

Each one of the encounters needs to be brought back to the text in question – layer after layer of memory, of discourse, of meaning. Many nineteenth century writers use epigraphs and peritexts as do twentieth century writers. These epigraphs are not superficial attachments; they are not even representative of ‘abstracted’ ideas. Instead they acknowledge the outside and recall the reader to the historical flow of time in its continuity, circularity and simultaneity. Nayantara Sahgal’s 2003 novel *Lesser Breeds* has several epigraphs – the title from Kipling’s poem ‘Recessional’ recalls in association his other poem ‘The White Man’s Burden’, as well as the civilisational discourses including J.S. Mill’s ‘*On Liberty*’ and Macaulay’s 1835 Minute. A second opening epigraph is from Gandhi’s favourite hymn *Vaishnava jan to tako kahiye, Jo pir parayi jane re*. The juxtaposition of the two is a confrontation between two opposing ways of life, two opposing civilisations and ideologies. The hymn has another layer – that of going across to the other. It brings into the circle of memory the history of India’s freedom struggle. There are several other epigraphs but I think the point has been made. Again maps too serve as a connecting point between the interiority and the exteriority of the world of the text in the novel. Maps and iconography have the capacity to make complex statements about the conflicts in society and summon the reader to engage with socio-political discourses. Fairly early in the novel we have a reference to an elongated map in Bhai’s study, indicating the spaces showing natural wealth and the European possession of these areas. Mineral and natural resources such as tin, timber, copper, lead, oil and rubber were the targets of western control (79–80). Then follows a whole chapter reflecting upon maps and spaces, visibility and invisibility and discussion about China, Philippines, Japan, and India and reflections on the strategic moves of the British during the Second World War (169–198). Later, in Mr Jenner’s library in the States, there is once again a Map of the World where ‘Early medieval Europe floated in unnamed seas surrounded by blank lands lettered Peopled by Monsters’ (220).

*Lesser Breeds* also works with and within different time periods – 1932 to 1968 at one level but subterranily moving from 1757, the Battle of Plassey, to 1988, and through this expanse works through power, subjugation, resistance, deceit and love. As



it traces the story of the growing capitalistic powers, it also examines the strength of fairy tales and Gandhi's vision of combating imperial power with non-violence. Fairy tales have their own complex mixture of terror and enchantment. Leda is a character in the novel who is engaged in collecting fairy tales of all kinds and narratives with fairy tale ending with rewards and punishments fairly meted out. Fairy tales have a great deal of violence and sadism built in as well as a great deal of suffering before the happy ending can be arrived at. Gandhi's belief in non-violence does not appear to be very different from a fairy tale. Houses are another category in the novel which open out in different ways – refuge, gifts, inviting houses, houses which connect. Leda is gifted a house as is Nurullah – houses which have been loved and lived in and symbolise relationships.

One must stop to ask the question whether these are merely interpretative strategies or do they formulate a discourse? The point is when does an interpretative strategy become a discourse? I'll venture a guess. It is the nature of reading which brings this about, when the reader becomes a participatory reader in the contingent world of the text as well as her own. When this reading enables the recognition of difference in approach, in histories and values and turns self-reflexive, it becomes discourse. Discourse places a greater responsibility on the reader as more than knowledge and perception it demands a degree of consciousness.

I am tempted to work with different kinds of texts, in order to explore the possibility of generating discourse in other ways. For instance a text like Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, which on the face of it is a political statement from all perspectives, but moves on to reveal itself as a personal statement at the same time as well as a blueprint for political action. Over and above the message which the title sends abroad, what kind of discourse does it build? The language is simple, the style dialogic. Written primarily with a need to communicate, it is transparent. Moreover the English text is a translation from the original Gujarati text and the transference has simplified it further. Written virtually mid-sea on his journey back from London to South Africa, it is concerned with India. Gradually it dawns on us that Gandhi's 'Editor' (the policy-maker) and the 'Reader' (the



Listener) are not the only listeners. In fact, it is Gandhi himself split into two. He is debating these issues with his own self, evaluating the choices, working out the logic and the logistics, carefully considering the likely hurdles and oppositions. It is also almost a judge's document carefully weighing and balancing his arguments; it lacks all the rhetoric of a public speech.

For a first-time non-Indian reader what does the text reveal? Are there any clues to be picked up by the non-initiated? There is a constant juxtaposition with the west in terms of civilisation and its manifestations, there is a fierce will to stand on one's own premises, no matter where it leads and there is a projection of soul force. *Hind Swaraj* focuses not merely on the nation or its subjugation, but goes beyond it to define civilisation, posit alternatives, redefine the notion of modernity and work on the possibility of a developed conscious self – the individual who goes to make the nation. Religion too has been shorn of its pretences and worked out in its moral essence. A full awareness exists of the economic scenario. Where does one go from here and how does one read it? *Hind Swaraj* is part of the many discourses about colonisation as well as of several resistance strategies. It branches out into multiple discourses both contemporaneous and distant. Directly placed in opposition to the violence of the revolutionaries, violence which had just taken place in London, and written after his talks with them, the text also moves away, through its redefinition of religion, from the conservative thought of his time. *Hind Swaraj* belongs simultaneously to several discourses, including ecological ones. It resists terms like exclusion and hierarchy and is both self-reflective and self-critical.

The relationship between text and discourse is a relationship of inter-dependence. Texts are not isolated events, and events too become texts as they flow in historical time and are re-enacted under changed circumstances or changed intentions. I cite here one example – the Dandi March with its transparency, purpose and strategy. Place it alongside other political marches, rath yatras, pad yatras and their purpose and impact vis-à-vis mobilisation, the nation and the self – Advani's several, Sunil Dutt's peace marches and several others carried on for harmony, ecology and solidarity in order to unfold its location in the political situation of



1930s and the political situation of the 1980s and 90s. Inbuilt into the yatra discourse are endurance, community, dislocation, comradeship, discipline and motivation. Where and when do they get dislocated by ego, power, camouflage and publicity – provides an important entry point.

The discourse enveloping or existent in oral literatures despite the lack of any single stable version, is richer than literary texts in its reflection on community, kinship patterns and even political happenings or changes. Oral literature is spontaneous and, as it is not overtly concerned with addressee or readerships, tends to be forthright in its statements. It reflects upon morals both public and sexual, explores psychological levels of desire, critiques social practices and often singles out deviation as praiseworthy. Their different versions reflect social change and become time markers. *Kanthapura* works with the constructs of the *sthalapurana* and the embedded Hari-kathas soon to be transformed into Gandhi-katha. Oral literatures have often reworked themselves into written narratives – we have Raja Rao, Girish Karnad, Suniti Namjoshi, Gabriel Marcia Marquez as well as a host of other writers who bring orality into their writing either as a story or as a method, as they seek to work through similitudes, across psychological and social discourses.

Discourse, in fact, is the spilling over of the text and constantly demands a detective-like skill from the reader – involved yet sceptical, the mind and eye of a Hercule Poirot, the quality of disbelief, and a persistence in distrusting memory recalls. Even the morphology of the text places it in a horizontal discourse, and opens out the suppressed layers of interaction – I'll just give two examples – Ondaatje's *The English Patient* with its isolated camp of exiles, and the discourse of the village narrative vis-à-vis the outside.

No text locates itself in a single discourse – texts carry forth human complexities into the outside and into the future, constructing our worlds and future ideologies, unveiling unknown realities, tentative meanings, unsettling us in our responses, pushing us into unexplored areas of knowledge and thought and reflection, in fact, literally helping us grow up. Texts in their turn, generate other discourses, which converge into new meaning patterns.

### Notes

1. Western humanism has come in for a degree of criticism for central to it was the 'white man's burden'. Dividing the human between white and black on the basis of colour and between civilised and barbarian on account of the difference in culture, it limited and degraded the human. Resistance movements have attempted to redefine the human in terms of relationships, sensitivity and compassion. Both Gandhi and Fanon have contributed to the formation of a new humanism though in entirely different ways. The Gandhian contribution has been an ethical one, while the Fanonian works through strategies of self-assertion. Dignity is a category central to both.
2. My reference here is to the philosophical questionings and artistic experiments made in art in order to define and interpret reality – Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1911), William James's *A Pluralistic Universe* (1902) and Henry James's 'The Art of Fiction' (1884).
3. Foucault admits that had he been familiar with the Frankfurt School, he would 'have avoided many of the detours' he made while trying to pursue his path. ('Structuralism and Post-structuralism', 440).
4. Adorno repeatedly insists that the exile forced on many intellectuals had completely mutilated them. *Reflections From Damaged Life* is about the descent of the human into inhumanity.