A CONTEMPORIZED MYTH AND REALITY IN CONFLICT: SUNDERLAL'S PSYCHIC IMBALANCE IN *LAJWANTI* BY RAJINDER SINGH BEDI

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Abstract

Man has always been trying to make sense of the world around him in the light of the narratives around him. Be they the stories given in the religious manuscripts, the myths of gods and goddesses, legends of the heroes, or everyday common moral stories, they are always regarded as a store of human wisdom, setting ideals to be aspired by man. The myth of Ramayana is such an epic narrative which provides the Hindus with perfect definitions of an ideal man i.e., Rama or an ideal woman i.e., Sita. During the partition of India (1947), the scene of Sita's abduction was repeated thousands of times with the women of the sub-continent. The men, who consequently had to play the role of Rama, failed in most of the cases to re-enact the narrative in the true sense of the myth. One finds many literary representations of men who remained confused about their roles in such situations. Sunderlal, a character in Rajinder Singh Bedi's short story "Lajwanti", trying to make sense of the Rama-Sita narrative in the wake of his own circumstances, seems to be totally lost in a world of incomprehension. This research affirms that this short story may be read as a contemporized and appropriated Ramayana through an examination of the mechanics of Bedi's

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juxtaposition of a concrete event (Lajwanti's abduction) with an abstract event (Seeta's abduction by Rawana) and the psychic aftermath of this juxtaposition which consequently shatters the essentials of Ramayana, the myth. The theoretical support will be sought from the concepts including Julia Kristeva's concept of "intertextuality", Harold Bloom's concept of "poetic misprision" and C.G. Jung's idea of "archetypes and the collective unconscious" to imply, through a detailed textual analysis, that these myths seem to fail to explain the circumstances and the psychical implications of similar events and situations in contemporary times (for the writer), for instance, the post-partition times of stress depicted in Lajwanti.

Keywords: Contemporized, Myth, Psyche, evolving narratives, concrete, abstract

Introduction

Mythologies are a part of a culture that transits from generation to generation through the medium of folklores, songs, and literature owing to their great universal appeal and their correspondence to the everyday human situations. They may also play an important role in constituting the values of a society. This paper studies Rajinder Singh Bedi‟s short story entitled *Lajwanti* as a contemporized and appropriated *Ramayana* that has consequently evolved in a way that it seems to have become Bedi‟s own version of the narrative. This paper aims to highlight the two corrective moves of Bedi which he has made while creating his own version of *Ramayana*. First, he may have contemporized it and by contemporaneity, this study means that the author has posited centuries old story within as the backdrop of this short story. It is to say that Bedi has made the *Ramayana* a contemporary story by drawing Lajwanti‟s character as a parallel to Sita‟s character in *Ramayana*. In other words, Bedi‟s text carries another text in it. Julia Kristeva may call this technique as "absorption" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). At one point in her book *The Kristeva Reader* she argues that "any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). Hence, this paper, according to Kristeva‟s understanding of intertextuality, maintains that Bedi has "absorbed" *Ramayana* in his short story *Lajwanti*. The second corrective move played by Bedi, as observed by this paper, is an act of appropriation. This is to say that the author might have appropriated the myth of *Ramayana* by adjusting it to the contemporary scale of Lajwanti. María M. Alfaro in her article "Intertextuality: Origins and Development Of the Concept" writes that Kristeva "does not discuss what happens to a fragment of the social text when it is „absorbed‟ and transformed by literature, nor does she account for how specific social texts are chosen for „absorption‟" (1996, p. 277). This may mean that Kristeva does identify that every text contains traces of another text, but she does not explore as to how

and in what form those traces are manifested in literature. This paper aims to address this niche with reference to the selected short story. This study seeks support from Harold Bloom's theory of anxiety of influence in order to relate the appropriation and the absorption of the myth within the short story. Bloom, in his book *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1997), refers to this corrective move as a "poetic misprision". While explaining this concept, Bloom maintains that "the anxiety of influence comes out of a complex act of strong misreading, a creative interpretation" (1997, p. xxiii). In other words, the anxiety of influence emerges from the adept misreading and interpretation of the precursor's text. Keeping in view Bloom's notion of poetic misprision, this paper argues that the narrative of *Ramayana* has evolved within Bedi's creative interpretation. This paper conceives Bedi's creative interpretation as an act of appropriation which helps to highlight the incomprehension experienced by the characters in the wake of a situation similar to the one in the myth.

The inclusion (absorption and interpretation) of *Ramayana*'s seems to disturb Sunder Lal's psychology who has been mentally engaged to comprehend the connection between *Ramayana's* abstract event and Lajwanti's, conversely represented, concrete event. In order to discern Sunder Lal's perplexity, this paper borrows C. G. Jung's concepts of "archetypes" and "collective unconscious". According to Jung, the collective unconscious refers to the unconscious mind that is shared by all human beings and is liable to various fundamental beliefs and instincts such as life and death, spirituality, and sexual behaviour. Almost all of these instincts and beliefs express themselves through archetypes as Jung says, "the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of archetypes" (2014, p. 42). Since archetypes are the patterns of thinking inherited from ancestors, they carry symbols and images of ancestral beliefs such as superstitions and myths. Thus, mythologies fall in the category of archetypes which transit through generations via collective unconscious because these myths keep on corresponding to the situations of life. This correspondence may activate them helping them dominate their mind and direct their lives. Furthermore, Jung argues, "there is no lunacy people under the domination of an archetype will not fall a prey to" (2014, p. 48). This may mean that the people are susceptible to a mental derangement that may occur owing to the overwhelming presence of myths in their lives. Hence, this paper contends that Hindu myth of *Ramayana* is an archetype that corresponds to the situation of Sunder Lal, dictates his actions, who consequently loses his psychic balance in an attempt to go against the compulsion of the archetype.

Literature Review

Lajwanti has been discussed by a number of researchers in the field of literary studies. For instance, Madhurima Guha has analysed this short story

with the lens of masculinity. In her article "Expect the Unexpected: Analysing Gender Based Violence and Its Reception in Rajinder Singh Bedi"s „*Lajwanti*" and Manto"s „*Khol Do*" under the Lens of Masculinity", she focuses on Sunder Lal"s bewilderment at the return of his wife and the way he receives her. She writes, "Sunder Lal, in this story is as vulnerable and palpable as his wife Lajwanti and any other women" (n.d., p. 6). This suggests that Sunder Lal had also suffered badly during partition. She maintains that Sunder Lal was facing a psychological trauma because of a guilt and remorse for he used to beat Lajwanti severely. His "ideologically colored mind" (n.d., p. 9) was stopping him to express his remorse. In sum, Guha"s study mainly focuses on Sunder Lal"s failure to perceive the "unexpected reality" that clashed with the situation assumed in the light of the mythical narrative provided to him as an archetype. Narain Baba, in the story said, "Sunderlal, you don"t understand the sacred traditions of the Shastras!"…(Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p .25). "„Yes, Baba," Babu Sunderlal replied. „There are many things in this world which are beyond my comprehension."" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 25). Sunderlal is not the only one, the other men also fail to understand their positions and roles in this post partition scenario. Again, and again Bedi refers to the men not being able to understand the women who came back: "Little did these people understand the courage of the women, the awesome strength with which they had faced death and chosen to go on living in such a world-a world in which even their husbands refused to acknowledge them." (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 23). Through this difference between reality and the myth, Bedi"s narrative brings out the sham of the ideals aspired in the epic narrative of *Ramayana*.

The myths seemed to fail to help these men find their way out. The shastras and puranas of the old myths did not help the men to accept the noble cause of accepting their wives. That was why whenever the representatives of the rehabilitation committee tried to convince people of the same, they fail to do so "… the longer he talked and the more he quoted from the Shastras and the Puranas, the more he ended up making a case against the cause he meant to plead for." (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 24). Bihari, the brother of an abducted woman tries to help his sister, but his parents would not let him do so. He "stared up at the sky as if searching for an answer from the heavens-but the heavens are no more than an illusion created by our fearful imagination, and the sky is merely the furthest thing to which our eyes can see." (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 24).

This is significant to note that Sunderlal himself criticizes the role of Rama in Ramayana to preach the innocence of their own abducted women. He sees an affinity between these women and Sita. He criticises the Ram Rajya for not honouring Sita, "Even today, Lord Ram has thrown Sita out of his home because she was forced to live with Ravana… Did Sita commit any sin? Wasn"t she, like our mothers and sisters today, a victim of violence and deceit?" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 25). He further says, "Once again, our

innocent Sitas have been thrown out of their homes …Sita…Lajwanti…" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 25). This parallel he draws between Sita and Lajwanti is ironic because the same myth which he is quoting will fail to provide any comfort or consolation to him when he comes across a similar situation.

The myth being archetypal in nature, very naturally builds the responses in Sunderlal"s mind. He, filled with the enthusiasm to subvert the myth by planning to treat Lajo different than Rama, is disturbed when the story of Lajo does not match exactly with that of the Sita. He received his first shock when Lajwanti, unlike Sita, looked quite better when recovered: "Lajo looked healthier than before. Her complexion seemed clearer and her eyes brighter, and she had put on weight…" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 30). The narrative of the myth demanded a woman wrecked and destroyed in the absence of her husband. Sunderlal could never expect to see as she appeared to him. "She looked different from what he had imagined. He had thought that suffering and sorrow would have reduced her to a mere skeleton, that she wouldn"t have the strength to utter even a few words." (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 30). Soon Sunderlal finds another inversion of the mythical narrative. The Ravana whom he had always hated for being evil and wicked: "ss? Ravana was a demon… He had ten human head" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 25) turns out to be a good person. Talking about Lajo"s abductor, he asks, ""Did he treat you well?" he had asked as he played with her hair. "Yes." "He didn't beat you, did he?" "No."" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 31).

A good number of articles on *Lajwanti*, study the psyche of women as a fragmented psyche and the absence of the voice of the abducted women in partition narratives. Dr Preetha M. M. writes in her article that "the mainstream narratives of India or Pakistan" (n.d., p. 12) do not talk about the sufferings of women. Similarly, another researcher Murthy, criticises *Lajwanti* as a narrative that constructs a stereotype against women that gives "a different impact about Indian women"s psyche" (2016, p. 95) to the readers. Moreover, she has questioned the portrayal of Lajwanti"s character as a female who accepts patriarchy. Her reception is as important as her acceptance of patriarchy. Lajwanti"s reception by her husband is overshadowed by long drawn myths that have been in circulation and are responsible for the reluctance in receiving their abducted women.

Another researcher Abbas labels Sunder Lal"s confusion as a "cultural trauma" (2015, p. 9187) that had been caused because he was one of the pioneers and the leading agents of the Rehabilitation Committee. Sunderlal, an activist, fails to come up to his own ideals and a reinforcement of the need for "a new Shastra and a new Veda, which would help people understand the new world confronting them…" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 30). At such a turn of events, the acceptance of his wife is no more than a duty now: "For Sunderlal, the thought of confronting his wife, who had been abducted and raped, was strangely disturbing. But he did not flinch from

doing his duty, and he behaved in a manly and courageous manner" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 30). The "prevalent constructs" (Abbas, 2015, p. 9183) of the committee as well as the male dominant society compelled him to keep Lajwanti silent, while he did not actually want to do so because of his guilt. Hence the essentials of his society clashed with his mental chaos that made him an agent of trauma. To sum up, Abbasi writes that the implications of that trauma are manifested in Lajwanti"s silence.

All of the above reviewed scholars have deftly analysed the predicaments of *Lajwanti's* characters bringing forward various perspectives such as feminist and masculine identities. But none of them has observed, as this paper shall do, the psychic imbalance of the protagonist as an outcome of Bedi"s experimentation with *Ramayana* within *Lajwanti* which seems like his own version of *Ramayana*.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper explores the experiment by proposing three questions. First, how *Ramayana* can be traced within *Lajwanti*? Second, how has this myth been treated by Bedi? And third, how and what kind of consequences have emerged because of that treatment? In order to answer these questions, this paper seeks support from three concepts to form the theoretical framework. These concepts include Kristeva"s concept of "intertextuality" which will help in as to how *Ramayana* has been absorbed within the short story *Lajwanti*. Second, Bloom"s concept of "poetic misprision" which will support this paper to discern Bedi"s treatment of the *Ramayana*. Third, Jung"s idea of "archetypes and the collective unconscious" will be used as an assistance in this paper to explain the psychic imbalance of Sunder Lal that emerges as a consequence of Bedi"s experimentation with *Ramayana*. Moreover, this research involves a closer reading of a literary text and according to Catherine Belsey, "Textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself" (Belsey, 2005, p. 160), therefore this paper has undertaken Textual Analysis which is used as a research method.

Analysis and Discussion

The first question addresses the absorption of *Ramayana* within the narrative by Bedi. The answer requires an ontological observation of both narratives. For example, there are similarities between both of the stories. To point out those similarities, it is mandatory to explain the goal and the plot of these stories. *Ramayana* is a centuries old Hindu mythology which is regarded as a true love story of a Hindu god Rama and his wife Sita, the goddess. Most of the plot of this mythical narrative revolves around Sita"s abduction by Ravana, the demon-king of Lanka, the villain of the story.

"Sita resolutely rejects Ravana"s attentions, while Rama and his brother set out to rescue her" ("Ramayana," 2020) and eventually they succeeded in rescuing her back. In *The Book of Ram,* Devdutt Pattanaik quotes Ram who tells Sita: "I have done my duty. Restored my Family honour. Killed the man who dared abduct my wife. Now you are free. Go to whoever you choose. You, who have stayed in Ravan"s orchards for so long, are under no obligation to come to me, Ram said." (Pattaniak, 2008, p. 158). However, as they returned, Rama came to know that people were questioning the chastity of Sita who has stayed more than ten years in Ravana"s Lanka. Sita, to prove her chastity, had to undergo a fire test. It was believed that if the sacred fire consumes her, she will be declared as guilty, and if she remains unburnt, she will be regarded as chaste and pure. The mythical narrative affirms that Sita plunged into a sacrificial fire and remained unburnt. Her survival maintained her chastity. Furthermore, when rumours against Sita"s purity reached Rama"s ears again, he banished Sita to forest for exile of atonement. She took refuge there and gave birth to Rama"s two sons. Rama and Sita reunited when their children grew up. In the end, Sita plunged into the earth, her mother goddess, because her innocence was still questioned. This mythology became a religious text, and its essentials have played an important role in constructing Hindu morality for both the genders.

A Hindu woman Lajwanti"s abduction and then her return resembles the abduction and return of Sita as Bedi writes in *Lajwanti* that "The scene was a re-enactment of the old story about Ramchandra leading Sita back to Ayodhya after years of exile" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 30). Sita"s abduction was an abstract event and Lajwanti"s was a concrete one as one of Bedi"s critic, Gopi Chand Narang maintains that:

> *Since in this creative process his journey is from the concrete to the abstract, from the event to the limitlessness of action, from the finite to the infinite or from mundane to the metaphysical, he again and again resorts to the metaphor, symbolism, mythology, and copious references to the Indian pantheon.* (2006, p. 19)

This critique suggests that *Lajwanti* is a concrete event that connects to an abstract event of *Ramayana*. This connection is established by Bedi through the technique of contemporaneity and by this technique it is meant here that Bedi has consciously inculcated the myth in his short story. In simple words, while juxtaposing the myth into the contemporary reality, he was completely aware that he was bringing two texts and linking them within a single narrative. This juxtaposition maintains that myths keep on visiting the contemporary reality along with the process of undergoing clipping and pruning in the subconscious of writers" minds. Kristeva conceives this contemporaneity as "absorption" of a text within a text. Hence through the contemporizing technique of Bedi, *Ramayana* provides a context to *Lajwanti*.

Second question of this research investigates Bedi"s treatment of *Ramayana* that whether it has been presented as it originally was, or he has made some alterations to use the narrative of the myth. Bedi has, this paper answers, appropriated *Ramayana* in order to create his own version of the narrative by making some alterations. Gopi C. Narang asserts that "the significance of the story lies in the fact that here a myth has been used with such telling effect as to invest the story with a down-to-earth quality" (2006, p. 9). The telling effect Narang is talking about here may be called as a misreading that has a potential to alter *Ramayana's* narrative. In order to say that *Lajwanti* is a misreading of *Ramayana*, we have to presuppose that there is a true reading of the myth as well. This true reading may imply the reading based on the literal meaning of *Ramayana's* text. While according to the Reader Response theory, "we only know a text by how readers respond to it" (Parker, 2014, p. 334) which suggests that the interpretation depends upon perceptions and each reader or an interpreter is a unique perceiver. Every perception, hence, emerges as a new version of reading. Since the interpretation is dependent upon the reader whose own interpretation may be viewed as a misinterpretation of the presupposed literal interpretations. Therefore, we may call the reader"s own interpretation as a misreading. Having understood this notion of misreading, this paper argues that Bedi, as a reader and perceiver, has misread *Ramayana.* This misreading, however, is intentional and is meant to reach greater ends.

Such misreading can be discerned as a creative interpretation or what Bloom calls a "poetic misprision" (1997, p. xxiii) which, according to Bloom, is an expression of the anxiety of influence. In simple words, a writer is influenced by his precursors and that influence, inevitably and unconsciously, keeps on intervening his or her own writings, however, in a modified way. In order to identify this influence, Bloom has proposed six corrective moves of modifications that a writer undergoes while handling and expressing the influence. Bloom has called these moves as Revisionary Ratios. This paper has identified one of the revisionary ratios in *Lajwanti* that is *Daemonization*. Daemonization, Bloom argues, is a move of later writer towards his or her individual "counter-sublime" (1997, p. 15) in response to the parent-writer"s sublime. In further explanation, according to Bloom, the influenced writer "opens himself to what he believes to be a power in the parent-poem (parent text)…. that does not belong to the parent proper, but to a range of being just beyond that precursor" (1997, p. 15). To put it simply, the influenced writer grabs the basic power of the text, that we may call a theme, and creates his own sublime that counters the sublime of the precursor.

Bedi"s daemonization, termed as appropriation in this paper, is that he has gripped the basic power of *Ramayana*, that is the theme of abduction and chastity, and innovated a counter sublime. In his own sublime, the protagonist has received and accepted his abducted wife without questioning

her chastity. For instance, Sunder Lal unlike Rama, did not ask for any fire test neither did he banish Lajwanti. This contradicting move, consequently, shook Sunderlal‟s psyche. Further discussion will explain that how this mental chaos arose in the protagonist‟s mind which is the third question of this research.

Third question connects this research with Jung‟s concepts of "archetypes and the collective unconscious" according to which the myth of *Ramayana* is an archetype, and it was responsible for the deep-seated definition of villain / evil in Sunder Lal‟s mind. And Jung says,

> *When a situation occurs, which corresponds to a given archetype, that archetype becomes activated and a compulsiveness appears, which, like an instinctual drive, gains its way against all reason and will, or else produces a conflict of pathological dimensions that is to say, a neurosis.* (2014, p. 48)

Above quoted words explain that the activated archetype becomes one‟s instinct that forces one to go against their reason and the empirical thought process and if we do not follow this instinct, it creates neurosis. Neurosis, according to Freud, is a severe mental illness that is caused by improper repression of an internal impulse by the ego. He argues that "a person falls ill of a neurosis if his ego has lost the capacity to allocate his libido in some way" (1963, p. 387). Libido here refers to the internal impulse that is inappropriately repressed by ego. The symptoms of neurosis include depression, anxiety, mental confusion, and the like. Similar situation happened in Sunderlal‟s case; his ego repressed the instinctual drive. That is to say, when his situation corresponded to *Ramayana*, the archetype got activated along with all essentials and its compulsiveness compelled him to put Lajwanti on trails of atonement. For instance, some trail equivalent to the fire test and the banishment because Rama had put Sita on such trials for atonement. However, Sunderlal did not banish her, rather he took her home and continued living with her. The repression of this instinct divided his psyche into two poles: one to accept Lajwanti and second to put her in a situation where she might have to prove her chastity. This indecisiveness is perceived as a psychic imbalance in this paper. For instance, on the one hand, he stopped listening to Lajwanti‟s account of her time spent in Pakistan. In an effort to see a Sita in her, Sunderlal starts calling Lajo a "Devi" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 31). Lajo thus becomes a woman turned into a goddess. This status takes away from her every opportunity to share the burden of her experience with her husband. "she wanted to tell Sunderlal, with tears in her eyes, all that she had suffered. But he always shrank away from hearing her story…" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 31). While on the other hand, "soon after her return, Sunderlal had asked Lajwanti about those ‚dark days‟" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 31). Moreover, he started calling her Devi, a goddess. This is another point of the story‟s conversion and yet a divergence also with the

mythical narrative. He raises the status of his wife to that of Devi"s but at the same time he did not acknowledge what had happened to the goddess in *Ramayana*. Hence, the suppression of archetypal instinct led Sunder Lal to bewilderment and confusion.

Moreover, the consequences are not merely related to the psyche of Sunderlal but have a significance on a broader scale. For instance, there happened a number of modifications in the understanding of the whole archetypal principle. For example, the essentials of the archetype, the myth, were altered as we have already discussed that the protagonist, unlike Rama, had not asked his abducted wife to give a proof of her chastity. It seems as if the definition and meaning of chastity had been changed. Then the treatment of goddess has also to be modified because Sita was tested with fire test and banishment while Lajwanti was accepted without any test or exile as atonement. Lajo is tested yet in another way. Bedi, here, raises the problem of silence—the inability of survivors and perpetrators of violence to talk about what happened—which is a common theme not only in partition literature but is also what happens in the Ramayana. "And so, Lajwanti"s sorrow had remained locked up in her breast. Helplessly, she had gazed at her body and had realised that, since the partition, it was no longer her own body, but the body of a goddess." (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 31). This type of test leads our attention towards even a bigger consequence, that was the transformation of the relationship of Sunderlal and Lajwanti which yielded in a chain of events linked to each other. "She began to gaze at herself in the mirror and came to the conclusion that she would never be Lajo again. She had returned home, but she had lost everything... Sunder-lal had neither the eyes to see her tears nor the ears to hear her sob" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 32). Suderlal thus becomes, like Rama, a sign of Patriarchy and Lajo, just like Sita, is made to lie in an exile, in her case in her own home. Sita sung, "My soul has become an exile / living in the wilderness." (Sen, 1998, p. 20). This transformation of relationship had occurred at the very moment when the character of Lajwanti had been transformed from a wife to a goddess. The act of giving someone the status of a god or goddess does not only mean that one is attributing high respect and honour to the other person, rather it may also imply, as suggested by *Lajwanti* also, that calling someone a god or a goddess might have two probable outcomes: former is the breakage of the bond between husband and wife, while the latter is a change of the husband into a subject. Nabaneeta Dev Sen writes in her article "When Women Retell the Ramayan", "Sita has been in exile right inside her bedroom

> Ram didn"t share her bed
> For twelve years
> She was locked up behind seven doors
> Ram is absorbed in his own business"
> Poor Sita"s youth is wasted away." (1998, p. 22)

First, while giving someone a status of a god, one cuts off the human ways of interaction and contact with that person. It could be a sort of verbal correspondence, for example, a dialogue or a non-verbal correspondence, for instance, an emotional connection such as empathy or sympathy and the like. The contact between two human beings is always a two-way interaction in which both of them participate. For instance, before becoming a Devi, a goddess, Lajwanti could share her griefs with Sunderlal: she could desire "to be Lajo again, the woman who could quarrel with her husband over something trivial and then be caressed" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 31) as a natural human being. While on the other hand, being a deity, she had lost the very nexus of human correspondence. For instance, "Lajwanti's sorrow remained locked up in her breast." (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 31). At this stage, her correspondence with Sunderlal had been transformed from two-way to one-way correspondence. To put it simply, after a complete loss of the connection between the two, they grew apart and it made Lajwanti think of their relationship twice before expressing anything. Her newly acquired status of a goddess came with the expectations from her to act in a way different from the true vulnerable status she had. Similarly, Sunderlal had to act the worshiper"s part. Therefore, as a goddess she could not share her griefs with a human being properly, and in the same manner Sunderlal, being a human, also could not share his feelings with his goddesses. Sita says, "Alas! If only Rama would understand." (Sen, 1998, p. 25). Hence, the marital bond between Sunderlal and Lajwanti broke leaving Lajwanti heartbroken and miserable.

The second probable outcome of the transformation of a wife into a goddess is that in so doing, Sunderlal had surrendered his stature and position before Lajwanti which suggests that he might have turned himself into a subject to Lajwanti. There were two possible reasons behind transforming himself into her subject. First may be his pent-up guilt for the compensation of his being strict and beating her many times for no reason, while the second reason may be to make his patriarchal community (including himself) believe that his wife is as pious as she was when he had lost her in order to avoid the community"s reproach. The sense of remorse as well as the sense of guilt was evident in his being deeply emotional during the processions of their Rehabilitation committee. For example, the narrator narrates, "There were tears in his eyes. Today he felt his loss even more deeply…" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 25). Such feelings of Sunderlal and also his very excited reaction upon the news of Lajwanti"s return in which "He didn"t want to have any doubts" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 28) shows that he just wanted to be with her again in order to compensate his past strictness. Out of that sense of guilt, he thought that he had to live with her to compensate the ill treatment she had received from him before her abduction.

While on the other hand, in order to justify his acceptance of Lajwanti in the patriarchal society and to avoid its reproach as well, he turned himself into a worshiper so that his goddess‟ chastity must not be questioned. This is how human cognition works that once a relationship among human beings establishes, it does not perish ever instead it may transform. However, the point this paper tries to emphasize here is that Sunderlal‟s attempt to keep Lajwanti with him differentiates his character from the members of his community as the "husbands, parents, brothers, and sisters refused to recognize them [abducted]" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 23). The reference here is towards those members of community who, unlike Sunderlal, had refused even to recognize their girls. So, their relationship underwent transformation because of the circumstances as those of post-partition times of stress depicted in *Lajwanti*. For instance, as this paper has already agued, Sunderlal‟s psyche was divided into two poles i.e., whether to accept Lajwanti or to refuse her. He wanted to accept her because of feeling of remorse while it was hard for him to do so in such a society where the matter of honour had transcended humanity. Thus, he had transformed their relationship compromising his position by turning to a worshiper from a husband so that no one could question his wife‟s purity. This transformation elevated Lajwanti‟s honour, on the one hand, while on the other, it gave Sunderlal a sort of legality for the continuation of their living together.

Taken together, the chain of events and their outcomes suggest that a centuries old myth, that had been leading the Indians in their day to day matters of life, failed to lead Sunderlal in his predicament during post-partition circumstances of tension. Instead of helping him to overcome the difficult and contemporary situation, the correspondence of myth had further tangled up his psyche. His subsequent actions are detached from his personal experience. Unmindful of Lajo‟s mental state, "every morning he went out with the procession through Mohalla Shakoor and joined Rasalu and Neki Ram" (Bedī & Bhalla, 2007, p. 32) to preach to honour women. He is as detached as Rama from his wife‟s experience: "Rama is reading about Sita‟s exile / In a book…"(Sen, 1998, p. 25). The estrangement of Rama‟s experience from Sita‟s is poignant. He reads about it in a book. This detachment and his imbalanced psyche ruined a lot of things. For instance, it destroyed his relationship with his society, his relationship with his wife and his relationship with his own self. In addition, it is important to note here that the inability of a belief constructing myth maintains that the narratives of myths must evolve with the passage of time. Bedi‟s experimentation suggests that one cannot always seek guidance from or blindly follow those narratives which are rigid and exist in their original forms, quintessential for their relative times. That is why, the narratives have to evolve or to put it otherwise, the mythical narratives must be modified, not whole of their forms, but at least as much as they could contribute to contemporary circumstances. If one does not modify them, he or she will suffer with more

complexity and perplexity as Sunderlal had in his time. In short, though Bedi‟s narratives allude to the myths, yet the structures of his stories evolve themselves as if on their own, taking a cue from the mythological narratives. So, one aspect of these character may be real and the rest of them archetypal. In other words, his interest remains in the depths of the sub-conscious of his characters which have "the ring of centuries behind them… and the shades of millennia of human thought." (Narang, 2006, p. 19-20). In Bedi‟s writing an event is not just an isolated event but it is a link in an unbroken chain of numberless events, all carried forward in one sweep. Time and space, thus, have no bearing in the conventional sense. The journey of his creative process is thus from "the concrete to the abstract, from the event to the limitlessness of action, from the finite to the infinite or from the mundane to the metaphysical…" (Narang, 2006, p. 19).

Counter Critique

Some readers may question the application of Harold Bloom‟s theory of Anxiety of Influence in a fiction. For instance, a question may arise in a reader‟s mind that Bloom‟s theory is a theory of poetry so, how can it be applied on genre of fiction? A possible answer to this question could be that Bloom basically talks about the influence of an old or contemporary writer on any other writer. The text can be poetry, fiction, or drama. Although Bloom had talked about intrapoetic influences but this does not mean that a poet can influence only a poet. Poetry can influence other genres writers as well and vice versa. As for example, Chinua Achebe‟s novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) was inspired by W. B. Yeats‟ poem "The Second Coming 1921". Moreover, the three words of the title of the novel are borrowed from the third verse of Yeats‟ poem. Therefore, this paper has may be justified to argue that Bedi‟s *Lajwanti* carries influence of Maharishi Valmiki‟s *Ramayana.*

Conclusion

While recapitulating the whole discussion, this paper synchronizes all the three answers to this conclusion that Bedi, while writing *Lajwanti,* has deliberately contemporized the centuries old Hindu myth, *Ramayana*, within the short story and appropriated it in his own way by making contrasting alterations. This antithetical evolution of the narrative caused imbalance in Sunderlal‟s psyche which led to the transformation of his relationship with his wife Lajwanti. Thus, the myth of *Ramayana*, which was quintessential in building a worldview of the Indians for ages, failed in helping the protagonist to deal with the complex situation of his times, for instance, the post-partition times of stress depicted in *Lajwanti*.

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