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THE BAPTISM OF DEATH: READING, TODAY, THE LIFE AND DEATH OF LAKSHMI KAUNDINYA[1]

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..... doctrine involves the utterances of speakers in the sense that doctrine is, permanently, the sign, the manifestation and the instrument of a prior adherence - adherence to a class, to a social or racial status, to a nationality or an interest, to a struggle, a revolt, resistance or acceptance. Doctrine links individuals to certain types of utterance while consequently barring them from all others. Doctrine effects a dual subjection, that of speaking subjects to discourse, and that of discourse to the group, a t least virtually, of speakers[2].

1.INTRODUCTION: FROM NARRATION TO NARRATOR

"I began with the desire to speak with the dead"[3]. In my case, in this paper, it is with Lakshmi Kaundinya, the wife of Hermann Kaundinya. My speaking and reading is guided by the directions set by the cultural critic Gayatri Chakravorthy Spivak, who writes:

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization[4].

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[2]. Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language", in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p.226.

[3]. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press 1988), p.1, quoted in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Adam Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.ix.

[4]. "Can Subaltern Speak?", in Patrick William and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p.102.

The text that contains the account of the "baptism of death" experienced through the conversion and baptism of her husband by Lakshmi Kaundinya is found in the monthly magazine of the Basel Mission called *Der evangelische Heidenbote* (roughly "The Protestant Messenger to the Heathen"), entitled "Der Sterbebette einer Braminenfrau" (the Deathbed of a Brahmin Lady), which appeared in March 1984 (pp.20-26)[5]. My reading of Lakshmi Kaundinya will be restricted to this text for the simple reason that a t this point in time this is the only text immediately available to me, although other accounts and perspectives are available in different loacales.

Reading, today, the story of Lakshmi Kaundinya is then, for me, a dialogue with the dead, the dead who refuse to rest in peace, but seek to reclaim their place within the "living" stream of church life.

2.THE PERSPECTIVAL GAZE: FRAMING THE SUBJECT

But suppose that there were a historiography that regarded 'what the women were saying' as integral to its project, what kind of history would it write?[6].

The account[7] begins by attempting to situate the issue in relation to Lakshmi Kaundinya's husband Hermann Kaundinya, who, as a 19-year old

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[5]. I thank Christopher L. Furtado for sending me a photocopy of this text. All subsequent quotations or summaries are from this text in my translation.

[6]. Ranajit Guha, "The Small Voice of History", in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, eds., *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings of South Asian History and Society*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.11.

[7]. There are references to this incident in the articles by Mohan D. David, "Caste Background of Basel Mission Christians", where he refers to reports in the *Oriental Christian Spectator*, Bombay, and writes, "Missionaries of the Basel Mission seem to have achieved reasonable success in their work among the higher castes from the very beginning. In 1844, for instance, they reported that four Brahmins had boldly confessed Christ in Mangalore which enraged the entire Brahmin community. There was such excitement in the town that they had to resort to military and police assistance for safety" (p.169 and note 14 on p.177), and that by Godwin Shiri, "Caste and Economic Background of Early Basel Mission Christians in South Kanara: A Historical Survey", where he summarizes: "There were a handful of Brahmin conversions to Christianity. The first of these took place in 1844 when the Brahmin trio - Ananda Rao Kaundinya, Mukunda Rao and Bhagavantha Rao (Christian names Hermann, Christian and Jacob) took baptism in Mangalore. On the same day a Brahmin by name Subbaraya, who was a mission school teacher, was baptized a t Kadike by Ammann. These Brahmin conversions were considered as a great victory in the Mission work and created hopes among the missionaries of more Brahmin conversions. Kaundinya's conversion had created an uproar in Mangalore among the Brahmins and Muslims. The military and police had to be alerted to avoid any violent incidents. It was the Anglo-Vernacular school of Mangalore which was instrumental in the conversion of Kaundinya and the other two Brahmins. Kaundinya was particularly a find of Dr.Moegling. He was sent to Basel for theological training and after his ordination he returned to India in 1851 and worked for many years in the Mangalore Seminary as a teacher and later as a pioneer missionary in Coorg" (p.185). Both articles, which do not address the

young man, then named Anandaraj Kaundinya, around Christmas 1844, along with two other Brahmin youth, convinced by the word of the Cross, moved out of "the darkness of heathenism" into Christ. In fact, the article begins by stating the writer's purpose in writing the article, which was to provide an illustration to a speaker in Leipzig who had spoken about the "power of heathenism" and to record the sad history of the wife of "our beloved, [and] to many of us well-known, brother Hermann Kaundinya, the converted Brahmin, who lived as a pupil for five years in the Mission-House in Basel"[8]. The writer goes on to say in a rather self-defensive tone: "I would not have ventured to openly describe the story of his poor wife had she not, through the closing by death, found an irrevocable end; and my only wish is that I would be able to depict her life and death through a long collection of letters of her husband, so that [I] could stand, with total engagement, for the unlucky women of India in a priestly capacity before God, to be truly strengthened and augmented." What is offered here is a portrayal and depiction through the "informant" who here happens to be the husband of the one being portrayed. However, [i]f we then drag our reluctant eyes away from the offered spectacle and focus them instead upon the spectator, our vision doubles"[9]. What is being offered for "consumption" here is the female-in-relation-to-the-informant, who is then sought to be understood, not as she is in herself, but as she is perceived through the eyes of the one who does the gazing.

The politics of interpretation from the perspective of the writer is revealed in the comment, where, after reporting that when Hermann decided to take "the great, decisive, step in the name Jesus, he was already, in accordance with

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issue of the wider family of the converts, appear in Godwin Shiri, ed., *Wholeness in Christ*, op.cit., pp.164-178 and pp.179-199.

[8]. References to Hermann Kaundinya can also be found in the more or less "official" account of the history of the Basel Mission in India where it is recorded that on 6th January 1844, three young Brahmins were baptized, two Konkani Brahmins (Bhagavantrao and Mukundrao) and one Sarasvata Brahmin - Aanadrao Kaundinya. "Kaundinya who was trained as a missionary in Basel, worked as such for many years in India. His first wife, died as a heathen, while calling on her God Rama; after that he married a lady from Wuerttemberg."... "He remained active for the Basel Mission till the end (1st February 1893). The hope that many Brahmins would enter the Christian congregation because of their fellow caste-persons, was not fulfilled." Translated from Wilhelm Schlatter, *Geschichte der Basler Mission 1815-1915: II. Band: Die Geschichte der Basler Mission in Indien und China*, (Basel: Verlag der Basler Missionsbuchhandlung, 1916), p.30.

In addition there is the brilliant reading of conversion cases, including an analysis of the legal implications and fall-out, by Gauri Viswanathan, "Coping with (Civil) Death: The Christian Convert's Rights of Passage in Colonial India", in Gyan Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, pp.183-210. The case of "Ananda Row" is discussed on pp.194-200 and passim.

[9]. Blake Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on the Gaze", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol.I, No.2 (1993), p.174.

Indian custom, married, had his own house in Mangalore, where he led, along with his wife, an independent family life", the writer goes on to say that "among the pagan Hindus there exists, namely, the unnatural, pernicious custom, that children, already in early childhood - often in their 3rd or 4th year - are festively engaged, which is held to be a firm and unbreakable band, so that when the boy dies, the unlucky young girl is considered to be a widow, and must remain a widow her whole life long." For me, this is interesting because the account does not set out from what already exists, namely, the fact that Kaundinya and his wife were married and were leading an independent life, but puts this in a context of the what the narrator sees as deeply problematic and unnatural 'Indian custom'. The case, for the writer, can only be interpreted from within this premise - there is something unnatural and incorrect in Indian marriage customs. Since this is so, then there is in the core of the marriage of the Kaundinyas something fundamentally wrong. Once this premise is accepted, then the rest of the narrative falls into place. In her brilliant and provocative analysis of *Sati*, Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan points out that "[t]he imperialist text covered over sexuality by discrediting conjugal love, and by sublimating chivalric love into disinterested justice or 'romance'..."[10]. It is only when the subject is neatly framed in opposition to that which is deemed appropriate and correct that the narrator believes a clear and obvious understanding of the case of Lakshmi Kaundinya can be articulated.

The narrator of the story describes the engagement customs of the Hindus, and thus builds up the frame of reference in providing the backdrop to the discussion of Lakshmi Kaundinya, which would then lead the reader to ask whether anything positive or of worth could emerge from such a situation. What is of significance here is that the frame is built up using the ethnographic methodology of description, through an attempt to capture the details and invite the reader to be a spectator. Thus, moving beyond the case or issue on hand, a generalized picture is presented so that the object can securely be framed within this.

After describing the engagement customs, the narrator then moves on to the question of what it is that the bride does after the ceremony. The bridegroom returns to his house and the bride will not see him again till the

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[10]. In the chapter entitled "Reprensenting Sati: Continuities and Discontinuities", in her *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p.53. Another important point that she makes is that "the colonial perception of a collective gendered identity for the women who die sharply contradicts a focus on the individual female subject, the sati, who is framed for scrutiny" (.59).

actual wedding ceremony. Till then the young bride must live hidden in her parents house. She cannot come into contact with a man, and when this is inevitable she can only do so heavily veiled. "Her occupation is sleeping, playing with her bridal jewels, decorating herself with them and sit brooding dismally without thinking, prattling with her mother and other women, eating and sleeping again." Here what we get is the attempt not only to write on the discipline of the child-bride, but also to situate such a person within the disciplining categories which could be held as a moral or ethical object lesson to those for whom such categories were both abhorrent and disgusting.

The wedding ceremony takes place when the bride is twelve or fourteen years old. The wedding ceremony of Lakshmi with Anandaraj Kaundinya who is now 18 years old is described by the narrator in minute details.

What we have encountered is the interplay between rationally exotic "otherness" representation, which has inbuilt in it the propensity of the use and abuse of power - power as a structure which has within it the possibility and the privilege to represent. Although I am not in a position to comment on the identity of the narrator, the text that we are reading, with its centre being not Lakshmi as herself so much as Lakshmi, the wife of Kaundinya, is, in this sense, a "male" text, and I am conscious that it is as a male reader that I have come to this text chastened and challenged by warnings such as those articulated by Tania Modleski who writes:

> Recognizing that women have long been held prisoners of male texts, genres, and canons, many feminist critics have argued for the necessity of constructing a theory of the female reader and have offered a variety of strategies by which she may elude her captors[11].

My desire to speak with Lakshmi Kaundinya is, sadly, not an attempt to enable to elude her captors, but is informed by my desire to understand how varieties of identity have been generated through texts, through prescriptions of modes of behaviours, through awakened expectations, and through the cultural baggage that forms an inevitable part of the encounter of either a colonizing power or a foreign mission agency or both. It is clear to me that a t the heart of the encounter between colonizers and missionaries in a strange

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[11]. Cf. "Feminism and the Power of Interpretation: Some Critical Readings", in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1986), p.121. Modleski concludes: "By working on a variety of fronts for the survival and empowerment of women, feminist criticism performs an escape act dedicated to freeing women from all male captivity narratives, whether these be found in literature, criticism, or theory" (p.136).

land there lies a deep ambivalence, which cannot be simply and crudely reduced to either-or terms[12].

3.TRYING TO DESERVE THE ATTENTION THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN ATTRACTED[13]

"Woman can never be defined"[14].

We now return to the newly-wed couple. They are deeply in love: "... Hermann loved his wife, and she, too, clung to him with all the love of which she was capable." This, for the narrator, is a very surprising thing. The German word left out in the previous quotation is "doch" - "yet". Why the "yet"? Because the narrator has just described the life of Lakshmi after wedding ceremony.

"Closeted in the women's area, she spent her time with nothing to do or with childish games. She got out of her sluggish situation only to spend hours decorating herself with flowers and her jewels, after which she spent hours sitting on the ground with nothing to think or to do, or spent hours chatting with visiting women, and then again went to sleep. For her husband, she cooked the rice each day as the other, fetched water or cow-dung, stood behind him while he ate and then went with the leftovers to the women's area, where she could then satisfy her hunger. Regarding intellectual or leisure companionship - how could one even talk about such a matter?" Then comes the plaintive "doch". The natives never loose the capacity to surprise. Just when one thought that the attempt to situate had been accomplished, there comes along an unforeseen and unexpected complication. It is precisely here that, however unwittingly, both Kaundinya and his wife, serve to subvert the categories set out for them. "It is particularly important to mark strategies of containment (points a t which the subaltern are contained by dominant ideology) as sites of power and the assertion of subaltern autonomy"[15].

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[12]. See the broad and sensitive analysis in Marc Ferro, *Colonization: A Global History*, (London: Routledge, 1997), passim. For an attempt to read the missionary encounter with India as the effort "to transplant the European church to India", see Jacob S. Dharmaraj, "Colonial Mission Theology and Early Struggle for Indian Christian Identity", *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol.XXV, Nos.2 & 3 (1993), pp.3-17.

[13]. Modification of a phrase in Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, (New Delhi: Indialink, 1997), p.144: "Adoor Bai wasn't trying to attract attention. He was only trying to deserve the attention that he had already attracted."

[14]. Trin T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcolonially and Feminity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p.96.

[15]. Kamala Visweswaran, "Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography", in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, eds., *Subaltern Studies IX*, op.cit., pp.86-87.

It is after this period - however represented, although the joy shines through - that the life of Lakshmi Kaundinya took another turn. She had moved along with her husband to Mangalore - the narrator is not sure when -. Kaundinya attended the mission school for a while, and through the education that he had acquired there rose to a high place of honour in the Government, and it was then that "he found the precious pearl which he certainly did not seek." The narrator can only speculate on the nature of the struggle that Kaundinya had to undergo up to Christmas 1844, and the power of grace that he obtained through Jesus for his victory. Following his baptism on the day of Epiphany 1845, "in order to win Jesus he sacrificed absolutely everything what he had in this world, in respect of happiness and honour, his possessions and his prospects. With this step he renounced his house and all his goods - his wife, whom he loved from his heart - his relations, who reckoned him as dead and lost, without wanting to have any sense of community with him, all his shining prospects, which his position, his talent, had opened for the future. As one through and through poor, forsaken and dishonoured by his own people, he moved into the house of our brother, only holding fast to simple faith in Jesus, and holding everything other than this holy knowledge as dirt and damage."

These dramatic events, and the build up to them, is something on which we can only speculate, led "Lakshmi, his poor wife, hurried back to Sirsi, to her father, as one filled with deathly agony, as one who had become a widow." The narrator reports that "any close connection with Hermann was from then on an impossibility. Hermann remained in the Mission House in Mangalore, and came to Basel in 1846 with brother Moegling, where he prepared himself for five years, in humility and fidelity, for future mission work among his people."'In this text, the five years in Basel are passed over in silence[16]. Right from the outset we had been informed where the focus of this report would lie and had been told that the narrator had, a short time previously, published a

[16]. It is quite possible that Hermann was taken to Basel not only for this task but also to put as much distance between him and the legal implications and complications of the conversion, which has been described by Gauri Viswanathan, "Coping with (Civil) Death ...", in Gyan Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, op.cit., where she writes that Kaundinya's parents alleged that the 18-year old "had been 'abducted' by his missionary-teachers and forcibly converted to Protestantism. What brought a 'reluctant' British administration into the case was the part played by the local English magistrate who, according to the parents of the boy, had abetted the missionaries by turning a blind eye on their activities. The sole redress that the family sought, they repeatedly asserted in a phrase that would have sounded ominous were it not for the pathetic transparency of the euphemism, was to have the boy returned home so that 'he could be brought to reason'. The magistrate rebutted in his turn that, as a result of his refusal to intervene, the family had staged an ambush on the mission house to reclaim Ananda Row, and when that failed, (again according to the magistrate's testimony) they had concocted a macabre plot to implicate Christians in the desecration of a nearby mosque, so that in the ensuing melee the family would be able to whisk the boy away, undetected" (p.195).

report on the life and conversion of Hermann. In this discrete silence we perceive a process of hegemonisation on work, where the former Anandaraja and now Hermann is in the process of being moulded and defined so that he may speak for the "us" but appear as the "you". Any analysis of the hegemonical aspects of the narration, which in its cris-crossing reminds one of the attempt to somehow construct a clearly negotiable path through the thicket of native unpredictability and obstinacy, seems to lead one to the concept of taming the native who is then to be returned in order to continue this aspect of mission.

After our sojourn in Basel, let us return with Hermann Kaundinya to South Kanara, where, suitably trained in the exercise of power, he returns not only to a task which he has to fulfil, but also to the reality of a wife who has now spent several years in Sirsi, wondering, wishing, waiting to exhale... ..

4.CONTROLLED ENCOUNTERS

> *Deep in his heart Charles did not wish to be an agnostic. Because he had never needed faith, he had quite happily learned to do without it ... Yet here he was not weeping for Sarah, but for his own inability to speak to God. He knew, in that dark church, that the wires were down. No communication was possible*[17].

The narrator begins this section on the return of the native with the assertion that "the hand of God had prepared for him a further difficult test, which was more difficult and painful than all that had happened till then." This test was nothing other than Lakshmi: "His heart had never given up the hope that the Lord would lead him to his beloved wife once more, and also that her soul would be gifted to him as booty. Only the Lord knows how he wrestled over this matter in prayer." Hermann returned to Mangalore with an inspector of the Basel Mission in October 1851, and "the news spread like lightening among the Brahmins of the whole neighbourhood, that the 'lost' Kaundinya had returned. All wanted to see him, all spoke about him." The point is that this news reached Sirsi very quickly. Events a t the mission station and among the missionaries too moved quite rapidly. Brother Moegling had to visit a neighbouring town on the coast along with the Inspector, and decided to take this opportunity to "visit the old Brahmin without letting him know that he, Moegling, was in fact the one who was the 'enticer' of his son-in-law. Contrary to all expectations, the missionaries were received with friendliness by the old one, who even asked whether it was true

[17]. John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, (New York: Signet, 1970), p.282.

that Kaundinya had returned to India. It seemed that there was an attempt of good-will in his behaviour. Hearing this news, Hermann wrote a letter immediately to his father-in-law and another to Lakshmi. Hermann received an answer from his father-in-law, but quicker than this came a letter from Lakshmi, or rather, since she herself could not write, from a trustworthy relative, who wrote in her name under instruction from her. Hermann opened this and read it with a fluttering heart. Yet all hope appeared to be clearly cut off. With deep melancholy he laid the letter aside. However, after further thought, it struck him that the words of the Hindus and particularly the Hindu women are not to be taken as they appeared, but that very often the hidden sense of their words denoted the opposite of what they appeared to say".

Here we have comments on the codification of motives, but what strikes me is the not-so-subtle sexual undertones that encapsulate the narrative, not only here but in other sections as well. The five years in Basel are passed over in this account in silence, but the moment the native returns to his home country the intrusive curiosity of the narrator, especially with regard to the natives as sexual beings seems to obtrude[18]. This element, where the narrator in attempting to think through Hermann's thoughts, tells us more of the narrator than of the one being narrated, and any reading of such texts ought to exhibit sensitivity to such elements, especially when religious sentiments, which are being analyzed, are recognized as being embodied in human bodies, including the body of a woman who has spent many years in a state of practical unknowing, without having had the chance to clarify obvious "why" questions through face-to-face encounter[19].

We have reached the stage where "practical unknowing" will shortly yield to a direct encounter. "He read the letter again - and behold, he was not disappointed. He quickly realized in the way the words were formed what the actual wishes of his wife were. The letter closed with the urgent request that Hermann ought not to come in the absence of her father. But that he ought to come precisely in this time was the hidden meaning of these words, something which Lakshmi herself confessed to her husband later. Hermann was

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[18]. An analysis of such intrusive curiosity in a different context is found in Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-century Art, Medicine and Literature", in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *"Race", Writing and Difference*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp.223-261. The author writes: "The 'white man's burden' thus becomes his sexuality and its control and it is this which is transferred to the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female" (p.256).

[19]. For an analysis of how "colonialism was always locked into the machine of desire", see the chapter entitled "Colonialism and the Desiring Machine" in Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.159-182, notes on pp.202-205.

undergoing a great struggle as to what he ought to do. Lakshmi's relative who had written the original letter came to Mangalore bringing the inheritance papers which Lakshmi had kept safely and also bringing "the unexpected assurance that Lakshmi had decided and was ready to once again join him." Hermann was requested to come to Sirsi and if faced with resistance was to take Lakshmi away from there by force, "and if she appeared to put up a fight or screamed, he ought not to get confused." One is justified in wondering how the story would have turned out if Hermann had gone along with the elaborate plans made by Lakshmi, but what we now get is the manifestation of the Christian domestication of Kaundinya, since the narrator reports: "Certainly, as a Christian Hermann could not follow this advice." For the narrator it is self-evident that this was a matter where Kaundinya did not trust himself sufficiently to act but obviously looked to his new advisors as to the best course of action. They too could not let their prized star wander off on a matter that could lead to the ripping open of festering tensions, and so the native must go home, not alone, but accompanied by one who would be by his side to control the situation, which after all the years of investment could not be allowed, in a moment of passion, to slip out of control. Rationality ought to rule over the heart and its reasons. "However the main thing was clear - that his wife wished for the renewed union. With a heart beating for joy Hermann hurried to Sirsi. Brother Moegling received from Inspector Totenhans the instructions to meet Hermann on the set day in Sirsi and to support him during this important matter with appropriate advice. On 21st December 1851, the Sunday before Christmas, the two met in the already mentioned town." The stage is now set for the controlled encounter.

5. FACE TO FACE AGAIN: RE-ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTION

The heart in misery
Has turned
upside down.

The blowing gentle breeze
is on fire.
O friend moonlight burns
like the sun.

Like a tax-collector in a town
I go restlessly here and there.

Dear girl go tell Him
bring Him to His senses.
Bring him back.

My Lord white as jasmine
is angry
that we are two[20].

The stage is all set, the curtain is being drawn, and "there follows now a scene, of the totally dreadful struggle, which we are allowed to witness, which this poor completely heathen Hindu woman has to pass through, in a time where, on the one side, the true, treasured love attracts her forcefully to her husband, but where, on the other side, to sacrifice her deeply enrooted distaste, which had grown with her whole being, against one who had lost caste, who was in her eyes impure, lost and reprehensible." The choice is clear, but the role of religion and custom is yet to make its powerful statement determining the course of events. "On Monday morning, a t 10.o'clock, strengthened by prayer, Hermann and Moegling set out for the house of the Sadaramin, which was an half hour distant from their place of shelter." The narrator then goes on to describe the *mise en scene* which is the house of Lakshmi's father, laying stress on the courtyard where the two entered and asked for Lakshmi's father, who after having been called made his appearance after some delay, seating himself on a carpet which had been placed in the courtyard and extending courtsey of chairs for his guests. "Moegling started the conversation with some questions regarding the Sadaramin's health and so on, and then asked, that since this time he had also brought Hermann with him, he [Hermann] would be pleased not only to see him [the father-in-law] but also his daughter. In the beginning the old one was very friendly, his face darkened by the mention of his daughter, and all sorts of excuses were paraded. He did not want to know Hermann any more, he claimed not to understand what Hermann wanted of his daughter, and asked why he was being disturbed." Moegling, manifesting the Aaron syndrome, spoke on hebalf of the apparently tongue-tied Hermann. Moegling informs the father that Hermann would like to hear directly from the mouth of his wife whether she would indeed be willing and ready to join him again. The father declared that such a thing was unthinkable and impossible. Had Hermann behaved in a manner appropriate for a relative, "that which has come to pass would not have come to pass. Now it is impossible to treat him as relative." The shadow-boxing continued and Moegling now took it upon himself, calmly and politely, yet firmly, to inform

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[20]. Mahadeviyakka (12th century). *Vachana 321*, translated from Kannada by A.K. Ramanujan in A.K. Ramanujan, trans. and ed., *Speaking of Siva*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 139.

the old father that according to the law, it could be ordered that Hermann be allowed to look ahead to a future which included his wife. The father must now simply decide, "whether he would allow this voluntarily or not." The veiled threat succeeded in overcoming the natural resistance. Perhaps memories of the earlier encouner with the law, and all that it had entailed in terms of time and bitterness, played no small part in the change of heart. Was Moegling, perhaps, seen as some kind of extension of the colonial power (despite whatever missionaries from the Basel Mission may have thought about the Empire)? The father now has become complaint, and informed his visitors that "he himself had nothing against it, but his daughter did not want it. Now someone was sent into the house, and behold, after some delay, Lakshmi appeared, veiled, in an anteroom, whose open door looked out on the veranda. While Moegling remained with the old one, down in the veranda, Hermann stood up and went forward; only about six steps distant from him in the room stood the shivering Lakshmi, whom he had not seen for eight years. His heart surged within him. Finally he asked her whether she was prepared to follow him and was ready to be united with him once again. But the poor woman found no answer for a long time. She finally broke the silence only to shower him with the accusation that he had abandoned her. He should have asked her this question eight years ago, but then he had not bothered to even ask her opinion. Now any talk of a reunion was no more possible. Hermann clarified to her how things had come to pass and declared to her his uninterrupted love. He asked her again, begged and pleaded, but in vain. Already a full hour of these negotiations had passed. The Sadaramin called over self-contentedly - 'Look here Hermann, my daughter does not want to come.' - and Hermann began to lose courage. Moegling called to him in German to gather fresh courage and asked him to hold on and persevere as long as possible. Our poor brother started again with requests, being again in the beginning with clarifications, explanations, admonitions; Lakshmi answered everything either with silence or unclear whisperings. A second, also a third hour flowed by. Hermann's body and soul had become weak. The Sadaramin repeated again and again that it was obvious that his daughter did not want to do what was being proposed. But Moegling opposed him, not without good reason, that on the contrary his daughter could not bring herself to separate from her husband. Already it was about 2 in the afternoon. For three full hours, Hermann had stood down in the veranda; three hours had Lakshmi held herself inside, and still it was as it had been in the first minute. The unlucky woman was bound to Hermann in her heart, and yet she did not deem it possible to give herself over to the 'unclean' and 'lost' one. Finally the Sadaramin unwillingly demanded, in an imperious tone, a decisive answer from his daughter. But she remained silent and shut herself up in her silence.

Now, finally, Moegling and Hermann set out and said their good-byes with a wounded disposition. The hope of the two brothers was severely toned down, however a second visit was planned for another morning."

From this point on Lakshmi moves more and more to the centre stage of the narrative, and my effort to speak with her will be an attempt through the translation of the text to move her from being a musty object of archival curiosity to the flesh-and-blood person that she really is. Obviously this textual incarnation (or re-incarnation) happens within given parameters, but it is precisely in the attempt to open the discourse to a wider body of participants than originally envisaged that the enfleshment occurs. Aijaz Ahmad raises a pertinent and provocative discussion point when he writes:

> The damage Orientalism often did can now be undone by superior scholarship, if and when we ourselves produce such scholarship, but the Orientalism scholarship as such cannot simply be dismissed as an exercise of bad faith ...[21].

We have to take the other unintended meaning of "faith" in this context when we speak of Lakshmi, and look to the subsequent developments with this in mind. In the same time Edward Said's observations continue to hold good:

... The Orient needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created by scholars, soldiers, and judges who disinterred forgotten languages, histories, races, and cultures in order to posit them - beyond the modern Oriental's ken - as the true classical Orient that could be used to judge and rule the modern Orient[22].

It is precisely the programmatic nature of the discourse which we cannot overlook or underestimate. Our narrator continues: "Tuesday dawned. With great fervour the two [Hermann and Moegling] united in prayer before the Lord, and entreated him, the one who directs hearts, to turn Lakshmi's mind to Hermann and also to save her soul. They had the faint hope that Lakshmi would send for them, but in vain. Finally, in the evening a t around 5 they hurried again to the house of the Sadaramin." The scene is repeated, but this

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[21]. Cf. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), p.259. The important insights and methodological warnings of David C. Scott on pre-colonial orientalism, especially in a context where the missionary does not initially create, but enters into structures of authority, perceived or otherwise, must not be lost sight of. See his article, "Precolonial Orientalism in South Asia", in David C. Scott and Israel Selvanayagam, eds., *Re-visioning India's Religious Traditions: Essays in Honour of Eric Lott*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), pp.3-21.

[22]. Cf. *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994 [1978]), p.92.

time with a bunch of relatives in attendance. Although the father was not around the actors took their assigned positions, with the difference that Hermann was not content to remain down in the veranda but went forward to the immediate proximity of the door behind which stood Lakshmi. Two hours pass and no answer is given. Finally Lakshmi pleads, "I cannot give a clear, decisive answer yet, I will do that in four months." Hermann and Moegling, totally dejected and depressed return to their traveller's lodge. "I was terribly weighed down in my disposition", wrote Hermann (the narrator informs us), "we had placed all our wishes before the Lord during that day; but now I had to give up the hope of rescuing my wife from her wretched condition. That was not a simple matter. However, the next morning I felt my heart lighten and was truly satisfied with the way of the Lord." Christmas Eve dawned. "Hermann wrote a melancholy farewell letter to his wife and sent it across to the house of the Sadaramin, packed his things, sent the palanquin, in which he had hoped to take his wife, along with the palanquin bearers ahead, had lunch, and rode off with Moegling towards Mangalore." The way through the town which was to signal the end proves to be the herald of a rapid succession of events. There is rapid movement on this road - a messenger runs behind them in great haste - "he requested them to come once again to Lakshmi. The two brothers turned their horses towards the Sadaramin's house; Moegling remained outside on the road in the shade, Hermann went in to the inner courtyard. Lakshmi stood again in her old place, surrounded by many relatives. 'Will you come now?', asked Hermann with quiet determination. But it was as if a devilish power again held her back she began once again, 'I will come with you after four months'. Without taking leave Hermann turned away, went out, sat on his horse and rode away from there. They had traversed a distance of a hundred steps, when Lakshmi's family priest hurried behind them out of breath, and requested to return 'just once more, only for a moment.' Again Hermann returned for some moments to stand before Lakshmi with the question whether she would come with him. And now - finally - through the quivering lips came a quiet 'Yes'. Her love for Hermann had won an indescribable victory. There was only one thing that she requested - not to be compelled to ride along with Moegling. This was accepted - Moegling would come slowly behind them." There was flurry of activity. He hurriedly rode off behind the palanquin bearers who had a start of three hours, "rode hurriedly back, prepared his wife for the journey, and a t 10.o'clock in the night, without even saying farewell to the father and the mother, the festive procession started out, Lakshmi in the palanquin, Hermann riding beside her. The magic circle in which the unlucky ones had been imprisoned

for so long had been broken, and a new joyfully rich hope appeared to dawn over the two."

6. TAMING THE PAGAN

> *The traditional image of separation which has created the impression of the 'baptized' being a loss to his original Hindu or Muslim family or community needs radical re-thinking. Separation can only be from sin and not necessarily from one's community. Baptism seeks to bring unity and not disunity*[23].

The protagonists are now on their way to the security of the mission compound in Mangalore. The narrator begins to speculate on the incredible events of the past few days, how Hermann could not believe his victory achieved against Lakshmi's inclination, and the nature of the love which brought this about. "In her heart there was not even the slightest idea of the heavenly magnificence of Christianity, to which her husband owed allegiance; more than this she was imprisoned and caught in the spell of paganism to the depths of her inner being; and she looked upon her husband, whom she loved as a man, as a lost, cast-away and impure apostate, who had cast himself and her with him in unutterable misery. Because of this, the more her natural love bound her to her husband, with even more anxious tenacity did she cling on to her heathenism. She appeared to be someone who being bound to a demon with irresistible magical power, become more and more panicky, resulting in her inability to escape from its clutches." Having laid the ideological grounds for us to understand the complexity of thoughts that were cruising through Lakshmi, the narrator returns to the procession which is travelling through the night. Around midnight they reached a Bungalow or traveller's lodge; shortly after their arrival came Moegling who had been travelling behind them, who occupied the second of the available guest rooms. This resulted in an inconceivable situation for Lakshmi - "that she, a Brahmin woman, should spend the night in a house built by a European. This was an unbearable thought ... to stay under the same roof as a European, and that her bitter enemy ... She begged, pleaded, threatened suicide. Hermann prayed with or, next to her, as he reported. This was in vain, she could not be consoled. The night was spent in unutterable wretchedness. The next day they travelled on. On the third day they reached Honavar. Here, for the first time, she ate something which was brought to her by her uncle who was living there - from

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[23]. J.R. Chandran, "Baptism - A Scandal or a Challenge?", in *Religion and Society*, Vol.XIX, No.1, March (1972), p.58. Chandran's article has been reprinted in his collection of essays, *The Church in Mission*, (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1991), p.9-17.

Tuesday evening to Thursday evening she had eaten nothing, because she could not bring herself to eat food which had not been prepared by the holy Brahmin hands."

In this stage I am conscious of the reality that I am projecting myself, my discontent, my anger, and my frustration, onto the narrator of the text. There can be no neutral reading when confronted with the terror and fear inherent in the text. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak admonishes us:

> In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual systematically 'unlearns' female privilege[24].

How can we speak to Lakshmi rather than simply listen to her or speak for her? How do we unlearn our male as well as female privileges in order to become receptive partners in this speech act? Returning to Lakshmi, there was another process of systematic unlearning which did not have to wait for a postcolonial interpreter. While we wrestle with the complexities of theory, she had to face the harsh realities of her changed situation: "In Mangalore, where she arrived on December 28th, the lamentations began anew. She was expected to live under one roof with other Europeans in Balmatta (the hillock on which our Mission House stood). Her condition bordered often on despair, almost on insanity. To be sure, Hermann attempted to read to her daily from the Holy Scriptures and to pray loudly beside her, but he had to give this up on account of her uncontrollabe resistance. To eat a t the Mission table was impossible for her. She was allowed to have her own small kitchen, where she cooked for herself and her husband. When this food was perchance touched by someone else, it was thrown away. Here there was clearly no other way possible to overcome her deadly distaste for anything Christian but the way of patience and sincere intercession. For half a year, Hermann allowed her to go on her way unhindered, but pleaded fervently to the Lord on behalf of his poor wife. However, there appeared to be not even the slightest change in her. The most that one could say was that she appeared pleased when her husband, in her presence, read loudly from the Book and prayed. She daily put the saffron-coloured mark on her forehead, which was the heathen Brahmin sign, overloaded herself daily with nose, foot and ear rings and other pieces of jewellery, and spent the day, having completed the small task of cooking, doing nothing. Hermann himself said, 'apart from cooking, eating, chatting, bathing and sleeping, she has done absolutely nothing.' He started to fear that his wife would interpret his pliability and friendliness for an approval of this

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[24]. Cf. "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, p.91.

existence and decided now, after many prayers and consultation with the brothers, that he should demand from Lakshmi compliant obedience. So, one day he came to her and spoke heartily and in a friendly manner to her heart and demanded only three things: to remove the marks on the forehead, laying aside the excessive jewellery, and joining the common Mission table. She would have one month to think over the matter. There arose again in this poor heart the complete, terrible power of resistance. The month passed with the unspeakable agony, that she knew that she daily caused her poor husband. He often felt like loosing courage, but the grace of the Lord held him upright. By the end of the deadline, he demanded her obedience. He himself wiped away the mark on the forehead, removed the jewellery before her eyes and handed them over to the brothers for safe-keeping. However, in case of this eventuality, she had a small container of saffron with her already. Yet Hermann's composure and decisiveness won through. Following unspeakable distress, she declared that she was willing to put aside the mark on the forehead, to remove the jewellery, to learn feminine work with sister Greiner and the German language with sister Hoch. The only thing she could not be forced to do was to eat together from the Mission table. She begged so imploringly to be relieved of this condition that Hermann gave up. 'She is now', wrote Hermann around this time, 'she is now without gold and silver, without colour and flower strands, poor and miserable, like a widow, an expression she uses of herself.'" The process of taming is proceeding, the white brothers and sisters are saving the brown woman both for themselves and for the brown man[25], whom they have succeeded in creating in their own image. All this was getting to be too much for Lakshmi. She fell sick and the lessons had to be postponed. "Continue" wrote Hermann in July 1852, "continue to pray for her, that her utterly dark heart will be illumined by the grace of Jesus!" In words that apply to a later period in the history of global colonialism but which resonate with our text, Edward Said writes:

> At the apex of high imperialism early in this century ... we have a conjunctural fusion between, on the one hand, the historicizing codes of discursive writing in Europe, positing a world universally available to transnational impersonal scrutiny, and, on the other hand, a massively colonized world. The object of this consolidated vision is always either a victim or a highly constrained character, permanently threatened with severe punishment, despite her or his many virtues, services, or achievements, excluded ontologically for having few of the merits of the conquering, surveying, and civilizing outsider. For

[25]. This sentence owes much to Spivak's use of the idea, in discussing *Sati*, of white men saving brown women from brown men. Ibid., p.93.

the colonizer the incorporative apparatus requires unremitting effort to maintain. For the victim, imperialism offers these alternatives: serve or be destroyed[26].

In the meantime the seemingly indefatigable Lakshmi recovered, and "with returning health her unbowed resistance manifested itself again. Already in August she demanded her jewellery back, decorated herself anew in the manner of pagans with flowers, made the marks on her forehead and refused to be obedient. Yes, on a particular morning, when Hermann was away, she left Balmatta with a maidservant and went over to Hermann's sister (who was like her also a heathen) in the city, and did not return. Her poor husband found her, begged, pleaded - but in vain! She had completely decided not to give way or to give up even the least thing. Under these circumstances, Hermann believed that according to the Scriptures (I Cor.7) to have the right to separate from his poor wife formally and legally. He told her that and requested her for a part of his inheritance. But look, that was too difficult for her; her natural love did not allow her to completely separate herself from Hermann. She changed direction and followed him back to Balmatta under the former conditions. Regarding this time Hermann reported: 'In reality however, there is no change to be noticed in her; she is as obstinate and indifferent as ever.' Nevertheless, the dear brothers held fast to the hope, through prayers and entreaties, that the grace of the Lord would triumph in the end. And this hope appeared to finally approach fulfilment in June last year. She became milder, complaint, and tried to live in a manner pleasing to her husband. On 6th July she started to learn German, on the 13th July, despite her almost insurmountable distaste against 'the business of tailors', as she said, she began to learn female skills. In half an hour she learnt the German alphabet, in eight days, she could read reasonably well. However, this shimmer of hope of moving towards a better time was not a dawn, but a sunset. On the same day that she began her feminine work (13th June 1853), she was struck with spasmodic fever. Her tender nature, which had been deeply upset by so many inner struggles, could not resist the power of the sickness. Despite all medical care and nursing, she started to sink perceptibly. On the evening of July 6th, Hermann spoke to her with great fervour about the Saviour and the possibility of her possibly approaching death, she however replied with the calling upon the name of her idol Rama. The heart spasms overtook her. 'I could only cry to her (wrote Hermann): the Lord, the true God, wants to show you mercy, when you go over!' After some hours, around 10.45 in the night, she drew her last breath. Hermann added: 'Only He knows whether in drawing her last breath she called to Jesus. I can not dwell in this hope. This exactly is, for me,

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[26]. Cf. *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p.168.

my greatest sadness; that she went over without hope of eternal life. Remember me in your intercessions.'"

Does she then rest in peace? Rest in Rama? She continues to speak, forcing me to look behind the production of missionary texts, exemplary in tone, ethic-creating in intent, admonitory in style, and sincere in purpose. I have learnt so much from them, but I have learnt to let the dead speak. Sometimes they need no interpretations; occasionally an extra effort, however unpleasant, may be necessary to assist in the work of exhumation. No, the dead do not rest so peacefully after all. Otherwise I would not have felt this need to speak with them. Am I looking for myself, my buried identity, roots and strands which have shaped me and made me what I am?

7.BACK TO THE BIBLE?

And other men and women cast themselves down from a high place and return again and run, and devils drive them. These are the worshipers of idols, and they drive them up to the top of the height and they cast themselves down. And this they do continually and are tormented for ever[27].

How does our narrative end? What are the lessons drawn for us? What can be said over the mound which houses Lakshmi, to which "on the next day already, as demanded by the Indian climate, her mortal frame was carried to"? The brothers-in-faith gather around and "Brother Greiner prayed a prayer and the brothers, on the request of Hermann, sang some verses from the beautiful German song: 'What God does, that is well done"[28].

The narrator in turning away from the grave side asks us: "We think on the serious, forceful words of the Lord (Luke 17: 34ff.): 'I tell you: a t this time there will be two on one bed - one will be taken, and the other will be left. Two would be grinding together - one will be taken, and the other left.' Yes, Lord! We call along with Paul (Romans 11: 33) how incomprehensible is your judgement, and unfathomable your ways! For who has understood the purposes of the Lord? Or who has been His advisor? Or who offered Him something before, that would again be repaid? To Him, however, be glory for

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[27]. *Apocalypse of Peter*, 10 (Ethiopic), translated in J.K. Elliot, ed., *The Apocryphal Jesus: Legends of the Early Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.194.

[28]. This hymn is found transcreated in Kannada in the *Kanarese Hymn Book*, Twenty-second edition, (Mangalore: Balmatta Institute of Printing Technology, 1984 [first edition 1845]), No.303.

ever and ever. Amen." In this 'Amen' we uncover a new beginning - baptism as dying and rising - an affirmation that the dead indeed speak ...[29].

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[29]. I would like to acknowledge that the work of Mrinalini Sebastian, *The Enterprise of Reading Differently: Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Postcolonial Arguments* (unpublished Dr.Phil. Dissertation University of Hamburg, 1997), has constantly proved to be both a source of inspiration and challenge