibility, unavailability, and dissonance, or *Unverfügbarkeit* (Rosa 2018). On the other hand, adherence to otium enables a more resonating and less unequal world. Laziness, empathy, and idle freedom as depicted in the narratives of Intizar Husain, response to one's artistic subjectivity and vocational calling as demonstrated in Basu's and Jawed's novels, can lead to formulations of a better world – or so the texts seem to suggest. In Nabarun Bhattacharya's texts, otium and idleness attain a vantage point from where social inequality can be observed and resisted. While hauntology – as a conceptual-analytical tool – has enabled a pluralistic reading of otium in the texts discussed here, as expressed through narrative, through its transcendental, transgressive aspect, and through subversion and critical agency, it also draws our attention to the relation of resonance and the association of the other with the self. In *Hār'bārṭ* and the *Phyātāṛu* narratives, social acceptance and inclusion, and rejection of class discrimination are argued as ways to inhabit a better world. *Gāndharbī* claims a transgressive space for the artist, irrespective of class and gender constrictions. "*Tafrīḥ kī Ek Dopahar*" demands a just world where it is possible to resonate with one's subjectivity, as opposed to a world filled with capitalist prejudice and mindless social obeisance. Intizar Husain's narratives hope for a world with resonance, where humans are responsible for each other and for nature, animals, and the environment. What is common in all texts is a plea for empathy and emotional resonance. The narrative voices recognise that a

phenomenological transformation is required for such a world to be possible. This transformation can be achieved through otium and emotions that enable resonance – calm, peacefulness, responsibility, sympathy, and love. The dissonance in the texts read is addressed and echoed through the possibility of the narrative. The narrative possibility of subjectivity and the essence of belonging to a social, resonating, and inclusive community can be argued to be attained through the literary, wherein the other is allowed space and opportunity.

Through stories, according to Husain, humans can listen to and speak to others – trees, legends, and the spectres we tend to distance ourselves from. By incorporating the spectre in our literary expressions, we may be able to listen to its narrative and share ours beyond the binary between the self and the other. The collective and the community are emphasised by Husain and Bhattacharya, as well as by Basu. Jawed's narrative foregoes the possibility of resonating with the community, focusing on individual alienation; yet, to tell his story, the writer, the reader, and the ghost respond to each other. Haunting and spectrality manifest unprocessed mourning and an elegiac desire for otium. The response to haunting and to the absence of otium, then, lies in resonance, and literature takes the shape of a requiem for these resonating vibrations, phenomenologically, in the musical, in the sonority of response, beyond narrative formulae. Resonance does not entail good or positive feelings but being able to recognise and respond to the other. This has been the argument for reading otium through an emotional approach as well – which does not mean reading otium only through good or positive emotions but to open up space for understanding moods, feelings, and the historical context of individual and community emotions. Emotional involvement with the literary allows a state of contemplation and reflection through resonance that may be shared by literary communities.

Otium is manifested in emotions within the literary. The emotional manifestation is elusively formulated in overtures of music and melody or other sensory systems beyond the fields of semantics, as argued by Jawed's ghost. Nevertheless, the emotional-semantic field can be located within the literary. Responding to Rita Felski's question – of whether resonance theory can help us rethink literary criticism (2020), this chapter, much like the broader study, has attempted to read literature critically but with the intent to respond and resonate with the underlying moods and emotions in the texts, to foreground the concept of otium. Haunting attains a resonance within the literature discussed here, where the texts, as manifested in mourning and longing in the form of literature, provide the muted spectres with the space to wander, idle, and drift. Otium then emerges as an experience in emotions invoked in the literary and through literature, where it can be located as resonance amidst the asynchronicity of being.

# Coda

*I too am dying out from Calcutta, tram.*
*Written off because I'm too slow, obstinate, unprofitable.*
Nabarun Bhattacharya[391]

In Nabarun Bhattacharya's Bengali poem "*Ṭrām*" (2020 [2004]), the slighted poet indulges in a reflective monologue with the sedentary vehicle, a remnant of the metropolitan's past. A mode of transportation introduced to the city by its colonial administrators, familiarised by the local inhabitants through quotidian habit, cultural visuality and literary imagination, it is a vehicle much mocked in contemporary times. The tram is rendered dysfunctional in the present for its tardiness and its rattling sound as it pointlessly rambles through the metropolis at its own leisurely pace against all sense of efficiency, speed, and traffic. An oft-repeated jocular way of discussing the tram in Calcutta involves exaggerated references to one's rapidly advancing age as one commutes by tram. Other remarks compare the speed of people cycling or swiftly walking past a moving tram as the vehicle reluctantly drudges at a snail's pace, stretching out the feeling of being suspended in time. Interwoven with this sense of slow, inefficient, and sauntering pace, only fit for the purpose of idling away one's time while gazing out of its windows, is an anachronistic sense of ruin embodied by the metropolis, often described as a 'dying city'. References to Calcutta as *dying* echo the feeling of being left behind in the economic-developmental phase of India's rapid market-oriented growth, embodied by younger cities, often reflected in self-mockery, for instance, in the 2012 Bengali film *Bhūṭ'er Bhabiṣyat·* (The future of the past/ghosts).

In a recent article published in *The New York Times*, Emily Schmall proposes 'nostalgia' as an emotion associated with the almost obliterated trams of

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391   "*Tram*" [2004]. Trans. Supriya Chaudhuri. *Nabarun Bhattacharya: Aesthetics and Politics* (2020) n.p. Part of the poem is quoted later in this coda, also in Chaudhuri's translation.

Calcutta, deeming them as quaint as a 'fairy tale'.[392] Not only is the comparison discordant, projecting a superficial imposition of quaintness as a vector of misreading, but it is also inaccurate to identify this sense of ruin as nostalgia. Reading nostalgia in this context, offhandedly, lends to a construction of the past in fetishising emotions and aesthetics. The tram is still operational, and its disadvantages are starkly felt; the nuisance it creates in traffic hardly generates emotions akin to longing or yearning. The emotional association with the tram, of a disjointed past's presence in the present, and possibly the future, is anachronistic against the pace of the twenty-first century, defined by "fast food, debentures, shares, smart money" (Bhattacharya 2020). Nostalgia, as we have seen, is an emotion with an ambiguous range, at times expressed in longing for a lost past and often in the conflicted remembrance of the past in coming to terms with its loss. The past, embodied by the tram, is not lost but continues to persist in the present, with the possibility of doing so in the future – leaving open several questions of temporality. The tram has been an integral factor in Calcutta's journey toward acceleration and escalation and has served as an efficient commute for its millions of workers for years. The past relevance of this once-efficient vehicle is now transformed into the possibility of a leisurely ride in the present context. Once a symbol of modernisation and the city's technological prowess, a signifier of the cosmopolitanism of Calcutta, it is perceived as redundant today. Similarly, once the seat of technological and cultural innovation, the city continues to move at a pace that doesn't sit well with the speed and advancements of the present. Nevertheless, the question of the future haunts both the tram and the city that boasted it once as a 'first' (the first one in Asia, kicked off in 1900). The tram also reminds one of the erasures of the future – a future that, as Schmall's article hints at – will probably not unfurl. The tram's significance in the future has been addressed in grievances and protests by both 'tram-lovers' and those concerned with the future – not of the tram system itself, but of the planet's ecology, calling, instead, for upgrading the sustainable tram system.[393] Not only are such concerns seen as antithetical to the essence of speed and efficiency, but the trams have been almost abolished, barring a few in the city. The poet of the epigraph finds himself in a similar value-exchange approximation, where a future sprawls ahead, with seemingly no necessity for poetry. He contemplates a sympathetic dialogue with the voiceless tram, based on this shared association of anachronistic presence –

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392    Emily Schmall, "Kolkata's 'Fairy Tale' Trams, Once Essential, Are Now a Neglected Relic" (2021).

393    "Kolkata: Tram lovers, activists plan protest against withdrawal" (2019). See also Krishnendu Bandyopadhyay, "Save and modernize trams, demand citizens" (2023).

being out of sync with the times and unable to express their sustainable relevance to the 'smart' present and questions of the future.

The disjoint in temporalities and emotions continues as pressing questions of the future, pace, and peace (an individual as well as a political expression of otium) haunt us on a global scale. The 'smart' present of Bhattacharya's poem is already fleeting, and our present is now being re-formulated in new shapes and shades. Acceleration, techno-capitalism, climate and energy crises, wars and a global-scale pandemic have brought newer transformations in society, within individuals, and between them, not only in a global but also within a planetary framework. Questions of the past are not yet passé, but past approaches to temporalities have culminated in unsuccessful projections of emotional and psychoanalytical dissonance like burnout (Han 2015) and environmental disasters (A. Ghosh 2016). How individuals and communities feel time is constantly shifting, not necessarily in linear vectors, but in multiple fissures and fluidities. Calcutta/Kolkata is not a dying city anymore but a drowning and choking city, like several other urban metropolises across the world. The divides of the north-south and east-west won't hold for long in the looming future, as they currently demonstrate several fissures. The current energy crises in the global north correlate to the incessant transport network and acceleration projects that threaten ecological disasters in the global south. How can we locate otium, emotions, and literature in this fast-changing world where our political and planetary concerns are urgently turned towards stability and sustainability? In this coda, I would like to reflect on the 'global' questions relating to otium and how this study on South Asia or the 'global south' responds to and resonates with these questions. This is not to offer resolutions to any crises mentioned above but to ask how entangled and ambivalent concepts like otium, literature, and emotions are relevant in the ongoing and extensive transformations.

The present study registers two significant aspects in relation to the global transformation of otium, idleness, and leisureliness. On the one hand, otium is seen as contrasted with modernity's accelerated pace; this renders memories of a leisurely pace of life to be processed differently in different emotions – the question of the future, in relation to the past and the present, with regards to *pace*, remains open. Haunting and hope are some ways in which we feel for the future; these emotions regarding otium within the literary have been addressed. Literature continues to remain the space where emotions and otium are experienced and expressed. And one significant possible scope of study is the intermediality of the literary, the ecocritical turn literature has taken, and what is now conceptualised as the Anthropocene (A. Ghosh 2016; Zapf 2016). On the other hand, and closely linked to the first point, otium has to be read in its aspects of privilege and power; in the past, in certain moralist and socio-cultural

recriminations of the underprivileged, often categorised as lazy and indolent (by the privileged sections of society) (Fludernik 2014: 130–31); in the future, the problem of privilege, exclusion, and asymmetrical conceptualisations loom large. As already argued, current trajectories of work-leisure binaries originate in forms of resource management – ecological and human – within frameworks of colonial capitalism (Alatas 1977) as well as forms of knowledge (Cohn 1996). These concerns relate to the first point of pace in the privileged access to time, space, and resources for experiences of otium. But these problems have persisted in the past, and the present alienation, acceleration, and crises are indisputable trajectories of such asymmetrical conceptualisations.

The entanglement of these two aspects has always formed the backdrop of how concepts of the self, embedded within society, are felt, negotiated, and expressed. Locating otium as a function and expression of the self, the context of colonial and postcolonial, multilingual and heterogenous South Asia attains immense significance in responding to these questions. In conflict or collaboration, these two aspects have been central to this study. They have been addressed chronologically – from the colonial to the postcolonial and onto the neo-liberal, and chronotopically – between interactions and encounters, projected within a regional (between South Asian communities) and a global (between South Asia and Europe) framework. In both nexuses, the significance of the 'other' emerges as a key player – in relations (between individuals and communities), in knowledge (of the other, through literature, language, and culture), and in ontological formulations (the human and the non-human). Conceptualising the other has been a critical approach to conceptualising the self (Said 1978) and addressing subjects and sources of the self (Taylor 1989). In conceptualising and naming functions of the other, we observe an enormous asymmetry. As demonstrated in Chapter 1 and elsewhere (Noor 2021), such highly asymmetrical contexts and naming methods require us to look for ways of reading concepts beyond semantic signifiers to grasp the emotional range of such concepts. This transformation of the semantic to the emotional creates the possibility of resonance, a probable trajectory of otium in the future. Resonance, based on a "previous similarity between the subjects", reproduces and amplifies the vibrations of "one subject in another" (Pernau 2021a: 9). Resonance is also a fruitful way of conceptualising the self and other in its pace – the time required for one to acknowledge and recognise the other; and in communication – where language also becomes shared in effect and affect rather than in differences. These two aspects of resonance correlate to experiences of otium and literary conceptualisations. Resonance also hints at the question of a shared space or environment, to which we will shortly return.

Exploring emotions associated with semantic networks has allowed an in-depth understanding of how these experiences are felt and conceptualised. Fur-

thermore, these conceptualisations, too, can, in effect, lead to communication and acceptance of entangled concepts, resulting in resonance within a global conceptual historical framework. Semantic asymmetries can always be overcome, this book demonstrates, if one engages with knowledge of the past (of the self and the other) that is expressed not in semantic data – as colonialist and imperialist modes of knowledge production have established, but in expressions that include and are embedded in emotions – in effect, literature, and other modes of expression. Acquisition of knowledge – i.e., conceptualising the other – must move away from the merely intellectual, since our intellect is not devoid of interests and feelings, to one that includes the emotional, the material, and the sensorial. While knowledge archived in ritual, environmental, and culinary praxis has gained increasing significance in conceptualising methods, the literary, too, has immense potential to open up ways of historicising, unpacking, and exploring the self and the other. In this, otium, literature, and emotions are vital players.

Reading otium, this study demonstrates, entails unpacking the concept by addressing it as entangled, accompanied by literary creativity, innovation, and expression. To explore how otium is negotiated within the literary, I have explored idleness and leisureliness as manifested in emotions. In these manifestations, we witness the nuanced ways in which literature responds to the powerful counterconcepts of otium. Locating emotions as central to the study of the entangled concept of literature with otium, the book reads otium in expressions of nostalgia for leisurely pasts, topophilia as necessary for creativity and enchantment, melancholia as protesting imperialism, acceleration, and capitalism, and notions of civility and pedagogy as mediation of leisureliness in the face of the impending global expansion of neoliberalism. Finally, it suggests new and strategic ways of reading otium in contemporary and future contexts, where the concept embodies an experience that fades away in the background as discrimination and the threat of destruction come to the forefront of literary discourses. In this setting, I conceptualise haunting and being haunted as ways of manifesting otium – in its absence – and as an expression that registers its absolute necessity. Expressions of haunting are also explored to decentre the overarching human of modernity and focus on the relations humans have had – and continue to have – with nature, animals, and alternate forms of consciousness. The recent turn towards the post-human, the environmental, and the ecological foregrounds further avenues of research on otium.

Spectrality can invoke central questions in conceptualising otium, particularly in its decentring of the human. If otium or idleness or leisureliness are functions of the self, reading otium as manifested in haunting directs us to the very nature of this self. The self is not necessarily "self-contained, autonomous, and with a strong sense of interiority" (Pernau 2021b: 115). Foregoing

the modern, Western, post-Enlightenment self, the self in the debates and discussions of this book is seen as subjected to alien rule, conflicted, partitioned, and fissured, but also a self that claims idle and leisurely freedom, that responds to the community and, to the ecology. This reading of otium in emotions within the self and between the self and the other opens up the space for vibrations and responses in the concept of resonance. The case for resonance has already been built in the final chapter with relations between haunting, emotions, and temporalities to recognise and address otium and its deprivation. Along with resonance and emotions, reflection requires some thought before this discussion is left (hopefully, for others to be taken up). Reflection and contemplation have already been acknowledged as central to experiences of otium, but reflection also plays a crucial role in understanding and responding to both emotions as well as the question of human thought, in effect, literary cultures. Instead of accepting that emotions are felt uniformly, the in-depth analysis in each chapter has shown the contexts and conflicts at the core of these emotions and how cultural-political contexts impact emotional attitudes towards notions of leisureliness, idleness, and indolence as entangled with the notions of freedom and selfhood. These emotional attitudes are furthermore negotiated, and at times, regulated through reflection. The literary offers the space for reflection and negotiation. If emotions are not universally felt, what can make them accessible and identifiable is reflecting upon these emotions. In the absence of otium in its reflective form, haunting emerges then as the alternate condition of reflection.

As an analytical tool, hauntology allows us to read otium as the possibility for subversion in the highly unequal society constructed around unsustainable industrialisation, traps of neo-imperialism, incessant consumption, and persistent discrimination. While otium as a lived experience/*Erlebnis* is deemed impossible in this dystopian (but real) version of society, spectrality and haunting manifest unprocessed grief and an elegiac hope for the possibility of otium. Bhattacharya's works grieve the absence of otium through social satire and spectral protagonists. Idle wandering becomes closely linked to the emotion of haunting, as caught between release and being trapped, in the story by Javed. In Basu's novel, a creative transgression for the suppressed woman musician is rendered as intertwined with her other-worldly persona of mythical, celestial singers. Intizar Husain provides literature itself, with its entanglements with the environment and non-human consciousnesses, in the form of the wandering agency of the *story*, as a respite from the unfulfillments of modern life.

The literary allows for the diverse registers of otium, idleness, and leisureliness that emerge in the context of modern South Asia but also in global contexts. In its various readings of multiple genres, multiple spatial-temporal contexts, and a multicultural and multilingual landscape, the study returns to the

opportune *space* for otium, as located within the possibility of expressions, agency, and creativity in the literary sphere. In each context, otium is read in the emotional expressions. This is observed in various contexts – colonialist critique or language elitism, genre hegemony and historicist temporality. In each conflict within the literary sphere, otium continues to manifest as the suppressed but persistent voice to be found in the emotional attitudes and registers of literary innovation. As Wajid Ali's *śauq* (leisurely pursuit) is curbed under colonialist critique in the semantics of debauchery, his emotion for loss is rendered in his heart-wrenching poetry, written in exile. For Rabindranath Tagore, the *ālasya ras*, the taste of idle leisure, is what obstructs the rhythm of his work and daily life; it is also the emotion that drives him to heights of creativity against shackles of 'civilisation', turning his idle days into the 'most productive years' of his life. In exile, feelings of dislocation and unfamiliarity, or *ajnabīyat*, allow Intizar Husain to theorise literature as the friendly ghost and the wise *betāl*, who accompanies the human and enriches his identity. The melancholic, obstinate poet in Bhattacharya's poem, although devoid of all hope, continues to write poetry for the tram, based on their shared asynchronous purposelessness.

> *Yet, tram, with you*
> *the protest march held step;*
> *And sitting in your second-class carriage*
> *the poet of rallies*
> *Sang untunefully,*
> *songs of revolt and freedom.*
> *With your three eyes and rain-soaked lights you were*
> *the unearthly transport of lovers.*

The relevance of the literary is in allowing the space – like the tram – for emotions to flow between individuals within a community of readers and writers, as well as producers of knowledge and culture. If otium is a function of the self, then literature, as the book has argued, is entangled with the literary as a concept. And as a concept, in its relevance to language and social history (Koselleck 2016b: 60–63, 72), literature also emerges as the vehicle for experiences and emotions of otium. Emotional engagement with the literary allows reflection, a reprieve from the alienation of acceleration and discrimination, and a space for expressions of the self, in the feeling of resonance shared by literary communities.[394] Resonance requires a community within which strong emotions can reverberate – and this possibility of a resonating community is already embod-

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[394] I draw this notion of resonance in response to literature and otium, from the works of Hartmut Rosa (2019) as relation, from Rita Felski (2020) as literary criticism, and Margrit Pernau (2021a) as transmitting emotions in a community. See also, Chapter 6.

ied, for South Asian – and arguably several other global – literary cultures, in the very notion of the literary – *sāhitya* (*sahit*/accompanying) and *adab* (an etiquette, a way of living with others). Originating in the lexeme *sahita*, meaning togetherness, "accompanied or attended by", *sāhitya* is a relationship of transaction between the *kavi* or *sāhityakār*, i.e., poet/composer and the *rasika* or reader, who responds, tastes, and enjoys (*rasa*). The transaction of the literary is achieved in the writer's/poet's success in communicating "emotions and ideas", and in the response of the *rasika*, who, in his/her role of the *sahṛdaẏa*, "a companion of the heart", resonates with the poet's utterance.[395]

This emotional and ethical resonance between the poet/composer/visionary and the reader/receiver/follower also resounds in the concept of *adab*. An Arabic concept, *adab*, in its South Asian formulations, is read as a guideline, "on how to live correctly"; literary art and response to literary vision is an integral component of these principles of etiquette, between the *adīb* – the writer/visionary/teacher and the *muṭālaʿa* – the reader, the one who pursues, and contemplates. This transactional relation of the literary and the spiritual realm is reflected in both the *ustād-śāgird* (in literary, musical, and other creative knowledge systems) and the *pīr-murīd* (pertaining to spiritual knowledge) Ṣūfī traditions. Therefore, *adab* (in its literary meaning) is also a concept of resonance, "between inner and outer modes of being and between the individual and social".[396] The sociality of the literary has been addressed in this study through a reading of contextualised literary communities and their emotional collectiveness. *Āḍḍā*, *naśist*, *mahfil*, *majlis*, *muśāʿirah* – are all expressions of sociality of the literary; located in histories of literature and leisure, these formulations of collectives can only function through emotional relations – like remembrance and nostalgia/*yād*, love and longing/*māẏā*, aimless vagabondage/*āvārgī*, melancholic grief/*udāsī*/*biṣād* and familiar civility/*bhadratā,* among others. The literary is thus seen to formulate a sense of community, in which emotions of otium can resonate. These literary communities can resonate and include the underprivileged, the other, and the non-human. Understanding otium as intertwined with the literary in its transgressive creativity and resonance within and

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395    For etymology of *sāhitya*, see Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary (1899) p. 1212. https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/csl-apidev/servepdf.php?dict=MW&page=1212 accessed on 13th February 2022.
See also, K. Krishnamoorthy, "The Meaning of 'Sahitya': A Study in Semantics" (1985), 66. See also Vinay Dharwadker, "Sahitya", *Key Concepts in Modern India Studies* (2015), 237–39. The significance of "*hita*" remains conflicted in both studies, but more significantly, the notion of "association" in the semantic concept is undebatable.

396    Edward Simpson & Farhana Ibrahim, "Adab", *Key Concepts in Modern Indian Studies* (2015), 1–2.

between individuals and communities can enable us to think of literature, emotions, and otium in innovative ways and reconciliatory impulses. Literature and the literary, as spheres of playful creativity, conceptualising the self, and resonating sociality, thus enable otium to manifest itself globally, within identifiable and reverberating emotions across cultures and communities – also, in future possibilities, in aimless wanderings, in enchanted wonderments, in requiems, reminiscences, hopes and longings – in idle and leisurely feelings.

Space is therefore a significant aspect, for resonance to reverberate, for the literary sphere, and for any possibility of otium to be expressed and experienced. This abstract understanding of space is not just a trope but a persistent aspect – in its very intricate links with lexemes and ideas of leisureliness itself – the space-time to do something otiose, returning to the Bengali *avakāś*, the Urdu *fursat* – has to be understood in concrete terms of the space we – i.e., embodiments of the self – inhabit. The possibility of future leisureliness and otium is dependent on the accessibility of this concrete, real space, as already highlighted by Nabarun Bhattacharya's oppressed, spectral, flying humans. If otium is not to be collapsed into topics of consumption and narratives of 'the good life', then the future of otium/leisure studies has to concretely engage with ecological concerns that formulate much of the self as it contains the self. Herein persists a resounding resonance for research on the topic in a global framework, as earth's ecology is the animate, alive agent and the transforming space we all inhabit, in diverse modes of being, feeling, and (not) doing. Otium, a function of the self, must also be seen in response to the space that the self inhabits and affects. The present study, emerging from histories of the so-termed global south, has demonstrated the need to question that self-contained self. For future researchers, the task is to take up these pressing challenges, as our concepts of being, feeling, and (not) doing require deliberations and reorientations for the future of individual, communitarian, and ecological selfhood.

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This book traces a conceptual history of literature, leisure and emotions in modern South Asia. Reading colonial capitalism as entwined with the 'myth of the lazy native', it focuses on vernacular literary contestations. It foregrounds otium, leisure and idleness as entangled with emotions and temporalities, in expressions of the self and community. It identifies literary spheres as emotionally evolving, where discourses of leisure are played out in stylistic innovations, negotiations of colonial modernity and postcolonial uncertainties. Highlighting key expressions, discussions, and processes, it explores nostalgia, melancholy, topophilia and haunting as emotions deeply attached to South Asian literary cultures, while resonating with ideas of otium across global modernity.