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A *Ghumakkar* of Modern Mithila: An Interpretative Reading of Baba Nagarjun's Personhood

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Vaidyanāth Miśrā (1911–1998) earned popularity and literary fame with many pen names such as Vidyārthī, Vaideh, Yātrī, and Nāgārjun. Known for writing prose and poetry in Hindi, Maithili, and Sanskrit in early twentieth-century Mithila, inspired by a significant older compatriot, Rāhul Sāṅkrtyāyan (1893–1963), he switched identifications, from *sanātan hindu dharam* (eternal Hindu way of life) to Buddhism. Committed to the idea of *ghumakkari* (wandering), the life and works of Nagarjun present a curious case of a wanderer's personality and fluid identity that summons an interpretative interest. This essay, in an interdisciplinary framework, performs an interpretative unraveling of the interface of culture and personality, to propose a perspective on the social and cultural paradox of living (in institutions of family and home) and leaving (to wander and explore) in modern Mithila.

In the vernacular context, manhood and corresponding personhood are not a uniform, monolithic, and universal experience. They entail subject formation in conformity to, and also in defiance of, the prevalent social and moral norms. This renders manhood, despite the institutional mechanisms in place, unpredictable and uncertain. Institutionally in India, a man is bound by social roles of a son, a husband, a father, and yet may develop pathways that serve a larger aptitude for wandering. Rather than a binary, social role sets for the householder and various roles as renouncer crisscross. Thus begins a modest trouble for many theses on the discursive distinctions of gendered personhood, as is the case in this essay that zeros in on a modern litterateur from Mithila.

Conventionally, Indology-informed social anthropologists have visualized and understood manhood in consonance with the dominant institutions. Such scholarly attempts tend to depict a Hindu man as a person who is a celibate student (*brahmacarya*), a householder after marriage (*grhastha*), subsequently a hermit dwelling in the forests (*vānaprastha*) and finally, a renunciant (*vairgya*). Such understanding owes to the Brahmanical classical knowledge systems in which *puruṣārtha* (ends of man)¹ is accomplished through a successful rite of passage including the four stages (Dumont 1960, 35; 1980, 235). Such a linearity of stages of manhood, in common sense as well as in the scholarship, presents men who wandered as a part of a cult or sect, or men

1 *Puruṣa* references the primeval, cosmic man in a Vedic creation narrative and *artha* refers to the purpose of pursuit, usually translated as an "end" of man (*puruṣārtha*).

who did not otherwise squarely belong to social institutions.² Curiously, Coralynn Davis (2014, 113–33) observed that in Maithil women's stories, men and women both wander into forest, producing an alterity to settlement (village, city, kingdom, etc.) and its institutional rules. But the male journey, despite personal accomplishments, eventually reaffirms male heroism and patriarchal norms of sexuality and social roles. This informs and adds a complex gendered layer to the male wandering discussed in this essay.

Against such a backdrop, I turn to a strand of manhood characterized by creative and libertarian ambivalence, coexisting in many worlds and institutions, without absolutely renouncing or subscribing to the householder tradition. This strand of manhood is characterized by *ghumakkarpan* or *ghumakkarī*, literally alluding to wandering across time and space to accomplish an understanding of the self and the world. Though *ghumakkar* is often associated with those who are not tied down to socially stable and locally rooted institutions such as family, marriage, and kinship, this need not be the case. Anecdotal folk accounts in Mithila suggest that many of the boys run away from their families, spend years traveling, working at various destinations, acquiring embodied knowledge and experience, and then returning home with a formation of subjectivity that determines the course of the remainder of their lives. The question is whether such subject formation alters dominant masculinity and gendered relationships, to which this essay shall return in the end.

Accounts of *ghumakkar*s are not rare in various villages and towns of the Maithili-speaking regions in northeastern Bihar, or even in Bhojpuri-, Angika-, and Magahi-speaking parts of the region. One such *ghumakkar* was Rāhul Sāṅkr̥tyāyan (1893–1963), who argued that such a behavioral trait pertains to a long-established practice across civilizations, and when it ceased it led to the fall of civilizations (Sāṅkr̥tyāyan 1949, 8).³ Sankrityayan was a renowned scholar of Buddhism and Marxism who converted to Buddhism, pursued the ancient Buddhist texts, and even translated some of them (for example, Sāṅkr̥tyāyan 1933). Known for his extensive writings, he traveled far and wide since his childhood. It is difficult to summarize the enormity of his life and works that arose from his persistent wandering. His treatise on the behavior and practice of *ghumakkarpan*, titled *Ghumakkar Śāstra* (1949), informs the discussion below since Sankrityayan played a crucial role in the life and works of Nagarjun. Sāṅkr̥tyāyan (1949, 9) emphasized that for him *ghumakkarpan* connected with Buddhism. To fathom the intricacies of the phenomenon one may recall Rahul Sankrityayan's suggestion that, "if there is any *sanātan dharam* [eternal duty] it is *ghumakkar dharm* [wanderer duty]."

2 In addition to Buddhists, there were a variety of Hindu sects such as the Ramanandi order and others as identified by Burghart (1983, 5), Olivelle (1993, 15), and Fuller (1992, 20). These scholars oscillate between textual canons and political Hinduism.

3 His name is hereafter spelled without transliteration except when citing his works written in Hindi, as spelled out in the references.

But this is not yet another narrow and parochial sect. Rather it is infinitely generous like the sky and spread out like an ocean . . . as a wanderer traverses far and wide so does increase his number of friends and kin" (Sāṅkrītyāyan 1949, 8–13).⁴ Furthermore, with the biography of Rahul Sankrityayan, who was a man of family, too, even while he wandered, there emerges a sense of manhood with utmost flexibility and creative ambivalence, rather than a rigidity of a unilinear, monochromatic masculinity.

But then, men with such a broader worldview due to wandering also had a gendered flipside, in their relationship with close kin such as their wives and children. While Sankrityayan and Nagarjun—as this essay shall depict for the latter—were on experiential journeys, they still had wives and children that they left behind. Nagarjun had chanced upon meeting with the wife of Rahul Sankrityayan when they were both visiting villages during the *kisān sabhā* (peasant assembly), discussed in the latter part of this paper. Sankrityayan's wife asked Nagarjun, "why did he leave me, what was my fault?"⁵ Nagarjun was speechless. This aspect underlines the intricacy of his personhood, less substantiated due to the absence of available accounts of Nagarjun's own wife. And yet, the essay points out a possible way forward for a rethinking of the gendered notion of masculinity, in that there is always a longing for belonging.

A vast trove of clinical, therapeutic, psychological scholarship exists on the violent and hegemonic nature of patriarchal masculinity, to the extent of underlining the toxic nature of masculinity (Harrington 2020, 345–52). Simultaneously, scholars among others have been interested in the exploration of alternative masculinities (Carabí and Armengol 2014, 10), furthering the debate on the gendered formation of manhood. The quest for alternative masculinities has been central in many parts of the world, as discussed in Boyd et al. (1996, 6) and Kimmel et al. (2005, 10), as well as in the context of South Asia (Srivastava 2004, 10; Roy 2007, 11). These explorations demonstrate that there are many ways to be a man, rather than the dominant template of manhood determined by the institutions of patriarchy that regulate everyday life in South Asia. Manliness in the broader scheme of personhood becomes an intricate site, entailing contestation with some patriarchal norms while conformity to some others (Hobbs 2013).⁶ In the context of Mithila, navigating the gendered tale world of the Maithil women in the scheme of narratology, Davis (2014, 93–111) points out a relative absence of maternal affection in men in the folktales. She observes that in the maternal devotion, *mamtā* and *māyā* are synonymous, denoting tender attachment, affection, compassion for Maithil women. Whereas for Maithil men, *māyā* is essentially an illusion to overcome, and hence paternal devotion lacks in emotions and

⁴ All translations are by the author of this essay unless stated otherwise.

⁵ Nagarjun's son Śobhākānt (1990, 62) recounts this anecdote.

⁶ This article appeared in an online journal.

relationships. Even in an exceptional tale where paternal affection is integral, *koikh* (womb), a marker of maternal affection, is an inevitable medium. Manhood in South Asia, as in Mithila, is more inclined to gendered formations, as this essay shall depict in the quest of the personhood of Baba Nagarjun.

In the remainder of this essay, we turn to the particular case of a *ghumakkar*, a learner, a litterateur, a sociopolitical activist, whose life presents to us a case of manhood in which sociocultural institutions intersect. It is the life of Vaidyanāth Miśrā (1911–1998), whose biography cruises through disparate geopolitical regions.⁷ The key vernacular context is that of the Maithili-speaking region in the northeastern section of Bihar, and the social and cultural subjectivities along with contextual materiality thereof. Through the life and works of Mishra, this essay aids in imagining a wanderer's South Asia, through a relationship between micro and macro context. South Asia, in the wandering of the protagonist of this essay, cannot be reduced to the geopolitical conglomeration of post-independent South Asian nation-states. Usually, the bureaucratic imagination of South Asia assembles seven or eight modern nation-states typically manifest in the idea of South Asia espoused by the SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation). In the poetics and politics of the wandering Vaidyanath Mishra, the image of South Asia is, instead, a fluid geography of experiences in which embodied learning is far more crucial than nation-centric institutional establishments (Pathak 2018, 35). Connection and flows of humans and their goods in such a non-statist South Asia focus on people rather than the state. Civilizational links are far more important in such a South Asia than diplomatic and international treaties. More than a rigid notion of sovereignty and territoriality, the region becomes a fluid geography. Such a fluid geography is a logical corollary, since the natives are perpetual travelers, as James Clifford (1992, 10) suggested elsewhere. An anthropologist's informant, the object of study for an ethnographer, may be viewed as a static and synchronic social actor rather than a diachronic agent perpetually on the move. Clifford criticized such an anthropological make-believe entity, persuading us to see a dynamism in the native's life. Here, the native is a traveler who accumulates ideas and experience on the move. The native is not merely an informant. It is through such an itinerant idea that we can understand the deeper nuances of the wanderings of a native. The native as traveler tends to develop an experiential map, as in the case of Mishra.

Thus, as the essay implies, the *puruṣārtha* of a *ghumakkar* is not bound to the fourfold framework of the Hindu rite of passage. Mishra's life aids in exploring a distinct variant of cosmopolitanism, following the realization that "there are many, different, cosmopolitan practices coexisting in late modernity,

7 His name is hereafter spelled as Vaidyanath Mishra, without diacritics.

with their own historicities and distinctive worldviews [that have] . . . led to an exploration of marginal cosmopolitanisms" (Werbner 2006, 497).⁸ At times patriotic and nationalist narrative dominates such multiple cosmopolitanisms. In contrast, the remainder of my essay shall dissect the making of a complex subjective personhood, intellectually free-floating (Mannheim 1929, 153–64)⁹ to develop a critical outlook. The essay shall return to this line of argumentation in the conclusion.

Who's Vaidyanath Mishra—Vidyārthī, Vaideh, and Yātrī?

In colloquial pronunciation, Baidyanath or Baijnath, or as formally written, Vaidyanath earned literary fame with his pen names, Yātrī and Nāgārjun, or under the lesser-known names, Vidyārthī and Vaideh. Fondly known as *bābā* (father) Nagarjun among his admirers, the term *yātrī*, one of his noms de plume, literally means "traveler." It clearly sums up the life and works, practices and perspectives of this prolific poet who wrote in Hindi, Maithili, and Sanskrit. Curiously, when he wrote in Maithili, he preferred the surname Yātrī, and for his work in Hindi, Nāgārjun. Figuratively and literally, as a *yātrī*, Nagarjun switched his identification from *sanātana dharma*—clearly suggesting influences of the Arya Samaj, a monistic Hindu reform movement initiated by the *svāmī* named Dayanand Sarasvati (1824–1883) in late nineteenth-century India—to Buddhism. He never shied away from changing ideological affiliations, either, and wielded his critical pen as a means of literary polemics against almost everything from traditional to modern. Recognizing Rahul Sankrityayan as his significant predecessor, and *ghumakkarī* as a mode of seeing, cognizing, and understanding, Nagarjun made valuable contributions to the vernacular public sphere with his novels, stories, poems, and translations that chronicled the sociocultural subjectivities, lives, and historical-material conditions in Mithila. In so doing there was a perpetual conflict between a male householder and an imaginative mind that sought creative, literary, and sociopolitical engagement with the world. Sense and sensibility, intellect and emotion, reason and contextual rumination come together to reflect the peripatetic life of Nagarjun.

Nagarjun's personhood is, as I intend to demonstrate, ontologically shaped by lived and situated knowledge arising from his contextual experiences. This manifests sharply in the relentless conflict between his various personas as Vaidyanath Mishra the householder and the *yātrī* Nagarjun who wanders to seek wisdom through experience. The former is a man of the householder's tradition, while the latter is a liberated soul committed to exploring the world beyond the confines of the home. Nagarjun's son Shobhakant (Śobhākānt) presented a personal account of his father's life. It begins with a verse from

⁸ Such ideas of multiple cosmopolitanism began to take discursive forms in the works of Clifford (1992, 96–116), Bhabha (1996, 191–207), and Nussbaum (1994) inter alia. Werbner (2006, 496–98) presents an overview.

⁹ The idea of intelligentsia with the spirit of freedom, so as to be able to challenge the dominant narratives, was discussed in Mannheim (1929) with the aim of understanding the sociology of knowledge.

Nagarjun's anthology. Difficult to translate precisely into English, it paraphrases as follows: I am an eternal traveler on an endless path; hundreds of thousands of years and yet no end (*"Meiñ ciryātrī path kahāñ ant, bīte lākhoñ varṣ anant"* [Śobhākānt 1990, 2]).

Shobhakant observes that the poet had a bodily journey of eighty-seven years. The motif of journey, observed the son of the poet, becomes an abiding feature of Nagarjun's life, marked by vicissitudes. As Nagarjun had noted, "nature is itself miraculous, rather than plain; why do you expect my life to be simple" (Viyogī 2019, 13).¹⁰ The topsy-turvy nature of his life journey begins when as a child he was nicknamed Thakkan, literally meaning the one who deceives and runs away! Since many of his siblings died early, he was given the name Thakkan, a relatively unflattering one, according to local social customs. Later, he had adopted the nickname Yatri, inspired by the Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore (Viyogī 2019, 43). Still later, he took the pen name Nagarjun for his literary works in Hindi. Along with his biographical accounts, Nagarjun's fictional works also reveal a great deal about the formation of his personhood, which is a perpetual process of becoming due to the experiential enrichment of *ghumakkarī*. And yet there is an implied gendered ambiguity therein, particularly explicit in the latter parts of his life. In the remaining portion of the essay, I examine key aspects of his life and writings toward an understanding of the deeper nuances of the expanded identity and subjectivity of the man and litterateur.

The Man in His Literary Kaleidoscope

Vaidyanath's experiences informed his first two novels, titled *Pāro* in Maithili (1946; Nāgārjun 2003a) and *Ratināth kī Cācī* (Ratināth's aunt, 1948; Nāgārjun 2003b) in Hindi.¹¹ Reading them enables one to locate the young Vaidyanath in the genealogy of the medieval Nyaya (one of the schools of philosophy) scholars. He was born in the village Tarauni to Gokul Mishra, a Maithil Brahmin, and Uma Devi, who suffered chronically from asthma without much medical attention. Of the six children who died one after another, only this boy had survived. Since his parents had worshiped the deity Shiva for the safe existence of their son, he was named Vaidyanath, another name for Shiva.¹² As a young boy he had seen his violent father beating up his ailing mother. The violent masculinity of his father and the miserable death of

10 Nagarjun said so in a reply to the request by Mohan Rakesh, the renowned litterateur, and the editor of the Hindi magazine *Sarika* in a column *Aīne ke Sāmnē*.

11 His son and editor of the *Nāgārjun Racanāvalī*, Śobhākānt (2003) notes, and Viyogī (2019) recapitulates, an instance that led Nagarjun to fiction writing, in addition to poetry. Nagarjun and Rahul Sankrityayan were imprisoned in Chapra jail in Bihar after they were arrested during the *anbāri kisān āndolan* (Anbari peasant movement). Sankrityayan began to dictate his novel *Jīne ke Liye* (To live) to Nagarjun. While the latter wrote, he developed a long-lasting interest in composing fiction. This was further nourished through the work of translation and editing that Nagarjun did before turning to Buddhism.

12 In colloquial practices Hindu devotees focus on the *śivaliṅgam*, the phallic symbol of Shiva, at Deoghar in Jharkhand as *vaidyanāth*.

his mother scarred the memory of the child when he was four years old. Vaidyanath the child was also the perpetual recipient of his father's unbridled anger until he embarked on his experiential journey.¹³

The agonizing feeling of paternal violence found expression in Nagarjun's various works, most remarkably in *Ratināth kī Cācī*. The story of the young boy named Ratinath and his aunt are interwoven. The social violence that killed the aunt was part of the young boy's life, too. Whenever Ratinath tried to recall his mother, the only image that crossed his mind was of "an ailing mother, helplessly bed-ridden, and a monstrosly violent father sitting over her with an axe to slit her neck; the mother desperately cries for help, and the three and half year old feels frightened" (Śobhākānt 2003, 30).¹⁴ The violent nature of the father persists and the child harbors the horror of being beaten black and blue by him. The father figure in the novel is also sexually perverse and unconscionable, having impregnated the aunt of the young boy and left her to deal with social stigma and outcasting, resulting in her suicide.

I shall return to Vaidyanath's biography with a rider. Unlike the Freudian father complex, in which a son would defeat a father to eventually carry out the primeval burden (Freud 1900), Vaidyanath sought to be away from a father figure in the quest for an independent maturation. The boy never had an amicable relationship with his father, though his first exposure to wandering was due to his father moving from one village to another, from one city to another, in his early childhood. The Hindi novelist Manohar Shyam Joshi has noted that the only thing young Vaidyanath inherited from his father was *pair kī śanicarī* (planetary motion of feet) (Viyogī 2019, 22).¹⁵ Leaving home to be independent was, however, loaded with an emotional longing for belonging. Vaidyanath seems to point to this longing through the key narrator, tellingly indicated by the pronoun "I," in the novel *Pāro*, where he writes the following: "It felt bad to be separated from the people who I had grown up seeing, talking and playing with. That mud-water, household-veranda, village, field-orchard, pond-well, cattle-old banyan tree, grass-plants—everything seemed to be loudly crying and asking me to not leave. I wished to howl and wail, but shied away" (Śobhākānt 2003, 537).¹⁶

Likewise, when the young Ratinath had to leave home for schooling in *Ratināth kī Cācī*, he looked around his home and thought, "Everything in the vicinity looked conscious and alive, as though they were begging him—do not go! Where would you go, just stop, go back. His heart wailed at the moment

13 Nagarjun's son Shobhakant (1990, 54–55) recounts this.

14 Translated from the novel *Ratināth kī Cācī*, in volume four of *Nāgārjun Racanāvalī*, edited by Śobhākānt (2003).

15 Here, *śanicarī* is a colloquial expression for the *śanigraha*, alluding to a particular astrological coincidence whereby a person is affected by the planet *śani* (Saturn), amounting to disturbance and discomfort in life!

16 Notably, *Pāro* is as much about the ordeal of the female protagonist named Paro as it is about the narrator telling the tale in first person with the pronoun "I." Quoted from the novel *Pāro* in volume four of *Nāgārjun Racanāvalī*, edited by Śobhākānt (2003).

of separation. His feet refused to move. And it was on that rare occasion that Ratinath's father, known to be recklessly violent and irresponsible, also had moist eyes" (Śobhākānt 2003, 82).¹⁷

Despite the family's penury, on the advice of relatives, Vaidyanath's father Gokul Mishr enrolled him in *prathamā*, the first level in formal Sanskrit education. The young boy was the only examinee from his village who passed the examination conducted by the Sanskrit Examination Board in 1925. He earned a reputation as a diligent student and was offered financial aid and scholarships to further his studies. Bhavani Bhavan Pathshala in Ganauli village of Darbhanga was a renowned middle school that invited Vaidyanath to join for *madhyamā*, a three-year course in Sanskrit education with an examination conducted by the board in the end. A teacher named Aniruddh Mishr taught him to compose poetic couplets in Sanskrit. In Ganauli, Vaidyanath was given boarding and lodging at the home of an esteemed Maithil Brahmin named Raghunath Jha. The young boy got a familial taste of affection, perhaps for the first time in his life, and became intimate with the young girl Indulata, the daughter of his patron Raghunath Jha. He would play with Indulata, as well as recite poems of Vidyapati, the famous medieval poet of Mithila, for her. Vaidyanath never disclosed the reasons for leaving the school and household in Ganauli, but one may conjecture that the intimacy with Indulata was the provocation.¹⁸ The novel *Pāro* (1946) seems to echo Vaidyanath's youthful struggles in how it portrays the agonies of the female protagonist named Paro in a conservative, patriarchal Maithil family in a society where intimacy is invariably an institutional taboo. His use of the pronoun "I" in relation to Paro suggests that intimacy, though it was conditioned by patriarchal kinship norms.

Tārānand Viyogī (2019), in his biography of Mishra, elucidates the journey of the young Vaidyanath emphasizing the pronoun "I" in *Pāro* (1946). Vaidyanath spent time with his uncle Parmanand Mishr in the village Mahishi, where he learned by heart some of the classics in Sanskrit such as *Siddhānta Kaumudī*, *Raghuvamśa Mahākāvya*, *Kumārasambhava*, and *Daśakumāracarita*. Subsequently, with affectionate support from his maternal grandmother, he joined Maharaji Pathshala in Darbhanga in order to complete his high school education. That experience exposed him to friends who led him to Kashi, then the destination of many Maithil Sanskrit scholars and litterateurs. Amid these experiences, Vaidyanath did not fail to take note of the homosexual desires and exploits of his peers and teachers. In *Āine ke Sāmne* (In front of the mirror [Nāgarjun 1963]) he reflected on his experiences, revealing that the teachers used to expect homosexual relations with young, unmarried boys. In his words, "Before my marriage with

¹⁷ Quoted from the novel *Ratināth Ki Cāci*, in volume four of *Nāgarjun Racanāvalī*, edited by Śobhākānt (2003).

¹⁸ Viyogī (2019) affirms the conjecture, while Nagarjun hints at it in his 1963 biographical account found in *Āine ke Sāmne*.

Aparajita I hardly knew anything about this novel feeling of intimacy. Prior to that I had only undergone the traumatic circumstances swayed by the unholy shadow of homosexual relationships between teachers and students. This was the time when people used to refrain from sending their boys to the school hostels. Besides, in the freedom movement during 1930–1932 there were thousands of *satyāgrahīs* (Gandhian freedom fighters) of various age groups; there too the unnatural sexual liaisons were prevalent” (Nāgārjun 1963).¹⁹

Ratināth kī Cācī (Śobhākānt 2003) includes explicit accounts of boys indulging in homosexual erotic experiences. The discussion of sexual practices and exploration is rarely magnified to become a spectacle in the novel; rather, it appears with an everyday ease.²⁰ Ratinath had his first exposure to homosexual erotica when another student, Suryadev, made advances on him in the dead of night. Ratinath cringed in disgust and was revolted; however, it was such a prevalent practice that he eventually gave in. Seemingly, he voluntarily developed an association with another boy named Naresh: “Eventually it became such a joy that he began to cast his eyes on any of the boys of his age or younger ones” (Śobhākānt 2003, 95).²¹ Even though each student was normatively expected to observe celibacy in the process of schooling, each one was vulnerable to sexual abuse as well as intentional indulgence. Such structural antithesis to the sociosexual normative order was palpable in Vaidyanath’s articulations in spite of the ubiquity and ambiguity of such experience.

Śobhākānt’s (1990; 2022) biographical accounts and Śobhākānt’s collection of interviews with Nagarjun (Nāgārjun and Śobhākānt 2000) show that Vidyarthi Vaidyanvth found new pathways while in Kashi, a popular destination for the Maithil intelligentsia. A Maithili literary public sphere, among other literary circles, emerged from Kashi. In the early twentieth century, the Maithil Vidvatjan Samīti, an informal association of Maithil intellectuals from Kashi, regularly challenged the then-king of Mithila, Rameshwar Singh. The *samīti* also facilitated the publication of esteemed periodicals such as *Mithilā Mod* in 1905 under the editorial leadership of Murlidhar Jha.²² Coming to Kashi was akin to entering a sociohistorical frame of Maithili literature for Vaidyanath. His patron was Rani Lakshmivati, the widow of the former king of Mithila, Lakshmishvar Singh. Vaidyanath had taken to living in the *rānīkoṭhā* (abode of the queen) in Kashi, away from the then-king of Mithila Rameshwar Singh. He was allegedly a stooge of the East India Company and advocate of Maithil conservatism. *Rānīkoṭhā* was, in fact,

19 The translation is from a digitized version that has no page numbers. See Nāgārjun (1963).

20 Similarly, another novel titled *Kumbhīpāk* narrates the quotidian erotic relationships of female characters without centralizing them as a focal theme. See his *Kumbhīpāk* in volume five of *Nāgārjun Racanāvalī*, edited by Śobhākānt (2003).

21 Quoted from *Ratināth kī Cācī*, in volume four of *Nāgārjun Racanāvalī*, edited by Śobhākānt (2003).

22 Just as the era of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1868–1938) is significant in the history of Hindi literature, so too is the era of Mod in Maithili literature. See Mishra (1998).

a hostel that accommodated students from Mithila who came to Kashi for intellectual and educational pursuits. Vaidyanath stayed there and studied further, enrolled in the Government Sanskrit College that was established by the East India Company in 1791. He met and learned from scholars such as the *paṇḍit* Madhusudan Shastri (a scholar of Sanskrit) and Jyotishvar Baldev Mishr (a scholar of astrology from Bangaon). Vaidyanath learned Prakrit, Pali, and Apabhramsha from Baldev Mishr, whose knowledge of Buddhist literature was comparable only to that of a *mahāpaṇḍit* (great scholar), a moniker used to show respect for a learned person in a specific field of study. Viyogī (2019) notes that it was during his time at the *rānīkoṭhā* that Vaidyanath began to manifest his social sensitivity and concerns that defied the borders of caste and creed. Be it his openness in consuming water from the lower caste or cremating the dead body of an unidentified lower-caste pilgrim, the *vidyārthī* (student) Vaidyanath established the freedom of his spirit and critical consciousness at this stage in his ontological journey.

But then, Kashi was also a place where Vaidyanath had to become Vaideh, yet another titular appendage to his name. Vaideh alluded to his belongingness to the homeland, and also to an embodied experience of being. How did Vaideh come into existence? The periodical *Mithilā Mod* had ceased to exist in 1927, and the scholars committed to it were already exploring the possibility of starting a replacement. Vaidyanath had published a poem in another magazine called *Mithilā*, on the request of Murlidhar Jha, the founder of *Mithilā Mod*. The poem was an expression of feelings of loss for modern Maithili literature. The erstwhile proponents and writers of *Mithilā Mod* took note of the poem. They formalized an association called Bhāratī Niketan (Indian Abode) based in the *rānīkoṭhā* and published a handwritten magazine called *Bhāratī*. The editor of *Bhāratī* was Vidyarthi Vaidyanath. It became a premise for the coming together of literary activists in 1930s. Many of the young literary activists started professing literary *upanāms* (nicknames), such as Kulanand Mishra becoming “Keśrī,” Devcandra Jha taking the name “Chander,” Vamdev Mishra transforming into “Vimal,” and Kancinath Jha adopting the name “Kiraṇ.” It was precisely then that Vaidyanath also adopted the *upanām* “Vaideh,” literally meaning the person from Videh.²³ The nickname was intended to allude to a consciousness about the iconic and mythological significance of the place. Vaideh stuck to him during his stint as an editor. With this nickname, he edited yet another handwritten magazine by the title *Vaidehī*.

Amid such sociocultural and literary mobilization, the Kashi-based Maithil scholars began to think of more organized endeavors. A concrete move toward this was the commencement of *vidyāpati-parv* (Vidyapati festival), a

23 Mithila, the land of *vaidehī*, a synonym for Sita, the mythological daughter of the local king named Janaka. She was also known as Janaki as well as Vaidehi.

celebration of the literary culture of Mithila on the pretext of commemorating the birth anniversary of the medieval poet Vidyapati. With Kancinath Jha whose nom de plume was “Kiraṇ,” Vaidyanath, predominantly known as “Vaideh” by then, was a co-organizer of the festival. Given the overwhelming participation in the festival, a team succeeded in persuading Madan Mohan Malaviya to start a Maithili department at the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in Kashi.²⁴ Meanwhile, Vaideh had become a known literary figure and cultural activist, acknowledged for his poems. Those poetic compositions revealed the new pathways that were beginning to emerge for Vaideh to become a Yatri. Vaidyanath is noted as saying, “The whole of my childhood was plagued by suffocation and frustration; poverty, bad sacrament and Brahmanical orthodoxy I could not swallow; living in Kashi I understood the imperative of progressiveness” (Viyogī 2019, 43). While this was so, he also used his Brahmanical knowledge to find a square meal when needed, as he recalled, “You know, here the man named Vaidyanath Mishra narrated stories from the Puranas, Jatakas, Mahabharata, and Valmiki and in the end got his bread and butter” (ibid., 44).

Viyogī (2019) and Śobhākānt (1990; 2022) further inform us that after the completion of his studies for the certification of *śāstrī* (scholar) in Sanskrit education, he returned to his village. This led to a major change in his biographical journey; namely, his marriage in the *saurāṭha-sabhā* (assembly of Saurāṭha)²⁵ with Aparajita, daughter of an aristocratic and affluent Maithil Brahman from the village known as Haripur. He left his bride at her natal home to go on a quest in his next *ghumakkar* journey. Everyone suggested that Vaidyanath should go to Calcutta and start a profession that could ensure his living. Instead, he decided to study further and earn the certificate of a *kāvyatīrtha* at the Government Sanskrit College, a renowned institute of higher learning in Calcutta. The principal of the college was the internationally acclaimed Cambridge philosopher Surendranath Dasgupta, known for his treatise on the history of Indian philosophy. Dasgupta was impressed with the poetic and linguistic skills of Vaidyanath and granted him a stipend. After he received the *kāvyatīrtha* certification in 1934, he returned to the village for the *durāṅgaman* ritual, the transfer of a wife from her natal home to the patriloc home of her husband. After this, it was urgent for Vaidyanath to find employment to provide for his new family that consisted of his wife and father, Gokul (Śobhākānt 1990; 2022).

²⁴ The Sanskrit name Kashi is also known as Varanasi and Banaras in the vernacular. The three terms are used interchangeably in the city and the region in which it is situated.

²⁵ *Saurāṭha-sabhā* was a customary institution of a mass marriage festival in which Maithil Brahmins determined nuptial unions after careful examination of family genealogies. The first ever acknowledgement of this system was in Cunnigham's survey in the late nineteenth century (republished in 2000).

Śobhākānt, in *Nāgārjun, Mere Bābūjī* (1990), narrates that the search for employment became a pretext for Vaidyanath's further wandering. Instead of taking the convenient employment of teaching in Calcutta, he opted to take on a research job that required him to go to Saharanpur, in Uttar Pradesh. There was an advertisement in a Bengali newspaper, *Ānanda Bājār Patrikā*, that a teacher in Saharanpur was interested in learning the Jain scriptures for which he needed assistance in Prakrit language. When Vaidyanath reached the employer's address he discovered to his dismay that the teacher's wife was against his research plan, and thus the job opportunity ended even before it had commenced. Vaidyanath further wandered on to Patiala in Punjab, and from there to Lahore (then in undivided colonial India, now in Pakistan). One of his old acquaintances whom he knew from his literary activities in Kashi and Calcutta was the author-journalist Harikrishna Premi. Vaidyanath began to write regular articles in the Lahore-based newspapers, the *Dainik Milāp* and *Viśvbandhu*. He gained popularity among the local litterateurs, journalists, and editors. That is when he met a person who looked like a sage named *svāmī* Keshavanand. The latter used to publish a monthly magazine called *Dīpak*. The two felt an instant sense of kinship since both seemed to have left home in more or less similar circumstances. Keshavanand appointed him as the editor of *Dīpak*, officially calling him *ācārya* (religious teacher) Vaidyanath Mishra. It was during this time that he had corresponded with the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore and received a congratulatory letter from him that was published in *Dīpak*. In addition, Vaidyanath earned enough to send money home and studied sufficiently to find yet another destination for his wandering. He was steadily preparing the ground for his journey from Lahore to Sri Lanka (Viyogī 2019).

The two biographies, respectively by Śobhākānt (1990) and Viyogī (2019), central in the above story lead one to notice the steady evolution of Vaidyanath's interest in Buddhism. Reading Sāṅkṛtyāyan's 1933 translation of the Buddhist text *Majjhima Nikāya* was instrumental in igniting Vaidyanath's interest in Buddhism. He wrote a letter to the Mahabodhi Sabha in Sarnath, near Kashi, expressing his desire to study the Buddhist texts in their original form, which Ashoka, the Mauryan emperor (268–232 BCE), along with his son Mahendra, had purportedly brought there in the third century. The place where the study of Buddhist texts was formally available was Vidyālanḱar Pariven in Kelaniya (Peliyagoda), Sri Lanka, a prominent place of learning and scholarship within Theravada Buddhism during the nineteenth century. When Vaidyanath informed Keshavanand about his intention, the latter was sad and resistant. The *svāmī* had developed an unconditional affection for Vaidyanath. Eventually he conceded, providing all that was requisite for traveling, from clothes and shoes to a substantial amount of money. Before leaving for Lanka Vaidyanath visited the Mahabodhi Society in Sarnath, writing a poem titled "Antim Praṇām" (Final adieu) for the magazine *Mithilā Mod*, which had resumed publication by then. For this poem, he used the pen name Yatri. This was an announcement

to the literary world that Vaidyanath had embarked on a *yātrā* (journey). Though he had already been a wanderer right from the commencement of his childhood, this was the occasion to announce a new leg of the journey that was to begin at Kashi and end in Lanka. It was also an intimation that Vaidyanath was soon going to become Nagarjun, despite his longing for his homeland in the background (Śobhākānt 1990).

Becoming Nagarjun

Viyogī (2019) informs that on his way to Madras (now Chennai), someone stole his money, and this mishap only added more force to Vaidyanath's wandering. Keshavanand had ensured that Vaidyanath was not helpless in Madras by writing a letter to the Dakṣiṇ Bhārat Hindī Pracār Sabhā (South Indian Assembly for the Publicity of Hindī). As a result, Vaidyanath started to do odd jobs in Madras to collect sufficient money for his planned Lanka journey. One day he came across the monastery of a sage from Gorakhpur (in Uttar Pradesh) located in Rameshwaram; the monastery was committed to popularizing the epic *Ramayana*. It was a well-to-do monastery connected with the head office of the Ramayani monastery in Janakpur (now in Nepal) under the headship of *svāmī* Ramsharan Das. This network of monasteries had a branch in Sri Lanka as well, and there was a regular exchange of *sādhus* (sages) between the monastery in Lanka and Rameshwaram. Vaidyanath could foresee a possibility for his plan and began to work as a *sadhu* in the monastery, using his knowledge of *sanātan hindu dharma*. He thus traveled to the Lankan-based monastery of a certain Kalyanpuri. He was deemed to be an enlightened Hindu worshiper and soon earned the unstinted affection of *bābā* (father) Kalyanpuri. Viyogī (2019) notes that when in confusion or distress, Vaidyanath resorted to chanting the name of his family goddess Chinnamastā (She whose head is severed),²⁶ the goddess who was principally a bridge between his *sanātan* Hindu background and the Buddhist foreground, as it were. Subsequently, he informed the *bābā* about his wish to visit Vidyalankar Pariven and as expected, *bābā* tried to ignore it as much as he could since for a *sanātan* Hindu the Buddhists were heretics. In response to Vaidyanath's dogged insistence, *bābā* relented and helped Vaidyanath to reach Pariven. This was the same place where some years ago Rahul Sankrityayan and Anand Kausalyayan had studied the Buddhist canon. For enrollment in the Pariven, Vaidyanath needed to show a recommendation letter from either of the two well-known scholars, Rahul Sankrityayan or Kashi Prasad Jayaswal.²⁷ In Pariven's official reckoning, both were scholars with established credentials. On Vaidyanath's request, the Orientalist scholar from India, Jayaswal, wrote a telegram that read, "admit this Sanskrit Pundit from Mithila" (Viyogī 2019, 76).

²⁶ Chinnamastā is one of the manifestations of the great goddess, often depicted as headless in iconography, known as the goddess of the great cosmic wisdom, and related to the *tāntrik* as well as Buddhist system of faith and practice, as detailed in Benard (1994).

²⁷ There is a research institute named after him in Bihar, <https://kpjri.res.in/about-us/>, which has a compilation of his scholarship and research.

Thus began Vaidyanath's stint at the Vidyalkar Pariven, which included his learning about the Tripitaka (three baskets), the textual canon of Theravada Buddhism, elementary lessons in the Sinhala language, and teaching Sanskrit to the formal students committed to learning and following Buddhism. He lived there for two and half years, eating the Sinhalese cuisine, which had generous usage of shredded fish, red chilies, and beef. It took Vaidyanath some time to adjust to the food. Eating beef caused revulsion in the beginning, and he had nightmares about a calf thrashing him. He decided to eat beef until the nightmare stopped. Thus, he accomplished a lived experience of the Buddhist way of seeing according to which there was no disdain of any kind of food. Leading the life of a Buddhist he learned the most important subject for a believer and scholar—*prajñā*,²⁸ an epistemic category central to the Buddhist precepts, which alluded to the ennobled vision in which mind and body work in unity toward liberation and awakening. He received *dīkṣā* (moral and religious precepts) just as had his predecessors such as Rahul Sankrityayan, Anand Kausalyayan, Jagdish Kashyap, and Bhadant Shanti. Vaidyanath was required to change his name, a customary practice for all the mendicants. That was when he opted for a name that appealed to him most, Nagarjun. He intended to be in the line of other Nagarjuns²⁹ from the ancient history of India, his ancient predecessors in Tantra and Buddhism respectively (Śobhākānt 1990; Nāgārjun and Śobhākānt 2000).

“Re-Turn”: Sociopolitical, Literary, and Emotional

With each *upnām* Vaidyanath seemed to have acquired novel perspectives, adding new dimensions to his personhood. Even though formally immersed in the Buddhist world of learning he continued to update himself about the social and political developments in India and Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka Nagarjun began to understand the *vāmapanthī* (left-leaning) perspectives, as he observed, “In the year 1937 at the Vidyalkar Mahavihar I got to know many socialist *sādhū* teachers. I therefore began to read Marx, Lenin, Stalin” (Viyogī 2019, 81). Along with reading about the anomalies of Sinhalese society, he was also getting acquainted with the grassroots politics of *svāmī* Sahajanand Sarasvati in India from the newspapers. Nagarjun was regularly discussing the issues of India's freedom struggle with his teachers too. The next destination for the wanderer, who had acquired novel perspectives as Nagarjun, was getting clearer. He exchanged letters with Sahajanand. Also, Rahul Sankrityayan had returned to India from Soviet Russia and received a grant to travel to Tibet and preserve the disappearing Buddhist texts. In the summer of 1938, Nagarjun joined Rahul, but he fell ill upon reaching the

28 Even though the simpler meaning of the word alludes to intellect, understanding, and wisdom, *prajñā* has deep philosophical connotations in the Buddhist epistemology. For a concise sense, see <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Prajnaparamita-Buddhist-literature> (accessed September 20, 2023).

29 The Nagarjuna of *tāntrik* tradition wrote a treatise on its philosophy and practice. But there have been other scholars and kings that went by the vernacular name of Nagarjun as well. See Khandelwal (2014, 10). The Buddhist Nagarajuna's philosophical work attracted much international scholarship. An introduction to his philosophy is found in Kalupahana (1986, 56).

Gyan Chi valley of Tibet and had to return. On the way back in Kalimpong he wrote the poem known to most of the followers of his literary works in India, “Bādal ko ghirte dekhā hai” (I have seen the swirling clouds), supposedly a reaffirmation of the depiction of the Himalayas in ancient poet Kalidas's (ca. fourth–fifth century CE) epic poem in Sanskrit, *Meghaduta* (Cloud messenger). The poem was published in the periodical *Sarasvatī*, with the pen name, Yatrī! Curiously, Nagarjun maintained the perpetuity of this pen name even after his new Buddhist *avatar* (incarnation).

When *svāmī* Sahajanand Sarasvati learned about the Tibet journey, he tried to dissuade Nagarjun from any further association with Rahul. As a result, Nagarjun reached Sarasvati's *sītārām āśram* in Bihta, Patna, Bihar. Sarasvati was in the process of mobilizing the farmers of northern India against the social structure of land ownership and hierarchy and believed that any awakened person including Rahul and Nagarjun must contribute to it. This was yet another destination for the wanderer as it led him to discover a sociopolitical dimension of his personhood.

As Nagarjun noted, “I joined my political mentor *svāmī* Sahajanand Sarasvati in 1938 for the summer school of politics, where I met many proven and principled socialist, communist, and congressmen type of nationalist-socialist leaders as teachers. I attended the school as a Buddhist mendicant named Nagarjun for the thirty days” (Viyogī 2019, 85). Against the backdrop of the national struggle for Indian independence, under the secret surveillance of the colonial authority, the school had lectures delivered by the doyens of modern Indian politics, including Jai Prakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Ramvriksha Benipuri, Sajjad Jaheer, M. R. Masanee, Ram Manohar Lohia, Mukut Bihari Lal, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay, among others, in the Sonpur district where the famous Sonpur fair of cattle is an annual event to this day. In this school everyone noticed the subdued and yet significant presence of the Buddhist mendicant who was taking notes of the sociopolitical concerns. Besides, Sarasvati took him along in many farmers' public meetings, where this Buddhist mendicant Nagarjun spoke like a newly converted socialist winning the hearts of the audience. They conducted meetings in Champaran, too, where they had to criticize the popularity of Mahatma Gandhi. In this process, the litterateur in Nagarjun was collecting plots for his literary works. This was more evident in the plot of the novel that he wrote later in 1967, *Jamaniyā kā Bābā* (Sage of Jamania). It was built upon the fake sage of Betiya who was morally and socially corrupt and had his goons unleashed on Nagarjun. But before this, there was another novel that was a testimonial to his social and political experience; that is, *Balcanmā* (1953), which was written in rustic Maithili. The novel narrated the exploitation of the peasants at the hands of Congress-inclined, seemingly Gandhian, landowners. And most of the leaders of the *kisān āndolan* (farmer's protest), including the *svāmī* Sahajanand Sarasvati, are characters in the novel.

Subsequently, in 1939, Nagarjun reunited with Rahul Sankrityayan, who had plunged into *kisān sabhā* politics upon his return from Tibet. Their public meeting together in Chapra, located in the Bhojpuri-speaking Saran district of Bihar, aimed at mobilizing farmers against the landowners. Both of them, recognized as Buddhist mendicants, joined farmers in solidarity against the atrocities of the zamindars (landlords) in Amwari village. Even though they were critical of Mahatma Gandhi, they employed the tool of *satyāgraha* (holding fast to truth), a Gandhian model of nonviolent civil protest, in many villages, eventually leading to their arrest. They both stayed in Siwan and then in Chapra jail. In this politically active companionship both Buddhist wanderers, Rahul Sankrityayan and Nagarjun, the professed *ghumakkārs*, developed an intimate friendship. Rahul wrote *Tumhārī Kṣay* (Your decay) in Chapra jail while on a hunger strike, followed by the novel *Jīne ke Liye* (To live), for which Nagarjun assisted as a scribe. During his stay in the prison, Rahul received the news of the birth of his son with a photograph that came from Leningrad. It triggered a seemingly concealed desire in Nagarjun for his own long-forgotten family back home. While Rahul was released from the jail, Nagarjun was transferred to Hazaribag jail where he wrote a poem, “Rajnīgandhā” (Night lily), which narrated his tormented nights in the prison. The emotional intent to return to poetry as well as to family had begun to take shape in the solitude of the prison.

It was before the Second World War that the socialist activists began to mobilize farmers. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, with whom Sahajanand Sarasvati had great affinity, was also a fulcrum of mobilization. Nagarjun accompanied Netaji to disseminate the message that no one should participate in the world war with the British army. Netaji's slogan, *nā ek pāī nā ek bhāī* (not a penny nor a brother [for the War]) was a key message. Most of the leaders were arrested, and so was Nagarjun, this time kept in Bhagalpur Central Jail. Upon his release from the jail his father reached Bhagalpur and persuaded him to return home, reminding him of his lonely wife Aparajita.

This re-turn to everything left behind was very much in continuity with his larger panorama of *ghumakkārī*. This was yet another destination in the larger scheme of personhood. It was homecoming after seven years, with a personhood in which social, cultural, and political currents crisscrossed. It was aptly articulated in the choice of the pen names, mentioned earlier. An escape from the father complex was also a making of a man, Nagarjun, who discovered the bliss of nuptial bonding only upon his return. Accepting the importance of love and family, he noted, “Youth is the most important time of life, and the foremost state of being from creative perspective is the mutual love of man and woman” (Viyogī 2019, 114).

Wife and husband spent time conversing with utmost joy. He got to know his wife, perhaps for the first time. Many of Nagarjun's poems narrate his experiences of conjugal intimacy and admiration of his wife, Aparajita. But

then, a conflict between the beliefs of the wife and the husband also surfaced. While Nagarjun had renounced his belief in the *sanātan* Hindu ways, his wife was a diehard believer. Their son Śobhākānt (1990, 74–83) recalls the conflict between his parents amid their conjugal intimacy. Besides, Nagarjun also had a hovering anxiety and search for a living, through his poetry and fiction writing. He made pamphlets of his poetry in Maithili and started selling them in the railway train compartments, singing them like the sellers of *canācūr* (crushed chickpea snack). This was the period when he wrote the poem “Rabi Ṭhākur” (name of the poet Rabindranath Tagore in colloquial style), seeking the blessings of the renowned poet for his poetic journey and creative life. The anthologies titled *Budh Var* (Aged bridegroom) and *Vilāp* (Wail) sold out in thousands. But Nagarjun’s wife deemed this endeavor of writing poems and singing/selling them unsuitable for her litterateur husband. Thus, he decided to leave the village with his wife and find better employment elsewhere, first in Patna and then in Ludhiyana. He got a job of editing Jain literature in Ludhiyana with the salary of a hundred rupees per month. It was fine except that he started prodding Aparajita for a more liberated life. He suggested to her that she look around and take an interest in other Punjabi men. Nagarjun’s outlook and suggestions began to terrify his wife. The litterateur Manohar Shyam Joshi is quoted as recalling, “The Brahmin wife thought that the husband had lost his mind, and she was fearful of any untoward incidents. She had heard that girls from Punjab are shepherded and sold in Kabul” (Viyogī 2019, 122). As a result, Aparajita returned to her in-laws’ place in the village Tarauni for a peaceful life as well as a stable upbringing for her children. Nagarjun subsequently continued his ways as a wandering and visiting husband and father.

Conclusion

Such a long-life journey of a *ghumakkar* of modern Mithila can hardly be summed up in a synoptic narration as attempted in the essay. The objective behind the selectively curated life above is mainly to locate the man in the geography of experiences, and the social and historical frame of mobility, in which the binary of householder and renouncer is too simplistic as a framework of analysis. Nor are those of tradition and modernity, the two distinct tropes of analyses in the twentieth century, given the mobility in life of the man with many appellations. Instead, it is about the perpetual becoming and belonging expressed in the various pen names integral to the poet’s self-identity—Vidyārthī, Vaideh, Yātrī, and Nāgārjun. The life and works of Nagarjun, by reaffirming the significance of *ghumakkarī*, puts more emphasis on embodied accumulation of experiences, insights, and ideas. The dimensions of personhood in the wake of these does not discriminate tradition from modernity or vice versa. Buddhism and Marxism can coexist as comfortably as the criticism of both by the same mind that adopted them. And in between Buddhism and Marxism may enter a meditation on the Hindu ancestral deity in the time of agonies. Arguably, such a personhood

was related to his heroic epic of leaving and living that began with departure from his motherland, Mithila, then ended in his return to his wife after a long journey. It is this fluidity in personhood that demonstrates the limits of any linear notion of masculinity.

However, such a personhood is fraught with gendered complexity too, particularly if one judges Nagarjun in relation to his abandoned wife, which this essay has not done adequately. Only incidentally does this essay turn to Aparajita, taking note of Nagarjun's longing for homeland steadily coupled with a desire for intimacy with his wife. The essay, however, hints at the possibility of a view of the gendered privilege of *ghumakkārī*. It was obvious when Nagarjun encountered his mentor Rahul Sankrityayan's wife's unanswered question, "why did he leave me, what was my fault?" A gendered critique of otherwise a seemingly ambivalent masculinity persists even in the case of Nagarjun. His son Śobhākānt (1990) has articulated a similar concern while dealing with the father, who was less available for family-matters and more inclined to his literary and public life as a *jankavi* (people's poet).

Inevitably, such an experience-bound personhood comes with a price. It retains a patriarchal principle, as evident in the essay, of a patrilocal family, patrilineal kinship, and, moreover, economic and emotional dependence of the wife on her husband. An abandoned wife with a subordinate status in the patriarchal kinship system thus remains a paradoxical presence in an otherwise-promising personhood of the protagonist of this essay, Nagarjun. The gendered perspective on women's struggle in some of his novels, discussed in this essay, cannot be a premise to explain away the gendered ambiguity in the personhood of the litterateur.

Last, Nagarjun's wandering, nonetheless, gives a ground to rethink manhood, one that loosens masculinity, while not fundamentally disrupting patriarchal norms altogether. This is much in tandem with the folktale world in which male heroism is at the price of a possible emergence of an alternative masculinity. Yet there is evident in Nagarjun's life journey a kind of cosmopolitanism arising from Mithila fraught with wandering. Such a vernacular cosmopolitanism does not always lead to such categorical destinations as exclusive nationalism or purely dislocated hybridity. Rather than an unequivocal ethnocentrism pertaining to the local particularities, there is an aptitude for the universal and openness to the social world. And in the same vein, there is a sense of belonging, as in the literary works so in the biography of Nagarjun. Such cosmopolitanism owes to the shaping of a qualitatively unique masculinity. The gendered behavior is subject to the ontological wandering and hence the writer on the journey does not shy away from narrating homosexual encounters, in biography as well as in novels. Such encounters are presented as quotidian in the larger scheme of experience in

everyday life. This manifests more dramatically in the instance of Nagarjun's later experience of conjugal intimacy, with an openness that he has with his wife.

Reading Nagarjun, as demonstrated in this essay, thus postulates a discursive possibility of rethinking personhood, masculinity, and cosmopolitanism of modern minds in the vernacular context of postcolonial India. This is so despite the all-pervasive patriarchy that conditions an ontology of being thereby delimiting radical transformation of a patriarchal society in modern Mithila.

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