

Critical Essays on  
Literature, Language,  
and Aesthetics



# Critical Essays on Literature, Language, and Aesthetics

*A Volume in Honour  
of Milind Malshe*

Edited by

Arnapurna Rath

Chandrani Chatterjee

Saroja Ganapathy

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A Volume in Honour of Milind Malshe

Edited by Arnapura Rath, Chandrani Chatterjee, Saroja Ganapathy

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## PREFACE

ASHOK KRISHNAJI JOSHI

Professor Milind Malshe has been a good friend of mine for nearly five decades. Over these long years, I have seen him grow into a fine bilingual scholar and a much admired teacher. Undergraduates and doctoral students at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT Bombay), postgraduates at various universities, college teachers at refresher courses in English and Marathi and participants at several conferences have all benefitted from his scholarship and guidance. During these years, Malshe has also developed into a good musician and a scholar in the area of the performing arts. Above all, he has endeared himself to many as a good human being.

I first came in contact with Malshe way back in 1971 when he was pursuing a Master of Arts (MA) degree at the Department of English, University of Mumbai. Along with his MA, he completed a diploma in Indian classical music at the university's Music Centre which was then headed by the renowned musicologist, Professor Ashok Ranade. Malshe and I had a common teacher and guide in Professor R.B. Patankar from the Department of English, University of Mumbai. He was an avid advocate of the discipline of Aesthetics and a pioneering scholar of Aesthetics in Marathi. Dr. Patankar was an exemplary bilingual scholar and a role model for his students. He would urge scholars of English to write in Indian languages so that global developments in thought could help scholarship in these languages keep pace with the times. Malshe has been among those who have consistently strived to achieve this.

Malshe's teaching career began in Mumbai at SIES College, Sion, and the Nalanda Nrityakala Mahavidyalaya at Juhu. He then pursued an M.Litt. at the Central Institute for English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL, now EFLU) at Hyderabad and eventually joined IIT Bombay where he has been teaching for the past 35 years. His PhD, completed under the guidance of Dr. Patankar, was titled *The Aesthetics of Literary Classification*. During the course of his long career at the IIT Bombay, he formulated and taught courses such as "Introduction to Arts and Aesthetics", "Introduction to Linguistics" and "Appreciation of Hindustani

Classical Music". He has also guided several doctoral students working in such diverse areas, as is evident from this volume.

Malshe has authored five books and several research papers, one in English and four in Marathi, besides several research papers in English and in Marathi. He has been a regular participant at conferences in both English and Marathi. His presence always enlivens the academic atmosphere at such events.

Malshe's book *Adhunik Bhashavidnyan: Siddhantani Upayojan (Modern Linguistics: Theory and Applications)*, published in 1995, is a commentary on modern linguistics that marks an important contribution to Marathi scholarship. The first half of the book traces the development of linguistics as a discipline until the generative theory of Noam Chomsky, while the latter half deals with issues in applied linguistics, particularly in the areas of socio-linguistics, stylistics and language pedagogy. Apart from this important book, Malshe has written a series of articles on modern linguistics in two reputed Marathi journals, *Anushtubh* and *Navabharat*. Over the last few years, he has been working on a translation project that aims to bring to Marathi readers ten important papers on linguistics in the twentieth century.

Malshe also collaborated with his father, Prof. S.G. Malshe, a well-known scholar in Marathi literary studies. They jointly authored a translation of R.G. Collingwood's *Principles of Art* and a path-breaking booklet on research methodology in Marathi titled *Shodhanibhandachi Lekhan-paddhati* (How to Write a Research Paper). Malshe has made a noteworthy contribution to the academic study of the performing arts. His book on research methodology for the performing arts, published by the University of Pune and Lokavangmay Gruha, is one of a kind. He has been invited to conduct several series of lectures on aesthetics and the performing arts at a number of institutions including the University of Mumbai, the SNDT University at both Mumbai and Pune, the National Institute of Design at Ahmedabad, FLAME University at Pune and the Faculty of Fine Arts at MS University, Baroda.

Literary theory has been an area of continuing interest for Malshe. He has published many papers on literary criticism and aesthetics in Marathi journals such as *Anushtubh*, *Lalit*, *Mouj*, *Navbharat*, *Muktashabda* and *Kalanirnay Diwali*. I had the pleasure of collaborating with him on *Adhunik Sahitya Siddhanta* (Modern Literary Theory), a book that deals with developments in modern literary criticism. It was published in 2007 by the University of Mumbai and Mouj Prakashan and has since proved to be a major critical work in Marathi on twentieth-century literary theory, appreciated alike by scholars in literature and the social sciences. The

book provides an extensive overview of developments in literary theory such as modernism, postmodernism, structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction, the Marxist and the psycho-analytic approach to literature and the other arts, feminist theory, reader-response theory, the new historicism, post-colonialism and cultural criticism. It received three coveted prizes for its significant contribution to Marathi literary criticism.

Malshe's extensive pursuit of music has complemented his keen interest in literary theory and aesthetics. He learnt Hindustani classical music from gurus such as Pandit G.T. Tilak, Dr. Ashok Ranade and Pandit Ratnakar Pai. Under Pandit Pai, he had the opportunity to learn several *recondite* or *anvat* ragas which he continues to present at his concerts. Malshe's learned introduction, titled "Bandish in Khayal", to the book *Raga-rachananjali* authored by his *gurubhagini*, the well-known vocalist Vidushi Ashwini Bhide-Deshpande, has proved to be an important contribution to the subject of composition in Hindustani classical music.

It is significant that Malshe's long career has unfolded at a premier institute of technology like IIT Bombay where the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences is admirably well-integrated into the institutional structure, functioning not as an appendage but as one of the core faculties. Malshe's contribution to research, teaching and the performing arts is in keeping with the holistic spirit of this institute and will certainly prove to be an exemplar for contemporary interdisciplinary studies.

## INTRODUCTION

The field of humanities studies in India has a rich cultural and historical lineage. Practising researchers and academics are engaged in interdisciplinary work that cut across local and global literary-linguistic-aesthetic-cultural nodes.

Research practices in English Studies within the Humanities clusters of the Indian Institutes of Technology demand a critical depth into an interdisciplinary spectrum covering literature, language, philosophy, cultural and social studies. This important dialogue of thoughts across fields offers a freedom for exploring terrains beyond watertight compartments of disciplines and sub-disciplines. The *raison d'être* of English Studies in India is its cosmopolitan character that embody a significant involvement of the local cultural and literary traditions, while preserving the international nature of the discipline.

This volume of papers is a humble recognition of the centrality of knowledge in the field of humanities, while we are felicitating the scholarship of one of the Indian voices of the interdisciplinary humanities tradition. Creation of knowledge, as a continuous dialogic process spanning across the boundaries of disciplines and sub-disciplines, defines the scope of this volume. This scholarly volume of papers covering various facets of literature, language, cultures, aesthetic philosophy, and critical theories celebrates the lifelong dedication of Professor Milind Malshe to the field of Humanities, through the work of his students and peers. The editors conceived the idea for this felicitation volume in 2013. It has taken us a long time to compile and edit the papers of the volume. We intend to preserve the rich tradition of writings, as well as do justice to the individual thoughts of the contributors of this volume. The papers compiled in this volume emerge from the varied research interests of Professor Malshe, his doctoral group, and some of his colleagues and peers.

When Edward Said famously articulated his own role as the “humanist” within the discipline of humanities in the seminal work *Orientalism*, he made a clear remark that knowledge cannot be demarcated into the “pure” or the “political”. It owes a lot to the individual’s position in the process of knowledge production: “No one has ever devised a

method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society. These continue to bear on what he does professionally..." (*Orientalism* 18). Professor Malshe may be called a "humanist" in that *Said-ian* sense.

The essays in this volume embark upon a journey to creatively negotiate through various aspects of critical humanities. The uniqueness of this volume is that the essays have been contributed by certain leaders of the field as well as by young, emerging academics and researchers. The contributors are well-known in humanities circles and these essays mark their rich academic journeys. Most of these papers by former and present students are a part of the doctoral work of these scholars conducted under the guidance of Professor Malshe at IIT Bombay. The papers by his colleagues reflect dialogue and mutually enriching scholarship. The central binding force in all these essays is critical theory and aesthetic philosophy. The task of observing a dialogue between the different thoughts of the volume was a rich learning experience by itself. It was interesting to note that while each of these papers stands out as unique by itself, they also share a dialogic relationship with other essays of the volume. These papers seem to engage in a conversation with one another along several interconnected threads.

The volume is divided into four segments, each segment comprising a set of essays: (a) Philosophy and Literary Aesthetics; (b) Theories, Narratives and Dialogical Selves; (c) Cultures, Transitions and Translations; (d) Language and Linguistics. The segments are named broadly according to a particular sub-field of humanities.

The first segment of this volume, **Philosophy and Literary Aesthetics**, has six reflective papers on the connections between aesthetics, philosophy and literary studies. Together, they cover a sweeping range of questions on the self and the other that have compelled humankind to come up with rich intellectual and creative propositions on the nature of experience. K.P. Jayasankar's paper on the Speaking Subject and the philosophical concept of the *Jivatman* combines a rich dialogue between the Western and Indian philosophical traditions in the context of the elusive role between the soul and the self. Binu James Mathew's paper enables the discussion to begin with views closest to our time by analysing the significant position of American novelist John Barth as a thinker and writer deeply located within the postmodernist philosophical discourse. The paper looks at Barth's writings as strongly postmodernist vis-à-vis the prevalent modernist tradition of writing of his time. The two papers that follow plumb deep

into some founding ideas of the Western and Indian philosophical traditions. Gagan Deep Kaur's paper studies the epistemic position of *techne* in the intriguing play between imagination and fantasy in Greek philosophical trajectories. The study brings an interesting analysis of the dichotomies between the craftsman and the imitator. It not only dwells on another of the ever-interesting debates between the iconic teacher-student pair of Plato and Aristotle in Greek classical thought, but also traces these ideas through the writings of their successors. Pragyant Rath's paper takes into consideration the aesthetic and philosophical turn of the nineteenth-century European tradition with Walter Pater and Doris Lessing. The focus of the paper is the dialogue between the visual and verbal in art, philosophy and literature. The paper brings out the complex dichotomies of understanding intellectual traditions and provides a counter-reading to the easy categorization of canons, problematizing the idea of what is intellectual and what is not intellectual. The paper by Prasenjit Biswas is a critical commentary on Milind Malshe's aesthetic contributions as reflected in the latter's critical writings and thoughts. Biswas makes a thorough critical reading through the idea of "literary contract" and Malshe's contributions to the literary context of Maharashtra. The last paper in this segment has been contributed by Milind Malshe. The paper discusses Marathi aesthetic scenario and the significance as well as need for the inclusion of aesthetics in the Marathi language and literary context. The paper focuses on the contributions of Professor B.S. Mardhekar to the Marathi aesthetic scenario.

The second segment titled **Genres, Narratives and Dialogical Selves** contains four papers on various aspects of literary and narrative theory. The papers by Amith Kumar P.V. and Arnapura Rath have the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin as a focal source of their analyses. Amith Kumar's paper provides a critical overview of the Indian literary scenario with respect to the Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism and unfinalizability of literary art. The paper complicates the division between tradition and modernity and looks at an Indian literary "event" as possessing an "internal dialogism" of its own. While Amith Kumar's paper identifies patterns and interconnections across an array of texts, Arnapura Rath's paper demonstrates the possibilities of a Bakhtinian analysis in the close reading of a single text. Her focus is on the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope through a close reading of the novelist Amitav Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies*. The paper opens the idea of an independent genre of epic novels. Manoj Patharkar's paper draws on the writing of another prolific twentieth century theorist, Raymond Williams. Considering literary "production" from the perspective of Williams' thoughts, the paper

preflects the connections between George Orwell's ambiguous encounter with the Empire, arguing that this encounter was constitutive of the very genre of dystopia in the Orwellian vision. Madhavi Gokhale's paper takes the discussion from classical dystopia to the kind of Utopian world conjured in popular "inspirational" literature. Her paper on the religious and transcendental symbols and allegories in Paulo Coelho's writing reflects on the sociological and pedagogical implications of the kind of mystical reality that such writing constructs.

The third segment is broadly titled **Cultures, Transitions and Translations**. Mythili Anoop's paper on dance invites the reader to step beyond the literary and consider a key binary of performance and literature. The interplay between the "scripted" and the "spontaneous" becomes, in her analysis, the very germ of continuous creativity in classical dance. Her observations are drawn from different schools of dance in India and as such provoke thought on the fluidity of categories such as "folk" or "classical". Saroja Ganapathy brings back the discussion to an engagement with the literary, while exploring its relationship with another art form. Her paper draws on two texts and two different genres of music. It goes on to ask what happens to the most commonplace aspect of a fictional text – the telling of a story – when fiction meets music. Translation presents one of the first challenges to a constricted view of literature. In this context, Chandrani Chatterjee's paper addresses the need for adopting an interdisciplinary approach towards translation studies and of understanding translation within the broad purview of "cultures". The paper provides a broad survey of translation studies as a discipline and proposes several interdisciplinary approaches like postcolonial studies, cultural studies and linguistic studies to broaden the ways in which translation studies as a discipline could emerge. Her approach towards translation studies as a way of understanding cultures and cultural transitions brings an interesting insight for scholars working in the field.

The fourth segment of the volume, is named **Language and Linguistics**. It includes five papers on theoretical and application based approaches to the study of various Indian languages and their relation with the English language. These papers demonstrate a unique balance between theory and praxis and between abstractions and pragmatic notions in language studies. The paper by Amit Hiray explores certain application-oriented approaches like web-based learning towards developing pedagogical tools for English language learning for native undergraduate engineering students. Debasri Chakrabarty's paper focuses on the Bangla language and analyses the morphological and syntactic ways in which verb alternations happen in Bangla language. Vivek Bhat's paper presents a study of the Konkani

language vis-à-vis the Marathi language. The paper takes into consideration a historical-cultural approach as well as a close syntactical study of Konkani. It specifically explores the richness of the cultural heritage of the language with its contact with Portuguese and Marathi cultures. Chinmay Dharurkar's paper draws examples from Marathi, Hindi, Telugu and Malayalam languages to illustrate the aesthetic and pragmatic ways in which English words and phrases have been appropriated in these languages. The paper calls attention to the significant role of "borrowing" across languages. Malhar Kulkarni's paper on the oral transmission of texts in the Sanskrit language traditions explores the complex grammar and meaning-making processes within the oral texts of Sanskrit. The paper brings out the rich interrelationship between word and meaning in the Vedic tradition and a methodological approach to words of the Vedas through an exposition of the *śabdāsūtra*.

The idea of putting together this volume was also a gesture on behalf of all the doctoral students of Professor Malshe who have benefitted in a variety of ways from his scholarship. Needless to say, the papers in this volume stand in their own right as independent contributions to the humanities and social sciences and each paper aspires to make its own contribution to the field. However, the papers also talk to each other, paving the way for an interdisciplinary discourse that has been at the core of Professor Malshe's research methodology. All the contributors to this volume are established scholars and academics distinguished in their own areas of research and teaching.

This volume alerts us to the fact that strict disciplinary frameworks need to be transcended for a more productive discussion at the rather porous boundaries of academic disciplines. The sheer variety in terms of content, style, methodology and theoretical approach makes the present volume a rich intervention, rare of its kind in contemporary academia. Though the editors have taken some efforts in standardizing certain formal features, style being one of them, there has been no attempt whatsoever to even out irregularities. In fact, we feel the strength of the volume lies precisely at those moments of unevenness, of a hesitant step towards reaching out to listen to the "other". Such steps are never easy, there is bound to be faltering of various kinds but that does not erase the attempts at conversation. Our individual academic limitations may have at times come in the way of editing the papers or categorizing them in different sections. We have tried to keep minimum editorial interference in the original ideas, research problems or concepts proposed by the contributors. As editors we have only tried to explore the possibilities of connecting the dots of literature, language, philosophy, and aesthetics.

Professor Malshe during his lifetime of teaching and research has been keen to initiate academic conversations. As a mentor, he is a patient listener allowing the scope for dialogue – the essential criterion for any intellectual life force. It is this aspect of our mentor that we propose to keep alive in the present book – the keen, alert, curious and empathetic mind that has always been willing to listen and to grow. We do hope that the current collection of essays will make an intervention in humanities and social science research at large, opening new terrains of enquiry for students, scholars and researchers across disciplines. We thank all the contributors for their patience and support. Without their scholarly contributions this volume would not have been possible. We hope this is just the beginning of a long journey of academic collaborations and associations.

**Arnapurna Rath**  
**Chandrani Chatterjee**  
**Saroja Ganapathy**



# I.

## PHILOSOPHY AND LITERARY AESTHETICS

# THE SPEAKING SUBJECT: A PREAMBLE TO JIVATMAN

K.P. JAYASANKAR

## Abstract

This paper delineates the notion of the speaking subject, in various discourses. It explores the crisis in Western thought underpinning theorization on the subject, to interpret how *Advaita Vedanta* addresses these concerns. *Adhyaropa Apavada* as a methodological strategy of Advaita is an attempt at comprehending the construction of the subject. The potentiality of Sankara's work offers an ontology, rooted in an eternal critical practice of *neti, neti*, which is a project of revising and radicalizing the discursive practices pertaining to the self and the world. The paper will carry a brief epilogue, which will attempt to revisit the "secular" energies of Sankara's thought. In contemporary India, where there is an attempt to hijack these philosophical traditions for sectarian right-wing political ends, it is important to reclaim these traditions for their critical potential.

## Introduction

This is an attempt to draw out the notion of the speaking subject, as articulated in various discourses, from Saussure to Sankara. It aspires to explore the crisis in Western thought underpinning theorization on the subject and to understand how Advaita Vedanta addresses these concerns.

This paper traverses two different planes: Western and Indian thought. The bifocalness of this movement is the measure of the paradox that we live with as "Indians", bringing us perilously close to the question: *What is Indian philosophy?* This question forces us to occupy a position outside the tradition, assigning to it the status of an object before our gaze. If we were within the tradition, we would also have raised the question: *What is philosophy?* Instead we have the onus of tackling both the themes in parallel. To be an Indian and to be raising questions pertaining to our Indianness is paradoxical. It is the discomfiture this paradox generates that this paper addresses, an attempt that we qualify as a preamble, which

“involves a movement of thought that is less like an arrow in flight toward its target than a rowing and rambling, a movement to and fro, between two different realms of discourse and vision, an exploration of two different topologies” (Mehta 15).

The parallel thematization of Indian tradition not only warrants occupying a space outside, but also necessarily impels us to contrast it with other philosophies. We are forced to reconstruct its identity vis-à-vis what it is not and where it impinges on the truths of philosophical traditions outside its jurisdiction.

“What is Indian philosophy” is, in that very questioning, also to contrast Indian Philosophy with non-Indian philosophy. Unless one transcends the tradition, one cannot and need not, ask such a question. Yet, unless one understands the tradition *from within*, one cannot answer it. We are thus confronted by a paradox, a paradox which we need not resolve, but, by the very nature of what we, modern Indian philosophers, are, we have to *live* through. (Mohanty 233)

This is a paradox that we have internalized; but the question still persists: “What is Indian philosophy”? Do we restrict ourselves to what Indians write on Indian and Western philosophy or what non-Indians write on Indian philosophy? As Mohanty points out, a more fruitful approach would be to enumerate “the *core* source-material in the various *darsanas* and then, extend the scope of ‘Indian philosophy’ to include any philosophical work which self-consciously takes up that core-tradition and perceives itself as *continuing* the discussion of the *themes, issues* and *problems* formulated in, and arising out of, that tradition, no matter in what language and irrespective of the geographical and socio-political loyalty of the author” (Mohanty 235). This is how the disparate discourses handled in this work become programmatic. They are all impelled by the same *core* concerns.

Advaita Vedanta argues not only for the demolition of a reified subject but also for the recognition of the world as an *imaginary* construct, debunking the dualist metaphysics that preceded Advaitic thought. In philosophical structuralism, one perceives a crisis within Western thought, a crisis that can be traced back to its dualist metaphysical underpinnings. Within the dualist discourse, language emerges as a tool “used” by a subject, either psychological or substantive. Structuralism aspires towards dissolution of the subject, granting an ontological priority to language, a problematic that finds its way to the writings of Lacan, Kristeva and Foucault.

Having said this, we would like to reiterate that this is an interpretation. Advaita Vedanta posits only one validating principle: any interpretation

has to strive towards the demolition of the constituted subject. If any text shows that the subject and the world are imaginary, then it acquires legitimacy. We have treated this as the prime presiding concern of this paper.

Apart from this endogenous rationale, in the Indian tradition, an interpretation is the interplay between *Sruti* (literally, what is heard) and *Smrti* (literally what is recalled as residual memory). *Sruti* denotes the text and *Smrti* the specific historical and ideological space of the interpreter. In interpreting the Advaitic tradition, hence, we have to take cognizance of the encounters that we have had with other traditions, and vice versa. This is not a transgression, but a necessary condition for any interpretation. How else could a *Sruti* deliver itself but through our *Smrtis*? Our *Smrtis* are replete with our encounters with Western traditions. The onus of justifying that there exists a “pure” tradition, which has to be appropriated without certain occidental or oriental prejudices, rests with the critics of the inauthenticity of this interpretation.

### **Saussure: The Dislodged Subject**

Ricoeur chooses to distinguish philosophical structuralism from structural linguistics, since the former “adds to it a tenet concerning reality, which is philosophical rather than a linguistic thesis” (Ricoeur 1354). Both can be traced back to Saussure. Philosophical structuralism was the first attempt to articulate self-consciously a concept of the speaking subject and incorporate it into various theoretical artifacts.

#### ***Saussure and Philosophical Structuralism***

The Saussurian philosophical position can be summed up as follows:

- Langue is a system of differences: the identity of each sign is governed by its opposition to other signs, and not by its material condition. The reality of langue is devoid of substance, either physical or psychical. Each sign contributes to a relational closure of the system.
- The speaking subject’s relation to this system is one of compliance. The codes of this system do not obtain from the speaking subject.
- The sign is the basic unit of language, which attains its value due to the relations internal to it, viz.: that between the signifier and the signified. The relation between a sign and a thing is fictional.

Thus, langue is a system without terms, without a speaking subject and without things.

### **A System without Terms**

Material and historical identity is not pertinent to a sign. The “8:25p.m. Geneva–Paris Express” does not refer to one particular rake (Saussure 108–9). The status of the train is defined by its relation to other trains, and consequently to the universe of trains:

In language there are only differences without positive terms, whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. (Saussure 120)

### **A System without a Speaking Subject**

The Renaissance, the French Revolution and the advent of political humanism in Europe witnessed some of the most categorical assertions of *Homo Faber*; the Cartesian *Res cogitans* is perhaps the most significant. There are variations of this dualist theme, a “psychological” ego as opposed to the “substantive” ego of Descartes, both of which have been debated and internalized by various discourses of the Western world from Kant to Fichte and to Husserl. The dualist themes have one aspect in common: a world that is inhabited by the ego. The debates have been over the primacy of these two essential adjuncts. Descartes doubts the existence of the world: *Cogito ergo sum*. Locke and Hume are preoccupied with the world “out there”; the ego is after all a *tabula rasa*, a psychological entity. The I/world distinction itself escapes their scepticism. It has always been a distinction unanalysably given. Within the structuralist schemata, the intentions of the “locator” are mere contingencies belonging to parole. It is not his subjectivity that brings langue into being, but the oppositional relay of the system itself. Like social reality, the human being is a product of language, not its inventor.

### **A System without Things**

There is no natural *a priori* connection between the concept (signified) and the acoustic image associated with it (signifier). The sign itself is defined by the internal dialectic between the two, an interaction that is arbitrary and absolute within itself, a closed system. The sign “Geneva–

Paris Express” has nothing to do with the object in question. The identity of the sign is generated as a result of its own internal relationship. This marks a turning point as well as the beginning of a host of unprecedented philosophical problems. Whereas the discourses prior to this were pre-occupied with “reference predication” and use of language as the only theoretical possibilities, structuralism shifted the debate back to its own object of inquiry: language. All the terms of reference used till then point towards an extra-linguistic reality, which language is purported to mirror instrumentally in a relationship of mimesis.

## **The Fragmented Subject**

### *Las Meninas: The Void*

Structuralism denotes a break from the classical tradition in which language stays in mimetic harmony with the world, language as a representation of nature and the world. The sign with its internal relationship effects two shifts:

1. By conceiving of the sign as an interplay between signifier and signified, without any concrete historical materiality other than this relationship, it breaks off with a world outside. The world and the word do not share the responsibility of living up to each other.
2. The sign being a relational entity, within a system of oppositions implies a retrenchment of a speaking subject. This is a shift towards signification from an act of mere representation.

Is this shift from the classical paradigm of representation to signification, radical though it is, unproblematic? Is it also plagued by the fundamental finitude of all such discourses on language? Foucault’s analytic of the painting *Las Meninas* by Velasquez bears witness to these doubts, revealing the futility underlying any such enterprise.

The painter is standing a little back from his canvas. He is glancing at his model; perhaps he is considering whether to add some finishing touch, though it is also possible the first stroke has not yet been made. The arm holding the brush is bent to the left, towards the palette, it is motionless, for an instant, between canvas and paints. The skilled hand is suspended in midair, arrested in rapt attention on the painter’s gaze; and the gaze, in return, waits upon the arrested gesture. Between the fine point of the brush and the steely gaze, the scene is about to yield up its volume. (Foucault, “Order” 3)

He stares into us, the space that we occupy behind his canvas, frozen into the silence of non-recognition by his gaze. The tableau threatens to dissolve once he resumes his activity; the painter would be lost behind the canvas, his gaze no longer addressing us. He is “caught in a moment of stillness, at the neutral centre of this oscillation” (Foucault, “Order” 3). In another instant, he will re-enter “that region where his painting, neglected for an instant, will, for him, become visible once more” (Foucault, “Order” 3). It is as if the very nature of this tableau warrants that “the painter could not at the same time be seen on the picture where he is represented and also see that upon which he is representing something. He rules the threshold of those two incompatible visibilities” (Foucault, “Order” 4).

What of us who occupy the position of his subject, eternally invisible? “The spectacle he is observing is thus doubly invisible: first, because it is not represented within the space of the painting, and, second, because it is situated precisely in that blind point, in that essential hiding-place into which our gaze disappears from ourselves at the moment of our actual looking” (Foucault, “Order” 4). His gaze, “addressed to the void confronting him outside the picture, accepts as many models as there are spectators; in this precise but neutral place, the observer and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange. No gaze is stable, or rather, in the neutral furrow of the gaze piercing at a right angle through the canvas, subject and object, the spectator and the model, reverse their role to infinity” (Foucault, “Order” 4–5). This gaze transposes the spectator into the realm of the painting.

As soon as they place the spectator in the field of their gaze, the painter’s eyes seize hold of him, force him to enter the picture, assign him a place at once privileged and inescapable, levy their luminous and visible tribute from him, and project it upon the inaccessible surface of the canvas within the picture. He sees his invisibility made visible to the painter and transposed into an image forever invisible to himself. (Foucault, “Order” 5)

There appears to be no clue as to what the painter is representing, except the mirror in the background, which suddenly reveals in its obscure forthrightness the countenance of King Philip and the Queen. The painter seems to be transfixed on his subjects that he is representing; the mirror in turn freezes the gaze of his subject as they look at the painter. The gaze on the mirror is shared by the spectator, who seems to have just come in from the back door. He beholds in his gaze the painter and the painted and the painting, signifying all the three aspects of representation itself. The spectator in the painting is “like a pendulum caught at the bottom of its swing. He repeats on the spot, but the dark reality of his body, the

instantaneous movement of those images flashing across the room, plunging into the mirror, being reflected there, and springing out from it again like visible, new, and identical species” (Foucault, “Order” 11).

Las Meninas represents the three-fold nature of representation: the model’s gaze, the spectator and the painter. It also points to the futility of representing the act of representation. “It may be that, in this picture, as in all the representations of which it is, as it were, the manifest essence, the profound invisibility of what one sees is inseparable from the invisibility of the person seeing – despite all mirrors, reflections, imitations and portraits” (Foucault, “Order” 16). To Foucault, the Velasquez painting represents the quintessence of all classical representation, a representation that represents the act of representing:

But there, in the midst of this dispersion which it is simultaneously grouping together and spreading out before us, indicated compellingly from every side, is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation – of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. (Foucault, “Order” 16)

Foucault’s analysis of Las Meninas illuminates “what is at stake in all orders and principles of ordering: a fundamental disorder or absence” (Carroll 58). It confronts “the instability at the heart of representation and the representation of representation” (Carroll 59). In this process, Foucault does not commit himself to any specific epistemological tradition; his attempt is to point out the fundamental finitude of all orders and theories of ordering.

Foucault repeatedly returns to the void at the heart of the order of words and things, a void that no epistemological order or historical series effectively compensates for or overcomes, . . . the repeated return to the point where the different orders break down is an attempt to indicate the possibility of transgressive, critical perspectives on any order or processes of ordering. (Carroll 67)

## **A General Theory of the Subject**

Any discourse on language and meaning cannot escape theorizing about a speaking subject; theories of language, in effect, become theories of subjectivity. Saussure’s privileging of *langue* over *parole* enables an elision of the speaking subject in the study of discourse. This elision entails an unwillingness to talk about the process by which the subject is positioned and constructed within discourse. *Langue* as a closed system can afford to dissolve the subject, but *parole* as a concretization of this

system needs a subject to actualize it. The dissolution of the subject, thus leaves a vacuum which Chomsky aspires to fill with a competent subject, in the process, rewriting the basic dichotomy of Saussure using subtler distinctions. The structuralist and the Chomskyan enterprise fail to take into account the constructed nature of subjectivity. For Chomsky it is an eternal presence and for the structuralists an eternal negation. Structural linguistics and Transformational Grammar (TG) are the culmination of a crisis which marks the enterprise of representing representation. Structuralism, however, opens up pathways to interrogate traditional notions of subjectivity.

The removal of the human subject from the centre of the stage can be said to have enabled the interrogation of what Stephen Heath has called “the mythic site par excellence in our society” – the subject/author as originating consciousness, authority for meaning and truth . . . It could be said that it was only the decentring, indeed exclusion, of the subject in Saussure’s own formulations that allowed the subject’s reintroduction – not as a plenitude, a full imaginary unity, but as a serial movement, an effect of language. (Young 12–13)

Lacan and Kristeva, drawing from Marxism and psychoanalysis, posit a general theory of the subject as a construction in language. The notion of ideology is central to the theory of the subject in Lacan and Kristeva. The subject is viewed as an ideological insertion into signifying practices. Hence, we begin with a discussion on ideology. We then move on to Lacan and Kristeva’s reinterpretation of the psychoanalytic subject.

## Ideology

Ideology has had different kinds of signifying statuses within the Marxist discourse. This can be traced to divergent notions of the relationship between the human agent and the societal whole. On the one hand, the subject appears as a product of the social formation, and on the other, as an agent of social reproduction and transformation. This problematic can, in part, be attributed to the fact that the corpus of Marx’s work lends itself to varying interpretations: from the political economy reading of superstructure as determined by the base, to readings that question this deterministic formulation.

A vulgar Marxist reading of ideology sees it as false consciousness, imposed by the dominant interests. This signifies a myopic view of the whole (“upside down as in a *camera obscura*” (Marx and Engels, cited in Hall, “Culture” 320)), myopic due to the interference of the class interests

of the perceiving subject. Dominant ideology is the manifestation of the ideology of the ruling class.

A more contemporary conception would view ideology in terms of the insertion of the subject into particular signifying practices. "Ideology has no creators in this sense, since it exists necessarily . . . The destination of all ideology is the subject" (Belsey 58). The fundamental differences accorded to the subject in these two formulations are:

1. A dualist conception of the subject as in Lukacs, which constitutes itself as a transcendent identity in relation to reality.
2. The non-constitutive subject, as in Althusser, as a structural component in the socio-economic historical process. Subjectivity is imposed on the individual through ideology. Individuals are "always already subjects" (Althusser 164).

Althusser defines ideology as transmitted on a "preconscious" level and hence neither repressed (unconscious) nor intentional (conscious). Althusser perceives ideology as a "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 152).

The individual becomes an ideological insertion in a social formation occupying certain positions in relation to the mode of production. The constituted subject presents itself as a free unified and coherent self to which society addresses itself. Ideology "puts the subject in the position of a homogenous subject in relation to meaning, a subject who thinks himself/herself to be the point of origin of ideas and actions" (Coward and Ellis 77). Althusser draws attention to the dual meaning of the word "subject":

In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who subjects to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this ambiguity, which is merely a reflection of the effect which produces it: the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject i.e. – in order that he shall (freely)accept his subjection*, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and action of his subjection 'all by himself'. *There are no subjects except by and for their subjection.* (Althusser 164, emphasis in original)

The social formation itself, in the schemes of the constituted subject becomes another "subject" and creates for itself a sense of identity above a

mere position in the societal structures. To Althusser, as against Lukacs, ideology is the totality of these relations.

. . . a complex formation of *montages* of notions, representations, images and modes of actions, gestures, attitudes, the whole ensemble functioning as practical norms which govern the concrete stance of men in relation to them the objects and problems of their social and individual existence; in short, the lived relation of men to their world. (Heath, cited in Coward and Ellis 35)

As opposed to the notion of the subject who acquires an ideology after lived-in experience, Althusser posits subjectivity as a product of ideology: subjectivity as an ideological insertion.

### The Lost Object

Lacan posits the subject as a “lost object in the field of the other” (Lacan, quoted in Young 13) – subjectivity as an insertion into the familial discourse controlled by patriarchal authority. The subject is viewed as an object posited for eventual fulfilment of incestual desires, the most instrumental mechanism in the formation of subjectivity being the castration complex posited by Freud. Freud was the first to realize the dubiousness of assigning the subject to the realm of consciousness (Coward and Ellis 95).

Kristeva’s attempts are located in the direction of reinterpreting the Freudian signification of the subject and its socialization vis-à-vis its relationship to language. The arguments are developed through premises which are directly traceable to the Lacanian conception of the self: the process by which the subject comes into being is analogous to that of the sign. Lacan argues that Freud could not possibly have acknowledged the presence of such links mainly since the concepts are antecedent to his work. Lacan views Freud’s theoretical formulations as powerful enough to accommodate these concepts pertaining to the sign. The dichotomy of the signifier/signified becomes more meaningful in the context of Freud’s work: “the signifier has an active function in determining certain effects in which the signifiable appears as submitting to its mark, by becoming through that passion the signified” (Coward and Ellis 284).

Lacan traces the history and formation of the subject from the pre-oedipal to the oedipal through the mirror phase. The unified image of the I exterior to itself in the mirror brings an act of misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) into play. It is this misrecognition that prompts the

identification/alienation. The misrecognition is a split within the I: the only “real” other that the infant knows is the mother.

The infant in the mirror phase is akin to a signifier, with its internal relationship with its own image, the signified. Both these unify momentarily to form a sign in the Saussurian sense and its identity is established by the internal relationship, a misrecognition. This misrecognition generates anxiety in the infant, anxiety to “assume an image” and live up to it. The infant’s relationship with its primary object, the mother, exacerbates this anxiety. It has to resolve for itself the presence and absence of the primary object. Summing up, the anxiety at the pre-oedipal phase is twofold: a) the constitution of the ego; b) its differentiation from the primary object.

The oedipal phase is indicated by the entry of the “Father” into the dyadic relationship between the infant and the mother. The term “Father” designates not only the male parent, but could be any male, the societal or religious order, or the law. He represents the intervention that “delimits” the mother–child interaction, in which the infant gains a positionality for itself in the discourse of the familial and the societal. Repression and the subsequent formation of the unconscious are consequential. The unconscious represents potential deviance from this assumed positionality in the familial discourse. The sign, in the pre-oedipal, enters the oppositional systems of discourse, for in the Saussurian scheme, identity of a sign is established by its relation with other signs. This identity is devoid of the object of signification, since material identity is not pertinent to this system. The sign does not signify a presence, but an absence: all identity is difference.

The infant’s entry into the world of discourse, the “symbolic order”, is marked by its constituting itself in relation to a central signifier. The central signifier assigns a differential identity to the infant, viz. boy or girl, daughter or son etc. This identity is delimited by parental authority and the castration complex; it is an attempt at submitting itself to the father, so as to enable the infant to eventually occupy the position of the father. The constitution of the subject as opposed to the central phallic signifier is also an entry into the world of language rules. The “metaphorical” world of language shifts to the “metonymic” relay of discourse. The mirror phase is marked by a condensation, a process as in dreams where several associations and meanings slide “to converge on one idea at the point of their intersection” (Coward and Ellis 98). The symbolic order represents a massive erosion, an eternal relay of signifiers, a relay of differences and absences.

In joining a process of familial enunciation, the infant is faced with an eventual desire to identify with his father, and at the same instant, an

inability to do so. Certain syntagmatic couplings in the discourse of the infant, are ruled out by the symbolic, for the distributional relay is governed by parental law. Incest becomes a taboo, a forbidden syntagmatic distribution. These taboos negotiate the body of the repressed; the other (probable) syntagmatic distribution would violate the constituted subject's relationship with the father. The son has the destiny of becoming a "husband" and a "father". This is again a projection of desire for eventual fulfilment propelled by the castration complex.

### **The Symbolic and the Semiotic**

Any desire springs from an absence. Discourse also comes into being because of an absence, a lack. Discourse lacks mimetic grounding; the words are devoid of the objects they desire to signify. According to Lacan, language is "what hollows beings into desire" (Lacan, cited in Eagleton 168). This "desire is insatiable because it is desire not of a symbolic position which is powerful, self constituting, source of the law, arbiter of the possibilities of the expression of desire. The desired object, like the signified, constantly recedes, being only the idea of an ultimate transcendent guarantee of identity" (Burniston and Weedon 216).

The corpus of the repressed syntagmas constitutes the unconscious and subsequently, constitution of the subject occurs in accordance with the phallic central signifier. "Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother" (Kristeva 136). The subject aspires for a unification at the site of language, an imaginary unity. This, unlike the Cartesian *cogito* is, as rewritten by Lacan, "I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think" (Lacan 166) and rejects the idea of an autonomous ego, which is spurious knowledge, a repository of absences. The subject is signified as an eternally fragmented self, decentred and empty.

Kristeva's subject is located as a "thetic subject" in a "symbolic realm" (Kristeva 130). Social discourse is a linking of the subject-object nexus within the domain of syntax. This symbolic order is linked to the concept of repression and hence is not free flowing in its transactions. Kristeva counterposes the symbolic with the semiotic. The semiotic order is the site of subversion, it is the negation of what the symbolic represses. Every discourse is an overlapping of the symbolic and the semiotic. Semiotic refers to the residue of the pre-oedipal, where the infant is unstructuredly libidinous, with unorganized drives. This residue of the pre-oedipal is discernible in the symbolic, which causes the overlapping of the two. The

delimiting of the semiotic by the symbolic brings syntactical lexical transformations into being, expelling ungrammatical distributions. This process which marks the subject's entry into language also subverts the constituted subject: Kristeva names this site of subversion "negativity". Meaning is a measure of the symbolic. It is an eternal sliding as in the discourse of the unconscious, remaining extraneous to any one meaning. This is termed "semiotic chora" (Kristeva 133). The semiotic can violate the grammatical and subvert meaning in the predicative syntactic realm of thethetic.

The semiotic precedes the symbolic and hence it is impossible to fix the semiotic in terms of a unified subject, because the unified subject is constituted in the realm of the symbolic. Language being the site at which the infant resolves its anxiety and constitutes itself, the semiotic is pre-linguistic. The semiotic is a pre-condition for the constitutive fixing, which demands an eternal "expulsion" of the subject into the "symbolic". Any constitution therefore can only be fragmentary and spurious. The unified transcendence is a transitory moment in any signifying practice. Kristeva names this site "the subject in process" (Kristeva 125). The tension between the two orders overlap, the symbolic appearing as a fixed moment in the subject in process. Starting as an enterprise to investigate subjectivity in Althusser's work, Kristeva goes on to relate the "mode of sign production" to the modes of production. The linking of the semiotic to the dominant political praxis is through the intermediation of familial and social structures. The infant's entry into the symbolic can only be momentary, since there exists an eternal attempt to subvert it by the semiotic. It is at the level of the familial that this constitution is reaffirmed and stabilized. This stabilizing, in turn, is linked to the established order, state and legal systems. Kristeva maintains that the speaking subject is the site at which the symbolic and the semiotic coincide, which involves the tension between the means of production (represented by the symbolic) and signifying practices (the semiotic). The subject assumes the potentiality to challenge the imaginary unity of its identity within the discourse of art and literature, the marginal discourse, eternally incestual.

. . . poetic language would be for its questionable subject in process the equivalent of incest: it is within the economy of signification itself that the questionable subject in process appropriates to itself this archaic, instinctual and maternal territory; thus it simultaneously prevents the word from becoming mere sign and the mother from becoming an object like any other – forbidden. (Kristeva 136)