

## Subramani's *Fiji Maa: A Book of a Thousand Readings* Daneshwar Sharma

### Abstract

The spread of English is like the spread of the plague of insomnia in Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. At first it is convenient; English (and insomnia) frees one to work more and improve connections, but soon one realises that they are losing memories of their past and unable to have dreams of their future. Living in a present with no ties to the past and no hopes of a future, one becomes an alien, speaking an alien language. To counter this erosion of memories, one has to write, label common household objects and describe their function in black and white. Márquez's character does so, and so does Subramani in his upcoming book, *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand*. Subramani recreates the world of Girmityaas and their descendants; a world lost long, long ago is made alive in front of the reader's eyes with the power of his magical words. Reading this book will be like starting a journey back towards the grandparents' village. This book, yet to be published, encapsulates the history of a time which will never return. The descendants of Girmityaas have migrated to far off places and have lost all ties to their collective memory. *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* will remind them what they were before the 'plague' of the foreign tongue. This paper proposes that Subramani's upcoming novel should not only be supported and celebrated by the present generation but also be gifted to the coming generations by the present generation. The paper highlights the literary resurrection of a bygone culture in Subramani's novel which makes it a book of a thousand readings, ritualistic reading for the people of today and for the people to come. *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* is about digging up the long lost Girmitya memory. Additionally, the paper analyses the dialects and local varieties of Hindi, especially the Fiji Hindi spoken in the northern part of the Fiji Islands which is used in the novel.

Keywords: Girmitya, Diaspora, Collective Memory, Language Archive, Fiji Hindi, Subramani

\*\*\*\*\*

### Subramani's *Fiji Maa: A Book of a Thousand Readings*

Years from now when Fiji Hindi ceases to be a living tongue, when patois English or an Indo-Fijian language supplants it, scholars will look back at Subramani's creative output in the Fiji Hindi demotic, Indian plantation culture's singular subaltern language, as the great archive of the language and its people.<sup>1</sup>

There are a thousand ways to read *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand*,<sup>2</sup> Subramani's upcoming novel written in Fiji Hindi. This will be Subramani's second novel in Fiji Hindi after *Dauka*

<sup>1</sup> Vijay Mishra, Endorsement of *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* (Subramani, Manuscript 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Subramani, *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* (forthcoming 2018).

*Puraan*.<sup>3</sup> *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* has been in gestation for more than a decade and Subramani has exhausted all of his personal memories and literary acumen to meander through the lifetime of the protagonist Vedmati. The novel follows Vedmati from her early childhood, schooling and married life in a rural Labasa village to her widowed old age in urban Suva. Like a cat, Vedmati has more than one life to live. As she recounts her story, sitting by a bank on the busy streets of Suva city as a beggar, she is called Fiji Maa by Joy (another character). Subsequently, the readers get to know her names during the different stages of her life. She has been called Ved, Vedmati, Mohaniya, Lekhraaji, Goat girl, Sanka Devi and there is a story associated with each name. These narrations of her life story are scattered with histories of a no-longer-existing rural life and its people. The novel can be explored using various themes, including women's emancipation, subaltern history, the global extension of Mother India, lost rural life of the remote islands, Indian culture in a foreign land and the trauma of forced migration. This article analyses the novel as a rich linguistic archive.

Fiji Hindi has journeyed from being a necessary tool of communication to becoming the tool of literary creation. Between 1879 and 1916, about sixty-thousand Indians were brought to the Fiji Islands by the then British colonial government in India and Fiji. These people were brought as indentured labours to work in plantations of sugarcane, copra and cotton. As these Indians were from various parts of the diverse Indian subcontinent, they needed a common tongue to communicate. Gradually, the caste system dissipated among Fiji Indians<sup>4</sup> and Fiji Hindi emerged as the mother tongue.<sup>5</sup> Scholars termed Fiji Hindi as a unique linguistic entity of Fiji Indians, developed by mixing various varieties of Hindi, with borrowed English and the native Fijian language iTaukei.<sup>6 7</sup> The varieties of Hindi like the Awadhi and Western Bhojपुरi along with the Hindustani had maximum influence in supplying the Fiji Hindi with linguistic attributes.<sup>8</sup> However the uniqueness and distinguishing factor of the Fiji Hindi from the Standard Hindi and all its Indian varieties lies in the situational factor (indenture and plantations) and linguistic interaction with the native Fijian language iTaukei and English.<sup>9</sup> The uniqueness and distinction of Fiji Hindi was being noticed as early as 1929 when W.J. Hands wrote that 'A form of Hindustani, hardly recognised by the newcomer from India, is becoming the common language of Hindu and Tamil alike.'<sup>10</sup> The efforts to do research work and document Fiji Hindi started with Moag's basic course on Fiji Hindi at the Australian National University in 1977.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Subramani, *Dauka Puraan* (New Delhi, India: Star Publications, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Chandra Jayawardena, 'The Disintegration of Caste in Fijian Indian Rural Society,' Eds. L.R. Hiatt and C. Jayawardena, *Anthropology in Oceania: Essays Presented to Ian Hogbin* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Siegel, 'Indian Languages in Fiji: Past, Present and Future,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21.sup001 (1998) 181-214.

<sup>6</sup> Rodney F. Moag, *Fiji Hindi: A Basic Course and Reference Grammar* (Canberra: Australian National U P/Suva, Fiji: Extension Services, U of the South Pacific, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Siegel, 'Fiji Hindustani,' *Working Papers in Linguistics, University of Hawaii* 7.3 (1975) 127-30.

<sup>8</sup> Jeff Siegel, *Language Contact in a Plantation Environment*. Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language. 1987 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Kamla Kumar, 'Diglossia and its Practice in Multilingual Fiji,' *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 4.3 (2001) 181-96.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Siegel, 'Indian Languages in Fiji: Past, Present and Future,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21.sup001 (1998) 149.

<sup>11</sup> Moag, *Fiji Hindi*.

Siegel wrote two books on the linguistic features of Fiji Hindi in 1977 and 1987 (*Say It in Fiji Hindi*<sup>12</sup> and *Language Contact in a Plantation Environment: A Sociolinguistic History of Fiji*).<sup>13</sup>

However, despite the research and scholarly work done in Fiji Hindi, it remained a preliterate vernacular.<sup>14</sup> The education and formal work is still done in Standard Hindi, despite the fact that Fiji Hindi, not the Standard Hindi, is used outside the classroom. Although there was a time when Fiji Hindi was discarded as a slang, as a newspaper article proclaimed that 'There is no such language as Fiji Hindi',<sup>15</sup> now Fiji Hindi has more acceptance in fourth and fifth generation Indians in Fiji. Fiji Hindi has become a sign of national identity.<sup>16</sup> The literary creation in Fiji Hindi was done using English alphabet by Raymond Pillay (*Adhuraa Sapna*),<sup>17</sup> and *Daukaa Puraan*<sup>18</sup> was the first literary work to use Fiji Hindi in Devanagari script. The reaction to Subramani's *Daukaa Puraan* is the epitome of the Fiji Indian community's reaction towards Fiji Hindi. In the same journal issue of *Fijian Studies, a Journal of Contemporary Fiji* (1.1), one reviewer terms the use of Fiji Hindi as 'a collection of slang and vulgarity'<sup>19</sup> and another reviewer hails the novel as a commendable feat in Fiji Hindi.<sup>20</sup> The place of Fiji Hindi in the Indo-Fijian community is changing as more and more people are using Fiji Hindi (in Devanagari script) for literary creation. Recently a short story collection written in Fiji Hindi Devanagari script was published.<sup>21</sup> As Fiji Hindi is getting recognised as a language of literary creation, the publication of the second novel by Subramani *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* would be another milestone in the journey of Fiji Hindi.

There are a thousand stories of a language's struggle to survive, to exist. The way one talks over dinner with friends or family, the way one tells bedtime stories to their children is different from the way the Queen speaks. If one loses this distinct, familial way of speech, one loses something very personal: the culture associated with the language. James Kelman, the 1994 Booker Prize winner, said in his acceptance speech, 'My culture and my language have a right to exist.'<sup>22</sup> Just because his novel, *How Late it was, How Late*, was written in working class Scottish dialect, one of the judges, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, avowed, 'Frankly, it's crap.'<sup>23</sup> Another critic, Simon Jenkins, declared the award to Kelman's book an act of 'literary vandalism'.<sup>24</sup> The novel was awarded for its experiments

---

<sup>12</sup> Jeff Siegel, *Say it in Fiji Hindi* (Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> Siegel, *Language Contact* (1987, re-issue 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Nikhat Shameem and John Read, 'Administering a Performance Test in Fiji Hindi,' *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics. Supplement Series* 13.1 (1996) 80-104.

<sup>15</sup> Hazrat Adam, Letter to editor, *Fiji Sun* (26 March 1988).

<sup>16</sup> Kumar, 'Diglossia.'

<sup>17</sup> Raymond C. Pillai, 'Adhura Sapna (A Shattered Dream),' *Language Transplanted: The Development of Overseas Hindi*. Eds. Richard K. Barz and Jeff Siegel (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988) 221-55.

<sup>18</sup> Subramani, *Dauka Puraan*.

<sup>19</sup> Rameshwar Prasad, 'Review of the Book Dauka Puraan,' *Fijian Studies, A Journal of Contemporary Fiji* 1.1 (2003) 216.

<sup>20</sup> Som Prakash, 'The Linguistic Wheel Coming Full Circle: A Review of Dauka Puraan.' *Fijian Studies, A Journal of Contemporary Fiji* 1.1 (2003) 209-14.

<sup>21</sup> Praveen Chandra, Ed., *Koi Kissa Batav: Fiji Hindi Me Kuch Kahani (Tell a Tale: Some Stories in Fiji Hindi)* (Brisbane, Australia: Carindale Publishing, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Lesley Mcdowell, 'James Kelman: Look Back in Anger,' *Independent*, 20 May 2004. Accessed 15 Feb 2017. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/james-kelman-look-back-in-anger-61351.html>>.

<sup>23</sup> Mcdowell, 'James Kelman.'

<sup>24</sup> Mcdowell, 'James Kelman.'

with vernacular speech and internal monologue,<sup>25</sup> but this natural vernacular sounded ‘monotonous, unpunctuated, and foulmouthed’ to other critics. Kelman’s use of Lowland Scots and Glaswegian dialect, different from ‘received pronunciation’ or ‘educated speech’, was derided by elite critics. The elite declared Kelman ‘an illiterate savage’.<sup>26</sup> Sir Kingsley Amis in his book, *The King’s English*, calls it ‘the last and least of the big fuck-novels’.<sup>27</sup> The rant about Kelman’s work is similar to the kind of treatment Subramani received from the purists when he wrote his first novel in Fiji Hindi. *Dauka Puraan* has been called a tragic mistake as it tries to elevate slang as a language.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Brij Lal called the publication of the novel in Fiji Hindi ‘an important event in the literary and cultural history of the Indo-Fijian community in particular, and of Fiji in general’.<sup>29</sup> What the purists miss is the motive of the writers of dialects and vernaculars. Writers like Kelman and Subramani want to preserve a way of life; they want to keep a record of the fast eroding or already eroded ethos of a people in their own language. Kelman writes about ‘the class into which he was born in 1946: about bus conductors, street sweepers, night-shift workers, the unemployed, small-time criminals, men waiting for scrawny unemployment checks and hopeless job interviews’.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, Subramani’s choice of language also stems from the kind of people he portrays, people ‘of unremarkable social pedigree, unpretentious, certainly not among the movers and shakers of society’.<sup>31</sup> Subramani’s decision to use the Fijian variety of Hindi is guided by his desire to portray life within the subaltern section of Fijian society.

If Kelman and Subramani are the contemporary examples of this attitude towards subaltern languages and dialects, Mark Twain is the classical example of this purist and elite crusade. Now there are Mark Twain Centennial celebrations all over the world and books written on his literary genius and use of dialects, but there was a time when his books were banned from libraries. The Concord (Mass.) Public Library, just after the publication of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1885, banned the book, saying that ‘with a series of experiences not elevating, the whole book being more suited to the slums than to intelligent, respectable people’.<sup>32</sup> In his introduction to *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn*, Michael Patrick Hearn writes that Twain ‘could be uninhibitedly vulgar’.<sup>33</sup> However, much later, the world realised that it was Twain’s use of dialect which enabled the readers to experience the novel as a living literature. This use of dialect made Ernest Hemingway proclaim that all modern American literature comes from this one book, *Huckleberry Finn*.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> James Wood, ‘Away Thinking About Things: James Kelman’s Fighting Words,’ *The New Yorker*, 25 Aug. 2014. Accessed 15 Feb 2017. <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/25/away-thinking-things>>.

<sup>26</sup> Wood, ‘Away Thinking About Things.’

<sup>27</sup> Wood, ‘Away Thinking About Things.’

<sup>28</sup> Prasad 216.

<sup>29</sup> Brij V. Lal, ‘Dauka Puraan (Review),’ *The Contemporary Pacific* 15.1 (2003) 226.

<sup>30</sup> Wood, ‘Away Thinking About Things.’

<sup>31</sup> Lal 227.

<sup>32</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (Oxford UP: New York, 1993) 115.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Patrick Hearn in Mark Twain, *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer’s Comrade)*. Ed. Michael Patrick Hearn. Annotated edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001) 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Hills of Africa*. Scribner classics ed. (New York, NY: Scribner, 1935) 22.

What Philip Larkin<sup>35</sup> has said about the preservation role of the arts in general could be applied to the writers of dialect and the vernacular. Accordingly, the decision to use a dialect or to write in the vernacular arises from the natural human instinct to preserve what is dear, to safeguard what might disappear in the future. Subramani is guided by this human instinct. Most of the writers of dialect and the vernacular are waging a war against memory loss and extinction. Dialect is the language used by the people of a specific area, class, district or any other group of people.<sup>36</sup> Upon this dialect, this personal, contextualised use of language, when a language in its purest form is forced, it acts like the plague of insomnia in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez (1991). At first the lingua franca is convenient. The plague of insomnia frees up the night time to work more. The enforced Master's language connects globally; it replaces specific, personal and contextual with the universal. But soon one realises what the plague takes back from one hand when it gives in another. The victims of the plague of insomnia have a lot of time to work but they start forgetting their past. They lose the sense of time and things. The victims, without the memories of the past, sink into a kind of idiocy. Márquez has described this state as:

... when the sick person became used to his state of vigil, the recollection of his childhood began to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past.<sup>37</sup>

The lack of sleep is similar to the lack of one's own language. With the loss of attachment with the language, one also loses all the conversations one has had in that language, and all the dreams one has seen in that language. With fading memories of the past and no hope for the future, one's present becomes a long, boring day which has no end. As the characters in Márquez's novel start forgetting the names and uses of things, they start creating a primitive encyclopedia with entries about each and every thing. They paste labels on everything: 'table, chair, clock, door, wall, bed, pan'.<sup>38</sup> However, soon they realise that the signs have to be more explicit. To hold fast to the reality that was slipping away, one character hangs a sign on the neck of the cow that reads, 'This is the cow. She must be milked every morning so that she will produce milk, and the milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee and milk.'<sup>39</sup>

Subramani is also trying to find remedies for this erosion of memories because of the lack of a language. When the purists thrust a very formal Hindi in his throat, trying to choke the voices in his head, he writes, he labels things in his own dialect, lest he forgets. Otherwise the generation to come would forget what a cow is, the meaning of the word 'आजी' (grandmother), and all the memories associated with it:

---

<sup>35</sup> Philip Larkin, *Letters to Monica* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> 'Dialect,' *literarydevices.net*, 15 Feb. 2017. <<https://literarydevices.net/dialect/>>.

<sup>37</sup> Gabriel Garcia Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991) 45.

<sup>38</sup> Marquez 48.

<sup>39</sup> Marquez 48.

आजी चिडिया बिलकुल नई आय दे अंगना में। अमरुद के डंडा से खेदा करी। कुवां के लगे कांटा वाला झाडी में बबली चिडिया चहचहाहट मचाय जइसे आजी के गरिआय। कभी कभी चिडिया सबेरे सबेरे मूंड खाय लगे जइसे आजी उठे। आजी गरिआई कचपचिया सुरु कर दिहिस आपन राग।<sup>40</sup>

The grandmother does not let the sparrow roam around on the veranda. Whenever the bird would try to venture into the veranda, she would use guava tree's stick to hit the sparrow. The bird would fly to the thorny bush by the well and make a horrendous cry from there as if it is scolding the grandmother. Sometimes the sparrow would start chirping angrily as soon as the grandmother would get up in the morning. The grandmother would also give a fittingly angry reply to the sparrow. The entire morning would be spent in this verbal dual between the grandmother and the sparrow.

*Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand*<sup>41</sup> is also a precious collection of the peculiarities of the people of a long-gone era, so that in the future, it shall become a document of immense historical and sociological importance as the rituals, practices and customs of the rural society would be found only here. There was a strange belief associated with breech birth in the Indian and Indo-Fijian communities that a back pain or stomach ache can be cured if the patient gets a kick from somebody who has had a breech birth. The following passage from Subramani's novel captures the nuances of such a belief:

सब जगहा पीठी देखाय लिया ओझा देखावा पीर बाबा के देखावा पीरा सारा जाते न। बोला चली तियागी के लडकी से लात मरवाय लेई लडकिया उल्टा पइदा भई है। कोई के कमर पिराय नस चढ जाय नाडा बइठारे के रहे अइहें लात मरवाय। हम खुसी खुसी ढेकी पे बइठ के चलाई लात। लात खाय वाले पीछे घूम के नई तकिहें सीधे घरे लउटिहें। दूसर रोज संदेसी आय के बताई दुखिया कि केतना अराम मिला बहुत आसिरबाद दिहिन लडकी के।<sup>42</sup>

The back pain would not be cured after visits to Hindu and Muslim healers. Somebody suggested to get a kick on the back from Tyagi's daughter as she was born in breech position.

---

<sup>40</sup> Subramani, *Fiji Maa* 179.

<sup>41</sup> Subramani, *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* (forthcoming 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Subramani, *Fiji Maa* 182.

Anybody who has nerve pain or back pain would come to me for getting a kick. I would also give a kick to them happily. The persona after getting the kick would not turn back and look at me; they are supposed to head back home after getting the kick. Next day, the messenger would come and inform us about the relief the person got after the kick and how they were blessing me for the relief.

In Fiji there has been a 'dramatic decline in the growth rate of the Indian component of the population after 1966'.<sup>43</sup> (27) Even the Fiji Bureau of Statistics calls it 'the exodus of Indians from the rural sector of Labasa Tikina'.<sup>44</sup> The sugar cane farming and the culture and lifestyle associated with it have been on the verge of extinction. Internal migration, that is, from rural to urban within Fiji, and external migration to the USA, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and other first world countries, have shaken the community's roots. Subramani's novel is an effort to save something for the coming generations. The former Labasa boy Brij Lal highlights the importance of the past in the context of Girit history in Fiji: 'Perception of the future is always fortified by knowledge of the past.'<sup>45</sup> As time will pass these urges to have knowledge of the past will become stronger and stronger. For now, Lal says that 'the quest often remains unrealised'<sup>46</sup> due to lack of information and relevant literature. *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* is a storehouse of answers for anybody looking for a sense of the long-gone era. Snippets of the village life of the northern part of the Fiji Islands can be found in the novel. One such passage is quoted below:

हम लोग के घर से स्कूल आधा घंटा के रस्ता है। गन्ना के माथा से होई के पहाड के दांती पकडे के पडे। रस्ता के किनारे गन्ना कट्टइया लोग एक पलिया घर बनाय के रहें। टोला से आगे लकडी वाला पुल है। बडा नइबी पेड के छाई में नीचे पानी करिया से लगे। डर लगे पानी ताको। पुल पे गोड रखते देहीं कांपे लगे। पटरा दूर दूर पे है। जब बरखा होय पुल पे पानी चढे लगे तो बस घरे बइठो। स्कूल पुल से दस मिनिट के दूरी पे है। बाप बोले पहिले स्कूल फूस के रहा। लडकन उंगरी से बालू में लिखत रहिन। मास्टर इंडिया वाला साधू। सुन के हंसी लगे साधू मास्टर सम्स अउर इंगलिस पढाय अउर लिखो उंगरी से बालू में अब तो टीन लकडी के स्कूल होई गय। स्कूल के आगे पीछे चिक्कन से मट्टी पटान अउर जगहा जगहा बडा फूल के पेड। जब लाल अउर पियर फूल फुलाय

---

<sup>43</sup> 2007 Fiji Census of Population and Housing Analytical (Suva, Fiji: Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> 2007 Fiji Census of Population and Housing Analytical 36.

<sup>45</sup> Brij V. Lal, 'Slavery Theory Goes Out of Indenture Definition,' *Indian News Link* (14 May 2014a). <<http://www.indiannewslink.co.nz/slavery-theory-goes-out-of-indenture-definition/>>.

<sup>46</sup> Brij V. Lal, 'Fijians Remember Giritiyas with Reverence,' *Indian News Link* (15 May 2014b). <<http://www.indiannewslink.co.nz/fijians-remember-giritiyas-with-reverence/>>.

जमीन पे गिरा रहे स्कूल पहुंचते दिल खुसी कर दे । जनाय गांव नई कोई अउर जगहा  
है ।<sup>47</sup>

Our school is at half-an-hour's time from our home. After crossing the sugarcane farm, one has to tackle the hill's treacherous way. The sugarcane cutters live by the road in shanties. Further to the shanties of the sugarcane cutters is a wooden bridge. Under the big Naibi (Tahitian chestnut or Polynesian chestnut) tree's shade, the water would seem darkened. To look at the water would be frightening. The entire body would start shaking the moment one would step on the bridge. The wooden planks on the bridge are at considerable distance. During heavy rains, the bridge would disappear in water and we would stay at home. The school is at a distance of time minutes walkway from the bridge. Our father told us that earlier the school was made of grass. At that time one had to write in the sand using their finger. During our father's schooling days, the teacher was a monk from India. We laugh whenever our father tells us about the teacher from India teaching sums and English by writing in the sand with fingers. Now the school is made of tin-shade and wooden planks. The grounds at the front and back of the school are levelled and numerous, large trees of flowers are planted around the school. In the morning when we would reach the school, it would be a very pleasant sight of flowers laying on the grounds around the school. It seemed as if we have reached a new village.

Further, the styles of fictional naturalism like Plato and Aristotle's theory of mimesis and Dryden's *Dryden: An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* also govern this choice of language.<sup>48</sup> The kind of characters and settings Subramani has in his novel would sound very unnatural and odd if they are written in the Queen's English or Standard Hindi. However, in order to join the winning band of the Queen's English, more and more critics and creative artists are abandoning this naturalism of language. The film *Slumdog Millionaire*<sup>49</sup> is a perfect example of the unnatural use of language. In the film, beggars and other such uneducated persons speak immaculate English in perfect British accents. Despite this incongruity, the film won eight Oscars including the Best Picture, Best Director and Best Screenplay. But all these awards did not stop critics from pointing out the 'profoundly dehumanizing view of the poor' in the film<sup>50</sup>. One aspect of this dehumanisation is the use of English in conversations between people who could not have used English in their humanised life. Smitha Radhakrishnan says that the film is full of slip-ups 'of which the most glaring was the language. ... it is highly implausible that they would come out of that experience speaking perfect British English'.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Subramani, *Fiji Maa* 191-92.

<sup>48</sup> See John Dryden, *Dryden: An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. (New York: BiblioLife, 2009); Gerald F. Else, *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry* (Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> *Slumdog Millionaire*, dir. Danny Boyle, prod. Christian Colson, Fox Searchlight Pictures, Celador Films, Film4, 2008. English.

<sup>50</sup> Mitu Sengupta, 'Slumdog Millionaire's Dehumanizing View of India's Poor,' *Weekend Edition* (20 Feb. 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Smitha Radhakrishnan, 'Slumdog Sincerity,' *UCLA International Institute*, 28 Nov. 2008. Accessed 19 Dec. 2018. <<http://international.ucla.edu/institute/article/101268>>.

However, in the world of written words, there has been an inclination towards using language according to the region, social class and background of the character. In fact, in a number of books, the special use of vernacular and dialects render the text's worth. James Joyce's *Ulysses*<sup>52</sup> is celebrated for its use of phonetic spellings, Irish idioms and literal translations from Gaelic into English. The Irish dialect has been celebrated in numerous books. Rodney Edwards wrote his book *Sure, Why Would Ye Not?: Two Oul Fellas Put the World to Rights*<sup>53</sup> about the Irish community and lifestyle in Irish dialect. For him the native tongue and dialect is part of its rich culture and diverse heritage. It has to be written in the Irish dialect as the book is written to the Irish people about growing up, about the family life and Irish country ways.<sup>54</sup> The distinct Southern culture has been reflected in many books written in Southern dialect including Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* are some more examples of the use of Southern dialect.<sup>55</sup> If Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*<sup>56</sup> was written without the subtle touches of the Southern uneducated white community's way of speaking, and if Harper Lee had used pure, Queen's English, the novel might not have become a classic.

Similarly, the contextualised and local form of English in the literature produced in South Asia, Africa and the Caribbean are dialects of English in their own right. The writers who live far away from the land of Queen's English approximate the English language according to their context and usage. Creole in these countries is often a mix of modified English and local languages. The approximation is done by modifying the rhythmic pattern, being playful with the words and spellings, fusing words, coining new words by transliteration. In this way, as Mitul Trivedi suggests, 'contextualization of English language in art makes the language more exotic to its context-based usages'.<sup>57</sup> (2) New literary terms have been coined for this linguistic phenomenon. The newly invented language, with heavy influence of the vernacular and local dialect, has been called acculturation/appropriation/nativisation/domestication of Standard English. Salman Rushdie in his book *Midnight's Children* calls it chutnification of English. Rushdie does this with the perspective that, 'The language like much else in the newly independent societies, needs to be decolonised, to be remade in other images.'<sup>58</sup> This ingenious use of English language won *Midnight's Children* the prestigious Booker Prize and the best all-time prize winners in 1993 and 2008 to celebrate the Booker Prize 25th and 40th anniversaries. The culture has a recognisable impact on the creative use and experiments with the language in the literary texts. The author has a liberty to customise the language lexically, syntactically, semantically and stylistically to present their culture, the time, age, class (and so on) in their text. In fact, in the post-colonial era, literary authors have been acknowledged and acclaimed for their

<sup>52</sup> James Joyce and Sam Slote, *Ulysses* (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Rodney Edwards, *Sure, Why Would Ye Not?: Two Oul Fellas Put the World to Rights* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2015). See Rodney Edwards, 'A Quare Spake: A Celebration of Irish Rural Dialect, So It Is,' *Irish Times* (26 Oct. 2015). <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/a-quare-spake-a-celebration-of-irish-rural-dialect-so-it-is-1.2406276>>.

<sup>54</sup> Edwards, 'A Quare Spake.'

<sup>55</sup> Eudora Welty, *Delta Wedding* (New York: Mariner Books, 1979); William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 1966).

<sup>56</sup> Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> Mitul Trivedi, 'Critical Reflections on South Asian English: A Literary Perspective,' *New Academia: An International Journal of English Language Literature and Literary Theory* 2.4 (2013) 2.

<sup>58</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage Books, 2010).

experimentation with the Standard English language according to their contextualised worldview.

However, if a writer like Subramani tries to do the same kind of experimentation with Standard Hindi for the representation of his contextualised worldview, his experimentation is not accepted. Writers like Rushdie are praised for experimentation in English language as he ‘has liberated Indian English ... from its false Puritanism, its fake gentility’.<sup>59</sup> (160). Agnes Scott Langeland claims that Rushdie’s impure English ‘helps to establish a wider ethnocentric base for the English language by creating a magical and humorous Indian blend of English’.<sup>60</sup> *Midnight’s Children* (2010) might not have been as successful if it was written in standard Queen’s English. The use of dialect and vernacular is guided by the writer’s desire to bring the text closer to the people about whom the writer is writing. Because of this primary logic languages have dialects, and because of this desire writers like Tulsidas choose Eastern Hindi or Awadhi instead of Sanskrit or Standard Hindi when they retell a story. Dialects and vernaculars are used to give the standard, formal language a personal touch. The 2001 Census of the Government of India records at least 50 dialects of Hindi. Prominent among them are Awadhi, Bagheli, Bhojpuri, Bundeli, Haryanavi, Kanauji and Khari Boli.<sup>61</sup> All these dialects share the Devanagari script. These dialects are named, generally, after the region in which they are spoken and yet all these dialects use the lexical, semantic and syntactical features of Standard Hindi.

The beauty of *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* lies in the fact that Subramani dexterously captures the nuances of the dialect spoken in the northern part of the Fiji Islands. As Rushdie has widened the ethnocentric base for English by inventing a magical and humorous Indian blend of English, as Tulsidas has brought the Ramayaan narrative closer to the common people by using the people’s dialect instead of the Vedic Sanskrit or literary Hindi, so has Subramani done the same and more for Hindi by reproducing the dialect of the northern Fiji Islands. In the process of recording the dialect, Subramani has shown that dialects ‘develop alongside standard varieties, not apart from them’.<sup>62</sup> He uses the script and basic lexical, syntactic and semantic rules of Standard Hindi while writing his novel in Fiji Hindi. Varieties and dialects of language have been defined not as bastardisation of the standard language but as variations upon the basic plan of the language.<sup>63</sup> In the extracts quoted below from Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Tulsidas’s *Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa* and Subramani’s *Fiji Maa*, the use of Standard English and Standard Hindi is visible, which shows that the variations of the language are respecting, following and celebrating the standard, formal language but in a personal, contextualised way:

I stay, my sirs. Here I know names of birds and plants. Ho yes. I am Deshmukh by name; vendor of notions by trade. I sell many so-fine thing. You want? Medicine for constipation, damn good, ho yes. I have. Watch you want, glowing in the dark? I also

---

<sup>59</sup> Rustom Bharucha, ‘Rushdie’s Whale,’ *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, Ed. M.D. Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994) 160.

<sup>60</sup> Agnes Scott Langeland, ‘Rushdie’s Language,’ *English Today* 12.1 (1996) 21.

<sup>61</sup> *Census 2001, Statement 5* (India: Government of India, 2001).

<sup>62</sup> John McWhorter, *Spreading the Word: Language and Dialect in America* (USA: Heinemann, 2000) 7.

<sup>63</sup> McWhorter ix.

have. And book ho yes, and joke trick, truly. I was famous in Dacca before. Ho yes, most truly. No shoot.<sup>64</sup>

जड चेतन गुन दोषमय बिस्व कीन्ह करतार ।

संत हंस गुन गहहिं पय परिहरि बारि बिकार ।।

jaRa cetana guna doṣamaya bisva kīnha karatāra,  
saṁta haṁsa guna gahahī paya parihari bāri bikāra.<sup>65</sup> (11).

God has created the universe consisting of animate and inanimate beings as partaking of both good and evil; swans in the form of saints imbibe the milk of goodness rejecting water in the form of evil.

जानत हवु हम अधिकारी के हिया अंगनवा में बइठु अधिकारी हम्मे भित्तर बुलाइस । एक बक्सा के रकम मसीन धरानु बोले ऐके सुनो । चाभी अंइठिसु ससुरा बक्सा बताय लगा कउन कहां मरु आज के मौसम का है कब घाट पे जहाज लगी । हम तो सुन के चकडिआय गवा । हद होई गयु बक्सा सारा सब खबर बांटे । अधिकारी समझाइस यही के बोलें रेडियो । हम तो सोचा बक्सवा के भित्तर कोई लुका बइठा है । अधिकारी खूब हंसिस बात हमार सुन के । वालिसतार के कमाल तो देख लियु पता नइ अउर का का होय वाला है । साइत एक टेम आई चाभी अंइठो खाना टेबल पे ।<sup>66</sup>

Do you know, I was sitting in veranda at Adhikari and he called me inside. He asked me to listen to a box like machine. He turned some nob in the box and it started to tell who died where, what would be today's weather and when would the ship dock at the port. I got confused after listening to the box. It was too much, now the box would spread the news. Adhikari told me that the machine was called a radio. I suspected somebody was hiding inside the box. Adhikari laughed a lot when I told him about my suspicions. I have seen the wonders of telegraphy. What new inventions are going to happen, nobody knows. Maybe one day one will twist a nob and food would be served at the table.

Even a casual reading of the extracts shows how the writers are inventing off-shoots of formal, standard versions of the language (English and Hindi) for their special literary and linguistic needs. Tulsidas retold the tale of Ramanayana written in Sanskrit in a more live and conversational language Awadhi; Rushdie used every possibility to bring the local colours in his

<sup>64</sup> Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 372.

<sup>65</sup> Tulsidas, *Rāmacaritamānasa* (Gorakhpur, UP, India: Gita Press) 11.

<sup>66</sup> Subramani, *Fiji Maa* 496-97.

narrative through an inventive use of language; and Subramani's *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand* is also written in Fiji Hindi, the language of the novel's characters and primary readers, of whom many are living in Fiji.

On this relationship among languages and their varieties, especially for Hindi, Mrinal Pande writes that 'like the Ganga River, Hindi language too picks up local colour and character as its several tributaries flow, branching out into streams, constantly evolving as they assimilate local dialects – Urdu, Farsi and even English – into their own flow'.<sup>67</sup> The evolving dialects of Hindi showcase the democratic nature of the language. Unlike Sanskrit, 'a stereotyped literary language which has not been allowed by grammarians to grow and multiply and bring forth children',<sup>68</sup> Hindi has a vast family tree with branches spreading in all corners of India and the globe through diasporic writing. The Standard Hindi would always be promoted in the formal usage and practice. However, as local varieties of Standard Hindi flourished in India, producing texts and a rich oral literature, Fiji Hindi should also be accepted and encouraged alongside the Standard Hindi for its cultural, social and literary value.

However, as local varieties of Standard Hindi have flourished in India, producing texts like *Padmavat* and *Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa* and a rich oral literature, Fiji Hindi should also be accepted and encouraged alongside the Standard Hindi for its cultural, social and literary value. The culture has a recognisable impact on the creative use and experiments with the language in the literary texts. The author has a liberty to customise the language lexically, syntactically, semantically and stylistically to present their culture, the time, age, class (and so on) in their text. In fact, in the post-colonial era, the literary authors have been acknowledged and acclaimed for their experimentation with the Standard English language according to their contextualised worldview. If in English, experimentation, contextualisation and localisation are accepted and appreciated, why not in Hindi?

*Daneshwar Sharma is working with Jaipuria Institute of Management, Jaipur, India as Associate Professor in Business Communication. He had worked as an Assistant Professor in the College of Humanities and Education, Fiji National University, Fiji Islands for three years. He has 11 years of teaching experience in India and Fiji. He is the author and editor of books and research articles in English and recently contributed to the short story collection in Fiji Hindi, Koi Kissa Batav: Fiji Hindi Me Kuch Kahani (Tell a Tale: Some Stories in Fiji Hindi).*

### Works Cited

2007 *Fiji Census of Population and Housing Analytical*. Suva, Fiji: Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2012.

Adam, Hazrat. Letter to editor, *Fiji Sun* 26 March 1988.

---

<sup>67</sup> Mrinal Pande, 'Dear "Purists", Hindi Is Not Being Diluted, It Is Just Evolving,' *The Quint*, 26 Sept. 2016. Accessed 20 Jan 2017. <<https://www.thequint.com/opinion/2016/09/26/dynamic-and-democratic-dear-purists-let-the-hindi-language-grow-literature-pakhwada-divas-english>>.

<sup>68</sup> Pande.

Subramani's *Fiji Maa: A Book of a Thousand Readings*. Daneshwar Sharma. *Transnational Literature* Vol. 11 no. 1, December 2018. <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

- Bharucha, Rustom. 'Rushdie's Whale.' *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*. Ed. M.D. Fletcher. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. 159-71.
- Slumdog Millionaire*. dir. Danny Boyle, prod. Christian Colson. Fox Searchlight Pictures, Celador Films, Film4, 2008. English.
- Census 2001, Statement 5*. India: Government of India, 2001. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018. <[http://censusindia.gov.in/Census\\_Data\\_2001/Census\\_Data\\_Online/Language/Statement5.aspx](http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Census_Data_Online/Language/Statement5.aspx)>.
- Chandra, Praveen, Ed. *Koi Kissa Batav: Fiji Hindi Me Kuch Kahani (Tell a Tale: Some Stories in Fiji Hindi)*. Brisbane, Australia: Carindale Publishing, 2018.
- 'Dialect.' *literarydevices.net*. Accessed 15 Feb. 2017. <<https://literarydevices.net/dialect/>>.
- Dryden, John. *Dryden: An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. New York: BiblioLife, 2009.
- Edwards, Rodney. 'A Quare Spake: A Celebration of Irish Rural Dialect, So It Is.' *Irish Times*. 26 Oct. 2015. Accessed 15 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/a-quare-spake-a-celebration-of-irish-rural-dialect-so-it-is-1.2406276>>.
- . *Sure, Why Would Ye Not?: Two Oul Fellas Put the World to Rights*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2015.
- Else, Gerald F. *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1986.
- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 1966.
- Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *Green Hills of Africa*. Scribner classics ed. New York, NY: Scribner, 1935.
- Jayawardena, Chandra. 'The Disintegration of Caste in Fijian Indian Rural Society.' *Anthropology in Oceania: Essays Presented to Ian Hogbin*. Eds. L.R. Hiatt and C. Jayawardena. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971.
- Joyce, James, and Sam Slote. *Ulysses*. 1922. Richmond: Alma Classics, 2012.
- Kelman, James. *How Late It Was, How Late*. New York, NY: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1996.
- Kumar, Margaret Kamla. 'Diglossia and its Practice in Multilingual Fiji.' *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 4.3 (2001). 181-96.
- Lal, Brij V. 'Dauka Puraan (Review).' *The Contemporary Pacific* 15.1 (2003) 226-29.
- . 'Slavery Theory Goes Out of Indenture Definition.' *Indian News Link*. 14 May 2014a. <<http://www.indiannewslink.co.nz/slavery-theory-goes-out-of-indenture-definition/>>.
- . 'Fijians Remember Girmityas with Reverence.' *Indian News Link*. 15 May 2014b. Accessed 15 Feb 2017. <<http://www.indiannewslink.co.nz/fijians-remember-girmityas-with-reverence/>>.
- Langeland, Agnes Scott. 'Rushdie's Language.' *English Today* 12.1 (1996) 16-22.
- Larkin, Philip. *Letters to Monica*. New York: Faber & Faber, 2011.
- Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002.
- Márquez, Gabriel García. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.
- Mcdowell, Lesley. 'James Kelman: Look Back in Anger.' *Independent*. 20 May 2004. Accessed 15 Feb. 2017. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/james-kelman-look-back-in-anger-61351.html>>.
- McWhorter, John. *Spreading the Word: Language and Dialect in America*. USA: Heinemann, 2000.
- Moag, Rodney F. *Fiji Hindi: A Basic Course and Reference Grammar*. Canberra: Australian National U P/Suva, Fiji: Extension Services, U of the South Pacific, 1977.

- Pande, Mrinal. "Dear 'Purists,' Hindi Is Not Being Diluted, It Is Just Evolving.' *The Quint*. 26 Sept. 2016. Accessed 20 Jan. 2017 <<https://www.thequint.com/opinion/2016/09/26/dynamic-and-democratic-dear-purists-let-the-hindi-language-grow-literature-pakhwada-divas-english>>.
- Pillai, Raymond C. 'Adhura Sapna (A Shattered Dream).' *Language Transplanted: The Development of Overseas Hindi*. Eds. Richard K. Barz and Jeff Siegel. Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988. 221-55.
- Prakash, Som. 'The Linguistic Wheel Coming Full Circle: A Review of Dauka Puraan.' *Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Fiji* 1.1 (2003) 209-14.
- Prasad, Rameshwar. 'Review of the Book Dauka Puraan.' *Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Fiji* 1.1 (2003) 215-16.
- Radhakrishnan, Smitha. 'Slumdog Sincerity.' *UCLA International Institute*. 28 Nov. 2008. Accessed 19 Dec. 2018. <<http://international.ucla.edu/institute/article/101268>>.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage Books, 2010.
- Sengupta, Mitu. 'Slumdog Millionaire's Dehumanizing View of India's Poor.' *Counterpunch*. 20 Feb. 2009. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018. <<https://www.counterpunch.org/2009/02/20/slumdog-millionaire-s-dehumanizing-view-of-india-s-poor/>>.
- Shameem, Nikhat, and John Read. 'Administering a Performance Test in Fiji Hindi.' *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*. Supplement Series 13.1 (1996) 80-104.
- Siegel, Jeff. 'Fiji Hindustani.' *Working Papers in Linguistics, University of Hawaii* 7.3 (1975) 127-30.
- . *Say it in Fiji Hindi*. Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1977.
- . 'The Development of Fiji Hindustani.' *Language Transplanted: Development of Overseas Hindi*. Eds. Richard K. Barz and Jeff Siegel. Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988. 121-49.
- . 'Indian Languages in Fiji: Past, Present and Future.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21.sup001 (1998). 181-214.
- . *Language Contact in a Plantation Environment*. Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language. 1987. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.
- Subramani. *Dauka Puraan*. New Delhi, India: Star Publications, 2001.
- . *Fiji Maa: Mother of a Thousand*. (forthcoming 2018).
- Trivedi, Mitul. 'Critical Reflections on South Asian English: A Literary Perspective.' *New Academia: An International Journal of English Language Literature and Literary Theory* 2.4 (2013) 1-7.
- Tulsidas. *Rāmacaritamānasa*. Gorakhpur, UP, India: Gita Press.
- Twain, Mark. *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer's Comrade)*. Ed. Michael Patrick Hearn. Annotated edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.
- Welty, Eudora. *Delta Wedding*. New York: Mariner Books, 1979.
- Wood, James. 'Away Thinking About Things: James Kelman's Fighting Words.' *The New Yorker*. 25 Aug. 2014. Accessed 15 Feb. 2017 <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/25/away-thinking-things>>.