



Research Article



Plagiomnium succulentum (Mitt.) T. J. Kop. (Family Mniaceae): New Moss for Nilgiri hills, Tamil Nadu, South India

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Abstract

Plagiomnium succulentum (Mitt.) T. J. Kop. is a corticolous taxa, growing on the bark of higher plants. The species is characterized by glossy, yellowish green, pleurocarpous, epiphytic, creeping, leaves distantly arranged on stem, oblong-ovate, margin throughout minutely dentate with distinct border; costa single, beghliet cells present; leaf-cells rounded-hexagonal to quadrate 2-3 row of narrow elongated, thick walled cells forming a distinct border throughout the leaf. During the present study taxon has been critically investigated and identified from Nilgiri Hills. It is reported for the first time from Nilgiri Hills.

Keywords: Corticolous, Moss, Mniaceae, Nilgiri hills, South India

1. Introduction

The Nilgiri Hills, located in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, represent a prominent hilly district and stand as one of India's most significant treasure troves of flora and fauna, second only to the Eastern Himalayas in terms of biodiversity richness¹⁻³. Also known as the "Nilgiris"—which translates to "Blue Mountains"—the region derives its name from the striking bluish-purple bloom of *Strobilanthes kunthianus* (Acanthaceae), which blankets the hillsides in a vibrant hue during its flowering season. Nestled within these hills is the popular hill station of Ootacamund, more commonly known as Ooty and often referred to as the "Queen of Hill Stations." The Nilgiri Hills also form the heart of India's first and oldest biosphere reserve—the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve—which plays a critical role in the conservation and diversification of the region's unique ecological heritage..

Plagiomnium is represented by four species in India^{4, 5} out of which three species have been earlier reported from south India⁴. In Nilgiri hills only *Plagiomnium rhynchophorum* (Harv.) T. J. Kop. has been earlier reported⁴. However, in the course of the present study, *Plagiomnium succulentum* has been collected and documented for the first time from this region, marking a significant addition to the known bryoflora of the area. This new record highlights the unexplored richness of bryophyte diversity in the Nilgiri Hills and underscores the need for continued bryological exploration in the region. Such findings contribute valuable insights into the distribution patterns and ecological preferences of moss species in South India.

2. Materials and Methods

The plant specimens were collected carefully with the help of sharp edged knife from different localities of Nilgiri hills, Tamil Nadu, South India. The collected materials were kept in brown paper packets in case of dried specimens and blotting papers used in case of highly wet specimens. The collected materials were air dried at room temperature. After drying the specimens were kept in brown paper packets (Size '6 x 4' Inch) which were labeled with complete details like collection numbers, localities, altitude, habitat, plant's name, date of collection and name of collectors. After this process, all specimen packets were deposited in herbarium boxes (Size '15 x 6' Inch). The collected plants have been successfully preserved in the Lucknow University Bryophyte herbarium (LWU). The observations were under stereoscopic binocular and Leica microscope.

1.1. Taxonomic description

Plagiomnium succulentum (Mitt.) T. J. Kop.

Plagiomnium succulentum (Mitt.) T. J. Kop., *Ann. Bot. Fennici* 5: 145. 1968.

Synonym: *Mnium succulentum* Mitt. *J. Linn. Soc. Bot. Suppl.* 1: 143. 1859.5

(Plate 1, Figs. 1-10)

Plants glossy, yellowish green, pleurocarpous, epiphytic, lax, creeping, 3-4.5 cm long and 2-3 mm wide with leaves; cross-section of stem circular, 0.43-0.50 mm in diameter, two rows of outer cortical cells slightly thick walled, small, brown in colour, inner cortical cells thin walled, large, 22-45 x 19-26 µm, central strand well developed with small, hyaline and thin walled cells; leaves distantly arranged on stem, oblong-ovate, 4.1-6.1 x 1.5-2.5 mm; margin throughout minutely dentate with distinct border; costa single, percurrent, beghlieter cells present; leaf-cells rounded-hexagonal to quadrate, apical cells 11-19 x 8-15 µm, middle cells 15-22 x 11-22 µm, basal cells rectangular, 19-38 x 12-20 µm, 2-3 row of narrow elongated, thick walled cells forming a distinct border throughout the leaf. Plants are vegetative.

1.2. Habitat:

Plants are epiphytic, growing on bark as pure population.

1.3. Range

India, East Nepal, Tonkin, Sumatra, Java, China, New Guinea, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam and Japan^{7,8}.

1.4. Distribution in India

Eastern Himalaya: Assam, West Bengal: Darjeeling, Meghalaya: Khasia Hills & Arunachal Pradesh. Western Himalaya: Uttarakhand: Mussoori. South India: Tamil Nadu: Palni Hills^{5,7,9}.

1.5. Specimens examined

South India: Tamil Nadu, Nilgiri Hills, Upper Bhawani: Avalanche, alt. ca. 2100 m, S. C. Srivastava & Party, 9 October, 2000, 12530A/00, 12560/00, 12561/00, 12562/00 (LWU).

2. Discussion

The taxa *Plagiomnium succulentum* was described earlier as *Mnium succulentum* Mitt. by Gangulee⁷. Kopenon⁵ described *Mnium succulentum* Mitt. as *Plagiomnium succulentum*. Daniels⁵ reported *Mnium succulentum* as *Plagiomnium succulentum* which is a valid name till now. It is widely distributed taxa within country⁷. In Tamil Nadu it has been earlier reported from Palni hills by Daniels⁵. During present study it has been collected from Avalanche locality in Nilgiri hills. The species is characterized by creeping plant habit, oblong-ovate leaves with distinct border, costa and a group of beghlieter cells (Plate 1, Figs. 1, 2, 5-8, 10).

3. Conclusion

Plagiomnium succulentum (Mitt.) T. J. Kop. is being recorded as new record for Nilgiri hills, South India based on the results of the current study.

4. Acknowledgements

The author expresses gratitude to Dr. Geeta Asthana, Former Professor and Head, Department of the Botany, University of Lucknow for her assistance in providing facilities and direction for plant identification. The Principal, Shaheed Smarak Government College, Yusufpur, Ghazipur, is also appreciated by the author for creating a wholesome atmosphere and offering moral support.

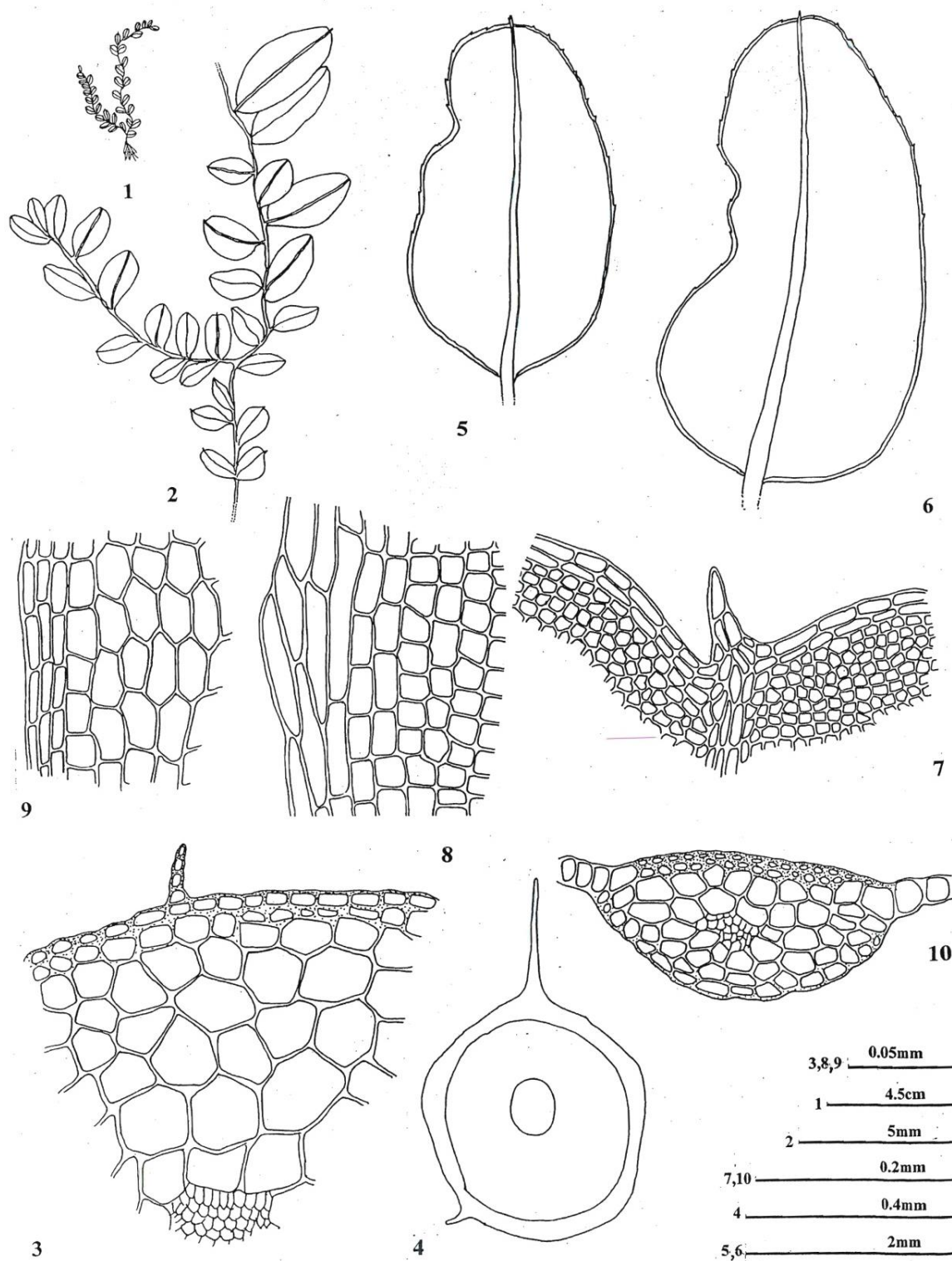


Plate 1, Figs. 1-10: *Plagiomnium succulentum* (Mitt.) T. J. Kop.: 1, 2. Habit of plants. 3, 4. Cross-sections of stem. 5, 6. Leaves. 7. Apical leaf-cells. 8. Median leaf-cells. 9. Basal leaf-cells. 10. Cross-section of leaf. All figures drawn from 12560/2000 (LWU).

Conflicts of interest

Not Applicable.

Authors Contribution

Not Applicable.

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Research Article



First Record of *Macromitrium hamatum* Dix. from the Nilgiri Hills, South India

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Abstract

Macromitrium hamatum Dix. is an endemic taxon of India and has previously been reported from Meghalaya and Tamil Nadu. In Tamil Nadu, it was reported from the Tirunelveli district by Daniels. This species is now being reported for the first time from the Nilgiri Hills. It is characterized by a pleurocarpous habit, erectopotent stems, and hamate, hooked, and lanceolate leaves that are densely arranged along the stem. The leaf cells are multi-papillose. This species differs from *Macromitrium nepalense* in having hamate, lanceolate leaves and multi-papillose mid-laminar cells.

Keywords: Orthotrichaceae, *Macromitrium hamatum* Dix., corticolous, Nilgiri Hills, South India.

1. Introduction

The genus *Macromitrium* Brid., belongs to the family Orthotrichaceae and is represented by 22 species in India. These species have been reported from various bryogeographical regions, including the Western Himalaya, Eastern Himalaya, and South India by various bryologists¹⁻¹⁷. In South India, *Macromitrium* is represented by 17 species, which have been reported from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra^{2, 7, 8, 14-17}.

Macromitrium hamatum Dix. is an endemic species to India and has previously been reported from Meghalaya and Tamil Nadu^{1, 9}. In Tamil Nadu, it was reported from the Tirunelveli district by Daniels⁹. During a survey of bryophyte specimens in the year 2000, a corticolous population of this species was observed in the Nilgiri Hills, South India. This population has been critically examined and is described here.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study is based on dried herbarium specimens housed at the Lucknow University Hepatic Herbarium, Department of Botany, University of Lucknow, Lucknow (LWU). To facilitate investigation, the plant specimens were soaked in water for 10-20 minutes to rehydrate them and restore their original shape. The external morphology of the plants was examined under a Stereoscopic Zoom Binocular Microscope (Carl Zeiss, M140, Germany), while cellular details and microscopic structures were observed using a Compound Microscope (Olympus OIC 71078) and a Leica Binocular Compound Microscope (LEICA S6D 1044339). Temporary slides were prepared in 70% aqueous glycerin for dissected plant parts and for anatomical studies using free-hand sections. Line drawings were made using a NIKON Camera Lucida at appropriate magnifications. Measurements were recorded with the aid of a stage micrometer and an oculometer.

1.1. Taxonomic description

Macromitrium hamatum Dixon

Macromitrium hamatum Dixon, J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 39:777.1937. (**Plate 1; Figs. 1-9**)

Plants pleurocarpous, epiphytic, dark brown in colour; main stem creeping, 2-4 cm long and 3-5 mm wide with leaves, irregularly branched; branches 1-2 cm long, cross-section of stem circular, 0.1-0.2 mm in diameter, 3-4 rows of outer cortical cells thick walled, small, brown in color, inner cortical cells thin walled, large, 11-19 x 7-11 µm, central strand absent; leaves densely arranged on stem, erect, hamate, lanceolate, 2.5-3.4 x 0.3-0.5 mm, margin entire; costa single, strong and percurrent; leaf-cells thick walled, rounded-quadrangle, papillose, apical cells 6-11 x 4-8 µm, middle cells multipapillose, 6-11 x 4-11 µm, basal cells rectangular, thick walled, 38-57 x 4-11 µm with single large papilla. Plants are vegetative.

1.2. Habitat: The plants are epiphytic, growing on bark in association with *Claopodium assurgens* and *Pogonatum microstomum*.

1.3. Range: Endemic to India¹.

1.4. Distribution in India: Eastern Himalaya: Meghalaya: Khasia Hills. South India: Tamil Nadu: Tirunelveli & Nilgiri hills: Ootacamund, Mukuruthy & Avalanche^{1,9}.

Specimens examined: South India: Tamil Nadu, Nilgiri hills, Upper Bhawani: on way to Avalanche, alt. ca. 2000 m, S. C. Srivastava & Party, 9 October, 2000, 12526/2000 (LWU), Mukuruthy: Parthimund Reserve Forest, alt. ca. 2250 m, P. K. Verma, 24 May, 2005, 18062/05 (LWU), Ootacamund: Parson's Valley, alt. ca. 2250 m, P. K. Verma, 25 May, 2005, 18125/05, 18133/05(LWU) and Doddabetta, alt. ca. 2600 m, S. C. Srivastava & Party, 7 January, 2006, 18586/2006 (LWU).

2. Discussion

Macromitrium hamatum is an endemic species to India and has previously been reported from Meghalaya and Tamil Nadu^{1,9}. In Tamil Nadu, it was reported from the Tirunelveli district by Daniels⁹. This species is now reported for the first time from the Nilgiri Hills. It is characterized by a pleurocarpous habit, erectopotent stems, and hamate, hooked, and lanceolate leaves that are densely arranged on the stem. The leaf cells are multi-papillose. The species differs from *Macromitrium nepalense* in having hamate, lanceolate leaves (Plate 1: Figs. 5-6) and multi-papillose mid-laminar cells (Plate 1: Fig. 8).

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, *Macromitrium hamatum* is an endemic species to India, with previous reports from Meghalaya and Tamil Nadu, particularly from the Tirunelveli district. This study presents the first record of the species from the Nilgiri Hills. Characterized by its pleurocarpous habit, erectopotent stems, and densely arranged hamate, hooked, and lanceolate leaves, the species is distinct from *Macromitrium nepalense* due to its unique leaf morphology and multi-papillose mid-laminar cells. The new record from the Nilgiri Hills adds valuable information to the distribution of this species, highlighting its presence in South India.

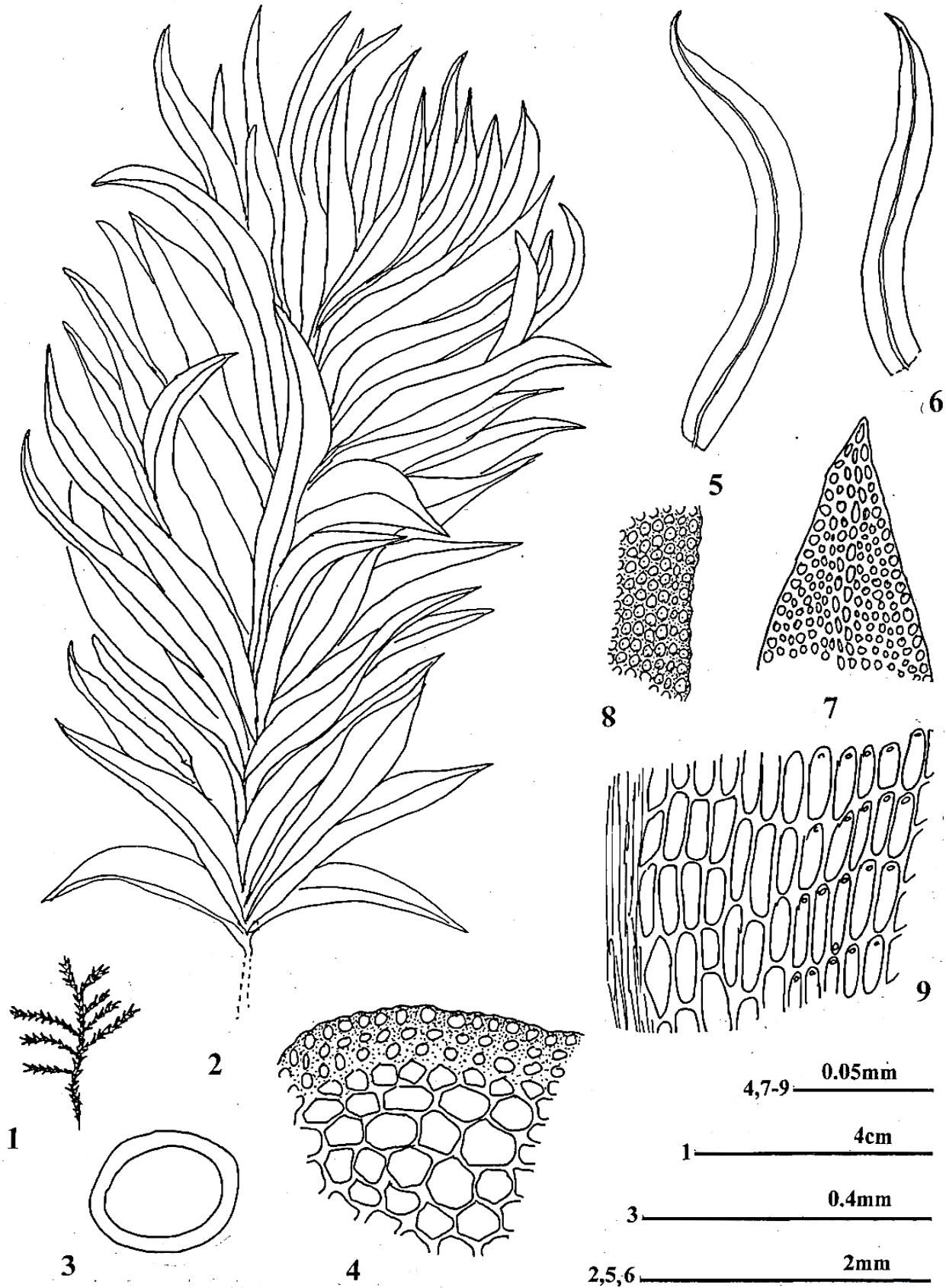


Plate 1; Figures: 1-9. *Macromitrium hamatum* Dixon: 1-2. Habit of plants. 3-4. Cross-sections of stem. 5-6. Leaves. 7. Apical leaf-cells. 8. Median leaf-cells. 9. Basal leaf-cells. All figures are drawn from 12526/2000 (LWU).

4. Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges Prof. Geeta Asthana, former Head of the Department of Botany at the University of Lucknow, for her valuable assistance in providing facilities and guidance for plant identification. The author also expresses appreciation to the Principal of Shaheed Smarak Government College, Yusufpur, Ghazipur, for fostering a supportive environment and offering moral encouragement.

Conflicts of interest

Not Applicable.

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सॉनेट का पथ और त्रिलोचन

डॉ. माधवम सिंह

असिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर, हिंदी विभाग, शहीद स्मारक राजकीय महाविद्यालय, यूसुफपुर, मुहम्मदाबाद, गाजीपुर

सॉनेट एक विजातीय काव्य रूप है। यह यूरोप की धरती से जन्मा काव्य रूप है। सॉनेट इटैलियन शब्द (Sonetto) (सॉनेटो) का लघु रूप माना जाता है। सॉनेट धुन के साथ गायी जाने वाली कविता है, जो मेण्डोलिन या ल्यूट (एक प्रकार का तार वाद्ययंत्र) पर गायी जाती है। सॉनेट का लम्बा इतिहास रहा है। सॉनेट वास्तव में किस स्थान से जन्मा? यह शोधार्थियों के मध्य मतभेद का विषय रहा है। कुछ के अनुसार यह ग्रीक Cpigram (सूक्तियों) से उत्पन्न हुआ है। किन्तु यह सर्वमान्य धारणा नहीं है। कुछ विशेषज्ञ 'इंग्लैण्ड' और 'स्कॉटलैण्ड' से सॉनेट का जन्म स्वीकारते हैं, तो कुछ विद्वान यह भी सम्भावना प्रकट करते हैं कि सॉनेट का जन्म 'सिसली' में हुआ होगा और इसे जैतून के वृक्षों की छटनी से समय गायी जाता था।

सॉनेट का प्रौढ़ स्वरूप तेरहवीं सदी के मध्य दिखाई देने लगता है। इस दौरान लिखे गए सॉनेट मिलान शहर (इटली) में संग्रहित हैं। इसी दौरान प्रौढ़ता से सॉनेट रचने वाले 'फ्रां गुइत्तोन' (Fra Guittone) को 'यूरोपीय साहित्य का कोलम्बस' कहा जाता है। सॉनेट को कलात्मक उत्कर्ष देने का श्रेय प्राप्त करने वाले पहले कवि इटली के पेट्रार्क (1304-1347) माने जाते हैं। आगे चलकर इटली, फ्रांस, स्पेन, इंग्लैण्ड आदि देशों में सॉनेट तेजी से लोकप्रिय होता गया। 'स्पेन्सर', 'सिडनी', 'शेक्सपीयर', 'मिल्टन', 'वर्ड्सवर्थ' और 'कीट्स' सॉनेट को अंतर्राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर लोकप्रिय बनाने के लिए जाने जाते हैं। सॉनेट प्रगीत (लिरिक) के विभिन्न रूपों में से एक माना जाता है। शैली व आकार के आधार पर प्रगीत के छः विभाजन किए जाते हैं-

1. सॉनेट (चतुष्पदी)
2. ओड (सम्बोधन प्रगीत)
3. एलिजी (शोक प्रगीत)
4. सेटायर (व्यंग्य प्रगीत)
5. रिफ्लेक्टिव (विचारात्मक प्रगीत)
6. डाइरेक्टिव (उपदेशात्मक)

'गुइत्तोन' ने सॉनेट की जिस संरचना को स्थापित किया उसके दो भाग हैं। पहला 'अष्टपदी' और दूसरा 'षष्टपदी'। इस प्रकार कुल चौदह चरण बनते हैं। एक 'अष्टक' में दो चतुष्पदी और 'षष्टक' में दो त्रिपदी की व्यवस्था होती है। 'अष्टक' और 'षष्टक' का विभाजन प्रमुख रूप से तुक पर आधारित होता है। तुकान्तता में प्रायः परिवर्तन भी परिलक्षित होता रहता है। 'फ्रां गुइत्तोन' ने यह स्थापित किया कि 'सॉनेट' के प्रत्येक चरण में दस मात्रिक ध्वनियाँ होनी चाहिए। यह माधुर्य की निरन्तरता के लिए जरूरी है। आगे चलकर पेट्रार्कन, स्पेन्सरियन, शेक्सपीरियन व मिल्टनिक सॉनेट रूप भी प्रकाश में आते हैं। जो बाह्य संरचना की दृष्टि से समान होने के बावजूद आंतरिक व्यवस्था के स्तर पर विशेष भिन्नता रखते हैं।

हिन्दी में सॉनेट बीसवीं सदी में दिखाई देता है। प्रसाद, पंत, निराला जैसे कवियों ने भी सॉनेट लिखे, किन्तु इस विजातीय काव्य रूप को हिन्दी काव्य संसार में स्थापित करने का श्रेय त्रिलोचन शास्त्री को जाता है। त्रिलोचन को हिन्दी साहित्य में सॉनेट का पर्याय माना जाता है। इन्होंने 500 से भी अधिक सॉनेटों की रचना की है। इनके 'सॉनेट' में कसाव, वैविध्य, संगीत, लय, भाषा और विन्यास का अनूठा सम्मिश्रण मिलता है। 'दिगन्त', 'शब्द', 'फूल नाम है एक', 'उस जनपद का कवि हूँ' और 'अनकहनी भी कुछ कहनी है' त्रिलोचन के पाँच सॉनेट संग्रह हैं। 'महाकुम्भ' पर लिखे गए सॉनेट 'अरघान' में संग्रहित है। उनके कुछ सॉनेट 'तुम्हें सौंपता हूँ' और 'ताप के ताये हुए दिन' संग्रहों में भी संग्रहित हैं।

सॉनेट के जितने भी रूप भेद किए गये हैं, त्रिलोचन ने सभी को आजमाया है। किन्तु उनके अधिकांश सॉनेट पेट्रार्कन और शेक्सपीरियन शैली में ही रचे गए हैं। त्रिलोचन अपने सॉनेटों में हिन्दी के जातीय छन्द 'रोला' के अनुशासन को अपनाते हैं। जिसके आधार पर उनके सॉनेट के प्रत्येक चरण में चौबीस मात्रिक ध्वनियों की व्यवस्था होती है, ग्यारह और तेरह मात्राओं पर यति के साथ। रोला छन्द का अनुशासन अपनाते हुए भी उनके यहाँ ग्यारह और तेरह पर यति की व्यवस्था अनेक बार भंग भी हुयी है।

ध्रुव शुक्ल के अनुसार " त्रिलोचन जी सॉनेट रचना में पूरे वाक्य को अपनाते हैं और वाक्य एक चरण से दूसरे चरण में फिसलते हुए चलते हैं। जैसे एक दूसरे का हाथ पकड़कर चल रहे हों।"।

त्रिलोचन सॉनेट के अभिजात्य को छोड़, उसे जनवादी संवेदनाओं और संरचनाओं में ढालते हैं। इसमें देशज संवेदनाओं, रीति-परम्पराओं, प्रेम, प्रकृति, आधुनिक भावबोध आदि को भर देना त्रिलोचन के ही सामर्थ्य में था। सॉनेट पर त्रिलोचन का ऐसा अधिकार था कि उसका अनुशासन भावों और विचारों की अभिव्यक्ति में कभी बाधक नहीं बन पाया। त्रिलोचन जिस जनपद के कवि हैं उस जनपद के अभाव, निर्धनता और संस्कृति का यथार्थ रूप अपने सॉनेट में बड़ी सहजता से खींचते हैं। 'उस जनपद का कवि हूँ' सॉनेट में त्रिलोचन बड़े साहस के साथ अपने जनपद का चित्र खींचते हैं -

“उस जनपद का कवि हूँ जो भूखा-दूखा है,
नंगा है, अनजान है, कला-नहीं जानता
कैसी होती है क्या है, वह नहीं मानता
कविता कुछ भी दे सकती है। कब सूखा है
उसके जीवन का सोता, इतिहास ही बता
सकता है। वह उदासीन बिलकुल अपने से,
अपने समाज से है; दुनिया को सपने से
अलग नहीं मानता, उसे कुछ भी नहीं पता
दुनिया कहाँ से कहाँ पहुँची; अब समाज में
वे विचार रह गए नहीं हैं जिनको ढोता
चला जा रहा है वह, अपने आँसू बोता
विफल मनोरथ होने पर अथवा अकाज में।
धर्म कमाता है वह तुलसीकृत रामायण
सुन-पढ़कर, जपता है नारायण नारायण।”²

त्रिलोचन सॉनेट रचने में इतने सहज हैं, जैसे यह उनके लिए बहुत साधारण कार्य है। सॉनेट के अनुशासन का अनुपालन उनके लिए ठीक वैसा ही है जैसे पानी का बहना। जैसे पानी अपने प्रवाह में बहता चला जाता है, वैसे ही त्रिलोचन की कलम से सॉनेट बहता चला जाता है अपनी लय और प्रवाह के साथ। किसी भी प्रकार की संवेदना या विचार को वे बड़ी सहजता से सॉनेट में पिरो देते हैं। धर्म को भारतीय समाज की रीढ़ कहा जाता है। धर्म का उज्ज्वल पक्ष है नैतिक चेतना, प्रेम, करुणा, दया, छमा, उदारता, मानवीयता आदि। धर्म का स्याह पक्ष है धर्म के नाम पर अन्धविश्वास, बह्दाडम्बर, छल, कपट आदि के माध्यम से समाज में अन्धकार फैलाना। त्रिलोचन धर्म विनिर्मित ऐसे ही अन्धकार से टकराते हैं। कबीर की भांति समाज को जगाते हैं। त्रिलोचन सॉनेट काव्य रूप को कितना समर्थ बना देते हैं -

“करता हूँ आक्रमण धर्म के दृढ़ दुर्गों पर
कवि हूँ, नया मनुष्य मुझे यदि अपनाएगा
उन गानों में अपने विजय-गान पाएगा
जिनको मैंने गाया है। वैसे मुर्गों पर
निर्भर नहीं सबेरा होना, लेकिन इतना
झूठ नहीं है, जहाँ कहीं वह बड़े सवरे
ऊँचे स्वर से बोला करता है, मुँह फेरे
कोई पड़ा नहीं रह सकता, फिर भी कितना
उसमें बल है। केवल निर्मल स्वर की धारा
उसकी अपनी है, जिसकी अजस्र कल-कल में
स्वप्न डूब जाते हैं जीवन के लघु पल में-
तम से लड़ता है इस पश्यन्ती के द्वारा।
धर्म-विनिर्मित अन्धकार से लड़ते-लड़ते
आगामी मनुष्य; तुम तक मेरे स्वर बढ़ते।”³

तुलसी दास का जैसा अधिकार भाषा पर था, त्रिलोचन का वैसा ही अधिकार सॉनेट पर है। भाषा तो त्रिलोचन ने तुलसी से ही सीखी है। तुलसी का रामचरित मानस सुनते पढ़ते ही त्रिलोचन पले-बढ़े हैं (तुलसी बाबा भाषा मैंने तुमसे सीखी...)। सॉनेट का पथ चौड़ा नहीं, अनुशासित है। फिर भी त्रिलोचन इस पर कितनी सहजता से दौड़ते हैं। कैसे भी भाव हों, कैसी भी अनुभूति हो उसे सॉनेट में कस देते हैं। 'सॉनेट का पथ' सॉनेट देखिए-

"इधर त्रिलोचन सॉनेट के ही पथ पर दौड़ा;
सॉनेट, सॉनेट, सॉनेट, सॉनेट क्या कर डाला
यह उसने भी अजब तमाशा। मन की माला
गले डाल ली। इस सॉनेट का रस्ता चौड़ा
अधिक नहीं है, कसे कसाये भाव अनूठे
ऐसे आएँ जैसे किला आगरा में जो
नग है, दिखलाता है पूरे ताजमहल को;
गेय रहे, एकान्वित हो। उसने तो झूठे
ठाट-बाट बाँधे हैं। चीज़ किराए की है।
स्पेंसर, सिडनी, शेक्सपियर, मिल्टन की बाणी
वर्ड्सवर्थ, कीट्स की अनवरत प्रिय कल्याणी
स्वर धारा है, उसने नई चीज़ क्या दी है!
सॉनेट से मज़ाक भी उसने खूब किया है,
जहाँ तहाँ कुछ रंग व्यंग्य का छिड़क दिया है।"⁴

इस प्रकार त्रिलोचन हिंदी के विजातीय काव्य रूप सॉनेट को हिंदी के सांचे में बड़ी सहजता से ढाल कर उसे हिंदी कविता के एक समर्थ काव्य रूप के रूप में स्थापित कर देते हैं। त्रिलोचन ने सॉनेट को बड़ी सहजता से हिंदी परिवार का सदस्य बना दिया, इसके पीछे सबसे बड़ा कारण त्रिलोचन की भाषा थी। त्रिलोचन की सहज और सरल भाषा के नैसर्गिक प्रवाह ने विजातीयता की दीवार को कब ढहा दिया पता ही नहीं चला। यहाँ गोविंद मिश्र की टिप्पणी महत्वपूर्ण है -“ त्रिलोचन के ज्यादातर सॉनेटों में विभिन्न मनोदशाओं और मनोवर्गों को वहन करने वाली सधी हुई और संभावित भाषा का उपयोग मिलता है। यही भाषा त्रिलोचन की अपनी सरल और विरल प्रकृति के तथा सॉनेटों के निहित भावों के अधिक अनुकूल पड़ती है।”⁵ त्रिलोचन सॉनेट के अनुशासन को ऐसे साध लेते हैं जैसे पैदल चलना। ऐसा संभव हो सका त्रिलोचन की कसी हुई भाषा के कारण। भाषा की कसावट के कारण ही त्रिलोचन सॉनेट के पथ पर दौड़ते हैं। यहाँ केदारनाथ सिंह का कथन बहुत महत्वपूर्ण है -“सृजनात्मक अनुशासन का सबसे विलक्षण और रंगारंग रूप उनके सॉनेटों में दिखाई पड़ता है। शब्दों की जैसी मितव्ययिता और शिल्पगत कसावट उनके सॉनेटों में मिलता है, वैसा निराला को छोड़कर आधुनिक हिंदी कविता में अत्यंत दुर्लभ है। त्रिलोचन के सॉनेटों के बारे में बहुत कुछ कहा-सुना गया है। परन्तु इस महत्वपूर्ण तथ्य की ओर ध्यान कम दिया गया है कि सॉनेट जैसे विजातीय काव्य रूप को हिन्दी भाषा की सहज लय और संगीत में ढालकर त्रिलोचन ने एक ऐसी नई काव्य-विधा का आविष्कार किया है, जो लगभग हिन्दी की अपनी विरासत बन गई है।”⁶

संदर्भ ग्रंथ सूची :-

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Literary Voices on Variegated Themes

Niraj Kumar Singh
Sanjeev Kumar



A BUNCH OF PRISMATIC THOUGHTS

**Literary Voices on Variegated
Themes**

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JEET THAYIL'S BOMBAY TRILOGY

A Critical Study in the Light of Orientalism

SATYANARAYAN TIWARI AND AJAY K. CHAUBEY

The battle of Bombay is the battle of the self against the crowd... individually multiple, severally one.... The battle is Man against the Metropolis. (Mehta, 2004: 580)

Bombay is the first and last word of this first novel (*Narcopolis*), an urban history written by a former drug addict through the changing composition of opiated and the changing characters of their users. (BBC; *emphasis ours*)

Introduction

Edward Said, in his 1978 seminal work *Orientalism*, sought to critique the persistent Western intellectual scholarship rooted in ancient Greek and Roman texts, where, as Terry Eagleton¹ noted, "colonial discourses often portrayed the east as indolent, treacherous, passive, inscrutable, devious, feminized and subservient" (Eagleton, 2006). Said outlined how scholars have evolved the concept of the Western imagination of the East and how this perception has transformed throughout history. Additionally, he endeavoured to offer his contrapuntal views on the global expansion of European colonial power. As

colonial philosophical perspectives evolved during the "Age of Reason", they transformed the globe into a domain where powerful hegemonies subjugate the 'powerless' (Olaitan², 2022). Consequently, Said observes that such ideas have existed—overtly or covertly—since the era of Aeschylus, Dante, and Homer where discriminating projection and 'othering' of the Orient's are evident.

Said's concept of Orientalism represents a construct, not a reality, an emblem of dominance and a weapon of power, which is the process of viewing and categorising Asian and Middle Eastern civilizations as inferior, archaic, and weird, where he elucidates the actual impetus behind the efficacy of the term by Western people and offers a new dimension to explicate colonial proclivity. The book argues that "all Western systems of cultural description are deeply contaminated...the politics, the considerations, the positions, and the strategies of power" (Moore-Gilbert 34). Thus, Orientalist writings though certain colonial stereotypes began to emerge in the Eastern part of the world, in which history was manipulated, native culture degraded, society claimed to be unprogressive, men were treated as uncivilized, irrational and indolent, while women were objectified as sexually promiscuous. Eventually, the Orient became "a European invention...a place of romance exotic beings, haunting memories, and landscape" (Said 1). In this way, Said unearthed a discourse based on the dichotomy between the East and the West, a discourse wherein "the West stand for religiousness and tradition, and following the logic of developmental thinking, the West possessed there with the right to conquer, suppress, and rule over India. *Thus, perpetuating the idea of occidental dominance over the orient*" (Hubiriette 3; *emphasis ours*).

It is an irrefutable observation that Europeans, purporting to undertake a civilizing mission, systematically exploited the resources of native people through the mechanisms of colonialism. This strategy operated as a remarkably lucrative enterprise that greatly augmented the wealth of European nations. The systematic approach employed to the indigenous populations like a magnanimous gesture, while in truth it was motivated solely by self-interest and avarice. Ania Loomba provides a comprehensive examination of the mechanisms through which



colonial communities were established within a structured framework. In her view, "the process of 'forming a community' in a new land necessarily meant *un-forming* or *re-forming* the communities that existed there already, and involve a wide range of practices including trade, settlement, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, and enslavement" (20). Colonial discourses constituted merely a fragment of these practices. The major functions were fulfilled by cultural texts and discourses of the Europeans.

This chapter, thus, employs the theory of Orientalism to critically examine Thayil's *Bombay Trilogy* aiming to identify the Western templates applied to Post-Colonial India as interpreted by the Indian writers through their portrayal of India. Prior to embarking on this analytical exploration of postcolonialism, it is essential to delve deep into the contours of Orientalism to consider how Edward Said deconstructs the lucrative but hitherto latent motif of European nations masquerading as colonialism in his influential work *Orientalism* "that helps bring together the various interwoven strands of this [postcolonial] field" (Quayson 3).

Edward Said: Writing Against the Empire

Said's writings are fecund with paradoxes reflecting intricacies of his life and academic experiences. This occurs due to his contrapuntal thinking; a concept originating in music but further elaborated by Said in his analysis of canonical colonial texts. According to William Spanos, "Said is consistently contrapuntal in his readings of the hegemonic 'truths' of the issues he discusses with his interlocutor, whether these pertain to Israel's monolithic representation of the Palestinians or the Arab world's monolithic representation of the Western world" (326). The enduring conflict between Palestine and Israel inspired Said's drive but also provided him with a distinctive perspective on the world, particularly the Middle Eastern nations and their historical and contemporary colonial narratives. Said asserted in an interview that he, after three years of this war, "completely immersed in politics and the Palestinian resistance movement" (qtd. in Ali 7). This experience prompted him to comprehend the dynamics of power across different realms as he witnessed the ascent of Zionism buttressed by many first world nations including America and also "found himself in an environment hostile to Arabs, Arab ideas and Arab nations" (3).

It was *Orientalism* that provided him with a framework to disseminate his ideas by employing humanistic, poststructuralist, and post-modernist theoretical tools to interpret various canonical colonial texts. Gyan Prakash posits, "the iconoclastic effects of *Orientalism* remain one of its most enduring influences, arousing some to an unrelenting hostility to the book while inciting others to mount further assaults on the authority of Western scholarship of the Other" (200). It is essential to acknowledge that the concept of Orientalism was not coined by Said. It has indeed garnered the interest of numerous scholars prior to the release of Said's book. Said assimilated the prior conceptual framework in a methodical approach and substantiated his arguments through various texts to assert that colonialism was not an act of benevolence but rather a meticulously orchestrated scheme where "criticism of Arabs or Muslims reflected the West's ethnocentric prejudices and its discriminatory, cultural map for imperial domination" (Landes 4).

Said's book challenges Eurocentricism and emerged as the new voice in postcolonial theory. Elleke Boehmer also defines postcolonialism in the same tone: "[It] is generally defined as that which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives" (Boehmer 3). By opposing the colonial narratives disseminated in the settler colonies throughout the colonial era, writers from post-colonial nations began an inquiry into the Eurocentricism and cultural hegemony of the West. Leela Gandhi contends that postcolonialism functions as a "theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering, and crucially, interrogating the colonial past" (Gandhi 4).

Although, due to the nuanced intricacies, postcolonialism is difficult to define. Among several factors are—hyphenated or non-hyphenated terminology, its beginning, the scope of its use, and its multi/inter-disciplinary nature. But the significant challenge lies in delineating the *modus operandi* of postcolonial (Indian English) writers. In recent years, the field of postcolonial theory has shifted its focus. Originally focused on reclaiming marginalized cultures and revitalising disregarded religious traditions, postcolonial literature primarily highlighted the historical

and cultural ramifications of colonialism. However, this emphasis has diminished in contemporary times. Arif Dirlik in the *Postcolonial Aura* (1997) accurately posits that "postcolonialism has been silent about its status as a possible ideological effect of a new world order situation after colonialism" (331). The primary concern that formerly characterised postcolonial literature—how Europeans articulated and portrayed indigenous communities via metaphorical or stereotyped representations—has diminished in relevance in contemporary works, particularly among Indian English authors. Om Prakash Dwivedi writes that the "entire project of postcolonial studies, which was putatively a kind of 'writing back' and decentring the West, has retained and reinstated the Western hegemony and epistemic authority over the Oriental literature, culture and society" (81). Within this framework, Indian English writers are actively chronicling and constructing their own historical narratives. Some of them draw a different perspective that India manifestly lacks in development, electricity, infrastructure, peace, and harmony. Their incisive critiques of India, projected in the novels like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) and to name a few, indicate an engagement with Orientalist perspectives, and their warm receptions on global spaces for such portrayals underscore the persistent power dynamics reminiscent of the colonial era.

Therefore, this paper meticulously examines how Jeet Thayil's Bombay trilogy—*Narcopolis* (2012), *The Book of Chocolate Saints* (2017), and *Low* (2020)—implies the idea of Orientalism and represent Bombay and India as a place of disorder and dystopia. In addition to providing a distinctive viewpoint, Thayil's portrayal of Bombay as an Opium City not only offers a unique perspective but also underscores critical concerns surrounding the representation of the city and, by extension, India to a global audience. Thayil both confronts and reinforces some clichés about the East by portraying Bombay as a locale defined by addiction, marginalization, and a sense and sensibility of degradation. The debauched image of the city raises the issue of whether his writings accurately depict the city or re-instate colonial stereotypes, in the same way as Indian diasporic writers intend to do through their writings. However, it is not only Thayil that portrays Bombay in a degraded way but many prominent Indian English writers have also portrayed Bombay as a city of pollution, congestion, and deterioration.

Literary Representation of Bombay in Indian English Novels: A Succinct Survey

The city Bombay has occupied a central place in many Indian English novels to the extent that Gargi Gupta (2013) aptly enquires into the significance of Bombay as the locus of numerous novels authored by Indian novelists from time to time. She asks, "[W]hat is it about Mumbai that makes it such fertile ground for writers looking for inspiration? Rohinton Mistry, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, Kiran Nagarkar, Gregory Roberts, Manu Joseph, Kalpish Ratna, Aravind Adiga (his latest novel) ... the list is long and growing by the year" (Gupta). Bombay got its first prominent place in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), followed by multiple notable novels and non-fictions including, *Bombay, Meri Jaan: Writings about Mumbai* (2003) by Jerry Pinto and Naresh Fernandes; *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (2004) by Suketu Mehta; *The Immortals* (2009) by Amit Chaudhuri; *Mumbaistan* (2012) by Piyush Jha among others. Jeet Thayil joins this league and represents the economic and commercial capital of India, Bombay, as the place of inferno in his trilogy and exposes the dark underbellies through 'the city's fleshiest parts'. Thayil's writings, discarding the conventional form of writing, rejects familial bonds, struggles, love, nostalgia, relationship, myth and dharma from his trilogy and thereby controvert best-selling authors such as Devdutt Pattanaik, Ravindra Singh, Chetan Bhagat, Amish Tripathi, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and their portrayals of domesticity, campus life, and religious and spiritual experiences. In place of conventional characters, Thayil includes pimps, eunuchs, prostitutes, strays, drug addicts and gangsters. T. K. Pius affirms that "Jeet Thayil belongs to a brave new generation of Indian authors; a breed that challenges established norms of writings, and does not fear controversy when furthering its opinion" (177).

Thayil's Bombay Trilogy

Thayil, by profession (primarily) was a journalist followed by writing poems, debuted as a novelist with his novel *Narcopolis*, published in 2012. Centring Bombay as the loci, he wrote two subsequent novels—*The Book of Chocolate Saints* (2017) and *Low* (2020) to complement the trilogy. The aforementioned trilogy on Bombay is grounded on the author's first-hand experiences,

having spent two-decades in Bombay as a drug addict. Therefore, comprehending Thayil as an author entail understanding Thayil's persona.

Thayil, born in Kerala in 1959, was the child of a Syrian Christian family. His father, Thayil Jacob Sorey George, was a renowned journalist. Thayil spent his formative years in Bombay and enrolled at St Xavier's school for his primary schooling. His family relocated to Hong Kong when he was only eight years old. There, he got admitted to Island School. Thayil returned to Bombay at the age of eighteen to finish his graduation from Wilson College. But his cosmopolitan disposition compelled him to go to New York to pursue his master's degree in fine arts from Sarah Lawrence College, New York. Subsequently, he went to Bombay to pursue a career in journalism, drawn significantly by the cosmopolitan allure of the city. "The City" as he says in conversation with Nathalie Handel, "welcomed everyone. Religion, gender, class, and class did not matter" (WWB). Thayil spent the most culminating period of his life in Bombay as a narcotics addict due to both unusual and unconventional reasons. In a conversation with Afia Aslam (2013), he states, "I never use drugs to escape. When I was using them... for me, it was a way of getting into something that I would never have known in the course of my normal life, which was typical and middle class...I think I was hungry for the experience, however dangerous or self-destructive it turned out to be" (Reportage).

Thus, it was the desire for experience that guided Thayil into the world of opium, and subsequently, Thayil skilfully moulded his encounters in his initial three novels. His return to Bombay in 2004 provided him the opportunity to record his life experiences in a book, leading him to start writing his initial work from that point onward. The turmoil in Thayil's personal life is mirrored in the atmosphere of the city Bombay. The devastated scenery of Bombay and its deterioration are deeply connected with the sadness and anguish of Thayil's characters, blending them into one whole, leading Thayil to contemplate his personal sorrow [of characters and] the sorrow of witnessing his cherished city undergo a slow deterioration because of environmental degradation (Daniel and Mishra 85).

Narcopolis: Epitomising Addiction and Intoxication in the City

As expected by Thayil, his debut novel received several denunciations for its bizarre depiction of Bombay. Ashley Tellis (2012) asserted that "[t]he indefatigable Jeet Thayil turns his hand to fiction and produces (surprise, surprise) one of the worst novels written in English anywhere. Substances abuse is the novel's subject (surprise, surprise again) as is clear from the novel's title..." (Tellis). Answering the question— "What has surprised you most about the critical reception of *Narcopolis*? —Thayil responds that "I expected criticism in India, but I guess I didn't expect it to be quite so vociferous. There is a new kind of jingoism which has to do with the new prosperity. We are still among the poorest nation of the world. No amount of shining propaganda will change that" (*South Asian Journal*, 2012). Moreover, Thayil is criticised for artistic exiguity for exposing India's paltriness and presenting a tenebrous image of India. However, Thayil himself opines that "*Narcopolis* was born out of empathy" (qtd in Mitra); empathy due to his preoccupation with the country, with its uncongenial aura because he was "always suspicious of the novel that paints India in soft focuses, a place of addled nostalgia and loving elders, or monsoons and mangoes. That India had little or no connection to the country I know", Thayil said this in an interview with Bhumika Anand (2013) which affirms that India is not thriving. In this way, Thayil aligns with the 'dark India' narrative which finds place in the work/s of Indian diasporic writers. Thus, Thayil too reinterprets the quintessential tenets of Said's 'Orientalism' and represents the city in an exoticized manner.

Thayil's novel encompasses not only a particular era and the opium milieu but also critiques Hindu orthodoxy and its societal norms wherein the sari is deemed perilous for women while Burkha is valorised. It addresses the degradation of Hindu deities and commendation of other religions; illustrating the metamorphosis of a Hindu girl into a Muslim, symbolising the transition of a women from menace to safety. Furthermore, it explores the political degradation of the nation and the rise of radical fanaticism, among other themes. Through the depiction of the experiment of "the planned socialist state of India," in which the pattharmar (stone pelter) are illustrated to eradicate poverty of "invisible entities without names or papers or families," the sublime consciousness of the narrative of the novel framework not only

perceives Bombay's opium world at a deeper level in which the city is totally engrossed, but also encapsulates the pervasive malignity of the city (*Narcopolis*2). In the novel, Bombay is projected as a city that is gradually diminishing its significance as a result of Nasha Khana, radical Hindu political factions, and negligence of marginalized communities, particularly those of the third gender, such as Dimple. Thus, as Arnab Das states, "*Narcopolis*, then, is an ambitious and richly layered meditation on the materiality of addiction, the process of urban decay, and the corporeal implosion of the city in the socio-historical and phenomenological context of Bombay as a particular human and environmental experience" (175). The situation is so appalling that Bombay and opium have become synonymous in the novel, as the first narrator, Dom (Dominic Ullis), asserts that, "...I found Bombay and Opium, the drug and the city of opium and the drug Bombay..." (7). It is interesting to note that living here requires intoxication since "it was, a habit, like bathing twice a day and eating vegetables" (63). Since there are no tomatoes available on the market, chemicals are easily obtained in Thayil's domain (199). Salil Tripathi affirms it in his review of the novel, "[T]he ingenuity of Thayil's novel lies in how he has squeezed this entire universe into an opium pipe" (Para 2). The depiction of the opium den and its description do not deter Thayil from fabricating the facts and testament of the Indian socio-political and-cultural *modus vivendi*. Even the Indian power dynamics and the Indian political landscape is lacking in its integrity, as illustrated in the novel, "[T]he doors [of opium khana] was always closed and because there were few customers the police didn't bother asking for chai-paani bribe money" (64). Thus, the real portrayal of India contrasts sharply with Thayil's derision of the working culture of Indians. In this way, the Orientalist way of thinking provides the foundation for Thayil's assertions which also find expression in his second novel that depict an exotic adventure of its protagonist in a fractured (under)world.

The Book of Chocolate Saints: Doomed Genius in Bohemian Underworld

Stemmed from the first draft of the first novel, the second book in the trilogy follow a different character named Newton Francis Xavier. However, Xavier's instinct resembles the same quest for identity and meaning, experienced by Rashid, Mr Lee

and Dimple in the first novel *Narcopolis*. Thayil opens this novel with a fractured universe, encapsulating the theme of disrupted existence inside the intricacies of sainthood and identity. This novel illustrates Xavier's quest to achieve equilibrium between redemption and damnation. Set against the backdrop of Bombay, Delhi and Manhattan, the novel examines the inner turmoil of the protagonist and his contemplations on life and death. Thayil employs vivid and evocative prose to narrate the compelling tale of Newton Francis Xavier—a formerly acclaimed poet grappling with creative stagnation, notorious for his liaisons with young women, a man who has battled against alcoholism, and is now a reclusive philosopher and India's most renowned living painter. Now sixty-six years old and residing in New York, Xavier prepares to return to India for a final exhibition of his artwork, anticipated to be a remarkable and perpetual event. Therefore, we are introduced to a wide range of people during the fantastic journey of Xavier along with Goody, including journalists, tricksters, drug addicts, artists, poets, sex workers, socialites, and criminals.

The narrative and structure of the novel offers both intriguing and occasionally intense viewpoints as it dives deeply into themes of love, psychosis, creativity, religion, morality, artwork, and the unadulterated passion that frequently propels great artistic success. Further, this novel is structured in an incoherent manner, with Dismas, a young author, compiles Xavier's life history and conducts interviews with different characters in the novel. The stories are presented in a linear manner. The book presents a palimpsest narrative that oscillates between Xavier's current reflections and the inescapable choices of the past, signifying a new beginning while obliterating memories of marriage, Bombay, and Delhi. Agnes Bunk also avers that,

The doomed genius leaves behind him a trail of marriages, divorces and paintings as empty as the bottles littering his life, haunted by this thought: how does one survive the death of one's art? What fate awaits the artists who were not "lucky" enough to meet a conveniently-timed death; what if French poet Arthur Rimbaud had not died at 37? After a successful debut as a poet, Newton runs away from these questions and their lack of answer, moving from India to New York, London and Paris and then back, wasting his talent, using and abusing drugs and alcohol, claiming

the right to survive his art, the right to fail, to be only human, neither a sinner nor a saint, and to be loved despite that. (Bunk)

Similar to his first novel, Thayil challenges postcolonial hangover in the second book of his trilogy by mocking Indian English authors. Moreover, he minutely critiques the lifestyle and routine of Indians. He states, "[T]his was what Indians did in a room with a television: they found a cricket match because somebody somewhere was always throwing a bat against a ball" (*Saint* 73). Even though this novel is not as satirical and trenchant as the first one, it through the story of Dismas, a lower caste, highlights the dichotomy between the East and the West as Dismas, in India, is cognizant about his lower social status, but in the New York, he celebrates the impartiality and liberty and experiences American egalitarianism. Now he does not consider himself a lower caste as he used to be in India. Thayil writes, "[W]ith his first substantial act of shopping since arriving in New York he felt American at last. Nothing else mattered, not his past, not his caste, not the weight of his degraded history. In this great country the only caste marks were the brand names you accessorised" (*Saints* 83).

A crucial segment in the novel critically examines the depiction of Muslims in the tumultuous aftermath of the 9/11 events. The narrative demonstrates that, in the aftermath of these assaults, academic and intellectual communities systematically reconstructed the image of Muslims, frequently portraying them as subjects of mistrust and unreliability. Pavan Kumar Malreddy opines, "9/11 attacks have resulted in an entirely new corpus of imperialistic sensibilities" (12). The third chapter of Said's *Orientalism* too posits how Muslims have been treated as a threat to the society. This antagonism gave them a new identity—the 'other'. This shift in representation is characterised as a deliberate component of a wider tendency in which fear and prejudice are integrated into scholarly perspectives, literary compositions, and media narratives. The novel explores the ramifications of this transformation for both individual characters and the wider Muslim community, emphasizing the enduring effects of such prejudices. Thayil writes that "[Y]ou are an American: a New Yorker: a Brooklynite. Then the towers come down and you find yourself on a plane headed west. It is 2003, wartime in American. You have to be wearing a turban and sitting on a

place to Arizona via Texas to understand the meaning of this" (Saints127).

The distorted framework of the novel and intellectual erosion of Newton Xavier result in a more condensed form of narration in the third novel, *Low*. The second book of the trilogy establishes a legacy of intellectual nihilism among poets and artists living in the 1970s and 80s, the third novel of the trilogy exemplifies the culmination of this trajectory in contemporary India. From a collective history of decline, illustrated in *The Book of Chocolate Saints*, Thayil transports the reader to the underworld of present-day Bombay, where he narrates a journey of a protagonist immersed in urban filth and abusive ambience of drugs.

Low: Mirroring Urban Chaos

In the last novel of the Bombay trilogy, Jeet Thayil, in the guise of Dominic Ullis, the protagonist illustrates his final experiences as a writer and a drug addict. Thayil affirms, "...this [*Low*] is the end of my Bombay trilogy. I'm now done with Bombay and I'm done with writing about drugs..." (qtd. in Fullerton). Thayil's odyssey to Mumbai, initiated in the first book, culminates in oblivion, demonstrating the city's underbelly through the protagonists and their experiences. Ron Doyle, in his review of the novel, writes that "Mumbai being the city whose junkie subsoil Thayil first sifted in *Narcopolis*, that amounts to a fair few: Dominic ingests cocaine, heroin, sleeping pills, opium, a great deal of alcohol, and, in a rare appearance in literary fiction, the synthetic upper mephedrone or 'meow meow'" (Para 2).

At the centre of the novel *Low* is a journey of Dominic Ullis, a poet, who, grieving his wife Aki's suicide, travels to Mumbai to immerse her ashes but, in place of clean water, finds debris and litter leading to an "environmental apocalypse" (Daniel & Mishra, 2024). Thayil's descriptions indicate how the sanitation in city needs a serious observation: "The salt receded, replaced by the raw smell of sewage and marigolds. Small waves of heat touched Ullis's face. He saw bits of plastic in the water, empty Frooti cartons, packs of Benson & Hedges and Gold Flake, drinking straws, fast food wrappers, and unidentifiable debris. Plastic waste and filth were nearing the city" (*Low* 165).

The narrative starts with the suicide of Dominic Ullis's wife, Aki. This episode signifies the beginning of Ullis's authentic adventure as he traverses Bombay to immerse her ashes while, regrettably, being ensnared in heroin, cocaine, and other narcotics referred to as Meow meow. In this way, this novel "[l]ike traversing a traffic-clogged Indian sprawl in the midday heat, drug and alcohol blowouts are notoriously enervating...offers vicarious kicks without the comedown" (Doyle).

Similar to the previous two novels of the trilogy, this novel too offers an incisive critique of India through the underworld of Bombay. The novel illuminates the sinister aspects of modern India while providing an unapologetic and even frightening portrayal of the nation. Thayil expatiates how issues like poverty, pervasive inequality, and class disparities erode the essence of everyday existence by exposing the fundamental vulnerabilities inside the Indian social structure via vivid narratives. The narrative explores how people are compelled to detrimental behaviours such as drug abuse and addiction due to financial hardships. Thayil unflinchingly illustrates the ethical compromises, apathy, and egocentrism that can manifest in a society grappling with serious social and political challenges.

The story presents several stances when Thayil evokes Western institutionalized discourses and characterises the East as a dehumanised, homogeneous, and fabricated 'other'. Characters in the novel perpetuate their own culture as inferior. The novel depicts Bombay as a horrible, polluted entrapment of ugliness and subjugation, making it a nightmarish metropolitan. Thayil writes that,

She hadn't seen the sky in weeks. She had forgotten there were stars above them. It was as if an impenetrable veil had fallen between her and the heavens. She couldn't imagine why people lived like this. For what reason did they submit to it? Surely there were alternatives? Unrelievedly ugly men and women surrounded by unrelieved ugliness. This was the truth of the city. All around her the mean minds idle in their pollution machines. There was not a face she could like. In the midst of it all, she and her husband, fighting, wretched, undistinguished. (Low 235)

Thus, the novel offers a vehement critique of Indian society by incorporating the aforementioned themes into the plot. Moreover,

this novel, in the words of Johanna Thomas-Corr (2020), "offers conspicuous depiction of corruption, poverty, and slums with the New India of Hindu Nationalism" (*New statesman*). At one place Ullis expresses scepticism on the existence of residents at this location. "I find it hard to believe that people live here. It's uninhabitable for most of the year but the monsoons are murderous, the entire city flooded with filths..." (*Low* 25). Moreover, this novel exhibits the environmental erosion by illustrating the suffocating situations caused by pollution and failed drainage system. Subin T Daniel and Binod Mishra write that "Dominic's grief works as a foil to the ecological grief expressed in the novel. Thayil vividly describes the sad state of Mumbai's metropolis. This ecological grief turns into eco-anxiety as he haunts his reader with the possibility of an apocalyptic end to the city of Mumbai engulfed by water" (88).

The title of the novel itself provides a diminutive form. It offers three levels of interpretation, each illustrating a deteriorating image of Bombay or a character. The novel is classified as 'Low' on a psychological level since it chronicles the bleak and unfulfilling path of the protagonist, Dominic Ullis. The second layer of meaning indicates the vicissitudes of elevated and 'low' existence affected by drugs and chemicals. The third level of meaning illustrates the 'poor' condition of our lives and the 'low' status of our society, particularly in Mumbai, highlighting the contempt experienced by its inhabitants. Jai Arjun Singh's review of the novel also posits the similar assertion:

Low is – like Thayil's first novel *Narcopolis* – very much a Bombay book, and it somehow feels apt that this most vibrant of cities should be the setting for a narrative about death and stasis, as well as reflections on a coming apocalypse. If Aki was always in danger of submerging into her low, the city is sinking too, or so Ullis believes. He is fascinated by the antics of the American president, an essential source of entertainment whose very existence seems like reassurance that the end really is near, that the whole world will soon go the way of Aki. (Para 7)

Thayil's novel portrays the image of the city, the identity of the people, and the overall atmosphere of narrative as marked by irreversible decline. On the contrary, he exhibits the allure of the

West in striking and adoptive manners. Thayil's skillful storytelling appears to pass through the lens of Orientalism, depicting Eastern nations as sullied states.

Conclusion

Thayil's trilogy encapsulates a journey spanning over forty years—from old Bombay of 1960s to New Mumbai of 2000s. But Thayil's perceptions seems titular as the city Bombay, in the trilogy, is portrayed as a re-Orientalized dystopia characterised by urban degradation, corruption, poverty, and eco-anxiety. Thayil professionally conveys a tone of dread and melancholy by using ancient Bombay as a potent metaphor to reflect common perceptions of crumbling state of India. He projects a bizarre and unsettling picture of the country that is not only seductive but also profoundly damaged through vivid allusions to murder, homosexuality, opium, and brothels. In addition to evoking the lost majesty of 'city of dreams', this grotesque delineation reflects the concerns of a society struggling with (post)modernity and moral ambiguity. Thayil challenges readers to consider the ways in which national identity is mediated via such narratives by portraying India as both exotic and problematic, reinforcing persistent tendencies typical of Orientalist discourse. Throughout the trilogy, Thayil addresses both the psychological growth of his characters and the deterioration of India (Bombay) by exposing its sinister facets. The aforementioned discussion foregrounds that the trilogy incisively inquires and applies the core concepts of 'orientalism' as enunciated by Edward Said. The trilogy seeks to depict the fractured identity of Indian people through the sombre image of its metropolitan city and its inhabitants, entangled in addiction, corruption, riots, and class conflict.

NOTES

1. Terry Eagleton offered this proposition in his review of *For Lust of Knowing: the Orientalists and their Enemies* by Robert Irwin (Penguin Press, 2006). In a 2006 review for the *New Statesman*, Eagleton contends that although Edward Said's *Orientalism* has flaws, inaccuracies, and "got many things wrong," its main thesis about the connection between Western knowledge, the belittlement of the East, and imperial power is "fundamentally correct." Eagleton supports Said's main argument in response to its critics, indicating that the portrayal of the Orient as inferior was crucial for Western imperialism.

2. Zainab Monisola Olaitan's study (2022) explores how Enlightenment concepts, especially those of Kant and Locke, ironically justified colonialism. The piece contends that Western philosophy established racial hierarchies and rationalizations for property (such as Locke's labour theory) that enabled land seizure and oppression of non-European populations, promoting a decolonized approach to social science.

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