

Knowledge Formations in Amitav Ghosh's "Sea of Poppies" (2008)

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1. Introduction

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28, KJV). This Old Testament verse shows that the belief in visions and spiritual experiences for *all* members of society was not always considered something only for fanatics. Medieval Europe had many famous men and women that publically based their knowledge on such experiences. Men like St. Francis of Assisi and Nostradamus and women like Joan of Arc and Hildegard von Bingen were not shy in attributing their superior grasp of the world to non-rational sources. Yet at some point, the Enlightenment pushed spiritual matters aside and relegated them to the bargain bin of history, only fit to be used by wise old women, the sick and the dumb. India experienced a similar shift from spiritualism to rationality, but the changes there look quite different from the European model. Yet despite the triumph of rationalism in the province of university and science, many Indians still base their knowledge of the world on religion and spirituality more than on rationalism. Two characters found in Amitav Ghosh’s novel *Sea of Poppies* are such Indians, placing spirituality higher than rationalism. They base their decisions on a vision and a promise from a guru respectively and evaluate the results using the knowledge thus gained. Both characters exhibit a way of forming meaning and knowledge that is different even from the European Christian model. Both of these religious characters show that knowledge can be formed in more ways than one and that these different ways of making knowledge function are equally reliable.

Analyzing knowledge formation is new territory in literature about the book *Sea of Poppies*. Most articles focus on identity or power. Speaking of the characters that end up on the *Ibis*, Raichel Sylus places her emphasis on the loss of identity due to displacement: “This gives rise to the amalgamation of the previous identity with that of the future. This loss of identity is inclusive of the personal, social and cultural identity in a person. All characters inside the ship have lost their present identity” (2013:209). Nilanjan Chakraborty focuses on how colonial power affects characters like Neel: “On the one side, the novelist develops the plot of Neel, the zamindar who finds lesser and lesser space to have his political will to rule over his subjects in an era where everything is dictated by the British administration” (2013:272). For Neeta Dhumal, the novel is about finding the freedom to forge your own identity (cf. 2013:155). Identity certainly is an important theme in the novel, and one that this paper will inevitably look into, but it is only one of many themes discussed in *Sea of Poppies*.

Others consider power to be the central topic of the novel. “The issue of power relations is starkly evident in the book where most of the characters become victims in the power game” (Swathi 2013:96). However, Swathi does not look at all of the major characters, focusing instead on Zachary, the lascars, the transportees and the “English Characters”, among whom he also includes Paulette (91). Nob Kissin is not even mentioned in the article. Another prominent lens for the novel is looking at its relationship with history and how it shows “common people” finding their “liveable niches” among “social conflicts” (Ahuja 2012:81). Kathleen Davis sees the novel as an allegory of power and history: “Events themselves allegorize the processes by which power arrogates to itself control over the writing and interpretation of historical narratives, control that threatens to collapse the difference between language and meaning, and thus to turn power into ‘destiny’” (2012:91). Power too will be looked at, but as a component of knowledge.

Among the mostly post-modern interpretations focusing on identity and alterity as well as Foucaulian power struggles, few articles mention, much less investigate, the discursive underpinnings of the characters. Some at least acknowledge the representative nature of the novel’s characters: “These characters become vehicles of the different cultures and the novel becomes a living document of social, economic and political ethos of the era” (Dhumal 2013:157). This is accepted as a common trait among Ghosh’s novels, which makes the omission of discursive studies all the more surprising: “[I]n fact all [Ghosh’s] ‘fiction’ has had a vigorous and rigorous grounding not just in ‘fact,’ but in serious research as well. One of the recurrent pleasures of reading Ghosh’s work is flipping to the back and seeing what sources he’s drawn on for his novel” (Burton 2012:71). Even explicit mention of an underlying discourse influencing an action or a choice is done only in a cursory manner. Speaking of Deeti’s marriage to Kalua, Samrat Sengupta notes that “[u]nder normal circumstances this would never have been possible as it was unthinkable in the community in which they live for a lower caste person like Kalua to marry an upper caste woman like Deeti” (2013:215). Nowhere in the article does he mention anything beyond this. He also fails to consider what the novel itself has to say about the changes he is analyzing. Sengupta accepts that the transformation from Deeti to Aditi “becomes complete” (216), but never mentions that the novel is critical of the change and has its way of commenting on it. Nilanjan Chakraborty mentions the concept of Black Water, but says that “Deeti and Kalua inherited the traditional myth” surrounding sea voyages (2013:274). This is problematic for two reasons, as it only gives a superficial explanation of the story but also does not grant the belief any legitimacy. The concept is immediately pushed into the category of useless and false

superstition rather than examined to understand *why* people would believe it or how this concept allowed people to create knowledge and meaning in their lives.

A similar problem can be seen in a treatment of Deeti: “Ghosh has a definite purpose in introducing Deeti as one of the central characters in the novel. Deeti’s life is subject to physical exploitation mainly because of opium although everyone initially attributes it to the influence of Saturn in her horoscope” (Sujatha 2013:123). The use of the verb “attributes” shows that the author believes there is a true, root-cause and that Deeti and others simply have not seen it yet. Perhaps thinking in terms of power is more useful, but it should not automatically be considered more legitimate merely because it is part of the rationalistic discourse. The same lack of legitimacy of the Indian discourse is seen in Davis’ description of Deeti: “The impoverished young wife of a former sepoy and opium addict, Deeti ‘sees’ the Ibis as she stands in the Ganges with her daughter Kabutri” (2012:89). The use of apostrophes could mean that Davis sees it as a type of seeing that is close to but distinct from the usual understanding of the word. But the fact that she never explains what she means by the term suggests that she considers the vision of the *Ibis* to simply be an allegory, an interpretation strengthened by Davis’s article being about the allegorization of history. Here the vision is not considered a real discursive possibility that is then *also* read as an allegory, rather the vision can *only* exist because it is *solely* an allegory.

A final issue that can be noticed in the literature about *Sea of Poppies* is the near-complete lack of mention of Nob Kissin. Despite having entire chapters dedicated to him in the novel, he is often not considered a main character, as in Swathi’s article. When he is mentioned, his entire story, along with its whole discursive background, is summed up in *one* sentence: “He feels that he is becoming one of the sakhis of Lord Krishna and embarking on a symbolic spiritual journey towards Vrindavan and his spiritual guru’s prophecies come true” (Chakraborty 2013:275-276). This sentence is true, but it draws on a complex and rich discourse. To grant Nob Kissin so little explanation is an affront to the real discourse he was inspired by.

The acceptance of the discourses, as seen in some of the critics’ works, is an important first step towards understanding the novel and the world it comes from. But without a deeper understanding of how these discourses *work* and *why* they work, readings of the book would still remain in an imperialistic stance. The Other world would then remain an Other and would be granted the right to exist by virtue of being an Other. Usually the effort is not made to comprehend the inner workings of that world’s knowledge. This could be because the Indian authors see it as common knowledge or because the Western authors consider it

secondary to their own theoretical endeavors. In these considerations, Nob Kissin, a character that I consider essential to understanding the Indian world of the novel, is overlooked by most critics. Even when Deeti is looked at, it is in connection with *identity* and not knowledge. Her vision is usually mentioned as something that marks her as unique and not much more. It is with the intent to rectify this omission in the literature that I will look at the knowledge discourses of both Deeti and Nob Kissin and show both their function and their standing within the world of the novel.

In order to discover the inner workings of both knowledge formations, I will first present Michel Foucault's concept of spirituality and its analysis of how spiritual searching for truth is different from the rationalistic scientific method. Then I will present the relevant parts of Foucault's theory of Archaeology in order to have the proper tools for unpacking both spirituality and the knowledge discourses of Deeti and Nob Kissin. As a final theoretical piece, I will look at Foucault's *heterotopia*, which will be used to come to terms with the standings of both Deeti and Nob Kissin within the world of *Sea of Poppies*. After this theory discussion I will delve into Deeti's story and reveal the underlying discourse that enables her knowledge both about the vision and the changes of identity she later constructs for herself. Using the concepts presented in Archaeology and Spirituality, I will draw on Hindu scripture and other ancient texts as well as Indian and Western scholars' writings on topics like visions, women and marriage customs, in order to show the regularity and plausibility of Deeti's story arc. After looking at Deeti, I will look into Nob Kissin's story and there again show that what appears strange at first glance becomes reasonable if one understands the discursive background Nob Kissin is from. Much of the discussion surrounding him will focus on the religious teachings of his geographic region. After having looked at the characters individually, I will draw on the concept of *heterotopia* as well as the overall structure of the novel to contrast Deeti and Nob Kissin with one another and with the other relevant characters on the *Ibis*. This is to show to what extent the changes that the characters undergo are considered legitimate or illegitimate by those around them. After this I will look at the final scene to see whether or not the novel itself considers the changes to be legitimate. Finally, I will use Foucault's concept of the *episteme* to show that despite being very different from one another, both knowledge discourses can be bound together into a single cohesive whole. With this discursive analysis I want to show that not only are the knowledges used by Deeti and Nob Kissin considered real within the Hindu context but they are both methods of gaining knowledge about the world that are coherent and that provide the user with workable results.

2. Theory

2.1 Spirituality

The French theorist Michel Foucault is noted for his contributions to the understanding of the way society is organized into spheres, each obeying distinct rules and conventions. Specifically, he was interested in the way knowledge was produced, negotiated and used in society. In one of his lectures he presents two “ready-made syntheses for subject position” which have to do with access to and legitimation of knowledge (2005:15). Spirituality, the one relevant to the present study, he defines as “the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth” (ibid.). The knowing subject must bring to bear its entire subject position in order to ‘know’ this or that. This makes Foucault’s spirituality, or spiritual knowledge as I would like to call it for this study, distinct from other knowledge formations, such as science. The modern, non-spiritual conception is quite different: “[T]he thinking, perceiving subject is thought to have a natural right and capacity to know the truth and therefore does not need to pay a price in its very being in order to gain access to truth” (McGushin 2014:473). This given right of access is what distinguishes spirituality from the modern scientific understanding of knowledge. Techniques and practices are essential in spiritual searches as they are inseparably connected with the preparations needed for spiritual knowledge:

We will call ‘spirituality’ then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth (Foucault et al 2005:15).

The methods are not for gaining and validating the knowledge as such, but serve as a rite of passage, a price to be paid for *access* to the knowledge. With this preparation the subject is then judged worthy to receive knowledge and to have the knowledge judged as true. Or as Foucault puts it: “It follows that from this point of view there can be no truth without a conversion or a transformation of the subject” (ibid.). Another important defining feature of spiritual knowledge is that it not only requires a subject that has reached a particular subject position, but the knowledge, once obtained, will produce yet further changes:

For spirituality, the truth is not just what is given to the subject, as reward for the act of knowledge as it were, and to fulfill the act of knowledge. The truth enlightens the subject; the truth gives beatitude to the subject; the truth gives the subject tranquility of the soul. In short, in the truth and in access to the truth, there is something that fulfills the subject himself, which fulfills or transfigures his very being (16).

These resulting changes, together with the required preparation, are what set spiritual knowledge apart from knowledge formations like empirical science, where the correct method

will produce the correct knowledge. In spiritual knowledge the correct type of subject position and the resulting changes in the subject itself are the criteria for the veracity of the knowledge obtained. True knowledge can be judged by the rigor of the preparation needed and the extent and depth of the produced effects.

While the concept of spirituality seems to correspond with the experiences of many religious people, Foucault cautions against blindly accepting such “ready-made syntheses.” In his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he argues:

We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset; we must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign. And instead of according them unqualified, spontaneous value, we must accept, in the name of methodological rigour, that, in the first instance, they concern only a population of dispersed events (1972:22).

These accepted (and perhaps even beloved) constructs must be analyzed and questioned, so as to understand the underlying structures that make them work. This does not mean that syntheses like spirituality are considered untrue or ineffective, but that Foucault wishes to come to terms with the place and function of constructs like spirituality or science, rather than blindly accepting and following them. His final sentence is an important first step in seeing the constructedness of these structures. Each structure in the culture and in each knowledge formation only applies to a limited sphere and is subject to specific rules and has specific constraints for its use and transformation, or “concern[s] only a population of dispersed events”. In order to understand the underpinnings of spiritual knowledge and thus question this ready-made synthesis he has presented, Foucault offers his theory of ‘Archaeology’.

2.2 Archaeology

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault states that his theory of Archaeology “tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules” (1972:138). He does not want to show some hidden sub-text of a discourse, but wants to show according to what rules and within what parameters the discourse itself functions. Archaeology can be understood as “a metaphor presenting knowledge as something that lies beneath a surface and needs to be uncovered before it can be understood” (Gutting 2014:13). As is often the case, people and even whole disciplines follow rules that they are not even aware of. Archaeology tries to uncover these and make them visible. This entails finding out which seemingly different surface elements actually belong to the same

underlying discourse: “[The first task of archaeology is] to show how quite different discursive elements may be formed on the basis of similar rules [...] to show, between different formations, the archaeological isomorphisms” (Foucault 1972:160). This means that two very different surface elements, such as two opposed theories of evolution, can be shown to both derive from the discourse of science and biology, with all of its rules on what may be studied and how. The term “isomorphism” refers to a mathematical concept where “[t]he model and the original resemble each other in their structures and not through sensible features” (Ricoeur 2003:284). So the base discourse (something Foucault calls “episteme”, a term that will be looked at shortly) has a certain model and gives certain rules and restrictions, which will show up in the produced surface elements, like books, institutions and scientific disciplines. These elements may not appear to be related to one another, like biology instruction in the 5th grade and genetics research at Harvard, yet both elements are derived from the same scientific world view and topic of inquiry.

The term “discourse” is defined by Foucault thusly: “[D]iscourse is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence” (1972:107). Stated another way, discourses are “practices obeying certain rules” (138). Here is yet another central term: *statement*. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault takes great pains to acknowledge what he does *not* mean by this word before giving his working definition. He mentions things like the linguistic or rhetorical statement, saying that while they are all part of what he means, none of them go far enough. He finally defines a statement as “a modality that allows [the statement] to be in relation with a domain of objects, to prescribe a definite position to any possible subject, to be situated among other verbal performances, and to be endowed with a repeatable materiality” (107). Here the crux of Foucault’s Archaeology can be found. A statement exists in relation to other objects, subject positions and statements. For example, the statement “God is real” does not exist in a vacuum. It relies on the existence of institutions like churches, the practice of prayer and most likely the belief in a set of holy writ. All of these entities themselves are again related to other statements and objects. Here one clearly sees the influence of structuralism on Foucault’s thinking: the meaning of something is determined by its position in a referential network. Foucault takes it a step further. Here the *function* of something is determined by its position in the network. A statement can only be uttered or produced by a certain subject position. “[D]iscourses are the complex networks of statements that make knowledge possible; that delimit what can be said, or understood, within a particular discourse; and that determine who can speak (or at least speak with authority or be heard)”

(Lynch 2014₁:121). Discourses are thus made up of all the statements that *have* been made and that *can* be made, be it by virtue of their reference to other statements and objects or by virtue of the accepted station (or subjectivity) of the one making the statement.

The subject position, as part of the unique identity of a statement is further explained by Foucault: “[The] subject [is] not the speaking consciousness, not the author of the formulation, but a position that may be filled in certain conditions by various individuals” (Foucault 1972:115). What he means by position instead of author he explains as follows:

First question: who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language [...]? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives from it his own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return, does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true? What is the status of the individuals who - alone - have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridically defined or spontaneously accepted, to proffer such a discourse? (50).

This ties into Lynch’s definition of discourse. It is not just a matter of having the physical ability to utter something or make some other type of statement. The reaction of others to this statement in large part determines its status as knowledge or even truth. One must have the correct position to “speak with authority or be heard” (2014₁:121). Anyone can create their own political rally, but only certain people have the right combination of authority, status, charisma, etc. to actually have people come, and thus to make themselves heard.

Since every statement gains its meaning by referring to others, Foucault adds the concept of the *associated field*, which is “made up of all the formulations to which the statement refers (implicitly or not), either by repeating them, modifying them, or adapting them, or by opposing them, or by commenting on them; there can be no statement that in one way or another does not reactivate others” (1972:98). In returning to the statement “God is real”, it can be seen that the priest both implicitly and explicitly refers to and opposes statements like Nietzsche’s ‘God is dead’. The priest would also be agreeing with statements like the beginning of the gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, KJV). All of these statements are “reactualized”, as Foucault calls it, or used again in the present. “[S]tatements serve to demarcate or delimit a field of objects and their possible, permissible, impossible, and impermissible combinations” (Lynch 2014₂:484) Depending on the exact constellation of other statements and objects it refers to, and how it refers to them, one statement will have a very different meaning and use from another.

The next piece of a statement's identity is its materiality. Foucault states that a statement's materiality is "a status, rules of transcription, [and] possibilities of use and re-use" (1972:115). Or rather:

The rule of materiality that statements necessarily obey is therefore of the order of the institution rather than of the spatio-temporal localization; it defines possibilities of reinscription and transcription (but also thresholds and limits), rather than limited and perishable individualities (103).

Thus the status is not just whether the statement was compression waves produced in the larynx of a speaker that hit the eardrums of a hearer or whether it was a printed sheet, but also the institutional status the material statement gains (or loses as the case may be) due to its materiality. In a court hearing, a witness' account of hearing the murderer plotting has a very different status than the same witness having read the plot in the murderer's diary. This is in part due to the possibility of that diary being found and copied as opposed to the heard plotting having only a transitory nature.

This mention of institution and institutional rules leads to the last part of a statement's identity and function, its *referential*, or "the general set of rules that govern their objects, the form of dispersion that regularly divides up what they say" (115). Or in other words:

These relations [of the referential] are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization; and these relations are not present in the object...They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority (45).

Thus it also depends on what institutions allow or disallow a particular statement or type of statement but also what kinds of behavior in a society would enable people to use a given statement. The statement 'God is real' would be odd in the legislative halls of most liberal democracies, but in church, or even from a legislator known to be particularly devout, this statement could be uttered in an acceptable manner. But to base legislation on this statement would clash with many people's understanding of a modern, secular society and with the promise of equal protection under the law. Thus the meaning and use of statements depend on all of these normative and systemic factors that will all limit a statement's range and use.

This specificity of statements discovered so far is a central point for Foucault's Archaeology. The analysis of the statement is summed up by Foucault as:

question[ing] [statements] as to their mode of existence, what it means to them to have come into existence, to have left traces, and perhaps to remain there, awaiting the moment when they might be of use once more; what it means to them to have appeared when and where they did - they and no others (109).

Analyzing statements as to their discursive meaning and function is much more than a semantic or even pragmatic analysis. All aspects of their existence must be taken into consideration: What other statements do they refer to? What objects of discourse do they refer to? Who is speaking? What status does the speaker have? What kind of materiality do the statements possess? This gives a unique identity and specific rules of use and re-use of the statements and one can then ask what it means for these unique statements to have appeared at that time and under those circumstances and how they may be used in the future.

The regularly produced and used statements, along with all of their other discursive objects and concepts lead Foucault to what he simply calls *knowledge*.

This group of elements, formed in a regular manner by a discursive practice, and which are indispensable to the constitution of a science, although they are not necessarily destined to give rise to one, can be called knowledge. Knowledge is that of which one can speak in a discursive practice, and which is specified by that fact: the domain constituted by the different objects that will or will not acquire a scientific status (182).

Knowledge and practice are both closely tied up with the actual and specific historical reality of a person or group. Similar to the way the *referential* limits statements, discursive practice limits knowledge. Just as a statement must be seen in its specificity, Archaeology as a method looks at man's concrete being-in-the-world. "Man's finite being continues the epistemic grounding of knowledge that was handed down from a dying thinking God" (Mader 2014:235). Since Foucault accepts Nietzsche's proposition that 'God is dead', he finds the ability to create knowledge and even truth not in the transcendental realm, but in "man's finite being" of living a contingent existence. While this certainly clashes with the spiritual life of the religious, this idea is a way to look not at the 'higher realm' for meaning but to look at how a group *creates* meaning out of their experiences. This lived experience that dictates the type and form of knowledge obtained is called *discursive practice*.

The term *discursive practice* receives a similar treatment as Foucault's statement, where Foucault first provides what the term is *not*. In his theory, it is more than linguistic or legal rules. "[I]t is a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space" that define how a discourse functions and according to what constraints it produces its statements (1972:117). Discursive practice is also what distinguishes the discourse of a "given period" or "given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area" (ibid.). This discursive practice is the way people and institutions produce what they consider knowledge. These are 'rules' that are usually not written or even explicitly understood but accepted as an implicit and often given part of life. "[P]ractices themselves *form* people into the kinds of people who do certain things [...] and hold certain things as true" (Stone 2014:387). In other

words, these are the things that define a culture at a given time. It is what determines which concepts a culture will believe and how it will organize itself. Or as Foucault himself puts it: “[B]ut there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms” (1972:183). The knowledge of the Hindu is very different from the Muslim because they organize their worlds very differently and live their lives in different ways. This produces different ways of seeing the world and thus different knowledges.

This brings the analysis back to the overarching aims of Archaeology. The goal is some type of totality, at least within certain parameters, such as a particular region or time period. A structure that can unite even disparate discursive practices during a given period, Foucault calls *episteme*. This concept is not a universal, but is bound to a specific lived experience: “By episteme, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems” (191). An example of an episteme is Europe’s and North America’s obsession with rationalism. Everything that is done from the cradle to the classroom to the economy must be based on rationalistic principles and methods. Even though something like breast-feeding (or not breast-feeding) has little to do with high finance, both feel the need to justify their actions through scientific research and statistics. Both can be reduced to that episteme. As Foucault puts it, he is not interested in questioning a given science’s *right* to be a science (or a spiritual knowledge’s right to exist), but instead in questioning “what it is for that science to be a science” (192). His analysis does not question “its right to be a science, but the fact that it exists” (ibid.). What does it mean for a spiritual knowledge to have come into existence in the first place? What enabled it? How is it significant that it came about or is used in a given time period? Or to modify Foucault slightly: “What it means to [those knowledges] to have appeared when and where they did – they and no others” (109). It is this specific inquiry into the spiritual knowledges of *Sea of Poppies* that will be attempted in this paper.

2.3 Heterotopia

Since *Sea of Poppies*’ plot can be summed up as ‘How do these different characters end up on the *Ibis*, and what happens due to their all being together?’, Foucault’s concept of *heterotopia* seems apt. Foucault considers ships to be “the heterotopia par excellence” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986:27). *Heterotopias* are “counter-sites”, which serve to simultaneously represent, contest, and invert all other real places in a society. Even though they are real

places themselves, with actual, physical locations and boundaries, they are outside of other places (cf. 24). Examples include graveyards and retirement homes, both of which challenge the modern desire to be young forever (cf. *ibid.*).

A specific category of *heterotopia* is the “crisis heterotopia” which includes “privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.” (*ibid.*). Thus areas of retreat like the bedroom, rehabilitation centers, and movie theaters are places where people undergoing crises in their identities or their bodies (or both), can retreat and society is able to bind their disruptive energy, which is a result of necessary changes and processes, without danger to the status-quo. Foucault adds that while many societies had such areas of retreat in the past, they are being replaced more and more by “heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (25). These include “rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons” (*ibid.*). People considered aberrant from the norms are placed in these locations so that they might not corrupt society as a whole.

The reason *heterotopias* are so valuable in analyzing a society is that they are “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (*ibid.*). For Foucault, an example of such a unifying space is the theater, as it “brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (*ibid.*). In a theater, society is able to look at and contrast ideas which would either never exist next to one another in day-to-day life or that would cause a break in the system if they ever occurred together.

Access to these heterotopic sites is also problematic. Many are “not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in, one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures” (26). A ship is such a place. In order to board, one must be at a special place (a dock) and have special access permission (a ticket). Not just anyone is able to enter. Even a stowaway gets onto the ship by special means, through means not sanctioned by society.

As to the function of *heterotopias*, Foucault has two “extreme poles” between which the *heterotopia*’s function is negotiated. Its role is either “to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory”, or else to “create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous,

as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (27). Thus the *heterotopia*, by juxtaposing different elements of society, either shows that everything is just an illusion, a convention and nothing more, or, on the other hand, it gives a glimpse of other, more utopic possibilities. With this theoretical trifecta complete, the knowledge discourses of Deeti and Nob Kissin, as well as the commentary provided by the heterotopic ship, can be properly presented.

3. Deeti

3.1 The Vision

The very first paragraph of *Sea of Poppies* sets up all relevant themes for this paper. Before even any of the characters are introduced, the novel jumps into Deeti’s vision of the *Ibis*:

The vision of a tall-masted ship, at sail on the ocean, came to Deeti on an otherwise ordinary day, but she knew instantly that the apparition was a sign of destiny for she had never seen such a vessel before, not even in a dream: how could she have, living as she did in northern Bihar, four hundred miles from the coast? Her village was so far inland that the sea seemed as distant as the netherworld: it was the chasm of darkness where the holy Ganga disappeared into the Kala-Pani, ‘the Black Water’(Ghosh 2008:3).

The word “vision”, especially in connection to the word “knew”, presents the crux of Deeti’s story. How is knowing and knowledge connected to something like a vision? The issue of seeing in general is also raised by contrasting sight in waking and dreaming states. The netherworld and its role of bordering the mortal world is also introduced, along with the concept of the “Black Water”, which will be looked at more in-depth at a later point.

To understand the discourse of this passage, one must first see the connections drawn between visions, sight and knowledge in the Hindu understanding of the world. According to the Indologist Jan Gonda, seeing is considered a foundational act. In a Hindu creation myth “the Creator-god Prajāpati who, being in the beginning alone looked round about [...] and saw another being (viz. the brahman); after that he engaged in conversation” (1969:8). Here the foundation of community was laid by contact initiated by sight. Speech only came after. This is very different from the Christian creation myth, where, apart from existing, the first action God takes is to speak. Of course both gods needed to look first, but the emphasis placed on visual contact in the Hindu text will create a discourse where sight will be favored over speech. Or as Gonda, paraphrasing the Vedas, puts it: “If two persons were to come disputing with each other [...] we should believe him who said ‘I have seen it’, not him who has said ‘I have heard it’ (9). The basic knowledge formation of the Hindu world is already predisposed towards sight over hearing. If the object one wishes to gain knowledge about has a visual medium as its materiality, its claim to truth would be stronger than an auditory

medium, simply by virtue of the different conceptualizations of the materialities. This different concept of sight is best summed up by another Vedic quotation: “The eye is asserted to be truth, because, unlike the mind and speech, it is not prone to give false witness” (in 15). The referential of Hindu statements favors the visual and tends to look towards sight as a justification for a statement being true. Deeti *seeing* a vision would immediately predispose her to judge the experience as true.

This leads to the term that is central to understanding Deeti’s knowledge formation: *darśana*¹. The word implies “sight in all its myriad connotations” and “includes both conceptual knowledge and perceptual observation, critical exposition and intuitional experience, logical inquiry and spiritual insight, concrete and abstract, and gross and subtle” (Mittal, Sushil and Thursby 2004:531). While the word includes many different connotations of the concept of seeing, the one that will be focused on is the religious one, commonly called *darśan*: “Darśan means ‘seeing’. In the Hindu ritual tradition it refers especially to religious seeing, or the visual perception of the sacred. When Hindus go to a temple, they do not commonly say, ‘I am going to worship,’ but rather, ‘I am going for darśan’². They go to ‘see’ the image of the deity” (Eck 2007:3). This seeing as worship is a further concept that allows Deeti to believe in the truthfulness of her vision. This is in part because of the location where she had it. The Ganga is one of several holy rivers and it is “said to fall from heaven to earth” (5). Seeing the vision in a holy location would add credence to her experience.

The final piece of her sureness of the true nature of the vision is her lack of Foucault’s “associated field”, or the other statements it refers to. What seems to be going on in Deeti’s head is the thinking that even though she has a concept of visions and the materiality is something she is familiar with, the content of the statement-vision is so far removed from her normal experience that it must be true, since she would not have been able to imagine all of the details, as she had no basis to imagine them. Therefore on top of all of the conceptual and material facts being in the vision’s favor, the vision must also be true because it draws on statements that she had no access to.

¹ This follows the convention of transcribing both Sanskrit and Hindi words, where the two different “sh” sounds are transcribed as *s* with diacritics, either *ś* or *ṣ*. Another convention pertains to the vowels *ri* and *li*, which are sometimes transcribed as *ṛ* and *ḷ* respectively. This means that the name Krishna is often *Kṛṣṇa*. Where a word appears in *Sea of Poppies*, I will use Ghosh’s transcription. If the word does not appear in the novel, I will use the diacritic method of transcription.

² While I was waiting to meet the guru of the religion my Indian mentor belongs to, my mentor left for several minutes. When she returned, her explanation was “I was getting in some *darśan*”, or rather, taking the opportunity to gaze at the guru up close.

At this point, it seems appropriate to address the issue of whether Deeti actually saw a true vision or perhaps had some seizure that produced a hallucination. In a passage from William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James addresses what he calls "medical materialism" that argues that if one can show the organic or material causation of some religious experience, it can no longer be considered a true experience and it may no longer be used as part of religious meaning-construction. James counters this claim in the following way:

To plead the organic causation of a religious state of mind, then, in refutation of its claim to possess superior spiritual value, is quite illogical and arbitrary, unless one have already worked out in advance some psycho-physical theory connecting spiritual values in general with determinate sorts of physiological change. Otherwise none of our thoughts and feelings, not even our scientific doctrines, not even our dis-beliefs, could retain any value as revelations of the truth, for every one of them without exception flows from the state of their possessor's body at the time (1917:14).

The fact remains that every human impulse derives, for better or worse, from some material source. To say that everything that is thus derived is worthless for the human endeavor would deprive humans of everything from language to science to religion. This paper is not looking at the material origin of experience, but where these experiences lead and how humans use them to create meaningful discourses. Thus it is irrelevant to the present discussion whether Deeti or any of the other characters 'actually' only had this or that disorder or experienced this or that illusion instead of 'real' experiences. The issue is to find out how and why Deeti is able to allow the vision to play a role in her own knowledge and how this knowledge formation affects her subjectivity.

Deeti's actions in her shrine room show her belief in the true nature of the vision. After the river, Deeti and Kabutri return to the puja room. "The term *pūja* denotes a ritual worship of an idol (*mūrti*³, *pratimā*) or an aniconic form of a deity as well as any other object which is considered as possessing special power and being sacred" (Bühnemann 1988:29). The puja room could also be called shrine room, since it is where the shrines to the worshipped beings are kept together. Deeti enters her puja room and "pick[s] up a green mango leaf, dip[s] a fingertip in a container of bright red sindoor and dr[aws], with a few strokes, two wing-like triangles hanging suspended above a long curved shape that end in a hooked bill" (Ghosh 2008:9). Two things are significant here: the fact that she paints the vision at all and that she paints it on a mango leaf. Deeti has also included portraits of family members in her puja room, as is possible, since any beloved or revered figure can be included.

³ Since the term 'idol' can have negative connotations, I will use the Sanskrit term *mūrti* instead.

There is, however, a division among the portraits: Some are of dead relatives, others of living ones. Her siblings that have died as children are drawn on “papery poppy-petal discs” but her older brother, who is still alive, and “[a] few living relatives” are present as “diagrammatic images drawn on mango leaves” (ibid.). Painting the *Ibis* on a mango leaf means that Deeti considers it a living being and not just a dead ship. The portrait of the *Ibis* on the mango leaf also adds the *Ibis* to the family pantheon.

The art of making a *mūrti* for worship is a very specific one, with rules governing who can depict what and how. The manuals or *śāstras* “assure that the image is not simply the expression of an individual artist, but the ‘written image’ – the icon – of the divine” (Eck 2007:52). The artist is also told to pray “that he may successfully bring to form the divine image he has seen” (ibid.). This means that a *mūrti* is not just art, but a representation of a reality that one has seen on some level. Deeti painting her image in her puja room, where such *mūrtis* would find use, indicates that she believes that she actually saw the *Ibis*. Once an image is ready it is dedicated in a special ceremony: “Every man-made idol is infused with life in a ceremony called *prāṇapratīṣṭhā* without which the idol is considered nothing but a lifeless object, unfit to receive worship” (Bühnemann 1988:52). If the original the image is based on is not alive, how could its depiction be infused with its life energy? Måns Broo explains that the purpose of this ceremony is actually to “call down the deity into the image and to bring all of its senses to life” (2003:250). This could only happen if the original were somehow alive already. Whether the *Ibis* is *actually* alive on some level is not relevant. All that matters is that for the sake of her knowledge formation, Deeti considers it to be alive.

After finishing her painting, Deeti’s daughter Kabutri asks her whether she will “put it in the puja room” to which Deeti simply says “Yes”. While the child is confused, probably knowing the implications of putting something in the puja room, Deeti unerringly holds to her conviction, surprising even herself “for she too was puzzled by the sureness of her intuition” (Ghosh 2008:10). This echoes the earlier sureness she felt about the *Ibis* while she was still standing in the Ganga. She somehow knew that the *Ibis* was real and was heading in her direction. “[T]he knowledge of this terrified her, for she had never set eyes on anything that remotely resembled this apparition, and had no idea what it might portend” (8). Deeti, then and in the puja room, has the interesting experience in which knowledge and meaning do not coincide. She knows without being able to assign meaning to the images. But there is no associated field for the statements, thus meaning is still lacking. However, this lack does not mean that Deeti is unsure in her actions. “I just know that it must be there; and not just the ship, but also many of those who are in it; they too must be on the walls of our puja

room” (10). This sureness concerning the vision is what will sustain her and propel her in the coming events.

3.2 Abuse and Despair

So far, the vision and its equation with knowledge are possible through the unique status of seeing within the Indian and Hindu context. Before looking at what changes begin to happen to Deeti as a result of the vision, the other side of spiritual knowledge, namely the changed subjectivity that is required for the spiritual experience to be deemed genuine, needs to be considered. Deeti’s life up to the vision is described as very difficult and often humiliating. The earliest accounts of her life have to do with her marriage preparations and the first trauma, namely the wedding night. She finds out that her husband is an “afeemkhor”, or opium addict (Ghosh 2008:35). After consuming some opium at her husband’s behest, she wakes up in the morning with “a dull ache in her lower abdomen and a painful soreness between her legs. Her clothes were in disarray”. She also finds that “her thighs were encrusted with blood” (36). Clearly someone had had intercourse with her the night before, but she begins to suspect that some sort of foul play is involved. She begins to see just how deep her husband’s addiction is and that he would never have been lucid enough to have intercourse with her. Thus someone else must have raped her that night. Instead of doing the impossible and confronting her mother-in-law with such an accusation, Deeti eventually hits upon the idea of drugging her mother-in-law with opium. This has a double benefit: it tranquilizes the mother-in-law, but it also wrings a portion of the truth from her. In an opium-induced trance, her mother-in-law calls her “Draupadi” and explains what she means by saying “Because the earth has never seen a more virtuous woman than Draupadi, of the Mahabharata, wife to five brothers. It’s a fortunate woman, a *saubhāgyawati*, who bears the children of brothers for each other...” (40). Even though this confession would probably be thrown out in a modern court hearing, there are several reasons why Deeti accepts this statement as true.

The mother-in-law’s statement is a spontaneous oral utterance, in other words, something she did not plan to say and that is gone after speaking. This ephemeral materiality *adds* believability to the statement since it is not something motivated by social forces but by inner processes that can break to the surface thanks to the opium. But the important discursive point is its associated field. The Mahabharata is part of the Hindu scriptures and accordingly has a high status as to truth claims. The story referred to also has a striking resemblance to Deeti’s situation. In his book on the women of the Mahabharata, Chaturvedi Badrinath gave the chapter on Draupadi the title “The undeniable truth of hurt and humiliation; The

undeniable necessity of transcending them” (2008:169). This title seems an appropriate summary of Deeti’s life as well. The story of Draupadi begins with her father looking for a suitable husband for his daughter by organizing an archery tournament and promising that “the winner alone would gain Draupadi” (173). At the tournament, the conditions are clearly set out again by Draupadi’s brother: “Whoever of you will pierce the target and bring it down, will gain my sister Krishnaa [referring to Draupadi] as his wife. This I solemnly promise” (174). The rules seem quite clear, yet Draupadi’s most famous characteristic would soon be revealed. A man named Karna is able to hit the targets in the specified manner and presents himself to Draupadi to claim her. Despite having clearly fulfilled the requirements set forth by both her father and brother, Draupadi responds: “I shall not marry the son of a charioteer, a suta-putra” (176). Badrinath explains the significance of this by saying: “Actually, Draupadi had changed the rules of the game, and had reneged on the promise announced publically” (ibid.). This defiant nature surfaces again and again in Draupadi’s story in the Mahabharata, but also in Deeti’s long quest for the *Ibis*.

In the end, she is won by Arjuna of *Bhagavat Gita* fame. But for various reasons, all of his four brothers also desire her. The five men return home and at the door they call out to their mother: “Mother! Mother! We have brought back largesse!” (Satyamurti 2015:117-118). Without looking at what her sons had brought, she replies: “Then, my dears, you will share it equitably between you” (ibid.). After meeting Draupadi she realizes what she has said and exclaims: “But how can you share Draupadi without breaching dharma? Yet, if you don’t, my words will be a lie” (ibid.). The compromise is found by having all five brothers marry Draupadi. This way the mother’s word could be upheld and the duties of the sons fulfilled. The reason this story is relevant to Deeti’s tale is that, like in the Mahabharata, the mother-in-law is complicit in the sharing of the daughter-in-law between the sons⁴. It would also be a story someone like Deeti would be familiar with and which would serve as a central foundation for all knowledge and identity formation of a Hindu.

All of these abuses and disappointments lead Deeti to conclude that her misfortune is the result of fate. Deeti not only feels that life is hard, but that she is a victim of life. This realization about the victim status makes Deeti even more like Draupadi: “The character of Draupadi has a special appeal [...] for coupled with her actual victimization is a strong realization of her victimization. She is allowed to respond to it in the only manner she knows: aggressive and outspoken attacks on her husbands” (Sutherland 1989:72). Deeti too will take

⁴ Some Indians interpret this passage as the mother knowing Draupadi was there and in order to keep her sons from fighting over her and creating division, she tells them to share her, maintaining the unity of the family.

seemingly rash actions. The actions can be justified, in part, by their being used by Draupadi in the scriptures. But before Deeti begins to lash out against her family directly, she still largely blames her bad fortune on her stars.

Her prospects had always been bedevilled by her stars, her fate being ruled by Saturn – Shani – a planet that exercised great power on those born under its influence, often bringing discord, unhappiness and disharmony. With this shadow darkening her future, Deeti’s expectations had never been high (31).

Having a bad fate could have many different causes in the Indian world. A common reason was *karma* from a previous birth. Specifically, simply being born a woman was taken as a sign of bad *karma*. “[T]he female form itself was considered a punishment for sins committed in a previous birth. Various rituals and penances were therefore prescribed for women so that they could be spared another cycle of birth as a woman” (Narasimhan 1990:37). Growing up within such a framework, it would be no wonder that Deeti is not optimistic about her prospects. But the concept goes further. Anantanand Rambachan reports on abused wives and the response they often get from their family: “I have personally heard many accounts of abused Hindu women who were sent back by their parents or advised to return to the homes of their husbands since the suffering inflicted upon them was a just reward for their actions in earlier lives” (2001:25). So with all this, Deeti must feel like she was a horrible person in her previous life and that therefore everything she was experiencing was her just reward.

On top of the low regard for women, Deeti was born under the influence of Saturn. Speaking of Indian astrology, Jyotisha Krishnamurti says that “the fundamental basis of astrology is Karma and Re-incarnation” (in Stone 1981:95). So the sign one is born under and its results are linked to *karma*. It is not coincidence or happenstance one must deal with, but the direct result of past actions. Deeti’s birth planet Saturn was believed to be a calamitous influence (cf. Shastri 1996:360-361). It is also believed to have very specific negative effects such as “union with older partners or sickly or ugly partners” (Defouw and Svoboda 2003:96). This certainly came true in Deeti’s marriage to the crippled, drug-addicted Hukam Singh. Saturn is also believed to potentially negatively affect one’s personality. This is not a guaranteed effect, but one that can be avoided. “To say that Saturn is harsh, hard-hearted and cruel does not mean that everyone who is ruled by Saturn is unrelievedly harsh, hard-hearted and cruel, for when Saturn is ‘properly prepared’ (i.e. strong and well placed) the native [the person born under the sign] is often wise, patient, and insightful” (97). A final piece of Saturn’s influence is its well-known slow orbit. This associates Saturn and those born under its influence with very long journeys (77), something Deeti will soon set out on. All of these

factors work together to form a person that believes in fate, bad karma from the past, and the near impossibility of fleeing from either. A vision would certainly be a welcome change for such an individual.

The final piece of evidence showing that Deeti was not only an abused but also an isolated person comes from the description of her eyes. They are grey, something that is very rare on the South Asian sub-continent.

Yet, despite the careworn commonplaceness of her appearance, there was one respect in which she stood out from the ordinary: she had light grey eyes, a feature that was unusual in that part of the country. Such was the colour – or perhaps colourlessness – of her eyes that they made her seem at once blind and all-seeing. This had the effect of unnerving the young, and of reinforcing their prejudices and superstitions to point where they would sometimes shout taunts at her – *chudaliya, dainiya* – as if she were a witch (Ghosh 2008:5).

The belief that the shape of the eye (or the appearance of any body part) could be read as an index of the person's character or personality was and is common among Indians. This practice is so well established in India that there is an entire traditional field of study dedicated to it:

These practices of reading bodily markers and affixing meaning to them were grouped together in a broad set of a popular genre referred to as *samudrik* or *samudrikvidya* (knowledge of material signs). They shared two broad philosophical assumptions with phrenology and race. First, physical marks were both signifiers of difference and a means of understanding it. Secondly, these physical signs of distinction were believed to be predictive in nature (Kapila 2007:503).

On top of becoming a formal area of expertise, like alchemy in the Middle Ages, Jan Gonda points out that the indexical nature of the body was also expressed as far back as the *Purāṇas* (cf. 1969:7). These ancient texts “embody the tradition (*smṛti*)” (Johnson 2009:247), which places them alongside but also in contrast to the *śruti* (‘heard’) texts of the Vedas, which is believed to be direct revelation (cf. 309). This status does not give the *Purāṇas* the same authority as the Vedas itself, but quite close none the less. But Deeti's eyes are not just part of the normal system of understanding, where she would be seen as lazy or thrifty due to their shape. She has something rare and therefore strange. What is strange is often called dangerous. In Deeti's case she is called a witch.

A witch in the Indian context is just as bad as the old European concept of an evil, wart-encrusted hag lurking in the shadows to devour unsuspecting children. They are something terrible. Among villagers in Rajasthan, a witch is the most feared of “the supernatural agencies which could bring misfortune, sickness or death upon a family” (Carstairs 1983:15). This belief in witches combines with the power of sight in Hindu thought to combine into a potent fear of these women considered witches. Even though all

people have the power to affect others with their gaze, the gaze of a witch is considered even more potent and dangerous. Carstairs calls this phenomenon the “evil eye, the product of jealousy” and points out that mothers will often be “anxious in case their child will fall sick because a childless woman, or someone with a grudge against its family, has looked at it with evil intent” (56). Someone like Deeti who would repeatedly be made aware of how powerful her grey-eyed witch-gaze could be would not need too much convincing that a strange vision really is true, because after all, did her eyes and her gaze not make others tremble in fear?

3.3 Transformation

After a while, Deeti’s husband falls sick and despite her best efforts, dies soon thereafter. She is now a widow and that means her status in Indian society has plummeted. Her only duty in life was to serve her husband in his religious duties.

If a woman’s salvation lay in the service of her husband, it followed that she lost her *raison d’être* the moment her husband died. Widowhood therefore, came to be seen as the worst calamity that could ever befall a woman; it became the ultimate degradation because it practically invalidated her continued existence. If a woman who became widowed continued to exist, it was a miserable existence at best, with social, economic and religious injunctions against her (Narasimhan 1990:36).

Widowhood, like so many other things in the Indian and Hindu worlds, was blamed on *karma*, meaning that a man dying early was the woman’s fault: “[T]he widow has been considered the ‘most sinful of all sinful creatures,’ her widowhood thought to be a result of accumulated karma, and her life made miserable by both natal family and affines” (Wadley 1995:93). This miserable situation left a widow with very few options. Marrying someone else that could then protect and support you is a common option in Western circles, but the Indian world was not always open to the idea. While a widower was always allowed to remarry, and depending on the period, even *encouraged* to remarry, since “a widower could not discharge his religious duties except by marrying a second time”, widow remarriages “were completely frowned out of existence by about 600 A.D.” (Altekar 1959:110). A famous prohibition of remarriage comes from the story about the Vedic sage Dīrghatamas, who was frustrated with the actions of his wife and instituted the rule of *maryādā*. This means that “henceforth a woman shall always have to adhere to one husband whether he be alive or dead, and that a woman who goes to another man shall go to hell” (in Datta 1979:92). Remarriage was also strongly discouraged by authorities such as Manu, whose *Manusmṛiti* has several passages that oppose the remarriage of widows (cf. Olivelle 2005:146, 147, 179, 193). This opposition was no small matter as his treatise, “received a reverence which was second only to that which was accorded to the Vedas. It has always been a work of universal authority. It

also became the chief authority in Hindu jurisprudence (Sharma 1980: i). The same sentiment is echoed by other writers (cf. Olivelle 2005:3 and Banerji 1998:104). This prohibition on remarriage serves a double purpose in the story. It creates a double conflict with her in-laws, both immediately after her death and once Deeti does actually remarry later in the story.

The prohibition on remarriage left widows with very few options. Remarriage would solve the problem of her lack of property rights, but since that is not allowed, all other options range from bad to worse:

Widows are left only three modes of conduct to pursue after the death of their husbands. First, to live a miserable life as entire slaves to others, without indulging any hope of support from another husband. Secondly, to walk in the paths of unrighteousness for their maintenance and independence; thirdly, to die on the funeral pile of their husbands, loaded with applause and honour of their neighbours (Narasimhan 1990:38).

It is this third option, *sati*, or widow burning, that is of interest, as it is the one Deeti begins to consider. The circumstances of growing up under Saturn, being considered a witch, raped by one's in-laws and now a widow with no male heir, would make anyone want to escape from such a hell. Unsurprisingly, her in-laws are less than supportive of her idea. Her brother-in-law, her husband's *younger* brother, finds a way to add insult to injury: "Do you think it's easy for a worthless woman like you to die as a sati? Have you forgotten that your body ceased to be pure on the day of your wedding?" (Ghosh 2008:165). Rather than allowing her the release, he taunts her with the past rape, one of the greatest humiliations and traumas a woman can experience. But here the changes begin to occur in Deeti. She stands up to her in-laws: "All the more reason then [...] to burn it in the fire. And it will be easier than to live as you say" (ibid.). The brother-in-law again shows the cold, calculating side of his family:

Big-big words...But don't depend on me to stop you, if you try to make yourself a sati. Why should I? To have a sati in the family will make us famous. We'll build a temple for you and grow rich on the offerings. But women like you are all words: when the time comes, you'll escape to your family" (165-166).

He is willing to grow rich on the pain and isolation that would drive a woman to ritual suicide by self-immolation. If Deeti had any justification for leaving her in-laws before, she now has more than she would ever need. This decision is also doubly brave, or stupid depending on one's view, as the practice of *sati* had been outlawed in British India in 1829 (Kumar 1993:10), and the book takes place in 1838 (Ghosh 2008:10), more than enough time for this law to be known even in Deeti's remote area, especially since her uncle-in-law, her husband and her brother are or had been members of the East India Company's army.

Undeterred by the social and legal obstacles, Deeti begins to make plans for her end, even sending her daughter to live with her brother and sister-in-law. With this act her "last

connection with life had been severed. From that moment she knew no further hesitation: with her habitual care, she set about making plans for her own end” (167). These preparations, especially the difficult step of sending her daughter away, would have been part of the price Deeti has to pay for access to the knowledge hinted at in the vision. But her calm has other sources. *Sati* was (and sadly still is) a controversial practice in India. In her anthology on *sati*, Andrea Major gives excerpts of several texts that either praise the practice or try to scare women with the dangers of not committing *sati*. One can hardly forget the belief that birth as a woman is punishment for past sins. One ancient *sati* proponent ties in with this idea: “And as long as a woman does not burn herself in fire on the death of her husband, she is never free from being born as a woman” (2007:5). Others promise great blessings: “[T]hat woman who follows her husband in death purifies three families—that of her mother, of her father and of her husband” (6). It was probably a combination of the threat of a repeated ordeal as a woman with the hope of blessing her relatives that made the option of *sati* so attractive for oppressed women like Deeti. This type of payment for past sins could also be seen as a change to a new subjectivity that could have access to higher knowledge.

The evening of Hukam Singh’s cremation and Deeti’s *sati* arrives. Deeti is drugged with opium and can barely walk (cf. Ghosh 2008:185). This too was a common practice with *sati*. Either out of fear they would renege on their pledge to become *sati* (cf. Courtright 1995:185) or to dull the pain (cf. Ghosh 2008:167), potential *satis* were given opium. Still drowsy and being partly dragged by her relatives, Deeti mounts the pyre like she is supposed to, but things do not go as planned (cf. 185-186). Another character, the low-caste cart-driver Kalua, comes to save her. He has his own reasons for doing this, one being that he is in love with Deeti. “It was myself I saved today...Because if you had died, I couldn’t have lived” (188). Here is one person caught in Deeti’s influence.

Deeti’s awakening on the raft in the Ganga partly mirrors her visionary scene at the beginning of the novel. She is immersed in the holy waters and about to experience a major shift. The *sati* ‘death’ is to become her access to this new knowledge. It opens new possibilities for change in Deeti’s world. But before she can experience the changes promised by spiritual knowledge, she will have to deal with a break with her expectations. She initially believes that she is in the netherworld “in the custody of Charak, the boatman of the dead” and thinks that “[n]one of this was surprising” (186). This initial belief that she has arrived in the netherworld shows that Deeti went to the pyre in the determination to die and pay her debt of *karma*. She initially did not expect to somehow survive her ordeal. The vision did help her overcome her old station, but the release she must have expected did not involve a new

constellation of her circumstances, but a new *life* in the broadest terms. She originally expected to have a new existence in a different plane of existing awaiting rebirth back into the mortal world. Instead she received a reshuffling of her current (and still present) iteration on the wheel of rebirth. This also explains why she would consider the *Ibis* a puja-worthy living being and not just a ship. She could have read the ship and the vision as a metaphor of god or gods or some other higher things calling them to their realm. This metaphorical reading would be much like the abstract cylindrical *linga* stones that are worshipped as “natural forms of Śiva” (Eck 2007:35). However, that initial understanding of the vision is about to be shattered by the realization of where and with whom she is.

Deeti learns that she has not died (in that her soul had left its previous body), but that she is on the Ganga with Kalua, and therefore still in the middle of her current birth.

At length, when the journey showed no signs of ending, she plucked up the courage to ask how long the river was and how far the destination. There was no answer, so she called out the name of the boatman of the dead. Then, through the whisper of a deep, hoarse voice it was made known to her that she was alive, in the company of Kalua, on the Ganga – and there was no destination or aim to their journey except to escape (Ghosh 2008:187).

For most Indians this news would be devastating. Instead of being in the netherworld, with your past sins being paid for by committing *sati*, awaiting your next rebirth, she was fleeing for her life with an untouchable cart-driver. Here Deeti proves her ingenuity in creating meaning and shows that both the vision and the *sati* ‘death’ helped change her in a way that enabled her new constellation of knowledge.

Even then she did not feel herself to be living in the same sense as before: a curious feeling, of joy mixed with resignation, crept into her heart, for it was as if she really had died and been delivered betimes in rebirth, to her next life: she had shed the body of the old Deeti, with the burden of its karma; she had paid the price her stars had demanded of her, and was free now to create a new destiny as she willed, with whom she chose (ibid.).

She becomes a new person. Rather than submitting to despair, she creates a new subjectivity for herself. The vision and the *sati*-death were part of the spiritual knowledge that had wrought this change in her. Deeti claims the blessing of expunged *karma* promised by the proponents of *sati* and cuts her ties with her old belief in fate and stars. She claims something that few women, even in modern India, would dare claim for themselves: autonomy. This is a huge change in the make-up of her subjectivity, as the *Manusmṛti* is famously against independent women:

Even in their own homes, a female whether she is a child, a young woman, or an old lady should never carry out any task independently. As a child, she must remain under her father’s control; as a young woman, under her husband’s; and when her husband is dead, under her sons’. She must never seek to live independently (Olivelle 2005:146).

The attempt to break free from the influence of men was and is an extremely difficult undertaking for Indian women. While the novel later shows Deeti's change to be more complicated, the fact that Deeti arrives at this point at all is remarkable on its own. Here the conflict that Deeti will have to negotiate for the rest of the novel is revealed. She will continually need to decide whether she continues with her inherited discourse or breaks with it. In this situation she chooses a complete break. This shift was only possible because she believed that she had some greater destiny, as revealed by the vision, and that her previous debts and duties had been paid for by her sacrifice.

The first action she decides on is to pick a new partner. One could scoff at Deeti saying she wants a self-determined life in one breath and in the next saying she wants to marry another man, but one must remember that in India then as now, a woman without a husband is very vulnerable socially and economically. Her wanting to marry Kalua is still a bold choice as remarriage was quasi forbidden to Indian widows. On top of this, Kalua was of the low "chamar" caste (Ghosh 2008:55). Deeti was a high-caste woman, belonging to the "rajputs" (4). The normal difference between high and low caste would have been enough to make the marriage unthinkable. Marriage between a woman of a higher caste and a man of a lower caste was called "patriloma (against the hair)" because it was considered to be "out of line with the natural order" (Johnson 2009:243). But the issue is not just a difference in caste, but that Kalua's caste is among the lowest there are. Even today, the *chamars* are mentioned in the Indian Constitution's list of "scheduled castes" (cf. President of India 1950). These are what used to be called the "depressed classes" (cf. Office of the Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1968:27), which was the old official term for the group of people commonly known as "untouchables" (Dushkin 1967:627). Being an untouchable is much more than being at the bottom of society. "[U]ntouchability is the stigma attached to certain people because of the pollution they convey. It is a stigma by caste; from birth, not from deeds performed; it lasts throughout life and cannot be ritually eliminated" (ibid.). The stigma carried by the *chamars* in particular is devastating:

[T]he very touch of a Chamar renders it necessary for a good Hindu to bathe with all his clothes on. The Chamar's very name connects him with the carcasses of cattle. Besides, he not only removes the skins from the cattle that have died, but also he eats the flesh. The defilement and degradation resulting from these acts are insurmountable (Briggs 1920:20).

As is well known, the cow is sacred in Hinduism. A caste that is associated with skinning and eating the flesh of these holy animals, even if they do not actually practice what they are accused of, will form the very bottom of a Hindu social order. A member of this caste is the

husband Deeti is choosing for herself. Even for a self-determined woman that might be physically attracted to the man, this choice is inconceivable for a high-caste Hindu woman. The fact that Deeti considers it, not to mention goes through with it, shows just how deep the discursive changes in her are.

Deeti and Kalua marry in a very simple ceremony in which the two of them are alone on the banks of the Ganga and exchange garlands. Despite seeming unorthodox, Indian society allows for such a union without a priest. Manu's explanation on this type of marriage is as follows: "When the girl and the groom have sex with each other voluntarily, that is the 'Gāndharva' marriage based on sexual union and originating from love" (Olivelle 2005:109). While the issue of *re*-marriage is still unresolved, the possibility of marrying away from priests and parents and only motivated by love is an acceptable type of marriage. "[Gandharva-marriage] was universally recognized as it was based on mutual consent of lovers" (Sharma 1980:90). Deeti is beginning to break with her past discourse, but the break is not complete. Even she does not dare to run away with a man without marrying him first.

3.4 Ibis

Through different events, the two end up on a ship transporting coolies, or indentured servants, to Calcutta. The Indian term the novel often uses instead of coolies is "girmitiyas" (Ghosh 2008:74). On the ship, Deeti is placed in the women's section and of course everyone wants to know who this new arrival is and why she would join a coolie transport. This exchange also shows how identity is understood among these poor, outcast Indian women: "Who are you? Heeru demanded...If you don't identify yourself, how will we know who you are?" (245). To know a person simply by hearing how they identify themselves seems to stem from all of the concepts seen earlier. If fate, family, caste and even religion are what define a person, these things all being something the person does not and cannot choose, then of course the discursive self-perception that the person takes on over the years will be the only identity he or she accepts. Even Kalua, despite also being mistreated and abused by most people around him, seems to accept his position. His position is his identity. His identity is who he is. There is no room for a separate longed-for dream and self-image. It is this belief in the correlation of identity and station that allows Deeti to subvert the system. Because everyone assumes that the given station is engrained into an individual's very being, it being the result of *past* being, Deeti is able to spin a whole new past and identity and every woman in the ship accepts it as the truth. None even question that someone who chose to run away from their past, like all of them did, would or even could invent a new identity.

The situation does come to a head when one of the women asks about Deeti's caste. Here Deeti needs to make a choice. But before she can choose, the ingrained nature of her caste identity almost trips her up:

I am...Once again, just as she was about to provide an accustomed answer, Deeti's tongue tripped on the word that came first to her lips: the name of her caste was as intimate a part of herself as the memory of her daughter's face – but now it seemed as if that too were a part of a past life, when she had been someone else. She began again, hesitantly: We, my jora and I...Confronted with the prospect of cutting herself loose from her moorings in the world, Deeti's breath ran out. She stopped to suck in a deep draught of air before starting again... (246).

Despite her previous exuberance over leaving her past life behind her, here the implications of what she is doing really sink in. Changing her caste-status would cut away the connections that previously had given her a secure, albeit difficult, place in the world. She manages to get out her identity: "We, my husband and I, we are Chamars" (ibid.). To be able to make this statement, to even have it come across her lips, shows how radical the shift in Deeti's knowledge formation truly is. To even conceive of changing caste status, something assigned by *karma*, assumes the speaker feels, to some extent, outside the purview of *karma* itself. On top of this, the new identity she gives herself is not of a higher caste, or at least of some caste equal to her own, but of a *chamar*, the untouchable caste Kalua belongs to and which has one of the lowest statuses in Indian society. This statement, "we are Chamars", is indexical of the deep impact both the vision and the *sati*-death had on Deeti.

On the way to Calcutta, Deeti begins to take on the role of leader of the women. The title the other women give her is "bhauji", which can be translated as "elder brother's wife" (Srivastava 1991:308). Since brothers are an important source of authority for Indian women, the *older* brother would have even more authority. Deeti's beloved brother Kesri is in fact also her older brother (Ghosh 2008:9). This is what gave his recommendation of Hukam Singh as Deeti's future husband so much weight. The wife of an older brother will also be held in appropriately high esteem. Towards a young woman, Munia, Deeti understands the new status to mean that she was now "the girl's surrogate bhauji, the sister-in-law that everyone dreamed of, friend, protector and confidante" (256). The role as senior woman, if not by virtue of age or experience, then by force of will, soon takes on ironic, almost comical proportions. Deeti so whole-heartedly slips into the role that when the women are to disembark in Calcutta and a sailor, the main character Jodu, is showing off and flirting with Munia, Deeti decides that "This had gone far enough now [...] as the senior married woman of the group, it was her duty to enforce the proprieties" (291) and even reprimands Munia for flirting back by rebuking her: "Why do you act like this? Don't you have any shame? Cover

up at once!” (ibid.). Or even “Don’t carry on like this...what will people think?” (292). Deeti, the widow that got remarried to an untouchable and is now running away from her family, believes it is her duty to “enforce the proprieties”. She even wonders “[h]ow long the girl would [allow] herself this liberty” of openly enjoying an interaction with a man she finds attractive (291). Without any irony, she is also able to ask another woman whether she is ashamed of her actions towards a man. Here Deeti swings back towards the status-quo. She has already taken bold steps in the direction of breaking with the discourses of the past, but she still needs to work through the issue of what exactly to do with the rules and norms of the past.

Deeti is forced to consider the past once they are finally on the *Ibis* and headed towards their destination, Mauritius. This destination has one major drawback. It is located in *Kala-Pani*, or the Black Water. This is a crisis of place and identity that all of the *girmitiyas* (the indentured laborers) need to deal with and one that affects Deeti deeply. The *Ibis* becomes a heterotopia of deviation for the men and women that have been forced into exile by societal pressures. When Deeti had first encountered a group of *girmitiyas* in Ghazipur, “a few urchins and old women threw pebbles into the crowd, as if to ward off an unsavoury influence” (74). Even the destination of the group was “disturbing” (ibid.). Being a *girmitiya* is clearly something different from the normal crisis heterotopias, as “urchins and old women”, people who themselves are in a crisis state, feel compelled to ward off the influence of these deviant people. Deeti flees onto the ship as a way of seeking her heterotopia of deviation, so that she might find a place for her own disruptive energies. Foreshadowing Deeti’s own journey, the novel calls the *girmitiyas* “the living dead” and describes their being taken away as vanishing “into the netherworld” (75). Deeti already underwent a death and re-birth on the banks of the Ganga and must now deal with the effects of the netherworld.

Being in a space dedicated to dealing with such an influence proves to be difficult, as the guards on board, the so-called *maistries*, take their duty of keeping these deviant forces in check very seriously. However, Deeti proves capable of standing up to the guards that are on the ship to keep the *girmitiyas* in line. Her pregnancy, from the intercourse with Kalua on their wedding-night, also begins to show.

Was it because of the glow of Deeti’s pregnancy? Or was it because of her success in dealing with the *maistries*? Either way, it happened that more and more people took to calling her Bhauji: it was as if she had been appointed the matron of the *dabusa* [the hold of the ship] by common consent. Deeti gave the matter no thought: there was nothing to be done, after all, if everybody wanted to treat her as if she were their older brother’s wife (447).

What this means in practice is that she becomes the ‘village’ wise-woman that is in charge of settling disputes and most importantly deciding on marriages. When Heeru comes to her to ask about the possibility of marrying a *girmitiya* of a completely different region and caste, Deeti must decide what to do. This throws her into a crisis that will be looked at shortly. Her advice is that Heeru should decide for herself, due to Deeti still being unable to resolve her internal conflict between old and new. Heeru decides to go through with the marriage and thus Deeti is called on: “As everybody’s Bhauji, it fell, as if by right, to Deeti to think of all the organizing and bandobast that lay ahead” (465). These preparations further add to the crisis Deeti already experienced as a result of Heeru’s inquiry and being cast into the netherworld that is the Black Water.

When the *girmitias* come on deck for dinner on the day the *Ibis* reaches the edge of the Black Water, everyone is shaken to their core by the sight of the ocean. “When it was her turn to emerge from the hatch, Deeti too was seized by the malady: for there it was, dead ahead of the schooner’s bows, the Black Water” (411). The word “malady” implies that this was something deeper than the awe of being on the ocean for the first time. The Black Water breaks all normal concepts:

[T]he water was as dark and still as the cloak of shadows that covers the opening of an abyss. Like the others around her, Deeti stared in stupefaction: it was impossible to think of this as water at all – for water surely needed a boundary, a rim, a shore, to give it shape and hold it in place? This was a firmament, like the night sky, holding the vessel aloft as if it were a planet or a star (412).

A way to understand why the seeming lack of borders is so terrifying is found in Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject. “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (1982:4). What makes the abject and abject things so horrible is that they challenge the common understanding of the way the world works. When borders are destroyed, the clear identity of things is lost. To return to Foucault’s system, when the referential and the associated field are unclear or even undefined, the ability to create meaning is no longer there. The whole system breaks down. The Hindu concept of the Black Water goes deeper than that.

Crossing the Black Water was considered a horrible sin. To illustrate just how serious travelling across the Black Water was, a passage of Mahatma Gandhi’s autobiography about his first trip to England should suffice:

Meanwhile my caste-people were agitated over my going abroad. No Modh Bania had been to England up to now, and if I dared to do so, I ought to be brought to book! A general meeting of the caste was called and I was summoned to appear before it. I went. [...] The Sheth - the headman of the community -, who was distantly related to me and had been on very good

terms with my father, thus accosted me: ‘In the opinion of the caste, your proposal to go to England is not proper. Our religion forbids voyages abroad. We have also heard that it is not possible to live there without compromising our religion. One is obliged to eat and drink with Europeans!’ [...] So the Sheth pronounced his order: This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today (1940:37).

For going to England, Gandhi was excommunicated from his caste. Even someone who knew his family well preferred to cast him out rather than risking ritual pollution. Many Hindus, like this Sheth, were categorically against any crossing of the Black Water. The actual debate on the admissibility of sea voyages was far from conclusive⁵. There was “no clear-cut borderline but rather fluid transitions between supporters and opponents” and “[n]either the supporters nor the opponents formed a homogenous group” (Arp 2000:258).

The ban on Black Water voyages was effectively in place. The *Baudhāyana dharmasūtra*, one of the earliest works to mention the sanctions against sea voyages, considers these voyages to be *pataniya*-transgressions (cf. 12). The ancient Indian commentator Govindasvāmin explains that transgressions of this type cause falling from your caste (cf. 13), or being excluded from your community. With this in mind, it is understandable that each *girmitiya* would be struck by a “malady” upon seeing the Black Water for the first time. Going out there meant being cut off from one’s past, one’s family and one’s religion. Everything that gave identity and a place in the world is stripped once one crosses *Kala-Pani*. One becomes a “living dead” and is thrust into the “netherworld” (Ghosh 2008:75). The novel describes the implications of moving onto the Black Water: “[I]n the light of which their presence here, in the belly of a ship that was about to be cast into an abyss, seemed incomprehensible, a thing that could not be explained except as a lapse from sanity” (414). The use of the words “abyss”, “incomprehensible”, and “lapse from sanity” beautifully illustrate what it meant for Hindus to leave India by crossing the Black Water: abjection and total horror.

With the horrible thoughts of *Kala-Pani* already in her head, Deeti begins to suffer great mental anguish over her break with her past. Heeru’s marriage proposal only deepens the crisis: “For Heeru to set up house with a hillsman would be no different from what she, Deeti, had done herself. Surely all the old ties were immaterial now that the sea had washed away their past? If only it were so!” (448). Deeti firmly believed that her *sati*-death and the black-water had, together, washed away all ties to her previous birth, *karma* and duties of her

⁵ For details on the different ancient sources for and against the ban on sea voyages and the reasons given for each side, see Susmita Arp’s book *Kālāpāni: Zum Streit über die Zulässigkeit von Seereisen im kolonialzeitlichen Indien*. (Sanskrit with English translation and German discussion)

station. But she begins to feel that changing one's knowledge and identity so completely is not as simple as walking away from everything one has ever known.

If the Black Water could really drown the past, then why should she, Deeti, still be hearing voices in the recesses of her head, condemning her for running away with Kalua? Why should she know that no matter how hard she tried, she would never be able to silence the whispers that told her she would suffer for what she had done – not just today or tomorrow, but for kalpas and yugas, through lifetime after lifetime, into eternity. She could hear those murmurs right now, asking: Do you want Heeru to share the same fate? (ibid.).

The discourse on her place, on what constitutes a proper knowledge, is deeply set in her. Even though she *consciously* breaks from these things, *subconsciously* she has added them to the make-up of her identity. Therefore she cannot simply cut away these principles and concepts. Even if she were able to, that stripping would leave a great trauma. This small voice, this conscience, is something she cannot discard consciously. The Black Water might erase one's *place* among one's people, but the morality of one's people remains, whether the person desires this or not. Deeti begins to fear the punishment that the *rishis* and sages of old promised to those women that transgress their bounds. Out of fear that Heeru might also suffer the same fate, Deeti is hesitant to give her approval of the match.

The lack of connection to the past is not felt only by Deeti. The other *girmitiyas* also notice that the lack of traditional social structures affects their behavior. Deeti, as the *bhauji*, is amazed at how many fights she needs to arbitrate. Deeti also wonders whether there still is a morality left, since the authorities of morality had been removed.

Now that they were all cut off from home, there was nothing to prevent men and women from pairing off in secret, as beasts, demons and pishaches were said to do: there was no pressing reason for them to seek the sanction of anything other than their own desires. With no parents or elders to decide on these matters, who knew what was the right way to make a marriage? And wasn't it she herself who had said, at the start, that they were all kin now; that their rebirth in the ship's womb had made them into a single family? (449).

Nevertheless, everyone feels that something has changed on the ship. The old structures are gone and the old authorities that gave order are also gone. Even if that order and its agents were something the *girmitiyas* resented at the time and would be happy to eliminate from their lives, the old knowledge formation and sense of identity are gone too. The referential and discursive practice that determines how statements are made, how knowledge is organized and how it is disseminated, tasks that were previously performed by chiefs, fathers, priests, mothers, government officials, etc. need to be reorganized. Deeti has already experienced that morality runs deeper than the law and the agents of the law and thus dealing with the vestiges of it is much more complicated than rejecting the past. How Deeti and the *girmitiyas* manage

to get out this crisis that the Black Water has thrust them into will be looked at later in connection with how the novel comments on Deeti's behavior.

4. Nob Kissin

The other main character in *Sea of Poppies* that needs to deal with a difficult knowledge formation is the Krishna devotee Nob Kissin. In some ways he is more important than Deeti to the story of *Sea of Poppies*, as he acts as the catalyst for much of the novel's plot movement. He causes the fall of Neel. He organizes the *girmitiya* transport from Calcutta to Mauritius that takes Deeti and Kalua onto the Black Water. He gets Paulette onto the *Ibis*, and he enables the final conflict between Zachary and Mr. Crowle. In a way, he is actually the main character of the story, Deeti just being a well-detailed story told as part of the threads that Nob Kissin spins into existence. His own story is more straight-forward and easier to tell than Deeti's, but the discourse he moves in is much stranger to Western audiences than Deeti's.

4.1 Preparation

The first part of his narrative, chronologically, recounts a time in his youth when he was trained as the future priest of the family's temple. The temple itself is very important in aiding understanding of Nob Kissin's place within the religious discourses of India:

His family's temple was in the town of Nabadwip, a centre of piety and learning consecrated to the memory of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu – saint, mystic and devotee of Sri Krishna. One of the gomusta's ancestors, eleven generations removed, was said to have been among the saint's earliest disciples: he had founded the temple, which had been tended ever since by his descendants (Ghosh 2008:168).

This temple is not just a generic Krishna-site, but one that is part of Chaitanya⁶ Mahaprabhu's Krishna worship. "The type of bhakti which is preached in the Bhagavata Purana is well illustrated in the life of Chaitanya, who was born in Navadvip, in Bengal, in 1486 and died in 1534" (Dasgupta 1976:132). Because Chaitanya came from and started his movement in the southern Bengali region of *Gauḍa*, it is often described with the adjectives "Gauḍīya" or Bengal (Johnson 2009:126). Nob Kissin's family lives and has their temple in the birthplace of the founder of their religion. This would not have been just any temple, but one of central importance to the followers of Chaitanya *bhakti*. In addition, the family claims that the lineage of the temple priest goes back to the original disciples of Chaitanya, further adding prestige.

⁶ Similar to the different spellings of Krishna/Kṛṣṇa, different authors spell Chaitanya's name differently. Some will transcribe his name with a *ch* while others will use only a *c*, giving Caitanya.

To understand the world Nob Kissin lives in, a few terms need to be sorted out. The central terms of Nob Kissin’s religion are *bhakti* and *Vaishnavism*. From these two, all other concepts of the Chaitanya school of Krishna worship derive their particular meanings. W.J. Johnson defines *Vaishnavism* as follows: “A collective term for those traditions...which consider Viṣṇu (or one of the avatāras associated with him, principally Kṛṣṇa and Rāma) to be the Supreme deity or absolute (i.e. God)” (338). Krishna is considered an avatar of the more ancient god Viṣṇu, but the later *Vaishnavas* (practitioners of *Vaishnavism*) raised his status significantly. They serve their god through a practice called *bhakti* or “‘participation’, ‘worship’, ‘devotion’...A generic (i.e. non-sectarian) term for a complex of religious attitudes and practices predicated on total devotion to a supreme deity with whom the devotee (bhakta) has a personal relationship” (51). This was usually practiced by developing “an elaborate set of myths about the gods Viṣṇu, Śiva, Devi and their godly associates and demon enemies” but also by developing an “elaborate iconography of the many anthropomorphic forms and incarnations of these gods and demons” and, finally, “worshipping these gods and their incarnations through pūjā at temples and shrines” (Clooney and Stewart 2004:186). *Vaishnavas* give their supreme deity a special title: *Bhagavān*, “the name applied...to God, as the supreme, actively and intimately involved in his creation and with his devotees” (Johnson 2009:48). This belief and this title will be relevant later, as it is the same word that appears in the titles of the epics detailing Krishna’s exploits: the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. As was mentioned above, Chaitanya’s doctrines derive from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which “is unambiguously a Vaishnavite text (that is to say, it views Vishnu as the supreme deity)” (Bryant 2007:112). The personal nature of *bhakti* combined with worshiping the supreme being of the universe are what define both the religiosity and knowledge formation of Nob Kissin.

Since Nob Kissin’s world involves so many new terms and concepts, it seems appropriate to mention something about the use of Sanskrit and Hindi terms. Like with the discussion of Deeti and medical materialism, there are some dangers in not seeing the complex world behind the terms that have come up and that will come up in the discussion of Nob Kissin. To understand a different knowledge discourse is not just a matter of translating a few terms and looking at them through one’s own culture. The terms used all rely on a tight and complex associated field of statements and concepts. A term as simple as *Gopī*, a milkmaid, is much more than that translation would lead one to assume. It has a complex relationship with scripture, tradition, religious practice and theology. For this reason one must always be very careful in assuming the direct translation of a term like *dharma* is enough to

understand the world it belongs to. To illustrate this point, the Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass quotes a definition of *dharma* given by Jan Gonda. It is quite long and very detailed, but in part, that is the point Halbfass is trying to illustrate:

Originally referring to the principle of universal stability, the power which sustains, upholds, and maintains, the firmly established order, this term [...] in general means the lawfulness and regularity, the harmony, the fundamental equilibrium, the norm which reigns in the cosmos, nature, society, and individual existence. *Dharma* is the basis for the norms of individual conduct, it sustains the structure of the community and regulates the continuity in all the manifestations of reality. The person who follows the Dharma realizes the ideal of his own character and manifests the eternal lawfulness in himself. As long as a phenomenon is normal, as long as a person (or animal) adheres to his normal behavior, his individual destiny and task, and possesses undiminished the individuality and appropriate properties which come to him through the power of his nature, as long as his doing and his omissions are in agreement with the normal, traditional, and personally approved actions, goals, and livelihood of his position, his gender, his family, his age-group, so long does he adhere to the Dharma. Here, stability and regularity in the cosmos and nature on the one hand and order and correct behavior of a moral, social and legal type on the other do not fundamentally differ. The events in nature and in the world of humans must occur in accordance with their Dharma (in 1988:312, translated by Halbfass).

Reducing *dharma* to the simple translation ‘duty’ does not do it the justice it deserves. *Dharma* is a fundamental principle which is used to understand both human and animal behavior. It is a way of understanding changes in the behavior of individual humans but also the different behaviors of different groups. All of this is a common hermeneutic problem in which the understanding of something different is made more difficult by the different networks of meaning the Other has set up. Halbfass summarizes the difficulty of words like *dharma* as follows:

We cannot reduce the meanings of dharma to one general principle; nor is there one single translation which would cover all its usages. Nevertheless, there is coherence in this variety; it reflects the elusive, yet undeniable coherence of Hinduism itself, its peculiar unity-in-diversity. There is no one system of understanding dharma, but a complex network of interactions and tensions between different usages (333).

As with all of the concepts seen so far in Deeti’s and Nob Kissin’s stories, one must give the benefit of the doubt to what seems strange at the first or even tenth glance. While it is impossible to completely *show* the complexity, this paper strives to give the terms the complex treatment they deserve.

Nob Kissin’s belief in Krishna as the *Bhagavān* and the practice of *bhakti* manifests itself in an extensive and complex system of emotional devotion, complete with stages and methods of cultivating each stage of the relationship:

The fullest realisation of the Lord can be had only through the experience of His *mādhurya* or sweet and loving aspect. This aspect of the Lord can be experienced through the cultivation of *preman* or loving devotion to the Lord. It is through this loving devotion that the devotee can reach the core of the Lord's heart and can maintain an intimate, personal and emotional relation with him (Sinhā 2001:37).

This quest of achieving a close, emotional relationship with the divine will be defining for Nob Kissin's knowledge formation. This belief also brings with it a different view of the standards of behavior. Since one's devotion is going to the supreme lord of creation, human standards are secondary at best. The standards for human behavior are only set by the Bhagavān.

To the Vaiṣṇavas, the immediacy of God, felt in bhakti and not the standards set by men, should be the measure of acceptable behavior. If the bhakta, then, is gentle and humble and forbearing, it is because these are religious virtues that also happen to be social ones (Dimock 1966:114).

Both the quest for a close relationship with god and the near complete disregard for the normal standards of men will manifest themselves in a manner similar to the changes that occurred in Deeti's life. He too leaves his past behind, but the exact nature of that break is still quite different from Deeti's changes.

Nob Kissin had been prepared his entire life to be the next temple priest. Not only was Nob Kissin's family of a special status, he himself was the next in line "to succeed his uncle as the temple's custodian" and because of this he had been prepared since childhood, receiving "a thorough education in Sanskrit and logic, as well as in the performance of rites and rituals" (Ghosh 2008:168). Here appears another trait that will define his life: he was highly educated in everything Hindu and Indian society could offer at the time, ranging from languages to theology to ritualism to philosophy. His family's tradition was based on spiritual rather than scientific knowledge, despite the training in logic and language: "[H]e was still a brahmachari – a virginal celibate – as befitted a student who was undergoing the rigours of an old-fashioned education" (169). In this family, education is not just of the mind, but also of the body. The student needs to learn control and pay a certain price, that of giving up indiscriminate indulgence of desires, in order to be ready to properly receive the knowledge being given. This practice must also have taught Nob Kissin great patience, since later he is able to wait for a sign for many years. The foundations of his coming knowledge are being laid in these years since he learned to pay the price of a changed subjectivity early on.

4.2 The Break

After his uncle's death, Nob Kissin is given a last task before beginning his duties as caretaker of the temple. His uncle had married the young woman Taramony, in a final attempt to beget an heir. This young woman was now a widow and is to be taken to Vrindavan, Krishna's homeland, to live out her widowhood in a convent. Nob Kissin is given the task of leading the expedition and caring for the widow during the journey. The novel does not reveal whether the uncle knew what would happen or not, but this task ensured that a different temple caretaker would have to be found. On the journey Nob Kissin makes a startling realization:

That his aunt was a woman of uncommon charm and comeliness, Nob Kissin had always known – but he discovered now, to his astonishment, that she was also a person of extraordinary spiritual accomplishment, a devotee of a kind that he had never encountered before: one who spoke of the Lotus-Eyed Lord as if she had personally experienced the grace of his presence (169).

In her he sees the kind of guru he had been looking for all his life. She not only talked of god and scripture, but she was someone who had had some deep spiritual knowledge that profoundly affected her. For a Christian it would be the difference between talking of Jesus Christ with a devout layperson and someone like Paul of Tarsus. Both can speak of Jesus, but the profound experiences of Paul would have a great effect on his teachings and most likely on the listener. Even though the relationship between the two, future priest and widow, deepens, it never crosses into forbidden territory: “Never once did Taramony permit him to touch her in an unchaste way” (ibid.). The relationship is intense on an emotional and spiritual level, and as a testament to Nob Kissin's training and Taramony's character, never on a physical level.

Nob Kissin begins to want her to be his guru, because of the relationship with Krishna she has and that he also wants in his life. “Then he understood that his feeling for his aunt was but a profane version of what she herself felt for the divine lover of her visions; he understood also that only her tutelage could cure him of his bondage to his earthly desires” (170). This desire for and need of a guru is expressed in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 5.5.18: “He who would not, or is incompetent to liberate a person (whether he/she be a pupil, relative, an offspring or a wife or a devotee) from involvement in *samsāra*, is not a real preceptor [...] or a real relative” (Ganesh 1976₂:657). *Samsāra* is the “cycle of suffering and rebirth” (Johnson 2009:286). Thus a true teacher or parent will pave the way for one's liberation from this cycle. Different theologians have interpreted this verse to allow a student to “disown such a teacher” that “would not or is incapable of leading his pupil to Liberation” (Ganesh 1976₂:657). This also allows a devotee to leave parents that do not lead him or her on the path

of liberation: “There is no sin in disowning such a father or mother” (658). Since only god can free the devotee from the cycle of rebirth, the guru must be someone that can lead the devotee to god. This is only possible if the guru has found his (or her) way there first.

Nob Kissin asks to become Taramony’s disciple, but she again shows her character and sets a few ground rules, which perhaps also serve as a type of test of faith that Nob Kissin must pass before he is deemed worthy to have access to the knowledge she can give. “She said incredulously: And you will live with me without touching me, without knowing my body, without knowing any other woman?” (Ghosh 2008:170). He does not hesitate, thereby proving that he wants this relationship for the right reasons. He also shows how the discursive practice of his religion affects his decision making: “Yes, he said. Isn’t that how you are with Krishna? Isn’t that how the Mahaprabhu was?” (ibid.). His argument is that this restraint is common in his religion and therefore desirable but most importantly possible. She raises the stakes and indirectly appeals to his celibate status and whether he would be willing to continue it forever: “And what of children?” He again uses other statements of his discourse as justification. “Did Radha have children? Did any of the Vaishnav saints?” (ibid.). Since everyone *knew* that Radha (Krishna’s favorite consort) and the founders and saints of his religion did not have children, and that Radha as a woman was not reproached for this, then why should someone else be reprimanded for the same behavior? The final question she poses to him goes to the heart of the issue: what of his duties, his dharma? “And your duties to your family? To the temple? What of all that?” (ibid.). His final statement, while surprising on the surface, coincides perfectly with his discourse: “I care nothing for such things, he said. You will be my temple and I will be your priest, your worshipper, your devotee” (ibid.). Similar to Deeti, Nob Kissin discards all those things that normally define a Hindu. He seemingly breaks with his normal discourse in order to follow a new guru rather than fulfilling the duties to his family and community.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism allows for and even encourages the kind of break with *dharma* Nob Kissin commits. In a strange and sad twist of fate, Deeti is born in a position where any break with the given role is considered a terrible sin, whereas, to keep the comparison parallel, Taramony is born into a group that encourages a break with duties under certain circumstances. Without understanding this seemingly odd situation it is impossible to properly understand and categorize Nob Kissin’s later behavior or the reactions to it. Though picking a guru should normally be a careful and even a long process, one *Gauḍīya* theologian makes an exception for a “sad (or sat) guru” (in Broo 2003:153). From this type of guru one should “immediately accept initiation [...] when he gives his consent, whether it is day or

night, one is in the forest or in a village. The desire of the sad-guru overrules everything” (ibid.). This means that while there are normal rules about the type and length of initiation, if one finds such a guru, those rules are superceded in favor of the spiritual progress that such a relationship promises. The particle “sat” itself means “true, good, or right” (Johnson 2009:292), resulting in the term ‘true’ or ‘good’ guru. Since Nob Kissin considers his aunt-in-law to be such a guru that can lead him to Krishna and thus to liberation from *samsāra*, this immediate decision to take her as his guru is allowed in the *Gauḍīya* framework.

For the *Gauḍīya* school, the more important text was the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Jīva Gosvāmī, an early *Gauḍīya* theologian, considered the only true *pramāṇa* to be *śabda*, by which he means the Vedas (cf. Chatterjee 1983:108). To understand the implication of this, the term *pramāṇa* must be understood.

[Pramāṇa is] ‘that by which true cognition is arrived at’ [...] it may be taken then to be a cause of, or a means for, achieving true cognition. It is a peculiar feature of the Indian epistemologies that this causal meaning of *pramāṇa* is also taken to imply a legitimizing sense so that a cognition is true in case it is brought about in the right sort of way, for example caused by a *pramāṇa* (Mohanty 1999:16).

These *pramāṇas* are part of the Indian knowledge formation. They are the concepts and practices that legitimize the knowledge a person or group attains. Different groups in India accept different *pramāṇas* and understand them differently, but the principle of epistemological justification is the same. While one group would value the word of the guru more than logical inference, both are methods by which the truthfulness of a statement can be judged.

The next term to unpack is *śabda*, “sound or utterance” (24). This usually includes “utterances of sentences by competent speakers” (ibid.). It can be understood as something like scripture, where a society trusts a statement because it is written in the Bible, the *word* of God, but it also includes things like trusting in the word of a guru, since gurus are believed to be “competent speaker[s]” whose words are true. The difference between *smṛti* (remembered) texts like the *Purāṇas*, and *śruti* (heard) texts like the Vedas also comes into play here.

Since the Vedas are thought to be directly ‘heard’ from the gods themselves, the most competent speakers there can be, it too falls under the purview of *śabda*. The other texts still have authority, since the tradition that preserved the *smṛti* is still highly respected, as seen with the authority afforded the *Manusmṛti*. But the authority of the *heard* texts is still higher than the *remembered* texts of later competent speakers. Here Jīva Gosvāmī applies a rhetorical trick to raise the status of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (meaning it usually belongs to the less authoritative *smṛti* texts). “[H]e argues that since the Vedas are difficult to understand and are

interpreted differently by different sages, the Itihāsa and the Purāṇas...alone should be considered as the true Vedas” (Chatterjee 1983:108). The *Itihāsa* is a group of texts including the *Mahabharata* (from which the story of Draupadi was taken and which also includes the *Bhagavadgītā*) and the *Rāmāyaṇa* (cf. Johnson 2009:151). With this switch in place, the *Gauḍīyas* are able to make one final change: they place the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* at the head of all other *Purāṇas* (cf. Chatterjee 1983:116). Similar to the medieval European conception about the Bible, they are then able to posit the text as the only true and trustworthy source for knowledge. This trust in the text has already manifested itself in Nob Kissin’s answers to Taramony’s questions and will manifest itself repeatedly in his spiritual quest.

There is a final area where the *Gauḍīyas* allow for changes that would be impossible in other areas of Hinduism. The normal concept of a person’s place and purpose in the world can be summarized as consisting of four elements, called *puruṣārthas*: “kāma, artha, dharma, and mokṣa”, which can be understood as “sensual pleasure”, “economic and political well-being”, “sociocultural norms and duties”, and “liberation from *saṃsāra*”, respectively (Holdrege 2004:237-238). For most Hindus, even today, these four ends are what shape decisions about career, marriage and family. But here the *Gauḍīya Vaishnava* movement sees the primacy of Krishna creating a different system. The movement “emphatically denies the traditional four ‘puruṣārthas’ (values of life) as the goal of human life [...] These are undermined and ignored to such an extent that, they are sometimes described as worthless as straw” (Chatterjee 1983:124). Instead, the relationship with Krishna is outside the law of man. This movement did not believe that their actions were bound by the conventions of men and that if actions coincided with human values, then it was coincidence that godly and human values happened to overlap. The ideal was only love for the *Bhagavān*: “The passion of love consumes all consideration of social and legal sanction” (Goswami and Goswamī 1949: xii). This approval of ‘deviant’ behavior (from the view of society) must not be overlooked in comparing Nob Kissin’s and Deeti’s discursive changes. The difference is set up nicely in the contrast between the Gopī, the Krishna’s consorts in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the ‘free woman’: “The woman who leaves the protection of society and family is impelled by passion of self-gratification. But the Gopī has no thought for her own pleasure. It is the happiness of her Beloved that acts as the sole incentive” (ibid.). The traditional (male) Hindu society sees a great difference in someone like Deeti who leaves her *dharma* ‘only’ out of “passion of self-gratification” and the Gopī that follows her god.

In the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, there is an episode between the Gopīs and Krishna called the *rāsa-līlā*. This episode shows what it means to be a true *bhakta* of Krishna.

The *rāsa-līlā* is an allegorical presentation of man's spiritual journey. Man can come to God only when God calls him. Kṛṣṇa draws the gopīs to Himself by the sweet strains of his flute. Whatever be the situation in which man finds himself at the moment when God calls him, he has to accept the call promptly. To postpone the response is as bad as refusing to answer. When the gopīs hear the sound of the divine flute some of them are milking their cows; others are boiling the milk; some are engaged in cooking; while a few are feeding their babies or serving their husbands, others are busy beautifying themselves. As soon as they hear the music of Kṛṣṇa they leave everything undone and go with haste to meet Him, their ear-rings swinging with their quick movements (Anand 1996:56).

The Gopīs are difficult and complex characters. Their trysts with the boy-god Krishna are much more plentiful and varied than the *rāsa-līlā*, but they certainly find their climax there. The call of Krishna, here symbolized as a flute, is seen as binding. Similar to the youth that asked to first bury his father before joining Jesus, the *bhakta* is reprimanded for lack of faith for not immediately leaving everything behind to follow god. It is not enough to leave everything behind *eventually*. One must leave it behind *as soon as* the master or the *Bhagavān* calls. The denial of the traditional *puruṣārthas* can be justified by considering the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to be the only true *pramāṇa*. Since the actions of the characters in the book are true, a *bhakta* of Krishna can use them as a perfect template for his or her actions. The women leave behind practically every *puruṣārtha* in order to follow the call. They stop their work of milking (*artha*), their housewifely duties as well as their care of their husbands and children (*dharma*), and stop making themselves physically attractive (*kāma*). The only *puruṣārtha* missing is *mokṣa*, and one can assume they forfeit that according to the traditional understanding by not fulfilling the other three. In other words, the call of Krishna is enough to justify leaving one's regular, assigned place. This is because the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* claims that “*bhakti* is not only the best means to fulfil the *puruṣārthas*, but is also the goal of all *puruṣārthas*, of all human endeavour” (83). Thus Nob Kissin is, within his own discourse and knowledge, perfectly justified in attaching himself to a *sat-guru* and leaving behind all duties he had been trained for since birth, all because he heeds the call of Krishna.

4.3 Calcutta

The way the actions of both Nob Kissin and Taramony fit into an existing discursive slot can be seen by the reaction, or rather lack thereof, that others have to them. Once they arrive in Calcutta, they begin living together as widowed aunt and nephew. Since the two are of a similar age, it would be conceivable for people to find those living arrangements uncouth, but “[n]o scandal ever attached to them, for Taramony's saintliness was so patently evident that she soon attracted a small circle of devotees and followers” (Ghosh 2008:171). The novel also never mentions any reaction by Nob Kissin's family, neither of approbation nor of

condemnation. They too seem to have internalized the teachings of their religion and allow their son to follow what he perceives as the call of Krishna. Taramony is not placed in the category of “fallen woman” that Deeti is forced into, but instead is placed in line with the Gopī discourse of breaking with expectations. Taramony even openly takes on the role of a guru. “On the more formal level, the guru is a representative of a specific religious tradition, has a publicly recognized status, and has a universal authority to teach” (Pechilis 2004:26). While having a female in such an important position is not common, there are plenty of precedents for it over the centuries, records of the first female *Gauḍīya* guru dating from the 16th century (cf. Manring 2004:53-54). This all contributes to the feeling that as strange as the behavior of these two might seem to an outsider, within the Indian world, their actions are not only acceptable, but laudable.

Even though the circle of disciples grows, Nob Kissin is not satisfied. Taramony uses the authority she has by virtue of being a guru and gives Nob Kissin, a man, the next-in-line as caretaker of a major temple, a task that runs contrary to his desire for loving union with Krishna.

Nob Kissin would have loved nothing better than to join this circle: to call her ‘Ma’, to be accepted as a disciple, to spend his days receiving spiritual instruction from her –this was all he wanted, but she would not allow it. You are different from the others, she told him, yours is a different mission; you must go into the world and make money – not just for our upkeep but as an endowment for the temple that you and I will build one day.

At her bidding, Nob Kissin went out into the city where his shrewdness and intelligence did not go long unnoticed (Ghosh 2008:171).

This turning from what he actually wants to do to worldly concerns is a test of faith for Nob Kissin. He must demonstrate patience and faith in his guru. It is something that he must overcome to prepare himself for the revelations and changes ahead. He is not told the purpose of this task. Yes, he is given the obvious motive of money, but one gets the impression that Taramony is too shrewd and wise to waste the spiritual talents of Nob Kissin on something as banal as earning money. It seems she has something in mind that lies beyond using his skills to gather funds for a temple. This period is a trial of patience and endurance for such a spiritually-minded man. During this time he also continues his ascetic life-style, most likely as further preparation for the relationship with Krishna he is hoping for. He is described as “abstinent in all things but food” but this gives him a particular advantage over others: he is able to observe the normal world “with the detached curiosity with which an astrologer might observe the movements of the stars” (172). By only partaking in the essentials of staying alive, Nob Kissin is able to remove himself from the problems of the world and better prepare himself for the hoped-for experiences. But for the longest time, they truly are only hoped-for:

“Yet, for all his success, there was one great sorrow in the gomusta’s life: the experience of divine love that he had hoped to achieve with Taramony had been denied him by the pressing exigencies of his career” (173). His work has taught him patience, but even he is becoming impatient.

He takes his concerns to Taramony and he shows another glimpse into his psyche. He has earned enough money to begin building the temple; he is just waiting on the command to start building it. He pleads with her: “When will you set me free from this worldly life? When will it be time to build our temple?” (173). For him, a worldly life is not enough. The world itself is not enough to provide meaning for his existence. Everything he has gone through has been either torture or a necessary evil. These things all mark him as a deeply spiritual person, for whom the knowledge provided by a materialist philosophy would not be enough. He is firmly entrenched in the world of spiritual knowledge and is willing to work, sacrifice and wait for the knowledges promised him by his faith. Yet despite his frustrations with the world and with having to wait, he accepts Taramony’s answer: “When the moment comes you will know”. It is said that he accepts, without question, that her promises “would be redeemed at a time of her choosing” (ibid.). It seems that Nob Kissin’s training in philosophy and his internalization of the doctrine and practices around gurus have also affected him. The *śabda* of his competent-speaker guru is taken as completely true. He trusts Taramony as a true source of knowledge, even if the ‘logical’ answer would be to walk away. This trust in her promises is soon put to the test when Taramony is dying.

Until now, Nob Kissin’s world and especially his knowledge formation were centered on his guru. But Taramony falls sick and Nob Kissin experiences his first real crisis of faith. In his religion, devotion is considered the most powerful thing a devotee can have. But this fails him.

When he saw that his devotion was powerless against her disease, he begged her: Take me with you; don’t abandon me to live alone in this world. Other than you there is nothing of value in my life; it is a void, an emptiness, an eternity of wasted time. What will I do on this earth without you? (ibid.)

The failure of a most cherished religious belief means that he will soon be deprived of the one person that gave meaning to his existence. Thus the crisis becomes that he will be left in the world without that source of meaning and without his hoped-for access to Krishna, the ultimate source of knowledge and meaning in his cosmos. He must now find an alternate way of functioning. Everything he has been taught up to this point is useless in the face of this crisis. Here the crux of Nob Kissin’s story appears. The reason he is strange both to non-

Indian and Indian readers can be attributed to the quest Taramony sends him on. “You must prepare yourself – for your body will be the vessel for my return. There will come a day when my spirit will manifest itself in you, and then the two of us, united by Krishna’s love, will achieve the most perfect union – you will become Taramony” (ibid.). A woman is to be reborn in a man? How? Why? Nob Kissin trusts her and asks the obvious question: “How will I know?” (174). She promises him “signs” and that he “must keep careful watch, for the indications may be obscure and unexpected” and that he “must follow them wherever they lead, even if they take [him] across the sea” (ibid.). He asks Taramony to give him her word. From a rationalistic materialist point of view, a promise of an individual is worth nothing when it comes to future events. But in the knowledge formation both Nob Kissin and Taramony live in, such a promise by a guru is equivalent to certainty since the guru falls under the *pramāṇa* of *śabda*. “You have my word, she replied. A day will come when I will pour myself into you: but till then you must be patient” (ibid.). To understand how this quest and its accompanying promise work, one must understand a few more things about the guru and the nature of the universe as understood by the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas*.

From where does the guru take such an authority to make true pronouncements? The theory of the avatars of a god has already been mentioned in connection with Viṣṇu and his manifestations as Krishna, Rama and others. This concept is expanded upon within the *Gauḍīya* movement to include the guru. He or she is not only seen as having a close connection to the *Bhagavān*, but is seen to be a manifestation of god himself. “Scripture says that the guru is the form of Kṛṣṇa. In the form of the guru, Kṛṣṇa shows mercy to the devotees” (Broo 2003:81). This idea is corroborated in a passage of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The passage uses the term *ācārya*, “teacher” (Johnson 2009:2) instead of ‘guru’. “The *ācārya* should be understood as Me, and never disrespected. The guru, abode of all gods, should not be displeased by thinking that he is a human being (11.17.27)” (in Broo 2003:81). This means that the guru is seen, in some form, to be super-human. He or she has at least part of the god or goddess within him- or herself. This would grant the guru powers like foreknowledge and clairvoyance that a mere mortal would not possess. For this reason a promise and prediction like the one made by Taramony is considered possible and legitimate, due to her being a guru. While this promise has ended one waiting period and test of faith, the real challenge is still ahead of Nob Kissin.

Nob Kissin works and waits for almost ten years. Since no signs have revealed themselves, even his considerable faith is nearing its breaking point.

As the tenth anniversary of her death approached he had begun to fear for his reason and had come to the decision that if the day passed without any sign yet being manifested, then he would renounce the world and go to Brindavan to live the life of a mendicant (Ghosh 2008:174).

But even here his non-worldly disposition is clearly seen. Even if the signs would not come, he will not throw out his faith and ‘enjoy’ life. Instead, he would reject the world completely and become a mendicant. This also shows that he has in fact changed since that fateful journey with Taramony. If he had been the same person, he could have returned home and lived life among friends and family. However, the changes required for spiritual knowledge have manifested themselves at this point. Nob Kissin has cut his ties with his past through rigorous spiritual discipline. This discipline, along with his continued faith in his guru Taramony, turns this potentially debilitating crisis into a moment of knowledge: “And in making this pledge, he came to be convinced that the moment was at hand, the manifestation was on its way. He had grown so certain of this that now he felt no further anxiety or disquiet” (ibid.). His discursive practice of complete trust in his guru, his concepts about Krishna and his workings, the other statements made by scripture and other spiritual authorities combine to allow him to turn a contingent future into the certain knowledge that the long-hoped-for promise is soon to be revealed. The promise is fulfilled in a truly unlikely manner.

4.4 Fulfillment

The first sign promised by Taramony is revealed aboard the *Ibis*. Since Nob Kissin is an employee of Mr. Burnham, the owner of the *Ibis*, Nob Kissin is tasked with inspecting the ship before the start of the fateful voyage. While completing his rounds, he hears Zachary’s flute from the captain’s cabin. Since the flute is used as a symbol of the call of Krishna, as in the *rāsa-līlā*, this causes him to freeze and listen intently. His arm is “prickling with gooseflesh” (151). He immediately and subconsciously knows that something extraordinary is taking place. Having goosebumps or having your ‘hairs stand on end’ are things commonly associated with fear and specifically with the uncanny. In addressing the uncanny, Sigmund Freud mentions that “this uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed” (2003:148). While the concept of the uncanny certainly does not derive from Nob Kissin’s discourse, it helps explain the reaction Nob Kissin experiences. He is scared because that which he has had to push aside for many years in order to properly function has finally returned to him and possibly to haunt him. Here a full-blown associative field is seen in

action. The flute is Krishna's instrument (cf. Goetz 1966:66), and Nob Kissin even hears the musical scales that he associates with Krishna and his music (cf. Ghosh 2008:152). These realizations shift the uncanny feeling to fearful anticipation: "[H]e fell to his knees and covered his eyes, trembling in fear of what was imminently to be revealed" (ibid.). Despite waiting for so many years without confirmation, the concepts and statements of his religion still make up his knowledge formation. This waiting has most likely also served to create the ever-important change of his subjectivity. He, as a wealthy and powerful *gomusta* (householder) and *babu* (gentleman), is in fact a very different person from the young student that came to Calcutta. But even though he can sense that something is about to be revealed, his test is not yet over.

When Zachary comes through the door, Nob Kissin must struggle to create meaning out of the experience. Despite trying to apply the warning given by Taramony that the message "might be delivered by the unlikeliest of messengers", he none the less feels an "intense disappointment" (152). In what is probably one of the novel's greatest satires, Nob Kissin is disappointed to see that the "messenger" is not "black", but only of a "pale [...] cast of countenance", since Krishna's "darkness had been celebrated in thousands of songs, poems and names" (152-153). Nob Kissin 'knows' from all the stories and depictions of Krishna what the god looks like. He has a clear associated field about these things. When the messenger does not correspond with the expectations, Nob Kissin is understandably disappointed if not confused. Zachary, the supposed 'messenger', gives his official race designation as *metif*, since his mother was already of mixed race (a *quadroon*) and his father was white (cf. 524). His central conflict with the white male leaders is over his race designation and whether he is 'black' or not. Nob Kissin seeing him as non-black plays discourses against each other and brilliantly shows how the knowledge of things like race depends more on discourse than it does on genetics or melanin levels. What this means for Nob Kissin is that he has to find a way to reconcile his own perceived lack of correlation between the skin-color of the messenger and his discursively produced understanding of Krishna. The meaning of the moment is only possible through the existence of and reference to countless other statements. Depending on the perspective, Nob Kissin begins to find (but also possibly create) connections between the Zachary of that moment and the stories of Krishna. Zachary is wearing a light yellow shirt. "And surely it was, if not quite a sign, then at least a minor indication that his shirt was yellowish, of the same colour as the clothes in which the Joyful Lord was known to disport himself with the lovelorn girls of Brindavan?" (153). Krishna wearing a yellow garment was a common motif in *Gaudīya* poems and songs

about him (cf. Goetz 1966:66, 68). Nob Kissin also relies on the authority of the oral tradition when he draws on the fact that a facet of Krishna “was known” or “was said” to be a certain way (Ghosh 2008:153). This returns to the concept of *śabda*, where the past, tradition and one’s progenitors are seen as reliable sources of knowledge. Nob Kissin creates meaning and knowledge for himself by putting the scene in front of him in correlation with statements that are accepted as true. This leads him to another important realization about the purpose of this experience.

Nob Kissin begins to suspect that this situation is a trick or a test, created by Krishna. After waiting for almost ten years for the sign of Taramony’s rebirth to be given, and now having something that could at least be understood as a sign, Nob Kissin wonders whether Zachary is not a “[g]uise, wrapped in veils of illusion by the Divine Prankster, so as to test the quality of his devotee’s faith” (ibid.). Again, Nob Kissin is confronted with a test of faith and therefore has to prove himself worthy of the knowledge to come. He uses the spiritual bent of his tradition to deal with this difficult situation. Rather than saying that his guru lied and that his faith is a fraud, he takes what is opaque to him and re-classifies it as a test of faith, similar to the Catholic Church reclassifying certain theological conundrums as ‘mysteries’. These things are then no longer a hole in the theology, but something the faithful can measure their faith by. The phrase “veils of illusion” used by the novel is connected to the Sanskrit term “*māyā*”, which means illusion (Johnson 2009:204). While its meaning varies within Hinduism, ranging from something negative to be overcome, to a godly boon, the meaning it has within the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* movement is decidedly positive. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, there are two verses in particular that shed light on the concept of *māyā*: “Oh Lord! You are really only one. Having created the entire universe consisting of *Mahat* and other principles by your power called *Māyā* [4.9.7]” (Tagare 1976₂:479). “It is by his grace that Matter, Action, Time, Innate nature and individual Soul (*Jīva*) function. They cease to do so when he becomes indifferent to them [2.10.12]” (Tagare 1976₁:213). This means that everything in the world exists and continues to exist because god made it so by his power (*māyā*) and continues to sustain it by his *māyā*. This belief has a two-fold implication: First, “the Caitanya school considers the material world as a reality” (Chatterjee 1983:114), or to put it another way: “In Vaiṣṇavism, the world is never looked upon as a false entity. It is a real manifestation of the real power of Viṣṇu” (Sinhā 2001:5). Unlike other schools, which consider the material world to be only a fake construct placed over the individual’s consciousness, similar to the way the Matrix functions in the movie *The Matrix*, the Chaitanya school believes the world to actually exist, to *be* there, more in the sense a materialist scientist would see the world. Secondly,

Krishna's use of *māyā* allows his devotees to have loving communion with him in *leela*, or the type of intimate play seen in the *rāsā-līla* in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*:

This role of *māyā* is especially discernible under the name Yogamaya, which occurs in the context of Krishna's *līla*. Yogamaya covers the pure liberated souls in the *līla* with her power of illusion, such that they are unaware of Krishna's real nature and thus relate to him not as God but rather as their friend, lover, or child, and so on. Were Yogamaya not to extend her influence in this way, the souls would realize Krishna's true nature and be incapable of interacting with him in *līla* in these intimate ways (Bryant 2007:116).

This means that god both placed everything in its place, meaning there are no coincidences or projections, but also hides his true nature as ruler of the universe from his devotees so that they may have the intense emotional relationship Krishna enjoyed with Radha. This also means that this second meaning, that of illusion, is none the less real since Krishna made it for the benefit of his devotees. For Nob Kissin this means that the seemingly random happenstance of coming to the door right as Zachary was playing and while he was wearing a yellow shirt is not happenstance at all but divine will. It is a divine will combined with *leela*, as Nob Kissin sees this as a test to allow him to show his devotion to and faith in Krishna. Since Zachary clearly does not fit the descriptions of Krishna, but since nothing is chance, Nob Kissin even considers the possibility that Krishna has decided to "compound the deception". Seeing as he also calls Krishna the "Master of Mischief" (Ghosh 2008:153), this belief again falls in line with the discourse. For these reasons Nob Kissin is able to equate his associations with the stories of Krishna with *knowledge* about Krishna as any association (or lack-there-of) would have been created by god himself to test his devotee.

While inspecting the *Ibis*' logs, Nob Kissin is given the original crew manifest by Zachary. Nob Kissin immediately sees it as the final piece he needs to be certain: "Well before he looked at the papers that Zachary had given him, Baboo Nob Kissin knew that they would provide the sign he needed to confirm what was already clear in his heart" (168). His knowledge, his certainty is not a matter of rational inquiry but of spiritual conviction. Since so many things had already coincided with Nob Kissin's expectation, then why would the *Bhagavān* stop now? He opens the manifest and sees the notation "Black" next to Zachary's name (174). This originally meant that in the American social and racial context, Zachary was considered a black man, despite his actual mixed-race background. Apart from again commenting on the nature of *racial* knowledge, this entry also shows how Nob Kissin's lack of familiarity with the American discourse allows him to co-opt that tag as part of his own knowledge formation. In Nob Kissin's world, being called 'black' is not necessarily a bad thing as this is also a distinguishing feature of god, whom Nob Kissin here calls "Dark

Lord” (174). Nob Kissin again draws on the concepts of *māyā* and *leela*, saying that the changes from the voyage and thus the world’s changeability “proved the presence of divine illusion, of Sri Krishna’s *leela*” (175). This line proves that Nob Kissin has made the connection with his religious discourse. The encounter with Zachary was not a coincidence or a projection that would allow Nob Kissin to maintain his beliefs, but an opportunity to experience the loving companionship of Krishna sent by the god himself.

After Nob Kissin has found ‘proof’ for his belief in Zachary as Krishna’s emissary, he begins to transform into Taramony. The first of many changes, consciously chosen or as a kind of symptom of his spiritual knowledge, is the decision to leave his hair “open [...] so that it hung down to his waist, like Taramony’s long, black locks” (ibid.). Since the guru is a form of Krishna and since Nob Kissin saw signs of Krishna, it must mean that Taramony’s promise to be reborn in him is to be fulfilled. He has traversed the preparatory phase and is now worthy of the fulfillment of his desire for union with Krishna. Nob Kissin is twice called a “seeker” (139, 404): Paulette uses the term once, and he uses it to identify himself as well. “The ultimate success in spiritual endeavours depends entirely upon the degree of fundamental qualifications in the seeker” (Nityananda 2001:69). Nob Kissin clearly was well-prepared spiritually and philosophically to be ready for the revelations that will continue until the end of the novel. Hinduism even has a special term for such people: “Such a man who has acquired the requisite qualifications, is called an ‘Adhikarin’” (68). The changes of subjectivity required for access to knowledge have been fulfilled and the requisite changes as a result of the knowledge are also beginning to manifest themselves. But the changes are much stranger than wearing hair like the object of your devotion.

Since part of Taramony’s promise was the condition to follow the signs wherever they lead, “even across the sea” (Ghosh 2008:175), and since Zachary will be leaving on the *Ibis*, Nob Kissin gets himself assigned as the ship’s “super-cargo” (206). He knows that the quest is not yet over and that he cannot yet ‘blow his cover’ so to speak. He accepts that he must act the part of a loyal clerk awhile longer. In this he reveals that everything he had been doing up to that point was in service of his faith in Taramony and not for the sake of getting rich. He describes himself as “[w]eary [...] of the world” but realizes that he must “endure it for a while yet” (ibid.). He is also very aware of the changes he is undergoing and how they might seem to his employer, the English Christian Mr. Burnham. The way the changes are described allows for a peek into how Nob Kissin thinks of them. He decides that he needs to “display as few signs as possible of the momentous transformations that were taking place within him” (207). This seems to indicate that Nob Kissin believes these changes to be things that are

happening *to* him and not things that he is causing to happen. These processes make him “conscious that everything had changed and that he was seeing the world in new, unexpected ways” (ibid.). That the changes would result in a new way of seeing, a new knowledge is in line with Foucault. If the objects, concepts, statements and practices associated with a discourse have shifted, then the knowledge that this discourse proffers would also have to change as a result. “[A] new arrangement of differences is being set up, an arrangement whose economy will regulate a wholly different system of meaning, hence a wholly different speaking subject” (Kristeva 1982:113).

Nob Kissin’s behavior is soon so changed from the norm that even Paulette, who has known him for years, has a hard time recognizing him. “[E]ven the way he walked seemed different, with smaller steps and swaying hips” (Ghosh 2008:349). While taking on the *actions* of the other gender might be possible, and something someone transgender might choose to do, the changes in Nob Kissin seem to run much deeper than mere copying of codes. In complaining about having only the large roots of a tree to sit, he makes an interesting switch: “Our saris – I mean, our clothings may become soiled” (ibid.). He inadvertently calls the robe he was wearing a sari, which is only worn by women in India. His immediate correction shows that he was aware of the slip-up and thus that his behavior might be seen as deviant. He is loath to sit on the large roots of a tree since he has “developed a housewifely aversion to all creatures that crept and crawled and was at pains to stay away from anything that might harbour these forms of life” (ibid.) and once Paulette convinces him to talk to her, he positions himself “so that no part of his clothing or person was in contact with any kind of foliage” (351). He is beginning to take on the manners but also the thinking of an Indian woman. At this point it is still possible to see these changes merely as evidence that gender is a matter of codes that can be copied. While this interpretation is valid and something the novel addresses through Paulette’s story, the religious and gender discourses of the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas* consider gender to be much more than codes.

The views on gender among the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas* are shaped as far back as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and then expanded upon by Chaitanya and his successors. Radha, the leader of the Gopīs and Krishna’s favorite (cf. Menon 2006:73), takes on a unique role in Chaitanya’s theology: “Ultimately, the Vaishnava traditions conceive of a bi-monotheism, the concept of a type of androgynous deity – a divinity made up of two persons who pose as the supreme divine couple, namely the Goddess Rādhā and the God Krishna” (Bryant 2007:443). Some theologians of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* describe Radha “as part of Kṛṣṇa’s energy” and the union of *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa* “takes an ideological form” in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* (Chatterjee

1983:106). This concept of difference-cum-non-difference is also found in visual depictions of the divine couple. In Hindu art, “Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are sometimes shown as entwined together in such a fashion that, while one could delineate two separate figures, they appear to the eye as inseparably one” (Eck 2007:28). This perfect union is extended in Chaitanya’s doctrine. Not only did Krishna and Radha attain this state, but individuals could exhibit the state of *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa*: “Many view Chaitanya as a dual embodiment of both Krishna and Radha” (Manring 2004:54). Chaitanya was seen as “a unique fusing of two persons, Kṛṣṇa the adolescent cowherd and his lover, Rādhā” (Clooney and Stewart 2004:176). The guru being seen as a manifestation of god, and god being conceived as a union between male and female, it does not seem strange that the founder of this religion would be considered to be the manifestation of this ‘bi-monotheistic’ god. This belief in the godly nature of Chaitanya also had the effect that his example influenced later *Gauḍīya* practice (cf. *ibid.*) This seems to have happened in the case of Nob Kissin. He is certain of the changes happening due to the promise. He is also able to accept the promise at all because of the foundational doctrine of the possibility of the union of *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa* in a single person, or the union of male and female in one body.

Upon seeing Neel, the raja whose fall Nob Kissin helped orchestrate, and the changes *he* underwent due to *his* ordeal, the maternal aspect of Taramony begins to shine through. Nob Kissin is seemingly proud that he helped ‘humble’ “an arrogant aristocrat” (Ghosh 2008:404). Nob Kissin sees this transformation as a type of new birth for Neel and considers his part in causing it “like midwiving the birth of a new existence” (*ibid.*). Here he further takes on a feminine role by making his male-dominated behavior of defeating an adversary analogous to the usually female role of helping to bring life into this world. This identification causes him to experience “the upwelling of a sensation that was so intense and so unfamiliar that he knew that Taramony had to be its source” (*ibid.*). New shifts occur in his mind and body and their attribution to Taramony seems to stem from a similar situation to that of Deeti assuming her vision to be true because she lacked the associated field to create it herself. These new sensations are part of another discourse, both in gender and religion, than the discourse Nob Kissin has lived up to this point. His thinking seems to be that since these things are so foreign to him, he cannot possibly be their origin. At this point, the only other origin he has is Taramony, so he ascribes the sensations to her. “Who else could be responsible for the upsurge of maternal tenderness in his bosom[?]” (*ibid.*). How could he as a man experience female, specifically maternal, emotions? The issue of Western academic notions about gendered emotions aside, the binary opposition between male and female emotions clearly

exists for Nob Kissin. He is confused that he should have tender feelings towards someone that he forced to undergo horrible mental and physical torture. “[I]t was as if Taramony had recognized, in Neel, the son, now grown, whom she had been unable to bear for her husband” (ibid.). This thought seems to draw on old Hindu beliefs about gender and child-bearing. “[T]here is no heaven for one who has no son”, or to put it another way: “[A] woman is at fault if she does not bear a son” (Leslie 1989:301). Since he has an irrational *maternal* affection towards Neel, the only source could be a woman, as he as a man is not under the same discursive obligation to beget a male heir as a woman is. Thus that kind of affection, again, *must* come from some female source, a source whose traits he is internalizing.

Never having been on a ship before, Nob Kissin is quite ill during the beginning of the journey. The bodily suffering on the ship and other physical changes are proof that the knowledge Nob Kissin is seeking is true. Yet again he proves his ability to renegotiate things to fit his knowledge. “[H]e understood that all those days of dizziness, diarrhoea and vomiting were the necessary period of suffering that precedes a moment of illumination” (Ghosh 2008:440). In other words, the physical sickness is literally a preparation for what is to come. Instead of complaining that Taramony sent him on a ship and then accepting the suffering as a part of life, he turns it into another vital part of the quest. Even these obstacles do not detract him from his complete faith in the veracity of Taramony’s promise. When then confronted by Zachary about his new choice of female clothing, Nob Kissin sees no issue. His answer attests to his inner conviction: “Bosoms are burgeoning, hair is lengthening. New modalities are definitely coming to the fore. How old clothes will accommodate?” (459). For him the changes are happening and the only reasonable course of action is to go along with them. He is developing breasts, so of course it is natural to begin wearing a garment that would accommodate them better. Where before there was some hesitancy in his explanations, as the end of the novel is approaching Nob Kissin is completely sure that what is happening to him is actually a transformation into Taramony. This change is considered a requirement in some *Gauḍīya* circles. “In devotional Vaishnavism, Lord Krishna alone is the male and all devotees, irrespective of their sex, are female” (Kakar 1989:127). This means that since “the highest relationship to be cultivated with [Krishna] is the erotic one” and since the *Vaishnava* world was still “operating within a heterosexual world view, all of Krishna’s devotees must necessarily be female” (Manring 2004:59). This means that on top of Nob Kissin’s own surety, there were voices within his religion that approved of and encouraged the changes that were taking place within him.

By the end of the novel, Nob Kissin feels that Taramony has fully manifested herself in him. Nob Kissin is described as needing to hold his “heaving bosom” (Ghosh 2008:481) and that there is a presence “blossoming within” him (484). Both phrases lead to the conclusion that Nob Kissin is convinced of the truthfulness of his experience. This leads him to the decision to free Neel from the imprisonment Nob Kissin himself caused. In the cell he asks Neel, who had heard of Taramony while he was still a raja in Calcutta, whether he “see[s] her now”. “Is she here? Within me?” (520). Nob Kissin needs an external confirmation before he can fully trust his own experience. After Neel nods in affirmation, Nob Kissin still needs a little more encouragement and Neel offers a profound assessment: “Yes, she is there. I see her – a mother incarnate: her time has come” (521). Now Nob Kissin is ready for the final step. He lets go both physically and emotionally and feels “that the last shreds of his former being were to be discarded” (ibid.). This meant that “Taramony’s presence was (now) fully manifest in him” and he feels ready to free people “ensnared by the illusory differences of this world” (ibid.). He himself has become an emissary of Krishna, there to help people traverse the world of *māyā* and come to Krishna’s *leela*.

5. *Ibis* as Heterotopia

The *Ibis* can be seen as a heterotopic site used to compare and contrast Deeti and Nob Kissin. As was mentioned in connection with *heterotopias*, Foucault considered ships to be the “the heterotopia par excellence” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986:27). Since both Deeti and Nob Kissin end up on the ship *Ibis*, and the novel ends with them linking arms while on deck and looking out to sea, it seems appropriate to ask the question: What does the novel say about the knowledge formations of these two characters by placing them within the same heterotopic space? Since heterotopias are capable of binding seemingly contradictory things within them, as a way of contrasting and commenting on these things, contrasting the stories of Deeti and Nob Kissin and the strange transformations they undergo seems to be a logical step. Now that the knowledge discourses underlying both Deeti’s and Nob Kissin’s stories have been examined, the next task is to see what the novel itself has to say about them and their legitimacy to exist.

5.1 Comments on Deeti

The reactions of the families to Deeti and Nob Kissin abandoning their expected roles show that both are from drastically different discourses. The reaction of Nob Kissin’s family, or rather the lack of reaction, can be understood in connection with the knowledge formation of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas*. In settling in Calcutta, “[n]o scandal ever attached to them, for

Taramony's saintliness was so patently evident that she soon attracted a small circle of devotees and followers" (Ghosh 2008:171). Of course no discourse allows just any break for any reason, but since Taramony was clearly a saintly person, her deviant behavior, or behavior that deviated from the path chosen for her by her husband, reentered the acceptable realm of the Gopī worshipping Krishna. When comparing these (non-) reactions to the scandal caused in Deeti's world, the lack of mention of Nob Kissin's family becomes a deafening silence. Deeti's fate was clear: "[I]n the event of capture, they [Deeti and Kalua] knew they could expect no mercy, even from their own kin" (202). Deeti and Kalua had broken with the discursive expectations of their social groups, seemingly as Nob Kissin and Taramony did. The difference is that the discourse of Nob Kissin allows for and even encourages these breaks under certain spiritual conditions, whereas Deeti's world sees deviance from the expected path as a heinous crime. Even their blood relatives would be under the cosmic duty imposed by *dharma* to restore the natural order of things.

Deeti later listens in on a conversation of two officials, both of whom belong to the same caste as Deeti: "...Stole her from the cremation fire [...] you're of our caste, you understand [...] as you can understand, the family's honour won't be restored till they're dead..." (235). Here the understanding of the horrific nature of the incident is transmitted by an appeal to caste status. The knowledge of why Kalua running away with Deeti is unthinkable and must be punished in the strictest manner is closely tied with social position and the knowledge that is enabled by a particular subject position. The fellow caste member *knows*, by virtue of his caste status, what this transgression *means*. No further explanation is needed. Despite whatever social commentary Deeti could have garnered from this conversation, she realizes, in complete contrast to Nob Kissin, that "her dead husband's family was determined to hunt them down" (236). In contrasting these two episodes, the novel draws attention to the fact that what is allowable and what is punishable by death has less to do with 'facts' or material reality or the amount of disruption it causes (no one would doubt that Nob Kissin running away created a large dilemma for his family that now had to find a replacement custodian), but has more to do with the discursive knowledge enacted and practiced within a person or group. Nob Kissin was allowed to break with his duties because he fulfilled the requirements to justify said break. Deeti was not allowed to break and was to be punished because her discourse had no such escape valve for women in her position.

The novel shows Deeti's transformation to be more complicated than she assumes it to be. As part of her new identity, Deeti decides she needs a new name. When asked by the other women on the ship heading to Calcutta what her name is, she has a similar dilemma as occurred with her caste designation:

Her proper, given name was the first to come to mind, and since it had never been used by anyone, it was as good as any. Aditi, she said softly, I am Aditi. No sooner had she said it than it became real: this was who she was – Aditi, a woman who had been granted, by a whim of the gods, the boon of living her life again. Yes, she said, raising her voice a little, so that Kalua could hear her. I am Aditi, wife of Madhu (245).

At first glance the novel seems to go along with Deeti's switch. It allows the phrase "it became real", which could make it appear that the novel agrees with and supports the change as legitimate. Here it seems appropriate to mention the fact that the novel is narrated by a limited omniscient third-person narrator. All of the events looked at up until now have been written in the third person or as direct dialogue. Even Deeti's vision is presented as "The vision *came* to Deeti" and not 'I, Deeti, had a vision'. While Deeti thinks of *herself* as Aditi, every subsequent time she is mentioned in narration, the narrator calls her Deeti, *not* Aditi. Even on the same page where Deeti seemingly changed her name, in the very next paragraph, the novel gives the line: "Heeru clicked her tongue sadly as she mulled over *Deeti's* plight" (ibid., emphasis added). The narrator maintaining her name as Deeti indicates that the novel does not go along with the change self-imposed by Deeti. There are only two other instances where Deeti is called Aditi. One is when they are being registered in Calcutta and Kalua gives her name: "Her name is Aditi, malik; she is my wife" (296). The only other time is when another woman of the group, Sarju, calls her *didi* (a short-form of Aditi) (469). Here the names used by Kalua and Sarju are in direct speech and serve to emphasize that the other characters accept and acknowledge the status Deeti creates for herself. Kalua considers her his wife. Sarju sees her as a *bhauji*. Within the group, Deeti's status is seemingly unopposed, but the narrator does not grant her the validation of being called Aditi.

In an episode that will be looked at in more depth shortly, Deeti's uncle Bhyro Singh calls her Kabutri-ki-ma, the proper name she was known by at home (cf. 494). A married woman only uses her own name when she is childless: "The significance of a married woman using her own name was not lost on the others [...] So your lap is empty then? No children?" (245). By calling her by her old name, the one she should properly still be using, as she is still considered married to Hukam Singh and the mother of Kabutri, Bhyro Singh indicates that he does *not* accept the legitimacy of the changes that have happened in Deeti. Thus the use of names in the novel is a clear indication of how characters, but especially the narrator, think of

the changes occurring in Deeti. The narrator's refusal to validate Deeti's simple transformation into Aditi can be understood by contrasting the way the other outcaste *girmitiyas* on the ship negotiate the wedding ceremony with how Deeti dealt with the customs of her past.

Heeru's wedding provides a foil to Deeti's hasty rejection of past discourses. The wedding is finally organized and soon the realities of the ship and the trip begin to surface. The *girmitiyas* do not have the same access to dancers, musicians and other ceremonial components that were easily accessible back home. The brilliant blending of home and foreign is first seen with a type of dance competition between the men and the women. "Worse still, it turned out that one of the Ahirs was also a dancer, and knew how to do women's parts, having been trained as a dancing-launda back home. Despite the lack of proper costumes, make-up and accompaniment, he was persuaded to rise to his feet" (478). This dancer did not insist on all the old trappings of his trade. These were beyond his reach and he could either decide to never dance again, as his performances *required* this or that accoutrement, or he could make the decision he did in the novel and choose to dance *despite* not having all of the old pieces. Being cut off from your past by the Black Water does not have to mean that everything your past life gave you must be jettisoned as well.

The opposite seems to occur with turmeric powder. As part of the wedding rituals, turmeric powder is needed to yellow the bride and groom's faces.

This root, so common on land, seemed as precious as ambergris now that they were at sea...but how was the turmeric to be ground, with neither stone nor mortar available? A way was found, eventually, involving the rear ends of two lotas. The effort and ingenuity that went into the grinding added an extra touch of brightness to the ceremony of yellowing (479).

The *girmitiyas* also find that what used to have *no* or *little* worth back home can take on immense value by virtue of its scarcity. But even though the turmeric was much more valuable out on the water, the prospect of grinding it could have led them to say that that part of ceremony is not really *that* important and to save on effort they should just eliminate it from the ritual. No, they had access to turmeric and despite being disproportionately difficult to grind, the *girmitiyas* made the effort as the yellowing was an important part of their old rituals, a part that they *could* emulate if they put in some more ingenuity and effort. With this, the novel does not claim that reworking old rituals for a new environment is easy. Instead it beautifully shows that one can and perhaps even should invest the mental and physical energies to finding a way to maintain customs even in adverse situations. These are all things that Deeti did *not* do on the raft or on the banks of the Ganga. There she jettisoned most of her

old discourse and it is only through this wedding ritual and the mental torment of the Black Water that she is reminded of her negligence.

The wedding preparation and wedding ceremonies make Deeti reflect on her own experiences and choices. Heeru's wedding seems to serve as a proxy wedding for Deeti who sees the event as a type of re-marriage for herself and Kalua:

Deeti turned to Kalua and whispered: Tonight it's like we too are being married again. Why? said Kalua. Wasn't the first time good enough? When you found the flowers for the garlands and strung them together with your own hair? But we didn't do the seven circles, she answered. There was no wood and no fire. No fire? he said. But didn't we make our own? Deeti blushed and pulled him to his feet: Chall, na. It's time to get back to Heeru's wedding (480).

This conversation raises the issue of the legitimacy of Deeti's marriage. No matter the discursive explanations or varied interpretation of the rules that could allow the remarriage the way it took place, the fact remains that Deeti does feel a discursive lack in the remarriage's ritual. Her main problem was the "seven circles" that never happened in the simple ceremony the two of them performed. There are different rites that constitute the essential or core part of the marriage ceremony. Bhabatosh Bhattacharyya includes "going round the fire" among these "essential rites" (1964:48). Manu calls this rite the "seven steps", which Patrick Olivelle clarifies as "the seven steps that the bride and groom take around the sacred fire during the marriage ceremony" (2005:317). Thus the ritual referred to here is equivalent to the "seven circles" mentioned by Deeti. Just how essential this can be is seen in Manu 8:226-227:

The ritual formulas of marriage are applicable only to virgin girls and nowhere among any people to non-virgins, for they are excluded from the rituals prescribed by Law.

The ritual formulas of marriage are a sure sign that she is the wife, and learned men should recognize that they reach their completion at the seventh step (179).

The main ritual Manu refers to as *the* marker of a completed marriage is seven circles around the flame. The fundamental thought here "appears to be that once the seventh step is taken, the transaction is ritually complete and cannot be annulled" (317). This is combined with the first verse where marriage is only for virgins. Setting the obvious injustice and double standard of men being allowed and even required to remarry aside, Deeti is considered bound to her first husband through their seven circles and her no longer being a virgin excludes her from ever making them again. Yet this exclusion is only justified through the binding and thus essential nature of this ritual. The fact that Deeti even considers the renewed need for the ritual shows that she has rejected much of the old discourse on gender and marriage propriety. In connection with Heeru's marriage, however, she resorts back to the old discourse, the one she had rejected for herself up to this point. In planning the seven steps for Heeru, "[t]he

matter of a sacramental flame was much on Deeti's mind. A proper fire, even a small one, was not to be thought of, given all the hazards" (Ghosh 2008:485). It is less that she is going soft or being weak in her resolve, but that she is instead renegotiating the rituals of her past life, the same way the other *girmitiyas* have to do with Heeru's marriage that is occurring on a ship. Deeti's considerations about the marriage flame also lead to newly productive rituals.

The marriage flame renegotiation leads to the development of new rituals. Deeti thinks through the options the group has for a "proper flame" and rejects most of them: "But a shuttered lamp or lantern, like those that were commonly used on the ship" would rob the ceremony of all meaning: "who could take seriously a wedding in which the bride and groom performed their 'seven circles' around a single, sooty flame?" (485). Here again Deeti shows her concern over the proprieties and what people will think. It would be easy to say that a flame is needed to walk around and a lantern is an available (and safe) alternative, therefore a lantern should be used to fulfill the requirement. Deeti's rejection of the easy alternative shows that she is becoming aware of the complicated nature of the changes and considerations that occur in adapting a culture to new material and social conditions. While many of these considerations are not actively shown in regards to Deeti's *own* break with her past, the fact that she is shown to consider these things in connection with another woman's marriage is a clever way to comment on the changes Deeti chose to undergo. Once a flame is chosen and the bridal couple gets up to do the seven circles, the group soon finds that "this ritual had not been conceived with the Black Water in mind" (*ibid.*). Again, rather than 'cheating' and doing something *like* the seven circles, the couple tries to do them properly but slides around the hold of the ship.

The hilarity created by this spectacle ended only when the most agile young men came forward to surround the bride and groom with a webbing of shoulders and arms, holding them upright. But soon the young men began to slip and slide too, so that many others had to join in: in their eagerness to circle the flames, Deeti made sure that she and Kalua were among the first to leap into the scrum. Soon it was as if the whole dabusa were being united in a sacramental circle of matrimony (486).

The young men spontaneously offer their support in this moment. Before this moment, no one knew that their agility might be needed, but here they do their part in contributing to the success of the ritual *despite* the adverse circumstances. When the whole group joins in to stabilize the inner circle, a new aspect is added to the seven circles. This "sacramental circle" was only developed out of necessity, but creates a beautiful new world of meaning for all involved. This scene shows how new circumstances do not solely make rituals more difficult but can lead to the discovery of new ways of dealing with old situations. The *girmitiyas* did

not throw out the seven circles because they were not “conceived with the Black Water in mind” and were thus too difficult to perform, but instead found a way to make them work, and created a new part of the ritual in the process. By having the two groups meet on the *Ibis*, this productive renegotiation is contrasted with Deeti’s rash rejection of her past and shows that the more difficult path of renegotiation is the more fulfilling and more productive method of dealing with the past.

5.2 Comments on Nob Kissin

Nob Kissin’s changes are also commented upon in the novel. The meeting between Paulette and Nob Kissin was already looked at in the context of the changes occurring with Nob Kissin. There it was seen that the changes are more complex than a conscious decision to adopt the gender codes of another gender. Paulette was also not particularly shocked at seeing Nob Kissin. If anything she was surprised and confused at the changes that almost caused her to not recognize Nob Kissin. Having Paulette in the story and especially on the ship is a way the novel comments on the change of gender Nob Kissin undergoes. Paulette is a hybrid-character, combining India and Europe but also male and female discourses. She tells Zachary of her great-aunt and how she joined a scientific expedition despite being a woman:

She did the simplest thing, Mr Reid. She tied up her hair like a man and applied to join under the name of Jean Bart. And what is more, she was accepted – by none other than the great Bougainville himself! And it was none too hard, Mr Reid – this I would have you know: it was no more than a matter of wearing a tight band over her chest and lengthening her stride when she walked. Thus she set sail, wearing trowsers, just like you, and not one of the sailors or scientists guessed her secret. Can you but imagine, Mr Reid, all those savants, so knowledgeable about the anatomy of animals and plants? – not one of them knew that there was a fillie among them, so completely was she male? (268).

Paulette’s story tells of a belief that gender is only a matter of codes and a few simple tweaks in physiology. This is the modern European discourse. Contrasting this view with Nob Kissin’s changes and his belief about them reveals that gender has very different discourses surrounding it depending on the culture. In Nob Kissin’s knowledge, gender is a constant that can be overruled through higher influence. Adopting the codes becomes a symptom of the deep changes that occurred in one’s gender. Similar to the contrast between Deeti’s and Heeru’s wedding, the comparison between Paulette’s and Nob Kissin’s discourse shows that outwardly things (rituals or behaviors) are a large part of knowledge discourses. However, Nob Kissin’s changes show that a true change of gender requires difficult and sometimes even unpleasant transformations and renegotiations of past behaviors. Nob Kissin’s knowledge discourse is also based on religion, whereas Paulette bases hers on science. From a materialist standpoint, gender is perhaps only a matter of codes and dealing with different sexual organs.

But in the knowledge of religion and the changes it can produce, the reality of gender is very different. Science must not tell religion that gender is ‘only’ codes, for as is seen in Nob Kissin’s world, codes are only a small, superficial part of the complicated construct that is gender.

Mr. Burnham’s religious discourse on gender clashes with Nob Kissin’s. The earliest direct comment on Nob Kissin’s change of gender comes from his employer, Mr. Burnham. Nob Kissin goes to ask about being assigned as “super-cargo”. Upon seeing the long hair and woman’s necklace, he exclaims: “What on earth has become of you? You look so...”, Nob Kissin even has the cheek to interrupt him with “Yes, sir?”. “So strangely womanish” (223). Clearly the changes are not just internal, be it mental or emotional. Mr. Burnham sees him as more feminine than before. Yet here Nob Kissin shows how clever he is in regards to manipulating the discourses of others. He knows that the Europeans find Hindus strange. “It is outward appearance only – just illusions. Underneath all is same-same” (ibid.). He plays with the idea that most elements of gender are just outward convention and that adopting some of the other gender’s codes is no big deal. Of course he is *not* the same underneath as his entire spiritual and emotional world is shifting at this point. At the same time, Mr. Burnham is not happy with this answer: “Man and woman? God made them both as they were, Baboon, and there’s nothing illusory about either, nor is there anything in between” (224). Mr. Burnham derives his knowledge of gender from an orthodox Christian creationist view that does not allow variation of any kind since the existing order is the one set up by the Divine and violating it would be a violation of the laws of the universe. This different concept of god and of creation, its rigidity in sharp contrast to the seeming laxity of the *Gauḍīya* concept of *māyā*, leads to a diametrically opposed understanding of gender and of the possibility of change between them. Belief in a creator-god does not automatically force a religion in one direction or another, but the concept can lead to different ways of seeing the world depending on the other concepts and statements that are brought into correlation. A belief in a creationist God, as both men have, can either lead to the trickster Krishna testing his devotees or to Jehovah ruling the cosmos in perfect order. The belief itself does not decide which side the religion adopts, but instead influences how the faithful will include things like illusion or the unchangeability of God.

Nob Kissin sees that he cannot win the argument on gender-grounds and slyly turns the conversation to abject things. One of the “womanish” things is a large necklace and rather than trying to argue that men could wear women’s jewelry under some circumstances, Nob Kissin says that it is for medicinal purposes: “Bowel movements will become smooth and

copious. Colour will also be nice, like turmeric” (ibid.). Talk of excrement is uncouth for a good Victorian man and Mr. Burnham quickly changes the subject. This exchange shows that two different religious understandings of a similar topic will not necessarily be similar by virtue of their both being religious. Two religious people might have more disagreements over how to understand a phenomenon than a scientific and a religiously minded person might, as was seen in the relationship between Paulette and Nob Kissin. But despite his obvious misgivings about the new condition of his *gomusta*, Mr. Burnham considers giving Nob Kissin the assignment as super-cargo. However, he is still not convinced, and he even treats Nob Kissin more like a woman than a man: “Mr Burnham cast a dubious glance at the gomusta’s matronly form. ‘I am impressed by your enthusiasm, Baboo Nob Kissin. But are you sure you’ll be able to cope with the conditions on a ship?’” (225-226). The doubt over the ability seems to stem not from questions over Nob Kissin’s seaworthiness but over his “matronly form”. Almost despite himself, Mr. Burnham accepts the changes and treats Nob Kissin as he would a woman, meaning that in this case Nob Kissin must deal with the negative stereotypes of women being weak and not fit for travel. Had he been only a man, his splendid track-record with many of the large trading houses of Calcutta would have most likely gotten him the position right away. But being a woman adds extra scrutiny. On top of being a comment on sexism in general, it also shows that Nob Kissin is beginning to move into the female world, despite Mr. Burnham’s claim to the contrary.

Deeti’s first impression of Nob Kissin shows that his transformation was working. While other characters, such as Serang Ali, comment on Nob Kissin’s knowledge formation, Deeti’s story comments on the results of that knowledge. Serang Ali tells Zachary about the questions Nob Kissin had about whether Zachary had ever stolen butter or turned blue, things that Krishna is known for. Serang Ali assessment can be summed up briefly: “He belongi too much sassy bugger” and “He too muchi foolo” (160). This episode occurred long before the gender change began, indicating that this skepticism is about the *Vaishnava* knowledge formation in general and not the changes due to Nob Kissin’s spiritual knowledge. When the ship carrying Deeti and Kalua finally arrives in Calcutta and the *girmitiyas* are to disembark, Nob Kissin is there to meet them: “Nearing the jetty, Deeti caught sight of Baboo Nob Kissin: he was in one of the boats, wearing his hair loose so that it fell to his shoulders in shining ringlets. He greeted the women almost as if he were an elder sister, ordering the maistries to let them through first” (370). Deeti sees the changes and is not immediately repulsed by them. She seems more surprised to see a large man with feminine hair. She recognizes and accepts his behavior as being that of “an elder sister” which seems to indicate that Nob Kissin is not

only *trying* to act like a woman, but that he is succeeding. A woman immediately feels like she is being greeted by another woman, despite seeing that it is clearly a man in front of her.

Zachary also has a run-in with the changing Nob Kissin. After Zachary is rebuffed by Paulette, who was disguised as an old Indian woman, Nob Kissin shows up to ensure Paulette's disguise is not blown:

Moments after Zachary's hand had been slapped, Baboo Nob Kissin Pander appeared at his side. Although the gomusta was wearing his accustomed dhoti and kurta, his shape, Zachary noticed, had acquired a curious, matronly fullness, and when he swept his shoulder-length hair off his face, it was with the practised gesture of a stout dowager. (380)

Zachary too sees Nob Kissin not just as silly or absurd but as "matronly". He sees the movements as "practised", meaning they are not just acted in that moment. Perhaps Nob Kissin did in fact practice sweeping his hair back. If he did, then that means that he is very dedicated to becoming a woman. If he did not practice, then he is very good at assimilating the codes of the other gender. Nob Kissin then wants to show Zachary something Nob Kissin has hidden in the chest-folds of his garment. "The gomusta thrust a hand through the neckline of his kurta, reaching so deep inside that Zachary would not have been surprised to see a plump breast laid bare" (ibid.). Zachary seems to be wholly convinced of the authenticity of Nob Kissin's behavior. Instead of joking about how fat Nob Kissin is or how much fabric he is wearing, he, for some reason, jumps to the conclusion that something feminine might be hiding beneath that fabric. Zachary is another character that has an incentive to accept the changes in others as authentic since his own station as second mate is dependent on people accepting him as a white man. Whether it is because of or despite this personal reason, Zachary does not think of Nob Kissin as a crazy religious fanatic but as an important man to be taken seriously.

The final character that directly comments on the changes occurring in Nob Kissin is Neel. Neel was imprisoned through the scheming of Nob Kissin and is a convict on the *Ibis*, being transported abroad as part of his punishment. Nob Kissin talks about Taramony and the changes and his plans for redemption with Neel. Neel is left mostly confused: "He was left with the impression of having understood a little of what Baboo Nob Kissin was trying to convey; and he understood also that there was something at work within this strange man that was somehow out of the ordinary" (484). Neel only thinks of Nob Kissin as a "strange man". While this means that Neel does not outright reject the notions Nob Kissin is presenting, it also means that he is not completely in agreement with everything Nob Kissin is doing and talking about. At the same time he feels that what is occurring in the man in front of him is "out of the ordinary" and not just gloating on the part of his jailor. Neel feels that there is

more to the transformation than simply a change in behavior. This judgement helps shed more light on a later statement. Neel, commenting on Taramony being reborn in Nob Kissin, says: “Yes, she is there. I see her – a mother incarnate: her time has come” (521). Despite considering Nob Kissin “strange” and not understanding what is happening or what Nob Kissin is talking about, Neel gives an affirmative answer to Nob Kissin’s question over whether Taramony is manifest or not. Of course Neel could just be saying anything to make Nob Kissin happy and thus speed his escape, but the detailed nature of the answer, being much more than a ‘yes’, gives the impression that Neel *does* actually see *something* in Nob Kissin. Even someone who had enough to do with thinking about his own situation seems to believe that the changes occurring are real, despite some personal misgivings and lack of understanding. With this, the final character and his confrontations with Deeti and Nob Kissin can be looked at.

5.3 Bhyro Singh

Bhyro Singh’s personal character and views on gender create a potent commentary on how Indian society views the changes occurring in both Deeti and Nob Kissin. Bhyro Singh is described as a man full of “strength and vigour”, his neck having a “bull-like girth” and his stomach having “surging contours” (32). He is also a *subedar*, a mid-ranking soldier in the East India Company’s army. In his world, everyone should try and compete with and outdo each other. When the two convicts on the *Ibis*, Neel and Ah Fatt, do not fight for his favor, but instead help and support one another, he considers this a defect: “to Bhyro Singh this was a sign that they were not men at all, but castrated, impotent creatures – oxen, in other words” (400). To show this assessment to all the world, he torments the two during the short periods they are allowed on deck. He is shown to enjoy the mistreatment he gives the convicts; he whips them like oxen: “While driving them around the deck, he would shout, for the amusement of the maistries and silahdars:...*Ahó*, keep going...don’t weep for your balls now...tears won’t bring them back” (ibid.). For him, a man that does not try and ‘move up’ in the world is defective, not a man anymore. His taunting of this ‘defective’ status goes further: “Or else he would rap them on the genitals and laugh when they doubled up: What’s the matter? Aren’t you hijras, you two? There’s no pleasure or pain between your legs” (ibid.). He clearly enjoys the emotional, mental, physical and sexual torture he is inflicting on these two men. His use of the term *hijra* is also significant for his assessment of Nob Kissin’s change into a woman. Here Bhyro Singh only *taunts* these two men with transgender status.

All the while Nob Kissin *is* transgender, which surprisingly does not seem to bother Bhyro Singh.

The theme of a man's turning into a woman or of being both a mother and a father [...] occurs widely in the biographies of several modern Indian spiritual figures and in the beliefs and ritual practices of contemporary groups, ranging from the flamboyantly transsexual *hijras* to south Indian cultic priests and established north Indian monastic order (Goldman 1993:384)

Transvestism is something that occurs all over India for different reasons. But not all transvestites are transsexual and not all transsexuals become so for the same reasons or act the same way after their gender-change. Goldman acknowledges that there are religious orders where the transgender devotee is sexual: "Unlike ordinary women, but like *hijras*, they flaunt an exaggerated 'female' sexuality. They also engage in both flirtation and sexual intercourse with men" (390). This indicates that a *hijra* transsexual is of a different kind than the celibate, chaste and even underplayed transvestism and transsexualism of Nob Kissin. The Indian discourse on gender is much more complex than the European and American one, there being gradations of both gender and transgender. All of these things help to both explain Bhyro Singh's reaction to Nob Kissin and to make it more surprising, while on the other hand making his reaction to Deeti more predictable and tragic.

Bhyro Singh's reactions to Deeti and Nob Kissin show that both characters have different levels of acceptance in Indian society. Despite all of the hyper-masculine behaviors Bhyro Singh displays, he shows very little reaction to Nob Kissin. And it is not as if the two never see one another. The two are the most powerful men on board, after the English and American officers. Both of them are tasked with making sure the trip works smoothly. With this much contact and potential for conflict or at least snide comments in passing, the novel is almost silent on their relationship. There is a short mention of Bhyro Singh not being happy about Nob Kissin wanting to inspect the hold and the convict cells: "Only with the greatest reluctance had Subedar Bhyro Singh agreed to Baboo Nob Kissin's proposed 'tour of inspection'" (Ghosh 2008:481). There is still no mention of *why* the Subedar was reluctant. It could simply have been that he did not like some bean-counting bureaucrat snooping through his domain. Either way, the absence of rude comments or exacerbated frustration over the insufferable transgender Nob Kissin seems to show that despite his obvious negative views of *hijra* transsexuals, he accepts or at least tolerates Nob Kissin's transformation, possibly because he sees it as deriving from a more 'respectable' discourse. This indicates that Nob Kissin's behavior is part of a well-known discourse and that that discourse enjoys a fair level of respect within the Hindu community. However, these non-reactions lead to Deeti's

inevitable showdown with her uncle-in-law. She will have to face the cost of turning her back on her past discourse.

Bhyro Singh and his world have designated Deeti as a whore. While Bhyro Singh seemingly has no major misgivings with Nob Kissin, he is willing to brutally rape Deeti. She broke with so many discourses and broke with them so deeply that she has become abject for her culture. To return to Julia Kristeva's description of the abject, it is "what disturbs identity, system, order" and that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (1982:4). Deeti has done all of these things in one form or another. She has disturbed her own identity, the identity of her caste by mixing with an untouchable, which also disturbs the cosmic order of *dharma* and one's position based on *karma*. She did not respect the social borders put in place for women, and she broke free of the rules placed on the position of women and widows. She is a menace to society. This is exactly how Bhyro Singh sees her: abject, polluting. Upon being asked by Deeti why he did not call her out earlier if he knew that she was on board, he responds with a simple logic:

His lips curled in derision: And bring shame on myself? Acknowledge a tie with a woman like you? A whore who's run away with a filth-sweeper? An overheated bitch who's brought shame on her family, her village, her in-laws? You take me for a fool? Don't you know I have daughters of my own, to marry off? (Ghosh 2008:494-495).

Even being associated with such a polluting factor would pollute his own position and reduce his standing in Indian and Hindu society. Having Deeti alive is more than just a scandal; it is a threat to his own place, for it means that he was lax in enforcing the cosmic order. If there was any doubt as to what Deeti's relatives thought of her changes, Bhyro Singh's reaction sweeps them aside and leaves no room for doubt that Deeti's changes are not approved by orthodox Hindu society. Deeti's abject status is seen in another perverse way. Deeti tries to turn away his wrath by appealing to her pregnancy from Kalua. "Child? Bhyro Singh laughed. A child from that scavenger? By the time I'm done with you, his spawn will be dribbling out of you like an egg-yolk" (496). He does not respect the child of an untouchable and threatens to abort the pregnancy with a brutal rape. Just before he wants to begin raping her, he intimates that she, as a whore, has provoked this horrible trauma: "So what do you say, Kabutri-ki-ma? [...] Are you whore enough for this?" (ibid.). Perhaps to justify such intimate contact with someone Bhyro Singh considers defiling, he says that she is a whore and this is what whores do and what they deserve.

Unfortunately, the issue of a man whose pride is at stake raping and even killing a woman is sadly a common theme in India. "[In India] rape is used for gender, caste, class, and

religious domination and for marking public space or exerting political pressure, in a perfect coalescence of sex and violence” (Basu 2011:190). Sex as a matter of control is seen throughout Deeti’s life with her rape on her wedding night, the sexual taunts by her brother-in-law, his trying to bully her into becoming his concubine after her husband’s death. The colonial courts did little to improve the chance of women to gain satisfaction through legal means: “[R]ape was treated by colonial authorities as a culturally common rather than a culturally specific crime” (Kolsky 2010:1115). In this sense, Bhyro Singh had little to fear by the way of *legal* reprisal, should Deeti come out against him. But it seems that it is not the legal argument he is worried about. The fact that Bhyro Singh first took Deeti below deck, into a closed storage space shows that even though he *feels* he is justified in (or at least likely to get away with) so harshly punishing Deeti, the space of this encounter belies his certainty.

The private setting of the punishment shows that more is at stake for Bhyro Singh. An execution or public punishment, like the one Kalua undergoes at the hands of Bhyro Singh, has a particular constellation (cf. 505-506). This whole event can be read as a statement, with a particular subject position (the executioner, the government officials presiding, the spectators, and of course the convicted criminal). There is a special materiality in that everything is live and will not be recorded, meaning that it is transitory. Foucault gives the following analysis of a public execution:

[T]he public execution [was] more than an act of justice; it was a manifestation of force; or rather, it was justice as the physical, material and awesome force of the sovereign deployed there. The ceremony of the public torture and execution displayed for all to see the power relation that gave his force to the law (1979:50).

Even though this analysis is from a work out of Foucault’s later genealogical period, the base elements of archaeology are still visible and relevant. With this special (public) constellation in place, the execution could mean more than the death of a hungry beggar or, in the view of the dominant class, of a rapist like Kalua. The execution was a sign that ‘law’ was acting here and not just a single human. The executioner was acting within a larger framework and was thus not a murderer but an agent of order. Foucault emphasizes the *public* nature of the spectacle. In the later scourging of Kalua, the whole ship was forced to gather to watch the spectacle. There Bhyro Singh’s actions were in accordance with the ‘law’. The eyes of all the spectators and their silent assent gave proof of that. With Deeti, the powerful *subedar* Bhyro Singh took great pains to close out all other eyes. This in connection with the public scourging that also took place on the ship, invites the conclusion that Bhyro Singh did not feel he had the same justification of the law for such a punishment. He vehemently disapproves of

Deeti's actions, and despite the law being in his favor in every conceivable way, he does not feel that he is able to punish her publically. Why? Deeti has become the epitome of abject in his world. She is so spoiled that not even the law can handle her, for everyone coming in contact with her will be soiled in the very act of bringing justice and order to the world.

5.4 Final scene

Before looking at the final scene of *Sea of Poppies*, it is important to look at what happens to the authority figures presented in the novel. Bhyro Singh, the powerful high-caste *subedar*, is killed by Kalua during the scourging. Bhyro Singh gave his justification for his willingness to kill Kalua through the large amount of lashes with the phrase "To kill a deceiver is no sin" (Ghosh 2008:507). Kalua turns this concept on its head to justify his *own* killing of Bhyro Singh. Like with Deeti and Nob Kissin, Kalua could be examined using Archaeology, but suffice it to say that he is able to use a statement intended for oppression into a vehicle of liberation. "Then, with a single, flowing sweep of his arm, he pulled the lash tight, jerking it with such force that before anyone could take a step or utter a sound, the subedar was lying dead on the deck, his neck broken" (ibid.). By the last pages of the novel, the Hindu controlling figure is dead by the hands of an untouchable. Captain Chillingworth does not fare much better.

Captain Chillingworth identifies himself as the representative of English rule and law: "At sea there is another law, and you should know that on this vessel I am its sole maker. While you are on the *Ibis* and while she is at sea, I am your fate, your providence, your lawgiver" (421). Certainly an intimidating figure while on the voyage, the captain's condition worsens over the course of the trip. The last the novel mentions him directly is in connection with his condition getting worse: "And as for myself, I'm more than a little a-weather, I must confess. I would be grateful if I could be spared any interruptions tonight" (514). The once-powerful law is reduced to a sickly old man who is unaware of the escape executed by the end of the novel. The English law has lost its ability to control and to condemn by virtue of its internal sickness.

This constellation of authority figures being either killed or in the process of dying is significant within the tradition of English Indian fiction. Tabish Khair notes that a common trait of English Indian fiction is the "Babu" position, something roughly analogous to the Western '*bourgeois*'; in other words, a privileged *male* position.

By defining the universal and the pan-Indian in largely privileged Babu terms, the Indian English novelist often denies the existence of the Indian 'other' – which is neither the middle class nor upper-caste. The fact that this Coolie 'other' constitutes the actual majority in India makes the denial even more significant (2005:136).

English Indian novels tend to favor this Babu position in terms of discourse and legitimacy. The Other is seldom granted the same legitimacy that the Babu enjoys. Khair mentions the Coolie as the prototypical Other of English Indian fictions. This fits into the constellation created in *Sea of Poppies*. Here the Babu position is completely undermined while the *girmityas*, or coolies, triumph over their oppressors. Mr. Burnham is powerless back in Calcutta, Captain Chillingworth is dying in his cabin, the first-mate Mr. Crowle is killed by Ah Fatt, the Indian guards have had their weapons locked away by the officers and Bhyro Singh is killed by Kalua. Last, and certainly not least, Nob Kissin, or *Baboo* Nob Kissin as he is usually called in the novel, chooses to give up his wealthy position in the services of Mr. Burnham to become both a woman and a renegade in the service of the marginalized. By the end of the novel, all Babu positions are undercut. The *girmityas* are able to force the hand of their guards time and time again and the male convicts are able to escape the ship. This is highly significant as English Indian fiction can usually “accommodate alterity only negatively as deviance, backwardness, irrational violence or stasis” (139). The novel, however, shows the Babus to be the more violent, irrational. They are the ones caught in the past, not the Coolie Other.

By the very end, the convict men, including Kalua who had been sentenced to death for killing Bhyro Singh, need to flee the ship. Deeti is left on deck with two other main characters: Paulette and Nob Kissin, while a fourth character, Zachary, looks on. The final passage of the novel reads as follows:

[T]he third was a woman in a sodden sari, who had never before uncovered her face in his presence. Now, in the fading glow of the clouds, she turned to look at him and he saw that she had piercing grey eyes. Although it was the first time he had seen her face, he knew that he had glimpsed her somewhere, standing much as she was now, in a wet sari, hair dripping, looking at him with startled grey eyes (Ghosh 2008:530).

At the end of the novel, Deeti is safe. Her husband must flee, but he survived the rage of both the Hindu and English authorities. What must also be stressed is the fact that the very last words of the novel are “grey eyes”. Earlier it was seen that Deeti having these eyes was very significant for her believing in the vision. The novel starts with the words “The vision” and ends with “grey eyes”. This connection seems highly significant. This is a sign that the novel does not condemn or deny her vision. It also never gives a clear answer as to what Deeti actually saw, if anything. This ambiguity as to the facts, combined with the clear vindication by the end of the novel, indicates that while the novel has its misgivings about Deeti’s actions, it accepts and perhaps even approves of the final outcome. The fact that Deeti’s story does

take her to the *Ibis* in the end and that the novel ends with her eyes gives her knowledge formation a large measure of credibility. It is fascinating to see how the novel treats the end of Deeti's story. After all of her ordeals, rape and further abuse by her in-laws, widowhood and near-death, running away, mental torment over the sins she feels she has committed and the near-rape by Bhyro Singh, Deeti is allowed to stand next to and in solidarity with two other important deviant characters. Deeti is not relegated to hell or some implied future torture. While her future is far from certain, she has gained the freedom to pursue her path. The part of her past that had caught up to her on the ship, Bhyro Singh, is dead at the hands of Kalua. Kalua is able to flee and thus the possibility of a reunion remains open. The final scene is told from Zachary's perspective and with his knowledge. She is not called Deeti, because Zachary does not know her name. She is now only "a woman", having finally achieved what she fought for during the course of the entire novel: the right to make her own path, a path started upon thanks to a vision.

The end of the novel also confirms the reality of Nob Kissin's transformations. He is accompanied by both Deeti and Paulette, while the other males are either looking on or fleeing in a long-boat. The fact that the novel places Nob Kissin with the women, linking arms with them, watching as the *men* leave the ship, suggests that Nob Kissin is now, for all intents and purposes, a woman. His transformation is not simply a psychosomatic symptom or a studied act, but a real transformation of subjectivity from male to female. This final constellation suggests that the novel will simply let the knowledges and the resulting changes of both Deeti and Nob Kissin stand.

6. Episteme

It should be clear by now that both Deeti and Nob Kissin move within established discourses (or at least from one to the other). However, the breaks seen in Nob Kissin's arc are quite different from Deeti's, both in the nature of the break and the outcomes of it. At this point it would seem that the two characters inhabit two worlds, with each world obeying its own discursive regularities. The episteme, in Foucault's *Archaeology*, is "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices" (1972:191). On an underlying level, even the vision-induced scorched-earth retreat from the past exhibited by Deeti works within the same episteme (or total set of relations) as Nob Kissin's sanctioned abandonment of his duties. The Indian philosopher J.L. Mehta worked on hermeneutics and the philosophical exchange between Europe and India. Mehta gives his interpretation of what the underlying 'logic' of Hinduism is in order to show, as has been my goal with this paper, that Indian

thinking and Indian religious practice follow a cohesive structure. “This inner logic, this thread running unbroken from Vedic times to the present, is constituted by the single-minded, unshaken will to the preservation of the dimension of the Holy in human living at all costs” (Mehta and Jackson 1992:107). The holy is of course a complex and complicated category, but even a cursory glance back at Deeti and Nob Kissin shows that both characters did everything they could to follow the instructions they received from beyond the mundane. This concept holds true even for a ‘villain’ character like Bhyro Singh, whose actions seem reprehensible to Western eyes. Even he was maintaining the holy order of the world in his own way. In facilitating the rape on Deeti’s wedding night, he was ensuring that his nephew could fulfill his *dharma* as a householder to have children despite his opium addiction. In trying to have both Deeti and Kalua found and killed, he was simply trying to return order to the cosmos. The final rape would also have been his way of returning order to the world. While he is portrayed as a nasty person, enjoying the torture inflicted on the convicts, a reader must not assume that he is a villain. He is a representative of a ruling part of the Hindu world that tries to maintain the holy in a way that causes those below them to suffer. But it would be an injustice to claim that his actions are only motivated by selfish or cruel intentions.

Speaking of the Rishis, the ancient Hindu seers, and their overarching goal in their writing and composing, Mehta mentions the focus on the divine and the sacred and trying to remove obstacles in the way of these things:

If there is any experience to which they did their mighty best to respond, and to which they gave an enduring reply, it was to godlessness, worship of false gods and idolatry; to falsity, deceit, conceited scoffing and denial of Divinity, cunning and magic; to the oppressive closure of sacred space, the unyielding resistance of all that covers up the hidden truth of things; to the obduracy of the stone that blocks the well-spring of sacralitv and the impediment presented by fortifications against friendly solicitations from the realm of the divine and the true (ibid.).

Both Deeti and Nob Kissin can be seen trying to keep the channels between them and the eternal sphere open. The quest for both of them was to find a space where they could continue their access to the communications from the divine. Deeti had to flee her oppressive and abusive family in order to follow her vision. Nob Kissin had to leave the security and comforts of his home to follow what he considered to be a true guru that could lead him to Krishna. Thomas Ellis, in writing on Mehta’s philosophy, sums it up as the individual responding to the call of the eternal:

From the *R̥gveda*, to the *Mahābhārata*, to the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, Mehta's logic running throughout the Hindu tradition ultimately concerns the self who responds to that which structurally exceeds its initiative and, in such excess, calls it out of its immersion in immediacy (2012:161).

Deeti received a vision which called her away from her home and across the sea to a place where she became a *bhauji*, a beloved wife, and a mother. She gave in to *darśan*, which “structurally exceed[ed] [her] initiative”, and accepted that the eternal had plans for her that she could not understand. Deeti sent her daughter away to live with her brother in order to better heed the call out of “immediacy”. Deeti was willing to suffer the pains of a *sati* death, all of this in order to find her holy space. Nob Kissin saw his duty as temple custodian as an impediment to the call of Krishna. Lucky for him, his religion lives and breathes this concept. For the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas*, anything impeding the devotee from coming to Krishna must be jettisoned for the sake of the call out of “immediacy” or day-to-day living. Each of the two characters acted out their following of the call in different ways, but the “total set of relations” underlying their “discursive practice” (Foucault 1972:191) point to doing everything they can to remove those things from their lives that would impede access to the divine spheres. Despite having different knowledge formations, based on different statements and concepts, the episteme underlying both (if not all Hindu characters in the novel) is quite simply “the preservation of the Holy”.

7. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the spiritual knowledge of two of the main characters of *Sea of Poppies*, Deeti and Nob Kissin. The central question was how these two characters created meaning (or knowledge) out of their experiences, and whether or not that knowledge is legitimate. Since Foucault’s concept of knowledge is inseparably connected with the practices of a given group and time, the question of what it means for these statements to have appeared at that time and under those circumstances needs to be looked into. This theory does not have ultimate or transcendental rules of what constitutes eternal ‘truths’ or inalterable ‘knowledge’, but these entities must be continuously settled within a specific cultural and historical frame. The novel *Sea of Poppies* is written by an Indian and set in colonial India. When these things are taken into account, one sees that the initial foreignness gives way to the understanding that these characters and their knowledges have an established and accepted place within the Indian context. While the concrete minutiae of the actions might be offensive to certain people and groups, the offense is not rooted in the alienness of the desire to follow Krishna or to remarry but in the discursive set-up where these behaviors can be seen as deviant. But calling them deviant still grants them a certain legitimacy and a certain right to exist. Yet the novel shows that while Deeti is persecuted for her actions, the root cause of the actions is found in an accepted Indian religious practice. Nob Kissin is shown to be near-universally

accepted, even by those that seemingly *should* consider him deviant. Both stories and transformations are ultimately legitimated and accepted by the novel.

This legitimation is none the less quite remarkable, as Deeti grew up in a restrictive gender and caste situation, from which one cannot escape by simply applying the discourse of modern feminism. Arguing that women have equal rights and equal standing was difficult enough in Europe and North America. These cultures had centuries of philosophy to base those claims on. The Indian world has a fundamentally different outlook on life, death, birth, class and gender. Concepts that can be used in the Western context lack the inter-texts and the discursive practice to be taken over wholesale. For this reason one must see the world of the novel at a deeper level and not just on a superficial ‘patriarchal oppression’ level. Deeti still lives in a world where running away from *dharma* is considered a sin punishable by death. Because of this, Deeti must apply different discursive elements, such as *sati* and rebirth, in an attempt to claim what even modern Indian women still struggle to obtain, namely mental, sexual and social autonomy. Seeing Deeti only as a suffragette in a sari misses the mark. She and her conflict cannot be understood outside of the hermeneutic horizon of colonial female India. Only once the role of gender, birth (especially *samsara*) and caste are understood in the context of India and not of post-Enlightenment, post-Civil-Rights Europe does the depth of Deeti’s transformation take shape.

As was seen in the context of Foucault’s spirituality, the truthfulness of knowledge can be judged by the rigor of the preparation needed and the extent and depth of the produced effects. It took years of abuse and negotiation of that abuse for Deeti to reach a point in her subjectivity that enabled her to have true *darśan* of the *Ibis* and begin her break from her in-laws. This period of trials can be seen as sufficient preparation for the *sati*-fueled radical changes she undergoes. The central interest for Deeti lies in the changes that she was able to undergo as a result of the enabling incident, the vision. Deeti went from being a timid new bride to becoming a devious daughter-in-law and eventually determined widow, before finally settling on being a confident re-married woman. Seen only in light of Western feminism her arc is quaint at best, because she still ends up ‘yoking’ herself to a man. But in the context of India, the courage to poison the mother-in-law, not to mention standing up to Bhyro Singh, the patriarch of the clan, are amazing and represent deep shifts in Deeti’s knowledge and subjectivity. These shifts would never have been possible during the first parts of Deeti’s story. Since the *darśan*-prompted shifts are so far-reaching as well as earth-shattering, the vision can be accepted as a true instance of spiritual knowledge.

Nob Kissin is fascinating for other reasons. While Deeti's story can be read as the common tale of a woman fighting for her right of self-determination, Nob Kissin undergoes an arc that has few parallels in Western literature. His metamorphosis from well-educated high-caste student awaiting his position as temple custodian might parallel a trust-fund millionaire's son waiting to become the next chairman of his father's company. There certainly are stories of that son then choosing a less opulent life over his inheritance because his wealth is not fulfilling. But this Western tale immediately shows its Western Protestant capitalist roots by focusing on money and its ability (or lack thereof) to bring happiness. Nob Kissin was not shown to be unhappy or unfulfilled in his role as future custodian. He chose Taramony (and incidentally *more* wealth than he would have likely had as a priest) because he felt (and even *knew*) that she could lead him on the path of salvation. While a Western reader might feel that the position and wealth that comes through his work with the English trading houses is what prompts him towards this journey, the novel repeatedly shows that the need to earn money is a burden and that the wealth he was forced to earn took him away from what he wanted all along. There certainly are parallels to the Western arc but the Indian answer is not *less* money but actually *no* money. When the spiritual quest seemed to have failed, Nob Kissin did not resolve to buy a farm and raise chickens, but to become a mendicant, a beggar. The Indian answer to the question of money is not to reduce to the essentials, but that money is not even needed at all. This different emphasis forces a closer look at how the Indian discourse functions.

Nob Kissin's story is filled with moments that bewilder and confuse in how he seemingly twists and wriggles out of impossible philosophical and theological conundrums, like his mentor dying or Zachary not meeting all of the criteria of Krishna. The apparent leaps of logic and faith he performs take on a different character when the Indian discourse he springs from is taken into account. Since the *Gaudiya Vaishnavas* believe in a personal creator god that is intimately involved with his people (in every sense of the word), things that would cause a Christian or Jew to lose faith can easily be turned into a test. From an epistemological standpoint, it is impossible to find out whether the single birth, saved-by-obedience-and-grace Christian is 'correct' or whether the cycle-of-rebirths, bhakti Hindu is in the 'right'. What is clear is that both groups have discourses that allow them to deal with life and to produce meaning where the entropic coldness of the universe leaves no room for meaning. Epistemology aside, the knowledge discourses of Deeti and Nob Kissin are just as coherently structured, logically consistent and meaning-producing as any Western discourse, be it based on materialism or mysticism. When one understands the inter-texts and the

discursive practices of the world Deeti and Nob Kissin inhabit then one cannot claim that their beliefs are absurd or wrong, since one inhabits a finite Western hermeneutic horizon.

The hermeneutic horizon begs the question of whether the discourses in the novel can be interrogated as to their legitimacy. The place of comparison in the novel, the heterotopic site, is the ship *Ibis*. Where on the spectrum of heterotopic functions does it fall? The “extreme poles” between which the heterotopia is negotiated are on the one hand “a space of illusion that exposes every real space [...] as still more illusory” and “another real space, as perfect, as meticulous [...] as ours is messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986:27). The novel ends up creating a space that is both of these things. The *girmitiyas* find that there are many rules and conventions that simply cannot be seen as final and binding for all time and for all people everywhere. Some of these rituals and customs were not made “with the Black Water in mind”. Bhyro Singh’s behavior also shows that caste distinction is not based on righteousness, as he is more cruel than any of the ‘convicts’ or ‘outcastes’ on the ship. The English characters also show themselves to not be more enlightened than the Indians. While Captain Chillingworth sees the Opium war, which is waged in the name of free trade and Christ, as a farce to justify greed, he is none the less still a tyrannical captain, and believes in the God-given nature of race and caste distinctions. Mr. Crowle is in the same vein as Bhyro Singh, a sadistic mid-level member of the controlling class that torments those under him. When Mr. Crowle sees the original crew manifest of the *Ibis*, all of the good will that Zachary had earned in the eyes of Mr. Crowle by the end of the novel is immediately jettisoned. The manifest simply designates Zachary as ‘black’. This shows that the imperial belief in White man’s superiority is constructed using texts, conventions and stories, like the justification of the Opium war is constructed and then used for the sake of power and profit.

Paulette and Nob Kissin show the complexity, but also the fluidity, of gender identification. They dress up as a male sailor and transform into a woman respectively. The novel does not say that gender is *only* an illusion or *only* codes or that it does not matter. The argument seems to be that gender is *partly* codes and *partly* illusion within society, but ultimately, because gender still matters in society, it is a central attribute of a person and of their place in society. The difference of the novel’s stance to the one commonly used in society is that despite gender’s centrality one should question its normal rigidity. At the same time, the gender of Paulette is based on materialist concepts and is much more based on gender as a social and personal *construction* of gender. Nob Kissin also believes that gender is codes that can be copied, but his belief in a creator-god, specifically a *male* creator god,

makes gender an eternal attribute. While he is able to shift from one gender to another, showing that gender is not fatalistic, the central importance of whether he is *actually* a woman or just pretending shows that one *is* a gender and does not only *perform* a gender. This difference of both epistemology and ontology of the concept of gender reinforces that knowledge about the world is largely conditioned by culture and the concepts and criteria given therein.

Towards the other pole of heterotopias, the *Ibis* has a more complicated status. The *Ibis* hosts several gruesome scenes such as the death of a *girmitiya* whose corpse is unceremoniously thrown overboard, the near-rape of Deeti and the scourging of Kalua. Yet the ship is also a place of wish-fulfillment. Here the *girmitiyas*, who are mostly from the untouchable castes, are able to win arguments against the high-caste guards, something highly unlikely back on Indian soil. Bhyro Singh is killed by his own weapon of oppression and the guards are unarmed by the officers. The *Ibis* becomes a place of perfection despite the continuation of old oppression because the heterotopic ship finally offers a place of justice and empowerment. The ship also becomes a place of self-determination through the renegotiation of the marriage rituals. Changes to rituals to better suit actual conditions would have been impossible in the period before their deportation on the *Ibis* since the priests would have required certain offerings and behaviors regardless of the actual ability of the people to accommodate them. Yet on this ship they are free from such power. The ship is thus not a utopia in the sense of perfection but in the sense that its lack of place enables them to enter a world of self-determination rather than outside-determination.

The *Ibis* is ultimately the legitimation of both characters. The statements, rules and other constraints on knowledge used by both Deeti and Nob Kissin are not only taken from an existing discourse, but receive a legitimate right to exist alongside other legitimate discourses on the *Ibis*. Does that mean that any action or change that can be shown to derive from a coherent discourse is legitimate? To say that something is legitimate by virtue of deriving from a given discourse would mean that a thief or a murderer and his or her discourse would have to be seen as legitimate on top of being seen as real and coherent. The novel differentiates between consistent real discourses that are illegitimate (like upper-caste patriarchy or white imperialism) and those discourses that are both consistent and legitimate (like the *girmitiyas'* rebellion or Deeti's and Nob Kissin's changes). Since the illegitimate knowledges also have their representatives on the heterotopic ship, their fate can be seen as the novel's judgement on their knowledge. Bhyro Singh is killed by Kalua, Captain Chillingworth falls ill and Mr. Crowle is killed by Ah Fatt. Their discourses were shown to

involve oppression of those below them. The deaths by the hands of the oppressed lend support to the legitimation of the discourse of the marginalized. The final legitimation comes at the end of the novel when Nob Kissin is allowed to stand among the women and Deeti is safely on the ship she saw in her vision. While their actions have shaken their world to its core, the peaceful nature of the final scene is in sharp contrast to the previous violence the ruling discourses experienced. Ultimately, both Nob Kissin's and Deeti's knowledges derive from consistent and real Indian discourses that are given vindication over the traditional discourses of power. By having both characters receive what they set out to find, the knowledges used by Deeti and Nob Kissin are demonstrated to being both real and legitimate methods of gaining knowledge about the world.

The world both characters inhabit is one where access to the Holy is of the utmost importance. Every character's actions can be seen as attempts to maintain the holy status of existence. All of this falls into the underlying episteme of the Indian world view proposed by J.L. Mehta. For him, India has a fundamentally different approach to philosophy and life. To say that Indians are less developed philosophically or even mentally because they accept non-rational knowledge formations is an arrogant imperialist stance. This stance claims that materialist science, in the form dominant in Western society, is universally true. This is taking historically and discursively contingent elements and claiming that the knowledge they create is *not* contingent but transcendently valid for all time and for all people. What the novel *Sea of Poppies* shows is that all knowledge is historically and culturally specific and that its legitimacy is a complicated and even ambiguous affair. What is not ambiguous is that for the main characters Deeti and Nob Kissin there definitely exists a world where "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, [and] your young men shall see visions".

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Abstract

Wie funktionieren die Wissensdiskurse Deetis und Nob Kissins innerhalb des Romans *Sea of Poppies*? Sind deren Wissensdiskurse legitim? Literatur über *Sea of Poppies* schaut nicht Wissensdiskurse an. Deeti und Nob Kissin haben nicht-rationale indische Wissensdiskurse, die auf echten indischen Diskursen basieren. Deren Diskurse sind, innerhalb des indischen Kontexts, genauso legitim und kohärent wie wissenschaftliche Diskurse im westlichen Kontext. Die Wissensdiskurse beruhen auf Vorbereitung und Verwandlung als Indikatoren der Authentizität des spirituellen Erlebnisses. Dies ist mit Michel Foucaults Spiritualität zu verstehen. Wissen besteht aus Regeln und Kriterien für Aussagen. Dies kommt in Foucaults Archäologie zum Ausdruck. Alle Charaktere im Roman enden auf dem Schiff Ibis. Foucault schreibt Schiffen einen besonderen Status als Heterotopie zu. Sowohl Deetis Diskurse zu Visionen und Frauen im Hinduismus als auch Nob Kissins Diskurs zu Krishna und Gender folgen einer kohärenten internen Logik und stützen sich auf hinduistische und indische Texte und Traditionen. Die unterschiedliche Behandlung Deetis im Vergleich zu Nob Kissin ist nicht mit westlichem Gender sondern mit den unterschiedlichen hinduistischen Diskursen zu erklären. Beide Verwandlungen werden am Ende des Romans legitimiert und vom Roman akzeptiert. Auch nicht-rationale, nicht-westliche Wissensdiskurse bieten praktikable Resultate. Diese Diskurse sind genauso legitim wie der westliche Wissenschaftsdiskurs.

Erklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig und ohne fremde Hilfe angefertigt und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel verwendet habe.

Die eingereichte schriftliche Fassung der Arbeit entspricht der auf dem elektronischen Speichermedium.

Weiterhin versichere ich, dass diese Arbeit noch nicht als Abschlussarbeit an anderer Stelle vorgelegen hat.

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