

Strategic Outsiderism of Fyatarus: Performances of Resistance by 'Multitudes' after 'Empire'

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Empire of Biogovernance: Open or Closed?

In the aftermath of two world wars, followed by a cold war era, as we enter a system of neo-liberal governmentality which ensures apparent peace and security to the world population, the strategy of power undergoes transformation. It aims less to impose the knowledge/power paradigm in constituting the docile bodies and minds that would be beneficial to power. The objective shifts from determination of the subject towards managing the subject according to his race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and other preferences. Apparently the Eurocentric colonial dominance and hegemony of imposing power and disciplining the subject gives way to a more free world with multiple identities to choose from and live with. The objective of power shifts towards a certain management of differences. The old Empires ended with the last breath of colonialism and imperial dominance. US as the power centre got replaced by a more fluid and non-uniform power-structure/apparatus. The presence of this power is naturalized and neutralized, as it manages and attempts to know each and every nook and corner of the world, and therefore controls through that knowledge. A system of information network and fluidity of resources and information has created a global nexus of power which appropriates and accommodates all variations and multiplicities around the globe. This produces a new idea of Empire that is all pervasive and omnipresent. It is present everywhere and therefore cannot be identified anywhere. It shifts the binary of centre and periphery towards a new economy of domination and marginalization – new working of power that is more dispersed and spectral. It is different from political and economic empires of the past which were geographical and territorial. It also gives us a sense of permanence and finality of history, or makes the historical trajectory of progress or advancement pre-designed and targeted.

The strategy of power in all ages has been to deliver a foreclosure to the current economy of belonging – to smooth the rough ends of confusion and difference and give the system of

existence an apparent neutrality and naturalism. It may seem that there is no outside to this power. It operates primarily on the basis of hegemony and trains the subject to its encodings giving it a truth-value. In Foucauldian pastoral power, the notion of divinity acted as the hegemonic force to maintain order. In disciplinary power structure disciplining became an act of shaping the mind of the subject to a certain notion of truth and well-being, which helps to maintain power. Biopolitical power coupling with its rapid spread through information network attempts to maintain and manage all differences by knowing and controlling. It becomes a representational crisis therefore to produce an antithesis to this structure – an outside to its enframing. It is important to relocate the “literary” in this context which has always been a counter-strategy to the maneuverings of power – its appropriations and manipulation. It is important particularly to this context when not only different signs but also the traces – the textual absences are attempted to be absorbed and appropriated to this nexus of power – the Empire. This essay attempts to address such a crises.

Foucauldian notion of power apparently drives in this representational crisis in the context of power. If the subject is constituted by power then can he be accountable for social change? Then how can we account for historic change and transformation of regimes of power, if there is no outside to the workings of the apparatus of power? If we consider post-structuralist notions of change proposed by Jacques Derrida then we will see how Derrida shifts the religious notion of messianism towards the notion of “messianic without messianism” (Derrida 2002 56; Derrida 1994 211). While different religious faiths believe in a radical divine intervention totally alien to the structure which would suddenly arrive and intervene to bring change, that change is determined by the ideology of that faith. In Derrida’s notion however such moment of arrival of messiah is undecidable and unforeseeable, yet a possibility of radical change remains folded always and already within the structure. Derrida points towards the incalculability of future to-come which is not possible to be fully determined by the present apparatus. It is like the radical alterity – the other of the self of history and politics – its current dynamics.

When the logic and rationality of the globalized world has produced its own end – reached its own logical conclusion of free flow of information and resources, and when

Fukuyama is announcing the “end of history” argument suggesting we have reached a final system where no further change is possible, then Hardt and Negri announce:

Empire not only manages a territory and a population but also creates the very world it inhabits. It not only regulates human interactions but also seeks directly to rule over human nature. The object of its rule is social life in its entirety, and thus Empire presents the paradigmatic form of biopower. Finally, although the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood, the concept of Empire is always dedicated to peace — a perpetual and universal peace outside of history. (xv)

Hardt and Negri would talk about how the multitudes maintained by the economy of power would ab-use, or use on their own the strategies of new global Empire in order to subvert the structure from within. In every discourse a certain possibility of performative shift can be recognized. This concept carries traces of Hegelian master-slave dialectic and Marx’s description of how the proletariat produced by the bourgeoisie would go against the power structure eventually. However, we must recognize that the new mode of biopower coupled with information-power¹ leads to a more control-freak society or “societies of control” (Deleuze 2-7), where ab-use of power or any performative shift becomes difficult. The objective of Empire is to redefine and appropriate each and every difference and dissent to its own purpose and use – to its own network. This end of history – this arrival of finality is not death of the presence but it is a perpetuation of the present moment without end – a world order of universal peace and stability. If we go through Foucault’s notion of biopower elaborated in his lectures *Birth of Biopolitics*, *Society Must be Defended*, and *Security, Territory, Population*,² we can observe how following Kant’s notion of impossibility of perpetual peace, Foucault calls peace a perpetual war to maintain order in the biopolitical regime. This is a strategic warfare fought through welfare state and global commerce. It naturalizes and neutralizes the current world order and ascribes a spectral presence to everything misfit to this new Empire without borders. Everything that belongs to the past – every identity that is different and resistant to the current world order are named, identified, defined and controlled. The control is not established by imposing force but through strict vigilantism and apparent freedom ascribed to those differences so long as they are knowable to the apparatus. There is an originary violence of maintenance and predetermination

in this regime of peace and security. Security becomes a ploy for knowing, naming and controlling in order to maintain peace. This regime of power and truth categorizes people into subjects of development and rights and manages them by knowing and responding to their demands according to their identity, thereby taming the possibilities of revolution or greater political change. The Empire institutes two kinds of violence – the ordinary violence of maintenance and the protective violence of attacking the elements it perceives as a threat to its system. The Empire does not wage war or become destructive so long as it is possible to know and appropriate the differences. It justifies its violence in the name of peace, security and welfare for all.

Modern tele-technologies in alliance with biogovernance would ensure communications at work – would transform all data into digital information thereby securing all differences and all counter possibilities. This is the model of the new Empire. Its objective is to maintain its system of signs and absorb all dissent and difference, all absences, silences and traces to that system. Derrida in a seminar on Communication delivered, his famous lecture “Signature, Event, Context”. Ironically it questions the perfection of communication itself. In any communication there is an addresser and an addressee but Derrida argues both to be not fully present. If the addressee is fully known then there will be no desire for communication. Derrida borrows his idea from J.L. Austin and elaborates to show how there is a fundamental unknowability that makes communication necessary in the very first place and which asserts that the communication is an impossibly possible task that always has the chance of overriding its actual intention. This is fundamental to language. Derrida writes:

In order for my "written communication" to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. My communication must be repeatable-iterable-in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability- (*iter*, again, probably comes from *itara*, other in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved. (7)

So in every communication there is a possibility of becoming other of the language – producing something disconcertingly different or subversive to the actual plan or intention. This is a process of producing the other – iterability – a difference that is produced through repetition and yet is unanticipatable from the structure of repetition. The objective of power therefore is always haunted by its other which can be realized in each act of its repetition. Derrida calls it performativity. In each performance there is departure from the script that is unintentional. Such is the politics of reading and writing – politics of reading that becomes new writing – creating possibilities unintended by the text. The moment of the literary is the moment of writing this other – performing this other through an act of reading/writing – ab-use of language. Literature insinuates its own counterpossibilities of becoming. Literature is able to question and resist the autoimmune structure of power, which identifies its own interior as resource of terror to itself and thus attempts to control and restrict it – give it a narrative foreclosure. The positivist humanist scholarship would talk about a structural transcendence to this closure – a theoretical outside to the apparatus of language and belonging (both intricately linked and constitutive of each other). The other is outside the structure – it is to be found in the left-over of narrative foreclosure of existence – something which remains beyond its scope. But autoimmune structure of state and governance has become inclusive of all aberrations – all variations and particularities through foreknowledge and tracking down. In such case what should be the moment of the literary? Can we yet talk about a literature which gives us hope for a modernist transcendence? When everything is sucked in a protean, shape changing, appropriating structure where there cannot be an outside, what and how would be the literary imagination? In this neo-liberal and bio-political apparatus can we re-imagine the absolute alterity – the radical other which cannot be accommodated and which directs us towards a future radically different from the present, yet flowing from the present? The hypothesis here would be to re-think such an alterity or alternation as the moment of the literary or redefine literary as the eruption of that absent present other in the economy of biogovernance. However we might question the possibility of literary representation as an explication of narrative performativity, where each representation through an act of repeating performs the difference and therefore challenges the hegemony and disciplining of power-structure that attempts to fixate and stabilize itself. In an autoimmune structure of power where all differences are absorbed within, perhaps total terror would be the

new form of performance that would end all performance. But the question remains as to how and why we can stage this negative performance or performance of negation, as that which would end all dialogue and possibilities of becoming. In the next section through a reading of the politics in West Bengal in the post-liberal era in the short stories of writer Nabarun Bhattacharya we shall explore this politics of representing the performance of negation amidst the totality of power.

Communities of Resistance: Nabarun Bhattacharya and Post-Human Ethics of Transformation

Twenty seven years on
 Bread with Jam
 Then came Burger made of ham
 More haughty now Radha of Shyam
 Sleepless nights
 Colorful riddles complain from pillow
 “Life is however a crazed lover hero
 Smell it with some care”
 Tells me Derrida and Foucault – two mad flying jokers.

- Bengali Poet Srijato in “Uronto Sob Joker” (Srijato 50-51)³

The above quote by the contemporary Bengali poet Srijato with post-modern sensibilities refers to a ‘transition’ in the politics and culture of West Bengal – a transition from a pattern of life where there was limited resources, possibilities and aspirations towards one, which promises uninterrupted flow of capital and resources. It refers to the 27th year of CP(I)M rule (when the poet wrote this poem, the party was still in power) which just ended after its prolonged career of 34 years of uninterrupted power. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) which in short is referred to as CP(I)M, came to power after the period of Emergency with promises and hopes for the oppressed classes, with dreams of transforming the poverty stricken villages through its land-reform policies. Its objective was to change the class-character of politics from comprador bourgeoisie to one which involves more participation of the masses. Mass movements, demands

for higher wages and improvement of working conditions of laborers, allegedly became the cause of closing down of industries and opposition for establishment of new ones. For a long time, middle classes complained about the inaction on the part of the government in providing the state of West Bengal, those facilities and comfort, that global flow of capital promised since 1980's and 1990's. It was really a long period since the middle-classes in West Bengal were tuned to live a humble life, eat bread and jelly and be contented with cultural activities facilitated by the government. These activities were meant to mould a band of faithful intellectuals who would support it and help in maintaining its hegemony. But the lure of capital could not be avoided for long. The doors of protected national economy were opened to the planetary flow of global capital. Partha Chatterjee shows how it becomes "difficult to conceal the seductive appeal of globalization. The elite and the middle classes are the first to protest: "Why should our standards of living and the quality of our goods and services be so low?" (Chatterjee 91) The Left party, just as the Right, could not but respond to this question. The necessity for transformation towards a post-Fordist economy was felt which would be characterized more by consumption and less by production.

As people were gradually becoming consumers of social welfare provided by the state, the workers got to be characterized by their capacity to bargain in the labor market. They organized more in terms of their capacity to participate in the circuit of global capital than in terms of their respective role in production. Instead of getting into the expected protest against the onslaughts of neo-liberal capitalism, the ruling Left gradually paved way for its successful entry and control over the state, with the establishment of new urban spaces – the shopping malls, housing complexes and service industries like Information Technology and B.P.O's, that would ensure the going global of the elite and middle classes. So finally, they got entangled in the "naturalness" of global order, which as Foucault suggests is characterized by "processes of a naturalness specific to relations between men, to what happens spontaneously when they cohabit, come together, exchange, work, and produce" (Foucault 2007 449). But in this re-conceptualization of capital, the concern that has to be addressed is that of marginalization and resistance. Two routes of analysis that we shall refer to in this regard are firstly, Partha

Chatterjee's notion of "Political Society" which he derives from Foucault's notion of population⁴ and secondly, Negri's idea of Multitudes (Hardt and Negri 2004; Negri 2008).

Surely in this global network of relations and flow, one gets confused about what is true and good – to which direction human beings must aspire to move as a totality: how they must become ethical and responsible towards each other in the face of the Empire which is uncontested, imposing and hegemonic. In the above lines, the poet's reaction, might be thought to have been directed towards a certain kind of application of French poststructuralism and its German antecedents which Hardt and Negri called 'weak philosophy' (Hardt 1-9; Negri 13-24), as it is alien and context-ridden. Amidst the totality of the Empire which does not have any competitor after the cold war, the task of political philosophy seems purely descriptive – a theoretical, hermeneutic exercise, that is just like the Empire, trans-local in nature. Derrida and Foucault in the language of the poet are described as flying jokers who simply suggest that life is a crazed lover and one must smell it carefully. The irony and nihilism towards the circuits of Empire – its hegemony is clear. It is also clear how nihilism and inaction is allegedly ingrained in philosophical thinking after Empire. It can thus be argued along the lines of thinkers like Negri, Vattimo, Esposito, Virno and Agamben, if nihilism is important in political thinking and if it is so, why is it so? It can also be argued how totality of Empire makes resistance possible without being anchored to any particular ideology. Above all, it might be suggested that biopolitics and governmentality in 21st century does not simply produce the naturalness of Empire, but also exposes the constitutive nature of all discourses – the contingency of the world and the self. Life after biopolitics can be shown as nothing but a parody of the grand philosophical projects of modernity. Indeed, rather than associating poststructuralism uncritically with denial and nihilism, it would be interesting to enquire into the structural relation between the two and show how poststructuralism transforms existential nihilism towards an ethico-politics of the impossible.

In the context of political and social transformation of West Bengal, which we have already mentioned, now, we shall bring into discussion some flying characters from the world of Bengali fiction. They enunciate the crisis we are discussing – the crisis of deploying and articulating protest and resistance in face of the totality of the Empire. The discussion would

push us towards a redefinition of the literary as a method of transcending the tyranny of signification and epistemic foreclosure in the act of repeating the system of signs in the global apparatus. In Bengali literary world, the appearance of *Fyatarus*, the flying human beings, whose task is like poltergeist to create nuisance and perform sabotage happens in the current millennium. In early 2000's in form of short stories these characters appeared in some Little Magazines. Nabarun Bhattacharya, the author of the stories collected them into a book called *Fyatarur Bombachaak (The Honeycomb of Fyatarus)*, in 2004. Before that he completed a novel on same characters called *Kangal Malsaat* in 2003, and wrote two more books – a novel titled *Mausoleum* and another collection of short stories titled *Fyatarur Kumbhipaak (Whirlwind of Fyatarus)*. Our current discussion would focus primarily on the stories in *Fyatarur Bombachaak*⁵. Dates of their publication are important, as after 2000, agitation against the hegemony of the left government started polarizing more and more, and Nabarun Bhattacharya himself was one of the major spokesperson against the Left government's attempt towards neo-liberalization and forceful land-acquisition. Nabarun Bhattacharya, son of the communist people's playwright Bijan Bhattacharya and Mahasweta Devi, an author who wrote on marginal people – the Tribal and the Dalits, comes from a Marxist background. He is an author with strong Marxist lineage but at the same time with strong post-humanist sensibilities which makes him an ardent critique of hegemonic leftism.

All of the eleven stories in the collection have a structural similarity where we see three characters – D.S., Madan and Purandar Bhaat (he joins from the sixth story), apparently useless and unsuccessful in life, collectively performing some nuisance or doing sabotage to some apparently serious events such as a marriage ceremony, a poetry festival or a fashion parade. Sometimes they have some personal reasons for doing so (as in “Kobi Sanmelone Fyataru” or “Fyatarus at Poetry Festival” (Bhattacharya 2004 72-88, it was done as Purandar, an aspiring poet was denied a chance to read his poems in the festival) or they do it for reasons purely impersonal (as in “Subhobibahe Fyataru” or “Fyatarus at a Marriage Ceremony” (Bhattacharya 44-53) it was done as the groom, the son of a wealthy jeweler was the one whose previous wife was killed for dowry). All these sabotages are temporary, immediate and funny. Sometimes they spread garbage from above, sometimes they steal the secret files of corrupt businessmen and

anonymously hand them to the media, sometimes they are content just spreading rumor about bomb inside a catamaran thus creating confusion and chaos. All these can be thought of more as parodies of resistance. They erupt from immediate anger and desire for subversion of anything exclusively good and perfect. More than resistance, these acts can be thought of as denial – desire for brushing aside a certain social order that is compulsive but exclusive, where everybody is not allowed. In a culture after Empire, there is no hope for programmatic resistance. It is not clear to which group the fight is directed. But the anger and will to resist is not false. The activities of *Fyatarus* are curiously resistant towards modernity of the Empire from within. Unlike what Paolo Virno would argue here the “mass intelligence” (Virno 26-37) that acts in response to the nihilism is not mobilized towards productive work-force. Unlike Partha Chatterjee’s political society, their politics is not that of identified group interest but simply a politics of rejection – they come together and become *Fyatarus* for rejection, denial and sabotage.

The Foucauldian model of Governmentality works on the principle of managing the “dangerous classes” (Chatterjee 2008 62) – people who could not be hegemonized by the system. Governmentality focuses here on the interests of population groups.⁶ These groups are not characterized by their utopian affiliation to any community with respect to their origin, but organized in terms of specific interests that could not be fulfilled through direct legal arrangements. Partha Chatterjee calls such politics, the politics of the governed. The State, on the one hand cannot stop the flow of capital; on the other hand in order to maintain peace and security, they have to ensure the reversal of the effects of primitive accumulation that is, taking away of land and property for the sake of development. The government must ensure that peace is not interrupted and capital flows smoothly. (Chatterjee 2008 53-62) This is the logic of the world after great peace of unchallenged power of the Empire. Virno’s model in the line of Negri and other Italian thinkers is based on the ‘multitudes’ for whom the programs of capitalist development are not aimed, but its networks enable them to use their knowledge and skills to participate in technological post-Fordist modernity and contribute to it.⁷ While in Partha Chatterjee we see a positive faith in effective compensation of primitive accumulation and adverse effects of capitalist programs towards the dispossessed, in Virno we see how

participation to Governmentality is possible through nihilism. People, in a compulsion to participate, do so, as there is a totality in which they live and the only possible form of living is to be strategic towards that totality. This feeling of totality or what Agamben calls “irreparable” is connected with nihilism (Agamben 39-42, 89-106).

The politics of nihilism, the politics of a sense of realization of totality and closure of the Empire has two dimensions. On the one hand it exposes the existential aspect of politics – how dwelling and thinking are tied into an ensemble. On the other hand it points towards a residual activism which is constituted upon left-overs of different political struggles – class war, religious struggle, and identity politics based on race, gender, ethnicity and nationality. When possibility of all forms of struggle seems existentially closed because of the pervasive, regulatory power of the Empire one might yet resist hopelessly. This resistance would emerge from the existential locations that could not be accommodated within the nexus of dominant power structure. One nevertheless is a part of the Empire, participates and negotiates with it but at the same time is compelled by his situatedness to resist it.

Communities of *Fyatarus* represent habitation of such spaces. The descriptions of dust, filth, public urinal, broken chairs, and black and white television pervade the stories. This is a pattern of life towards which we are blind in the developing megacity of clean corridors. The descriptions are caricatures of urban development. While magical spaces of large housing complex and shopping malls are invading the city-space of Kolkata we are becoming evasive about this pattern of life. They seem to be impossible cohabiters of the emergent world order. As violent alternative of plush corridors these spaces seem ghostly, *Fyatarus* are also like ghosts. They belong to the city as marginal characters that fly in order to spread anarchy and confusion, destroy events and activities which don't allow them to participate. They are a part of the Empire, yet could not be accommodated. They remain intoxicated most of the time drinking local liquor. They represent a short-circuit between the civil society inebriated by desire for access to global capital and good life and also the political society which is not sanctioned by legal structures and depends on the supply of the welfare state that can anytime cease their right to participate. They perform refusals of the Empire. They are the Multitudes. Negri defines Multitudes as “a class concept based on the concept of labor, on its exploitation and on the

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antagonism which is created within exploitation.” (181) However such definition is again economic in its character. Multitudes can simply be thought of as singularities that realize their locatedness as distinct with respect to the totality of the Empire. They are unorganized masses who for various reasons resist the Empire. They resist and yet they do not have any foundation to their resistance. It is anti-foundational in its existential mode of production. Therefore they are uprooted and they fly. They are loosely connected to the structure of Empire and they take off and land playfully. They are perhaps not a major threat to the Empire but are a cause of anxiety and indeterminacy that haunts the totality of the Empire from within.

If we see more into the social situations of *Fyatarus* this will become clear. D.S. is named after a brand of liquor – Director’s Special. He is a stock dealer whose wife elopes every now and then. He wears a terry line shirt and carries an attaché case with him with his initials engraved. He is dark, short and fat – ugly in conventional norms and is described as an ugly toad. Madan, who initiates him to become a *Fyataru* is toothless and carries false tooth in his pocket. They cannot be simply described as proletarians but somehow marginalized in their own ways. Madan’s weird ways of earning by selling fishes of his dirty little marsh or cultivating mushroom inside wet mat are exaggerations of non-conformism to corporate capital. They are caricatures of resistance and hyper-examples of those who could not be fitted in the structures of Empire. Purandar Bhat, another *Fyataru* in line is a failed poet. The Bengali meaning of the word *bhat* means trash. So he acknowledges that whatever he writes is trash but wants recognition. He aspires to read his poems in a poetry-session. There is a post-humanist confession that writing poetry is perhaps fruitless – reasonable trash in the protean, cunning, all-embracing structure of the Empire. All these characters participate and live within the Empire. They also desire to get its positive fruits but existentially they deny its dominance. If we consider how the poetry-festival was organized in the story “*Fyatarus in Poetry Festival*”, we see NRI poets and Bengali poets who have backing and recognition are only allowed to read their works. (Bhattacharya 2004 72-88) It privileges a certain pattern of dwelling and thinking. Purandar is against such totalizing cultural chauvinism. His poems are parody like, slang infested, short and mischievous. They grow often out of immediate situation and often contain strong sexual innuendos, apparently inappropriate for the gentle sensibilities of civil society. Colloquialism is a major feature of

Fyataru stories. They are almost untranslatable. They are rooted to a certain street culture of Calcutta which has its own existential moorings. Unlike many arguments which suggest more and more inclusion of subaltern voices in dominant bourgeois world order we may think here of a simultaneous bourgeoisification of the world. It would be interesting to note how bourgeois double standard and hypocrisy becomes a strategy of resistance in the world after Empire. Agamben comments:

The planetary petty bourgeoisie...has taken over the aptitude of the proletariat to refuse any recognizable social identity. The petty bourgeois nullify all that exists with the same gesture in which they seem obstinately adhere to it: They know only the improper' and the inauthentic and even refuse the idea of a discourse that could be proper to them. (63-67)

Bourgeois desire for security has been universalized by a global politics of security where Governmentality would not allow any space to remain outside its purview. Different classes become consumer of this security and governance. But they existentially cannot belong to it completely. Beneath the apparently harmless appearances of *Fyatarus* lurks the desire for damage. They cannot destroy the world order but can damage and disturb it with their little resistances. Madan describes that the aim of *Fyatarus* is not to kill or injure anybody but to simply damage. The class character of *Fyatarus* as we see is also dispersed. Apart from the three main characters we already mentioned, there are the Cheaters of North Calcutta, the Shopkeepers, the Sex-workers from Sonagachi, Garanhata, Bhallukpara, the Eunuchs and the failed writers. (Bhattacharya 9-20) They all come together for spreading dirt and spoiling a party on Floatel – which is a floating hotel on Ganges. The spaces like Fashion Ramp, Poetry festival or Marriage ceremony of rich people are such that *Fyatarus* would seem misfit and won't be allowed entry. The damage is against such spaces. They are a community which following Roberto Esposito might be characterized by shared absences, shared denials instead of shared belongings. (Esposito 37-54) Their existential locations have to be characterized by denials and absences. *Fyatarus* can be then an effective tool for understanding resistances of multitudes against the Empire. Unlike Partha Chatterjee's point of view which is from the side of governance, where he views populations as empirical categories, we might look at communities

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from below, from the point of view of denial. *Fyatarus* form a community of the ungovernable. Of course it is not meant that something purely ungovernable does exist. Nor is a faith on the purely governable asserted here. Both are fictional in certain sense. While Empire promotes the fiction of the fully governable, *Fyataru* stories suggests the ungovernable – it mythifies the same in a technique similar to magic realism. However the magical here descends as a ploy of representing the “other” – the imagined alterity to the appropriations of the Empire. Such “other” seems incomprehensible in the realism propounded and constituted by the neo-liberal Empire and its semiotics of repetition. Against such semiotics of repetition a different aesthetics is posited – the aesthetics of the otherworldly – the reality of the other that seems magical in the dominant system of signs where all marginalizations gets accommodated, invisibilized and normalized.

Communities of resistances can be thought non-teleologically here unlike the programmatic revolutions. They are thought of as, existentially defined in terms of denial, instead of a part of a grand philosophical project. When D.S. asks “what are *Fyatarus*?,” Madan replies: “I can’t say exactly. But *Fyatarus* are very special...You will see how across history so many ideas are suggested by so many great minds to re-construct man. I feel after a lot of struggle it is *Fyatarus* who are made.” (Bhattacharya 12) This suggests failure of all great projects of modernity to produce man as ideal being – as what he should be. It is a post-humanist caricature that mocks the liberal humanist utopia of the greatness of humanity and the myth of the naturally great man. Instead it talks about the sad hybrid, existential constitutiveness of man in the form of *Fyatarus*. *Fyatarus* just represent the anarchist force against order, against any ordering of self, any scheming of life. Paolo Virno talked about the problem of Multitudes who supposedly resists the Empire and tries to reorganize life: “Contemporary capitalist production mobilizes to its advantage all the attitudes characterizing our species, putting to work life as such. Now, if it is true that post-Fordist production appropriates “life”—that is to say, the totality of specifically human faculties—it is fairly obvious that insubordination against it is going to rest on the same basic datum of fact. To life involved in flexible production is opposed the instance of a “good life.” And the search for a good life is indeed the theme of ethics.” (Virno 2005 35) Rather than participating in search of good life which both revolutionaries and reactionaries have

done through centuries, in the face of totality of 'life', resistances can only emerge from an acceptance of death – a death in life. Impossibility of death itself becomes death in life. So to evade such death in life the only possible way is to deny the so-called life-affirming projects – constructions of “culture,” “society,” “politics” etc – only to damage all plans, programs and projects. *Fyatarus* are nothing but an embodiment of such denials. In a deconstructive move we may suggest a double-bind of affirmation and denial which is the source and substance of all kinds of politics. If we think in terms of affirmation only then politics seems strategic and if we think in terms of denial it becomes anti-strategic. Foucault comments: “it is immaterial to me whether the strategist is a politician, a historian, a revolutionary...my theoretical ethic is opposite to theirs. It is “anti-strategic”.” (Foucault 2000 453) It is important to think of resistance, and communities which form around those resistances outside a political, strategic program. When we realize biopower of the Empire as a constituted totality for preservation of life we think of a counter-constitution in terms of nihilism and total denial. After Empire it would be an anti-strategic move to measure political space as an outsider who however actually is an insider. Amidst the totality of life-preservation strategy only route of escape is that anti-strategy. The best strategy for resistance is then an anti-strategy towards Empire. *Fyatarus* illustrate such anti-strategies. As West Bengal reached its much-awaited moment of political transformation it perhaps won't be a bad idea to study the resistances which happened against land-acquisition along these lines. It may be a possibility to study those resistances in terms of denial of a certain global reordering of space and forceful transition of one way of life to other rather than simply towards the affirmation of a new political regime. This is both an ethical and an aesthetic move and this way of looking at politics as anti-strategic might be called strategic outsiderism.

Negative Performative: From Essentialism to Outsiderism

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak in her interview with Ellen Rooney professes to have shifted from her earlier academic position of strategic essentialism, as the term has been used “as a point of self-differentiation from the poor essentialists” (Spivak 1992 5) and stops from critiquing its own strategic positivism. Strategic essentialism is an idea which Spivak invoked initially to make an effective use of ascribing essence to marginal identities such as woman or the subaltern in order to produce difference and critically counter the dominant power relations, despite knowing that

such essences are purely contingent and transient. But such essentialism was later felt necessary to be distanced from the notion of strategy which is purely situational and contextual and therefore singular – it is not a theory with a generality to be used everywhere. She writes: “The strategic use of essentialism can turn into an alibi for proselytizing academic essentialisms...the bigger problem: that strategies are taught as if they were theories, good for all cases.” (Spivak 1992 4) The distance between strategy and strategic essentialism may be compared with the distinction between justice and law. One cannot do one without the other. Strategy immediately formulates an essence as justice assumes certain laws – certain epistemic closures in order to be at work. Yet essence may go against the singularity of strategy as it has some amount of universalism in it. It is again similar to law which regularizes and constricts the immeasurability of justice. Justice assures justness to the other – the one who is different, but it requires law to be functional. Law names the subject of justice. In the act of naming, the other is constituted and absorbed by the hegemonic world order.

Derrida locates this paradox in his seminar on “Foreigner Question” (Derrida 2000 3-74). The law of hospitality can only work when the foreigner – the *estranger* is identifiable and namable. But in the act of naming he/she is framed by the laws and disciplines of the law-maker, thereby losing the status of the absolute other – outsider. The law of hospitality is therefore an impossible possibility. There cannot be hospitality without condition. If it is purely unconditional the scary possibility of the guest becoming a parasite would jeopardize the law of the host itself. Yet the host cannot be purely in control of the alterity of the guest – cannot name him/her completely. In this lapse remains the possibility of parricide – the killing of the benevolent, law giving father. One has to be a part of the family in order to perform parricide. The moment the foreigner is subjected to a law, he becomes somehow an insider to the family. One cannot avoid this inclusion. Even the law of restrictions – the encoding of passwords actually is an invitation to break it. There cannot be an *ipseity* without the other – there cannot be a home without windows and doors which is an invitation to the outsider. The outsider cannot be purely determined and named. In the global apparatus of power where the absolute freedom of transference of goods, people and knowledge across porous borders and apparently transparent digital networks happens, the surveillance and attempt to determine, name and control the

passage of such huge amount of differences also takes place. The act of digitization of identities, freedom of communication across networks requires huge amount of archiving and framing of the same. The law of hospitality requires the conditionality by default. However Derrida suggests that in the process of this archiving and determining one “can hide a letter only by...yielding it to the outside, by exposing it to another.” He calls it “operational iterability.” (Derrida 2000 65) We have already discussed about the performativity of the other in the very act of communication. Then what can be the nature of this performative other in the face of absolute determination and totality of Empire?

Fyatarus can be a creative possibility of depicting such other of Empire. However they are not constitutive of a positivist essence of resistance to this Empire. They are sadly hybrid constitutions shaped and appropriated by the Empire. They are not an organized humanist force against the dehumanizing force of neo-liberal capital transforming and reframing all entities into elements of calculation. They are apparently harmless. Yet their little harmless parodic resistances suggest the impossible violence as the only possible performative left in the face of the semiotic totality of the Empire. This is the post-humanist turn Nabarun brings to the defeated discourse of erstwhile Marxist social activism which claimed a certain humanist turning over of the power structure by which, apparently, it itself remains uncontaminated. Displacing and supplementing Spivak’s acknowledged limits of the concept of “strategic essentialism” with Derrida’s notion of the foreigner – the outsider who is always and already an insider in the very act of naming and yet remains inadequately determined to the structure; we may call this performance of negation *strategic outsiderism*. This is a notion of strategy that is different from strategy as the positivist system of values that would go either in favor or against the determinacy of the Empire. It is different from the strategy of the Empire to appropriate differences and also to the positivist faith in an outsider to that system which can put that power to question. This strategy is partly unconscious, as if the system produces its own impossible unknowability – its own outsider.

Derrida discussing the foreigner question cites example of *Oedipus at Colonus*, where Oedipus accuses the city of Thebes as guilty. The structure produces its own outlaw. Oedipus is a production of the “city’s unconscious.” (Derrida 2000 39) The notion of strategic outsiderism

also has to be measured as an unconscious production of the system of signs which attempts to provide foreclosure to all possible outside. The indeterminacy of *Fyatarus* in the act of flying depicts it. They are insiders who perform the impossible outside. They are not conscious revolutionaries but they contain the unconscious elements of resistance. The resistance to Empire however not to be read as an ethical move towards justice. Nabarun as it has already been asserted is a writer with post-humanist or anti-humanist tendencies. There are elements of strong misogyny and class-hatred in *Fyatarus* speeches and the cuss words they use. It would be wrong to romanticize their resistance as larger than life move against the present world order. However they nullify the positivist claim of the developmental assurance of the Empire and are reminiscent of the possibility of total terror and violence. If the strategy of global biogovernance is to appropriate and measure all differences, *Fyatarus* are emblematic of little acts of violence and disturbance which are insensible and incomprehensible.

Fyatarus though are performative negation to the power-structure, are at the same time constituted by it. Their outsiderism is unconsciously strategic against the global strategy of reasonable biogovernance. But they are shaped and constituted by the same structure they are negating in their little, apparently harmless acts of violence. In the totality of biopower it would be a fallacy to determine the ruptures in the structure of neo-liberal democracy as a process of the deepening of democracy. They constitute the impossible possibility – the unthought imaginative impulse of the descent of the radical other amidst liberal democracy. But this descent of the other is not coterminous to Derridean performative where it would move towards an alterity of democracy – a “democracy to come”. In an anti-humanist move it may be argued that democracy is neither fully present in the present, nor is it present fully in the future. It never comes fully. It never arrives. The possibility of democracy Derrida asserts in *Rogues* is already fraught with its own counter-possibility. What if through democracy the will of the people comes to an extremely undemocratic conclusion? So the descending of the radical other may not belong to justice. The radical other of the neo-liberal democracy is a risky persuasion we must however follow. It is an unconscious move against the totality of Empire without guarantee of justice. The only completion of justice in this total foreclosure inhabited by the Empire is the negative performance of death and total terror. *Fyatarus* are a literary symptom of such unrealizable

possibility. They come in fragmented, parodic form to the Empire and seem to be harmless and imbecile. However their undecidability and indeterminacy to the logic of the Empire posits a potential threat to its totality. The post-humanist vision of catastrophe would assert that a seeming threat to the totality of the structure, which appropriates everything, is a potential threat to the totality of existence that it shaped by such structure. The future is annihilation-to-come. The *Fyatarus* are the post-humanist aesthetic depiction such damage.

It is impossibility to tell the tale which nobody would live to utter. The horrendous vision of totality of absence cannot be articulated. If the mask of the totality of Empire and its bio-governance is to allow the co-existence of differences thorough a hospitable act of naming and bringing those within its law, the ploy for depicting the totality of the unconscious resistance which is produced by the same structure it resists, is to present it as apparently harmless. In the last story of the book *Honeycomb of Fyatarus* titled “Fyatarus and Global Terror” (Bhattacharya 2004 122-128), we see D.S. accompanying his wife and baby boy, has gone out with Purandar and Madan in a park, to enjoy the breeze. A Police force with information of a possible terrorist attack at American Centre in Kolkata, suspects them, because they were carrying a wrapped old garden umbrella with them. The police suspected it to be a missile. The moment the police discovers the umbrella and lets them go realizing their mistake, suddenly the group of *Fyatarus* starts flying. Police could never know their actual identity. They remain confused and horrified. In the totality of Empire every subject is a potential terrorist, who must be adequately known and controlled. When little acts of unreasonable violence and damage jeopardize that order and remains undecided by the system, it feels confused and helpless. The life securing project of biogovernance gets disrupted by the left-over of civilization – the garbage of Empire who cannot be totally reduced to its use. In the little disturbances of the peace giving project of the Empire, the sudden barricades – road blocks, burning of vehicles, destruction of public property or playing loud-speaker aloud beyond control points towards the possibility of a desire for damage that is constitutive to the Empire. *Fyatarus* form the aesthetic or counter-aesthetic (as no real transcendence to the Empire is possible) depiction of such little resistances. They are not reducible to reasonable and manageable identities. Apparently they are harmless people like D.S., Madan or Purnadar but with strong desire for damage. It asserts a politics counter to

middle-class politics of citizenship and rights. It is anti-politics of resistance to a certain world order, while, at the same time, remaining within it. It is a politics of non-identity as *Fyatarus* depict a community of damage. The civil society and the power-mongers can see the effect of the damage they perform, but can never know who they are as they do not form a namable identity – their subalternity is as Spivak defines the subalterns – a “position without identity” (Spivak 2007 429-448). Therefore in the end of the story, we see the *Fyatarus* going up in front of a beguiled and unsettled Police force:

The large Police Force beguiled. *Fyatarus* take off from the noon time Kolkata Maidan. They go up. They Keep going up. (128)

Notes:

¹ I have developed the notion of “information-power” in my unpublished article “Information-power: Teletechnology and the Ethics of Human-Animal Difference”.

² See Michel Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics*, “*Society Must Be Defended*” and *Security, Territory, Population*.

³ Translated in English from original Bangla by me from Srijato, “Uronto Sob Joker” (“Those Flying Jokers”)

⁴ See Partha Chatterjee’s essays - “Communities in the East”, “Two Poets and Death: On Civil and Political Society in the Non-Christian World”, “Democracy and economic transformation in india” and sections of *The Politics of the Governed*.

⁵ Nabarun Bhattacharya, *Fyatarur Bombachaak o Onnyanyo (The Honeycomb of Fyatarus and Other Stories)* Henceforth all references of the text are made from this book.

⁶ See Michael Foucault, “Governmentality” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 87-104 and Michael Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 435-455.

⁷ For discussions see Paolo Virno, “Interview with Paolo Virno” taken by Branden W. Joseph.

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