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UTOPIAN ART AND LITERATURE FROM MODERN INDIA

Satinath Bhaduri's Bengali Novels *Jagari* (The Vigil) and *Dhorai Charit Manas* as Utopian Literature

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This article analyses two novels in Bengali by Satinath Bhaduri, *Jagari* (1946, translated into English as *The Vigil*) and *Dhorai Charit Manas* (1949–51, translated into English as *Dhorai Charit Manas*). It analyses them as examples of vernacular Indian utopian literature, with specific reference to competing visions of utopia as crystallized in the anti-colonial Quit India Movement in India and to Gandhian notions of utopia. Neither of these novels adopts the well-known and canonical Eurocentric format of a utopian novel, in which a traveller from the outside world goes to a utopian country. Bhaduri's two novels, rather, show us how inhabitants of India in the very last years of British colonialism engage in social dreaming, with Gandhian utopia, and critiques thereof, as central themes. Gandhi's modern and radically non-Eurocentric reinvention of utopia—driven through the topoi of Ramrajya, of the ashram as utopian locus and of the oceanic circle of future Indian villages—demands a reconsideration of utopian writing. Both novels discussed in this article represent Gandhian utopian themes, but both also critique idealized Gandhian utopianism. Gandhian, socialist, communist and militant social dreaming play dialogically through the novels. This article traces the utopian impulse in these novels, as well as their ways of opening out multiple utopian programmes.

This article analyses two novels in Bengali, or Bangla, by Satinath Bhaduri, *Jagari* (translated into English as *The Vigil*) and *Dhorai Charit Manas* (translated into English as *Dhorai Charit Manas*). It analyses them as examples of vernacular Indian utopian literature, with specific reference to competing visions of utopia as crystallized in the anti-colonial Quit India Movement of the 1940s in India, originally called for by M. K. Gandhi (henceforth referred to as the Quit India Movement). That modern India, as a highly diverse, culturally rich, populous, multilingual and geopolitically influential sub-continent in the world, has produced much utopian art and literature is not surprising. Bill Ashcroft's volume *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures* (2016), a key recent scholarly monograph that considers Indian literature from the colonial and post-Independence periods in relation to utopianism and to postcolonial studies, sees postcolonial utopianism structured firmly round critique, offering a vision of utopia positing transformation of coercive power, and offering, as in Salman Rushdie's writings, various fluid, destabilized hybrid utopian worlds as alternatives. Ashcroft sees utopia constantly adumbrated but never secured in postcolonial utopian writing, with Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi and Salman Rushdie being his foremost examples from India. There is little engagement with *bhashas* or vernacular art and literature from India in Ashcroft's book, though.

Satinath Bhaduri's novel *Jagari* or *The Vigil* (1946, henceforth *The Vigil*) takes the form of four first-person narratives. Of the four narrators, Bilu is a young anti-colonial activist (affiliated to the socialist wing of the anti-colonial Indian National Congress Party) who is sentenced to death in a prison in eastern India by hanging because of his role in the Quit India Movement. Bilu's voice and those of his father, mother and brother narrate the novel. On the night before Bilu will be hanged, he, his father, brother and mother reflect on the circumstances that led to this jailing and execution, and each tells the story from their perspective. The family is Bengali, though they live in Purnia district, an area which is now part of the post-Independence province of Bihar, a neighbour of the current Indian province of West Bengal. Bilu's father is a headmaster of a boys' school and resigns from his job to found a Gandhian ashram in which his wife and two sons also live. The whole family becomes part of the Quit India Movement that started in 1942. Bilu's brother Nilu, a Communist,

deposed against Bilu and supported the British war effort during the Second World War, in line with the view of the Communist party of India that this was an anti-Fascist people's war. Bhaduri, like his protagonist Bilu, distanced himself from middle-class Bengalis through active participation in Congress Socialist politics, his imprisonment for participation in the Quit India Movement and his socio-politically critical, and stylistically and linguistically experimental, writing.

Satinath Bhaduri's other classic novel in Bengali, *Dhorai Charit Manas* (1949–1951, henceforth *Dhorai*), has as its protagonist Dhorai, a male member of the Tatma or Tattama marginalized lower caste (a caste consisting originally of weavers), who inhabits a village in fictive Jirania (real-life Purnia) district. Dhorai slowly awakens to political consciousness, becoming a Gandhian activist and, later, a militant anti-colonial actor. *Dhorai* distances itself from the idiom and world of prosperous middle-class Bengalis, in Bihar and elsewhere, the grouping that Bhaduri himself belonged to. The title of *Dhorai Charit Manas* alludes to *Ramcharitmanas*, the sixteenth-century version of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, written in the Awadhi language by Tulsidas. Bhaduri's novel makes the lower-caste Dhorai, not the powerful, privileged king Ram of the *Ramayana*, its hero. Dhorai embraces Gandhi's modern and non-Eurocentric reinvention of utopia, Ramrajya (Sargent, 2010: 73; Dutton, 2010: 240–241), which itself is a reinvention of the idea of a utopia ruled by the Hindu ruler Ram in the epic poem the *Ramayana* and is a vision that demands a reconsideration of utopian writing. Bhaduri's novel, adding further layers of complexity, I argue, can be seen as an intertextual version of the *Ramayana*.

I argue that these two novels by Bhaduri, vernacular (*bhasha*) narratives from India, are utopian narratives that majorly change our global map of utopian imagination in literature. Such vernacular novels have not been analysed by Ashcroft, nor have their innovative utopian form and content been acknowledged by scholars of utopia, except by Anupama Mohan (2012). Mohan specifically discusses utopian treatments of the village in India and South Asia-related modern literature; she however also does not analyse Bhaduri's vernacular utopian fictions about the anti-colonial struggle. Neither of Bhaduri's novels adopts the well-known, Eurocentric format of a utopian novel or narrative, in which a traveller from the outside world

goes to a utopian country, narratives written frequently from a white or colonial perspective, and with colonialism or white supremacy being integral characteristics of the utopian land. In such tales, the traveller usually confronts the possibilities and limitations of her own world in dialogue with the nature and possibilities of the utopian country (think of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) or of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) as examples). Bhaduri's two novels, rather, show us how inhabitants of India in the very last years of British colonialism engage in social dreaming, Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of utopianism (2010: 5); such novels show how plural and contested visions of an ideal Indian society are, with the Quit India Movement of 1942 as a backdrop to this. As represented in Bhaduri's novels, the inhabitants of this India, or, rather, a very particular region in it, think, imagine and act in order to transform the society around them into a utopia or a locus of the good, desired and ideal, while these characters also confront gaps between the ideal and their reality. Sargent identifies three faces of utopianism: the literary utopia; utopian practice; and utopian social theory (2010: 5): Bhaduri's novels illuminate, from an Indian vernacular perspective, all these three dimensions.

Bhaduri's novels enable us to see how intricately intertwined utopian literature, utopian thinking, history and politics are; in particular, the dream of decolonization and of an Indian nation are at the heart of how these novels relate utopia, history and politics. Ashcroft has argued that India offers a striking example 'of the imbrication of an anti-national utopianism and the formation of the nation state' (2016: 114). Ashcroft analyses Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, first published in Gujarati in 1909 and then translated into English by Gandhi, and views it as anti-nationalist, anti-modern and anti-capitalist (2016: 114). Gandhi's vision provided 'the spiritual energy for Nehru's nation state' of independent India (Ashcroft, 2016: 114): Ashcroft acutely picks up on the paradox of such a text forming one of the inspirations of the post-Independence Indian nation-state, in which nationalism and capitalism were espoused. Ashcroft also notes how critical Rabindranath Tagore, poet, educator and friend of Gandhi, was about nationalism and valorizing of the nation (2016: 114). However, reading Ashcroft, one could be left thinking that in order to understand anti-colonial Indian utopian literature, one needs to think about the nation state

and about nationalism, not about alternative, multiple narrations of the nation. The present writer, on the other hand, concurs with Priyamvada Gopal, who has argued in her outstanding study of literary radicalism in India that the nation was a site for many alternative, contested narratives articulated in Indian vernacular and Anglophone literature: 'Aesthetics and politics were to be articulated together in unprecedented ways even as the precise modalities of that partnership were to remain open to debate from the 1930s into the late 1950s' Gopal writes (2005: 2).

The social dreaming of decolonization and the imagination of stories of an emergent nation by politically radical writers, such as Bhaduri, imbued Indian literature not with a putative monolithic, West-derived ideological homogeneity. Rather, like the works analysed by Gopal of progressive writers such as Sajjad Zaheer, Sadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai and Rasheed Jahan in vernacular languages such as Urdu, Bhaduri's fictions play with contestations around dreams and movements for a nation. Scholarship by Gopal, Prasenjit Duara (1996: 205) and Aijaz Ahmad (1987), among others, has reiterated that we need to see writers and intellectuals from spaces such as India and China, during periods of the anti-colonial struggle, as reinventing and contesting monolithic, reductive notions of the nation. Such contestations and polyvalent narrations decentre any reductive notion of the nation as a Western and imperial concept. This article further argues that the novels discussed articulate both utopian impulses and utopian programmes, to use a distinction formulated by Fredric Jameson. I also argue that these novels demonstrate that utopias do not have to read as being empty of densities and heterogeneities, and that utopia and history are not opposed but supplementary.

Bhaduri was born in 1906 in Purnia, Bihar. He was the son of a lawyer and also studied law, in which he obtained an undergraduate degree, and economics, in which he obtained a postgraduate degree. He became an activist, espousing the anti-colonial nationalist party, the Indian National Congress, after some years of practising law in the city of Patna in the 1930s. He went to jail from 1940–41 and from 1942–45. After Independence, Bhaduri joined the Socialist Party, having lost faith in the Congress Party. *Jagari* was Satinath's first novel, for which he received in 1950 the very first Rabindra Puraskar, a leading prize awarded for literature published in Bengali. Bhaduri died in 1965.

On 8 August, 1942, the Congress Party passed a resolution asking the British to quit India; it urged every Indian to use *ahimsa* (non-violence) to bring about a breakdown of the colonial order in the country. The Quit India Movement lasted from 9 August 1942 till 5 May 1944, when Gandhi was released from prison. With Gandhi in prison and the British colonial government adamant about their stance of continuing to govern India, the later phases of the Movement saw violence, destruction of government property and attacks on railway lines and stations, trams, buses and post offices. Notwithstanding mass arrests and use of the Air Force on the part of the British, it took until 1943 for the colonial government to regain control. After Gandhi's release from prison in May 1944, the Movement died down.

Bilu's and Nilu's father moved his family to a Gandhian ashram that he founded; Dhorai becomes a Gandhian activist. Before we move on to consider Bhaduri's novels, we shall consider the ashram and Ramrajya as two kernels for Gandhi's imagination and practice of utopia, articulated in many writings by him, notably in his *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi takes a normative view of the Indian village as utopian community, offering a frontal challenge to British colonial structures of governmentality and metropolitan power. In this context, the metaphor of the oceanic circle of villages in India is also powerful in Gandhi's thought. The ashram is a utopian locus for collectivity. The ashram is a place that enshrines a longing for the good, as well as realizations of the gap between the ideal and the real. Political scientists Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph have argued (Rudolph and Rudolph, 2010: 140–174) that the Gandhian ashram helped to forge a civil society and a public sphere that were an alternative to British colonial collectivity. Emphasizing the value and practice of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (a passion for truth and civil disobedience), the Gandhian ashram and village are typical sites of quotidian practices such as the spinning of khadi cotton. Gandhian espousal of the ashram, of spinning cloth and of village regeneration movements, need to be seen as part of other reformist movements that had swept through different parts of South Asia since the mid-nineteenth century. Many of these had been led by non-elite reformers such as the Dalit Mali activist, writer and educator Jyotiba Phule in western India and Sree Narayana Guru, from the Ezhava community, in Kerala. Gandhi, influenced partly

also by European utopian thinkers such as Lev Tolstoy and John Ruskin, first built Phoenix Farm in Durban and Tolstoy Farm in Transvaal, both in South Africa; later, he established the Sabarmati Ashram in present-day Gujarat and Sevagram in Wardha in present-day India. Austerity, manual work and cultivation of indigenous crafts were central to Gandhi's view of the ashram as utopian place of renovation. Gandhi's friend, associate and critical interlocutor, Tagore, belonged to a utopian community of Santiniketan ('abode of peace') in rural Bengal, which featured among other elements a school, a university and a centre for rural development. This was built up on the model of a Vedic ashram, and was, paradoxically, also highly internationalist.

Another kernel in Gandhi's utopian ideas and imagination is Ramrajya, a place infused with harmonious social justice, a place with a just order and rule. Krishan Kumar argued that 'there is no real tradition of utopia and utopian thought outside the western world' (2003: 72); Gandhi's notion of Ramrajya is one among many examples that refutes Kumar's claim. Gandhi writes as someone steeped in the world of the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, recounting the trials and victory of upper-caste king Ram. In tellings and retellings of the *Ramayana*, there was much emphasis on Ramrajya as a just social order. That women or lower-caste men and women did not always fare very well in this supposedly just order was also clear. Gandhi decides to create his own notion of Ramrajya, in which Hindus, Muslims and indeed members of all religions, races and genders would flourish. Gandhi wrote:

[B]y Ramrajya I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by Ramrajya, a divine raj, the kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of truth and righteousness. Whether Ram of my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, the ancient ideal of Ramrajya is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure. (1929: 305)

As the passage above demonstrates, Gandhi is writing while seeing himself as part of a tradition and ideal passed on from ancient times, one which is not centred on Europe, with references to Ram and Rahim, which are South Asian names for

God used respectively by Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi emphasizes the promise of Ramrajya, extracted also from this ancient Hindu and South Asian tradition, to offer direct justice to humble and poor citizens. Gandhi's Ramrajya is a utopian imagining, expressed in writing, of a society and polity that is wished for and dreamed about, but also worked towards, through, notably, rural reconstruction:

It can be religiously translated as Kingdom of God on Earth; politically translated, it is perfect democracy in which inequalities based on possession and non-possession, colour, race or creed or sex vanish; in it, land and State belong to the people, justice is prompt, perfect and cheap and, therefore, there is freedom of worship, speech and the press—all this because of the reign of the self-imposed law of moral restraint. Such a state must be based on truth and non-violence, and must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and village communities. It is a dream that may never be realized. I find happiness in living in that dreamland, ever trying to realize it in the quickest way. (Gandhi 1999: 104)

Ramrajya is an unsectarian vision of society fundamentally based in village life, which again formed the basis for Gandhi's idea of the oceanic circle of the innumerable villages of India, a utopian locus, where truth and simplicity are enshrined in Gandhi's view of India's ideal future:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and,

therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it. If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first or, in other words, no one is to be the first and none the last. (2008: 158–159)

Note that Gandhi sees utopia as analogous to the point in Euclidean geometry: at once real and unreal, at once an ideal and a deeper reality. Note also the image of such villages where 'the last is equal to the first': this is clearly a reference to John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860), the core ideas of which Gandhi translated into Gujarati in 1908 as *sarvodaya* ('the uplift of all'). Ruskin's critique of capitalism, and his alternative idea of creating societies and economies that would have meaningful work at good wages, and that would empower those who have the least power in society, clearly appealed to Gandhi, who appropriates Ruskinian critiques of wage capitalism and assimilates them into his notion of the utopian oceanic circle of the Indian village. Europe is decentred from this vision, and elements borrowed from European thinkers who were at odds with their own industrial-capitalist societies are assimilated into an India-centred rural utopian vision.

Northrop Frye (1965) contrasted the speculative myth of utopia to the social contract; in his framing, utopia leans to the future, social contract to the past. Yet much Indian utopian imagination and practice, including the Gandhian, show that past and future are deeply connected in the social dreaming of utopia, and that community, family, caste, individual and formations-in-the-making such as nation are also intimately connected: village India is for Gandhi part of the past and the present of India, and village India provides the basis for future regeneration. Bhaduri, too, is very good at showing this connection between past and future. The colonial order in India was never based on a social contract yet tried to function as if sovereignty had been vested in the past in British colonial rule by the agreement of the Indian

people. Bhaduri's two novels show steps in the journey towards an imagined community of the nation of the future, with India's own vernacular past and present, not colonialism, offering visions of such futures, and with highly utopian contours combining social dreaming and a sense of a gap between that which is desired and the actual practice or achievement.

The utopian futures are that of a putative Indian nation, yet there are many possible visions of that utopia, exemplified by the views of the two different brothers, the father and the mother in *The Vigil*. My argument in this article offers a critical supplement to that of Supriya Chaudhuri, who writes, about *The Vigil* and in an article on resonances of Woolfian modernism in India, that the novel:

Is also in some ways an allegory of the nation, since the revolutionary is finally reprieved at daybreak. Set against the background of the Quit India movement of August 1942, *Jagari* embeds the personal within the political, creating an intricate web of memory, feeling, and experience that connects the prisoner with his brother, father, and mother, and yet isolates and alienates him. (2016: 462)

In the end, the ultimate state punishment of hanging is averted for Bilu, but Bhaduri does justice to many different kinds of social dreaming without writing out the individual and the private sphere; this he also does in *Dhorai*. The nation, I would argue, is shown as comprised of multiple, contestatory claimants, with different views about the utopia of a decolonized India. The father and mother of Bilu and Nilu are in prison, like Bilu, for being Gandhian anti-colonial activists. The father says, while he is spinning khadi cloth on the *charkha* in true Gandhian spirit, in the prison:

How can so many people spin by the light of only two lanterns? Where can we get more light? ... This is not merely the spinning of so many yards of cotton thread. The wheel has a special significance. It is the only weapon we have with which to restore the golden age of Ram. The reign of Ram will be the reign of love, of Gouranga. People shall forget hatred and violence. They will work, eat and live together in happiness. No one shall be in want.

Milch cows will be in every cowshed grain, every bin. We draw nearer to our objective with every yard that is spun. Each helps the other. The rich shall give homestead lands to the poor. The villagers will no longer look outside for the things they need. All the ways in which the poor are exploited will be blocked... Large numbers of political workers are forsaking our way. It has become the fashion to be a Socialist whether you understand Socialism or not, agree or not. The boys were brought up in a way and so taught that I was led to think it would never be possible for them to abandon our ideals... Russia is drawing everybody's attention. The Vedas, our great epics, the wise men of old, the whole history of our country is being forgotten. Is Russia greater than your country? We also studied history, the history of many countries including Russia and India. We thrilled to the immortal stories of Mazzini, Garibaldi, Washington, Kossuth. Their example inspired us when we were students. But we didn't forget the glory of Sivaji. We have not forgotten the teaching of Vivekananda, or abandoned it for the gibberish of Marxism. I don't consider Stalin greater than Gandhi. Why shouldn't you read the writings of foreign thinkers? Read them. Did we not study Bentham, Spencer, Mill? Must you forget yourselves completely? Or forget what is your own? If I had tried to explain all this to Bilu when he joined the Congress Socialist party, things might have turned out differently. (Bhaduri, 1965: 69–70)

This is a passage that brings out the conflicts in ideology between the older and younger generation in the family. These are competing visions of an ideal society, of utopia. We have the Gandhian, somewhat pastoral notion of Ramrajya, with the notion, steeped in nostalgia, of the return of a golden age of Ram, with valorization of village labour, milkgiving cows, village harvest and community solidarity. The heroes of nineteenth-century European nationalist movements, and of nineteenth-century British utilitarianism, Social Darwinism and liberalism are positively invoked. We also have the competing utopias of Communism and Socialism which the father finds alien and unattractive (though, interestingly, the older kinds of foreign, liberal and nationalist ideology are acceptable to him). It is well established in scholarship

that Communism and Socialism are key sites of utopian (and dystopian) imagination (Sargent, 2010: 102–103, 39). There is also in this passage an absence of references that one might associate with the Islamic, Buddhist and Christian parts of India's heritage. The father and mother seem rather conservative on matters of religion and regional affiliation, with the father elsewhere ruling the fact that his wife, more conservative than he, even objected to his son's marrying a young woman because she was not Bengali.

The economics of maintaining a utopian community proves daunting for the father's ashram. Trying to maintain a self-sufficient, austere economic cycle on the basis of the labour of the occupants does not prove easy:

There were many who, in the name of the Congress, offered me financial assistance. I refused to accept it. Other Ashrams are maintained by subscriptions but that was forbidden in my ashram from the start. Once you accept subscriptions it becomes impossible to be impartial and courageous in your work and so difficult not to lose one's self-respect. My affairs had come almost to a standstill for want of money when I was informed that an allowance of seventy-five rupees a month had been granted by the Gandhi Seva Sangh. Gandhiji seems to know everything. (Bhaduri, 1965: 91)

The ashram tries to survive by hiring out two ox carts, extracting oil from an oil press, manufacturing washing soap and holding agencies for several newspapers (Bhaduri, 1965: 91–92). Bee-keeping and silkworm-farming are also undertaken but prove not to be profitable activities. The vegetables grown in the ashram gardens keep all in the community fed, however. The father's account of his Gandhian ashram helps us to understand that utopian dreaming and practice would go together in many anti-colonial actors' lives and work, Without the civil society space of the ashram, between private and public spheres, so fostered by Gandhi, the anti-colonial movement would not have had such a socially embedded and renovating character. One can also argue that this paternal and paternalistic space of the Gandhian ashram helps to nurture a more revolutionary, socialist kind of utopian imagination and practice, as well as

a different politics: the father teaches his sons to believe in anti-colonialism, to be committed to one's political beliefs and to act in accordance with them. Both the sons become socialists and are, while continuing to love each other, also in sharp disagreement, to a point that leaves the father despairing:

The aims and concerns of both Nilu's and Bilu's parties are the same though their methods differ. Can the consequences go so far? A party which depends upon public opinion for its support should take as its sole duty the task of explaining to the public the mistakes of other parties and, in pointing out those mistakes, draw people from erroneous ways into their own. Nilu, you have certainly misunderstood your instructions. (Bhaduri, 1965: 93)

Allowing us, as *The Vigil* does, to see males active in politics interacting with the private space of the family gives a particularly novel view of dreams, ideals and practical politics in India in the 1940s; the principal female figure in this novel on the whole has to move in tandem with her husband's views and is unable to influence her sons' behaviour, except by acting conservatively to prevent Bilu from marrying outside the known bounds of the family's regional grouping.

What of *Dhorai*? Shirshendu Chakrabarti (1984) shows how over the course of the novel *Dhorai* changes, how rural society changes and how through his inner and physical journeys, the novel shows a movement into the matrix of history, with *Dhorai* becoming an active agent of history. This article broadly concurs with Chakrabarti's fine, lucid argument, but notes that the frame of social dreaming or utopia adds layers of complexity to this putative passage to historical consciousness. The desire for the good, and a gap between desire and actuality, so characteristic of utopian imagination, both remain inescapable in *Dhorai*.

Partha Chatterjee, meanwhile, writes, in his book *The Politics of the Governed* (2004), from the disciplinary perspective of political science, of the nation in heterogeneous time and analyses *Dhorai* in this context. He critiques Benedict Anderson's view of the empty homogeneous time of the European nation state, terming this time the utopian time of capital (Chatterjee, 2004: 6). Such an empty, homogeneous, utopian

time of capital linearly connects past, present and future, creating the possibility for all of those historicist imaginings of identity, nationhood, progress and so on that Anderson's work has made so familiar to us. For Chatterjee, the real space of modern life consists of Foucauldian heterotopia. Time here is heterogeneous, unevenly dense. For Chatterjee, utopia and the homogeneous, empty, unreal time of the European nation-state are congruent; Foucault's heterotopia, embodied in liminal real spaces such as prisons, brothels and cemeteries, are closer to Bhaduri's representation of time in a postcolonial country such as India. Chatterjee writes:

Let me discuss in some detail an example of the continuing tension between the utopian dimension of the homogeneous time of capital and the real space constituted by the heterogeneous time of governmentality and the effects produced by this tension on efforts to narrativize the nation. (2004: 8)

Chatterjee further writes:

“Where does this road begin? Where does it end? [Dhorai] doesn't know. Perhaps no one knows. Some of the carts are loaded with maize, others bring plaintiffs to the district court, still others carry patients to the hospital. In his mind, Dhorai sees shadows that suggest to him something of the vastness of the country.” The nation is coming into shape. Satinath sends off his hero into an epic journey toward the promised goal, not of kingdom because this is no longer the mythical age of Rama, but of citizenship. (2004: 12–13)

Chatterjee's acute article misses much, however: *Dhorai* is to be read intertextually with a utopian vision of India, centred in the village, called Ramrajya, a highly unique re-visioning of aspects of the *Ramayana* and a re-visioning formulated by Gandhi, the single most important political leader who helped bring India to independence. Gandhi, or Gandhi Baa as Dhorai terms him, is certainly a central figure straddling history and myth in *Dhorai*. The anti-colonial politics of the lower-class, lower-caste individual Dhorai is not just a journey towards citizenship on the paved, metalled road he is building towards the nation—rather, the novel dramatizes and performs

competing kinds of social dreaming of utopia, which can be captured by the term nation as long as we agree that the nation, as Gopal (2005) and Ahmad (1987) argue, is a contested narrative.

Moreover, this article disagrees significantly about utopia definitionally being associated with empty homogeneous time and capital. That position takes utopia as a static, homogenizing concept: the thrust of much of utopian studies has argued otherwise. Mohan makes very good use of the concept of heterotopia, seeing Foucauldian heterotopia as spaces where social ambivalences can thrive and diversity and difference can be negotiated, but she also concedes that this is an impulse that utopia too can share, as a space for transformation and amelioration (2012: 9), and this article concurs. While Foucault evolved the term heterotopia partly as a critique of the term utopia, which he sees as nostalgic and homogenizing, there is much to critique as regards Foucault's ironing out of the punning irony in the term 'utopia': the good and the fictive, a locus to enshrine values, and an ironizing, distancing impulse are both to be found in utopia. Utopia, when studied from perspectives such as those from urban studies, architecture and sociology, must grapple constantly with practice and with the real; it is not some putative, unreal, entirely imagined and idealized object or concept. Mohan, meanwhile, uses yet another term, homotopia, to signal 'those visions of unified collectivity where an aggressively homogenizing impulse operates and where unity is a form of collective gathering of one or two co-ordinates (race/language/religion) and the deliberate repudiation and exclusion of others' (2012: 8–9). This categorization is particularly useful for understanding fundamentalist religio-political utopias, whether claiming to be Hindu, Islamic or Christian, that neither Gandhi nor Bhaduri espouses.

Dhorai, in both volumes, represents caste, community and politics, including Congress-led anti-British politics and petty political ploys by moneyed and upper-caste Congress politicians who attempt to reinforce class and caste hierarchies in the ever more powerful movement against British colonialism. Bhaduri's novelised utopia seeks to find modes of narration and handling of temporality that bring together myth and legend and historical consciousness. With the novel structured into *kāndas*

(chapters, the same term that is used to name the chapters in the *Ramayana*), it intertextually references that Hindu epic. As I have suggested, the chapters also allude to the Gandhian, modern utopia of the rule of Rama, with, however, Dhorai as the lower-caste protagonist as the new epic hero. Ipshita Chanda shows that the use of language in the novel brings to life multiple linguistic registers and multiple registers of caste, class and region. The novel, Chanda writes:

Is written in Bangla about the experiences of people who live in a cultural milieu in which the language is spoken, but it fractures the cultural discourse of the language-world by placing the Bangla and the Bengali in the context of a number of intertwined historical discourses of class, caste and gender that are foreign to it. (Bhaduri, 2013: xiii)

This is a plurivocal universe where language itself allows us to see hierarchies, notably those of class and caste, decentring in particular an upper-caste male Bengali perspective.

Dhorai, who belongs to the lower-caste Tatma (weaver community), has around him other communities, such as the Dhangars (scavengers), who are part of India's aboriginal or indigenous people, specifically the Oraons. Many Oraons are viewed as untouchables by the Tatmas and the Bhangars, many of whom are converted Christians and are proscribed from mingling or intermarriage with the Tatmas. Dhorai, having lost his father in his childhood and been adopted and brought up by Baa, a priest, ascetic and devotee of Ram, imbibes many of Baa's values, including socializing with the Dhangars. Dhorai engages himself in road construction with the Dhangars: given that the Tatmas find this kind of work beneath their caste's dignity, Dhorai faces criticism. Against the wishes of many members of the Tatma community, Dhorai marries Ramiya, a stranger to the village. Suspicious of a possible intimacy between his friend Samurai, a Christian, and his wife, Dhorai leaves the marriage. He goes to another, faraway village named Koiretola, to look after tobacco fields. Here, Rajput landowners exploit marginal *adhiyars* (agriculturists without land) and the Rajput landowner and his son represented in the novel, both Congress members, manipulate anti-colonial politics to further their own power and profit.

Dhorai slowly becomes a leader of marginal, poor people of Koiretola. He becomes a Gandhian and sings 'songs ... about the way to establish Ramrajya. Bhajans to spread the glory of Ramchandraji and Mahatmaji' (Bhaduri, 2013: 247). But eventually, without giving up his allegiance to Gandhi, he joins an armed militant unit called the Azad Dasta (later renamed Krantidal or Revolutionary Party), a unit similar to many which were part of the Quit India Movement in its militant phase. The different members of the unit are given new names (such as Patel and Gandhi, after these two Congress leaders), and Dhorai's name becomes Ramayan, after the *Ramayana*. When he nurses a boy from his original village back to recovery, Dhorai wonders if the boy is the child of his wife Ramiya and Samurai. He returns to his original village, but finds that this is not so, and that in fact his wife had died in childbirth.

Dhorai is Bhaduri's Ram: not an upper-caste king, as the protagonist of the *Ramayana* had been, but from the weaver caste. Ram had been exiled by his father unjustly; later, his wife Sita had been abducted by king Ravana. Ram fights a war and recovers Sita, is crowned and has two sons with Sita. This is the version of the *Ramayana* we find in the *Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsidas. Charit literature narrates the lives and exploits of heroes, notably kings and saints (Chanda, 2003). In this article, I choose to make an intertextual analysis of Dhorai and of Gandhi's Ramrajya in relation to the longer ancient epic, the *Ramayana*, that Tulsidas, Gandhi and Bhaduri all rework. In certain versions of the *Ramayana*, Ram, after defeating Ravana, subjects Sita to a trial by fire to prove her chastity and even exiles her, to discover, some years later, that she has had two sons by him, sons whom he acknowledges. Such versions of the *Ramayana* are also intertextually crucial for understanding *Dhorai*. The novel ends with Dhorai feeling 'completely alone in the world today. The weight of his own solitary heart almost chokes the breath out of him' (Bhaduri, 2013: 337). Dhorai decides, as an armed militant wanted by the British for his anti-colonial activities, to surrender to the government. The novel ends on a note of irony. Dhorai's fellow-revolutionaries of the Kranti Dal say that he is surrendering because the government had already decided to let the important Congress leaders (like Gandhi) out of prison, the implication being that Dhorai too will be set free if he surrenders. The word 'Dhorai' is related to the cognate word *dhora* or poisonless

snake: the closing lines of the novel state that like such snakes, Dhorai cannot poison others while alive (Bhaduri, 2013: 338). Dhorai, protagonist of this unusual novel, is a marginal inhabitant of India, who learns to engage in a struggle to decolonize, and his endeavour is not to gain power or munificence for himself through anti-colonial politics, unlike many others, higher in the hierarchy of caste and class in India, who exploit Congress politics to aggrandize themselves.

We need plural modes of analysis allowing different kinds of focalization and distances that allow one to evaluate utopian impulses and programmes, such as those found in Bhaduri's novels, critically. In Bhaduri's two novels, I trace a utopian impulse, but also ways of opening out multiple utopian programmes. This distinction between utopian impulse and utopian programme has been made by quite a few scholars, but Fredric Jameson articulates it especially well:

We would therefore do better to posit two distinct lines ... the one intent on the realization of the utopian program, the other an obscure yet omnipresent utopian impulse finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and practices. The first of these lines will be systemic, and will include revolutionary political practice, when it aims at founding a whole new society, alongside written exercises in the literary genre... The other line of descent is more obscure and more various, as befits a protean investment in a host of suspicious and equivocal matters: liberal reforms and commercial pipe dreams, the deceptive yet tempting swindles of the here and now, where utopia serves as the mere lure and bait for ideology (hope being after all also the principle of the cruelest confidence games and of hucksterism as a fine art). (2010: n.p.)

Jameson sees much explicitly utopian literature presenting a utopian programme, while he sees the utopian impulse presenting itself in places, including texts, that do not appear at first sight to be utopian, but which can be read allegorically as utopian. I disagree with Jameson in that many written, literary narrative texts can and do bridge the utopian impulse and the utopian programme. Utopian writing is not a static or frozen form, and arguably to see it this way is to buy into a limiting,

highly reductive, Eurocentric literary generic taxonomy of utopian, one which novels such as Bhaduri's do not fit, as I have argued in this article. Utopian writing can also enshrine the utopian impulse, as in the writings of Satinath Bhaduri. And texts from parts of the world such as South Asia pose enormously instructive challenges to facile generalizations about utopia, helping us re-value heterogeneities and non-linearities in global utopian imagination. Utopia, it is my contention, can accommodate heterogeneity, anti-teleological ways of reading and non-linearities, while making us reflect on the future and on the nature of representation itself. The Bengali middle-class upper-caste schoolmaster and his young leftist sons, and the young Tatma lower-caste man and his fellows from the Tatma and Dhangar communities, are represented in *The Vigil* and in *Dhorai* in an intertwining of social dreaming and spinning and weaving of the threads of history. This takes place in *Dhorai* in intertextual and often ironic references to episodes from the *Ramayana*. Part of a classic canonical quartet of Bengali male Modernist writers from the twentieth century (the others being Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, Tarasankar Bandopadhyay and Manik Bandopadhyay), Bhaduri, who, as we earlier remarked, resisted assimilation to upper-caste Bengaliness, creates novels where different kinds of social dreaming, Gandhian and socialist, elite and lower-class, are represented dialogically.

Dhorai shows that the reality of village India was riven by corruption, inequalities and petty struggles for power in which anti-colonial parties also participated, contrary to Gandhi's rosy image of village India as utopia. *Dhorai* does not negate the Gandhian dream of Ramrajya, rather showing that this dream of a just society and polity might need to include and recognise the crucial role of lower-class, lower-caste villagers in the transformation from the now-here to the desired-there of utopia; equally, attention decentres in Bhaduri's fiction from Ram the monarch and the centre shifts to the marginal Dhorai, a new hero of a tale which ends not in celebration but rather in tempered realizations and sobering decisions. *Dhorai* offers a realistic utopia encapsulating a period of decolonization and movements for democratization in India. Neither Bhaduri nor Gandhi espoused a view of India as being for Hindus only, or to be dominated by religio-political fundamentalists, whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian: utopia, arguably, as a heuristic, speculative

approach to social dreaming, allows the uncovering and unmasking of homotopia espousing the dominance of any one religion or religious ideology. In this context, it is also important to remember that many Ramayanas are part of the plural tradition of India, with work by scholars such as Paula Richman (1991) and Nabaneeta Dev Sen (1998) having uncovered women's and lower-caste people's critical perspectives on Ram in relation to women and lower castes, from medieval times to recent times. Women re-writers of the *Ramayana* include Chandrabati (in medieval Bengali), Molla (in medieval Telugu) and contemporary Marxist-feminist Ranganayakamma (Telugu). Recent anthologies of speculative fiction such as *Breaking the Bow*, coedited by Vandana Singh, feminist and environmentalist speculative writer, and Anil Menon, continue that tradition in another genre.

Bhaduri's two novels discussed in this article allow us to see that utopias are contested. They demonstrate that utopias do not have to read as emptied of densities and heterogeneities, and that utopia and history are not necessarily opposed but supplementary. Bhaduri was involved in the politics of anti-colonial nationalism for many years, but he wrote the majority of his novels after Indian independence, when he lived quietly, engaged in literary representation and re-imagination and at a distance from the social dreaming that fuelled the anti-colonial movement. Lila Ray, translator of *Jagari*, writes:

After India became free Sri Satinath Bhaduri retired from politics. He lives quietly at home, absorbed in his books and his garden. His favourite subjects are Philosophy and Sanskrit. He is an authority on plants. He enjoys the companionship of old friends and likes pets, especially dogs. Meetings and public engagements he seeks to avoid. He has made one trip abroad, visiting Europe in 1950. He has written eleven novels and short stories, to date.
(Ray, quoted in Bhaduri, 1965: vii)

This passage allows us to note the reflective, somewhat contemplative, mode in which Bhaduri wrote the majority of his novels, of which the two I analysed in this article are about the social dreaming engaged in by individuals such as Dhorai, Bilu or Nilu, the young, passionate future citizens of a decolonizing India, fighting for a

better day and better life. Reconstituting aesthetically the Quit India Movement of the early 1940s, focalizing that key period in the transition to nationhood through ordinary Indians, whether middle-class and upper-caste, or lower-class and lower-caste, Bhaduri's two fictions are innovative literary utopian narratives that show the principles of hope and desire for a better world. These novels also show the many pluralities and contestations round utopia in the period leading up to the independence of India from British colonialism.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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