

AUT Master of Creative Writing Thesis

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FREEDOM STRUGGLES

Freedom Struggles (the working title) is a manuscript of a novel by Kamala Jackson accompanied by an exegesis

The exegesis component of the thesis is 4500 words in length/ 12 pages

The novel length fiction component is 100,000 words/ 366 pages

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

EXEGESIS

Freedom Struggles is the first draft of a novel set in Telengana, the Telugu speaking part of the State of Hyderabad, South India. The time is the 1940s and most of the action takes place 1947-8, the period of Indian Independence and its aftermath. Other novels written about the same era (Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*) are set in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent, in areas that were once part of the British Raj. Unlike these, *Freedom Struggles* is set in the South Indian feudal princely state of Hyderabad, ruled by the Nizam. It explores the disruption to lives, and the testing of friendships and loyalties across ethnic, religious and political lines that arose when Hyderabad was forcibly incorporated into democratic, secular, independent India. This subject has not to my knowledge been explored in contemporary English literature, nor has the life of Indian Christians in that area. The novel centres on a Christian community and an established mission station in the fictional town of Kalampett.

As this novel is set in India after its independence from British rule, it can be seen as a postcolonial work. Postcolonial literature is defined by Talib (2002) as literature of the colonised and formerly colonised. Brians (1998, version 2006) gives a variant definition: the “ literature written by people living in countries formerly colonised by other nations”(para. 5). However, the discussion on postcolonialism is not limited to “literal colonization” (Brians, 2006, para. 6). Dominance of one country can be effected by the spread of its ideas and values in a country that has not been under its colonial rule. This is the concept of ‘hegemony’ (Brians, 2006). Neo-colonialism is a term given to the continued influence of an ex-coloniser through some legacy, for example the continued use of English in India. But Rushdie (1991) has written “... Those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, . . . They use it as an Indian language, as one of the tools they have to hand.” (p. 64)

The neo-colonialist view is sometimes seen as Euro-centric, attributing a greater relevance and position to the ex-Colonial power in the contemporary life of the ex-Colony

than it actually has (Brians para. 9). Chaudhuri (2001) talks about the “peripherality of the Western figure” (p xix) in Indian literature. Brians has noted that “postcolonial authors” do not necessarily write to engage “in an on-going critique of colonialism” (para. 12). In the Indian context he mentions the writer R.K. Narayan, who “displays a remarkable indifference to the historical experience of colonialism” (para 10). Chaudhuri goes further and explains that colonialism does not mean “a simple conflict between native and foreign cultures” (p xix). The colonial period “represented a troubled, but rich, phase in the Indians sense of self, and his or her relation to tradition, history, community and change” (p xix). The changes Chaudhuri mentions are education, the railways, the emergence of a new class structure alongside or cutting across the traditional caste system, and the growth of urban life. He continues, “this phase of self-enquiry and self-redefinition is, substantially, what colonialism meant in India” (p. xix). In a discussion of Bengali literature, he describes the response to colonialism as “complex, subtle, varied and profound . . . If an oppressor . . . is identified and subject to critique . . . it is either the old feudal landlord caste or the emerging upper middle classes.” (p. xx)

Boehmer (2005) identifies three developments in postcolonial writing during the 1990s: writing by women, by indigenous peoples, and by diasporic or migrant writers.

She sees the writing by women as multi-voiced, with a “ mosaic or composite quality: the intermingling of forms derived from indigenous, nationalist and European literary traditions.” (Boehmer, 2005, p. 219). Postcolonial women writers “are . . . concerned to bring to the fore the specific textures of their own existence.” They note “ the validity of the buried, apparently humble lives”. (Boehmer, p220).

The second strain of later post-colonial writing identified by Boehmer, the writing by ‘first’ peoples in white settler colonies, has no relevance here.

The third category is that of migrant writers. “Ex-colonial by birth, ‘Third World’ in cultural interest, cosmopolitan in almost every other way, she . . . works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same retaining thematic and/or political connections with a national, ethnic or regional background.”(Boehmer, p. 227)

The overarching, historical, macro-narrative of *Freedom Struggles* is the conflict between the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Government of newly independent India. The Nizam wants to be free to rule Hyderabad as he wishes, something he was not entirely able

to do when Britain, the “paramount” power, ruled India. However, the Indian government cannot tolerate a large, wealthy, separate state in the middle of India and wants Hyderabad to “accede” to the Indian Union. When negotiations break down there is a stand off, formalised in the Standstill Agreement. This situation is resolved when the Indian Army invades Hyderabad and the Nizam surrenders.

This novel has multiple characters struggling in their separate ways with changes to their world and their identities.

Anand is the son of the widow, Graceamma, employed in the mission bungalow. Anand’s aim is to marry Rosie, the schoolgirl daughter of the clerk in the mission office, and a teacher in the mission school. But to be acceptable to Rosie, Anand must make himself a suitable suitor – a man with prospects who can ensure status and financial security for his wife.

As an eighteen year-old, Anand is sent by his missionary mentors to Hyderabad to learn the printing trade. His future seems assured. He meets the charismatic Satyan, a caste Hindu with dangerous secrets. Anand’s one area of superiority over Satyan is that he can read and write Telugu, thanks to his mission schooling. Satyan who went to school in Hyderabad City, is literate in Urdu, the minority elite language, but not his native tongue. Satyan hires Anand to teach him to read and write Telugu and a friendship develops.

Anand is also befriended by the theologian, Isaiahgaru, who has recently returned to India from Britain. Luke, Anand’s father, was Isaiahgaru’s great friend in their student days. Anand knows very little about his dead hero father, but learns more from Isaiahgaru.

Anand is asked by Satyan to look after his secret gypsy wife and two sons when his friend leaves Hyderabad to join the communist insurgency in the countryside. In keeping this promise, Anand has to leave Hyderabad himself. Communist cadres prevent his return to Hyderabad, so he decides to make his way back to Kalampett, his mother, the missionary mentors and Rosie. On the way he finds himself in Cheddapalli, the village where he was born, where his father died, and now a centre of communist activity, led by Satyan. Anand begins to act politically against the armed struggle of the Communists. This places him in direct opposition to Satyan, his former friend, and puts him in danger. As the Indian army is about to enter Hyderabad State, Anand and Satyan fight and Anand is left for dead. At the end of the novel, both Anand and Satyan are prisoners of the military in Kalampett. Anand,

now blind, is a suspected communist, and Satyan is disguised as Shiva Rama Rao, a robber caught red-handed by soldiers. Satyan's true identity is another secret Anand must keep. Anand's credentials as a suitable suitor for Rosie are lost, and Rosie herself is no longer a "suitable" bride. Anand while in Cheddapalli, and while he was wounded and semi-conscious on a bullock cart and even while he is in gaol, learns more about his dead father.

Graceamma, Anand's mother, traumatised by the early death of her husband has lost her ability to read. Her life choices have been largely determined by others. She became the ayah to the daughter of a missionary household. When the daughter is older and no longer needs an ayah, Graceamma stays on as a servant, as the missionary bungalow is now her home. Anand's unexplained disappearance causes further trauma, but she recovers and leaves her life as a servant, making her own decision about how she will pursue the rest of her life.

Abraham, the cook, a lover of beauty, dignity and order, is dissatisfied by his employers' ways of sabotaging their own status, symbolised by Harriet Rimmer's inferior dinnerset. By undermining their status they undermine his, as cook and bearer at the mission bungalow. In difficult times, he is forced to respond to demands made on him by the cheating Muslim butcher, Hassan, who fears for his life, and take responsibility for the unbeautiful schoolboy, Prakasam, who becomes a victim of political change. In the process Abraham revises his priorities.

Harriet, the missionary, despite her dedication and concern for her servants and the pupils at the school, cannot in the end keep them all from harm. She learns from her cook, that a cheap dinnerset will not effectively close the gap between her position of privilege and the lives of the local Indians.

Mrs Amos, who in her keenness to look after the unfortunate Kumarraj, her youngest sibling, and at the same time to find a neat solution to her husband's desire to retire, inadvertently brings about the situation in which her beloved daughter Rosie suffers the ultimate disgrace to a conventional young girl.

Rosie is a young girl with the traditional Indian (and Jane Austen-like) ambition of seeking financial security and an improved social position through marriage, possibly to Anand should he prove himself. This plan is upset by Anand's disappearance, and more seriously, when she is raped by her uncle, an event that cannot be kept secret because she is

made pregnant. She attempts suicide. Missionary patronage allows Rosie to escape from the small town of Kalampett and the oppression of conventional judgements and go to college in Madras. Marriage is on hold, but there are now other options in her life.

Kumarraj's name is literally PrinceKing. He exemplifies the high status of the male in traditional society, and his counterpart is the traditionally submissive woman, his wife Shanti who died in childbirth. Despite the high value put on a bride's virginity, the power of a man's standing is such that when one asks an unmarried virgin to go to bed with him, she finds it difficult not to comply, despite the risk of pregnancy and disgrace. However, Rosie, though traditional in respect to wanting status and security through marriage, is not submissive. Kumarraj takes advantage of her when she is asleep, and Rosie when she realises what has happened exacts her revenge. Kumarraj repents his act and seeks to change his life.

The young and sensitive Lester, who carries a war wound, is the latest recruit to the Kalampett mission station. He falls in love with the beautiful Amy Parker stationed in Bezwada and woos her against the odds of distance, the lack of privacy, the disapproval of the Bishop, the disruption to the mails and his diffidence. His staid courtship is a counterpoint to the more dramatic lives of the Indian characters.

In a story within a story, the fictional Rahel, daughter to one of the Nizam's concubines, hero-worships her father, but grows disillusioned and at the end makes the decision to leave his protection and embark on an independent life. The friendship between Rahel and Nasreen (meaning Wild Rose), echoes in some respects the friendship between Rachel (Harriet's daughter) and Rosie. Both Nasreen and Rosie are victims of incest.

It will be seen from these many storylines that the novel is multivoiced (Boehmer, 2005). The author is a woman, however she is not a Telugu, or indeed an Indian, but a Westerner born and brought up in India till she was sixteen and in that sense "ex-colonial". Like the migrant writer Boehmer describes, she "works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic . . . connections with a . . . regional background". (p. 227)

This region, Telengana, did not experience "literal colonization" (Brians, 2006) as it was ruled by a traditional Muslim dynasty, with its unique culture, feudal structure, and its own administration. So the power opposed in the novel by the communist Satyan is not a

western, but an eastern power structure, and, to quote Chaudhuri again . . . “If an oppressor . . . is identified . . . it is . . . the old feudal landlord caste . . .” (p. xx). Whether the fight against this caste should be with weapons, or by non-violent means, is a matter of dispute between Satyan and Anand, and comes to a head after a communist ambush. Anand and his associates, in a Good Samaritan act, pick up a wounded victim along the roadside, only to realise that the man they have saved is the cruel and hated landlord. This puts them and their village in danger as the communist cadre, realising they have not captured their target, seek him out.

So the political struggle in the novel is not against a Western colonial power, but a struggle between Indians with different interests, a struggle between feudalism and democracy, between oligarchy and the idea of an elected government, between the traditional and the modern, and a struggle between fundamentalist Islamists and Communists, who later forge a pact to fight a common enemy, independent India.

In the novel there is an ambivalence towards Indian Independence. It is celebrated by the Christian community of Kalampett and the missionaries who are “progressive” in their views. However, the communists see the new Indian government as essentially elitist and bourgeois. According to Benichou (2000), a leadership change in the Communist Party of India in December 1947, from reformist to radical, introduced a hardline attitude towards the socialist Nehru who was officially regarded as a reactionary bourgeois leader. The Muslim population saw the Indian government as representing the Hindu population, and to the outcaste and landless peasants it was a “caste” government, with more in common with the oppressive landlord class than with themselves. To the illiterate population concepts of “democracy” and “representative government” had no resonance, and calls to oppose “foreign rule” meaningless to a population conditioned to a traditional respect for the Nizam. (Benichou, 2000). It was the Communists, local leaders committed to protecting the landless against the exploitation of the landlords, who gained political traction in Telengana.

In the novel, Anand, whose views have been influenced by the radical Satyan, and the travelled and highly educated Isaiahgaru, adopts a wait and see attitude to whether the new nation, though gloriously free and independent, delivers what the people hope and need.

While Hyderabad was not directly colonised by Britain, it was also resistant to its “hegemony”, that is, resistant to Western values and institutions, (but not to modern innovation, such as the railways). Unlike other Indian Princes and members of the Indian elite in British India, the Nizam did not have his sons educated in Britain. Also, it was the Nizam’s opinion that “Constitutional monarchy . . . has no meaning in the East” (Campbell-Johnson, p. 329). It could be argued that the Nizam’s enemies, that is, the post-Independence Government of India and the Communist Party of India, were far more susceptible to, indeed promulgated, European ideologies, (Democracy and Marxism). It could be said that from a Hyderabad point of view, the Indian Government was a proxy for the colonial power, espousing representative Government, and inheriting administrative structures.

The historical Nizam had personal ambitions to be an independent ruler but there were also strategic reasons for Hyderabad to maintain independence. The partition of the subcontinent into the separate countries of India and Pakistan, put the Nizam in a difficult position. The ‘princely states’ though legally entitled to their own independence had much pressure put on them by the leaders of Indian Independence and by Britain, in the person of Mountbatten, to voluntarily join or “accede” to India or Pakistan. For geographic reasons a Hyderabad accession to Pakistan was unrealistic, and accession to India might have provoked a violent reaction of the Nizam’s Muslim subjects. (Benichou, 2000) While most Princely States were too small to contemplate viable futures as independent states, this was not the case with Hyderabad. Its income and expenditure matched Belgium’s and was greater than those of twenty smaller member countries in the United Nations.(French, 1997)

The Westerners in this novel are missionary characters and one of the missionaries, the Bishop, is an Indian, a Tamil. Historically, Westerners living outside the city of Hyderabad tended to be Protestant missionaries or Roman Catholic priests, there by permission of the Nizam’s government. (Author unknown, *Khammamett in 1913*, 1914). For this writer, the novel *Freedom Struggles* has had a thirty year gestation. One of the difficulties was how to represent the missionary characters at a time when public discourse on Maori Sovereignty, British colonialism and ideas of political correctness have rendered the missionary an unadmirable character and a tool of colonialism.

In Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible* (1999), the American missionary, Nathan Price, is an emblem for the evils of Imperialism. Kingsolver's parents themselves worked briefly in the Congo as "medical and public-health workers". In an Author's Note (page x), Kingsolver thanks her parents "for being different in every way from . . . the narrators of this tale." The missionaries I wished to depict, in order to be "true" to my experience, were also people of a different stripe. Theologically, they were evangelical but not fundamentalist, politically and socially they were "progressive". They were well-educated, the ones from the United Kingdom often graduates of Oxford and Cambridge or Trinity College, Dublin. In a peasant culture, these outsiders had the status of *dora* or "lord". They had authority and *mana*, perceived by the locals as not being there for personal gain. Some missionaries stayed for many years, decades or even a lifetime. Local stories and anecdotes often depicted them as "heroic" or "holy".

In the novel, the pragmatic dhobiwoman sees the missionaries as being good for business. Anand describes them as midwives, "alongside us through all this, caring for us and ready to intervene", but they "do not themselves experience the pangs of labour at this birth of a new nation." The missionaries are not the main story, but exist as agents for change, providing education and medical care not provided by the government of the Nizam. The religion of the missionaries, Christianity, provides an opportunity for people, particularly for the 'untouchables' of a traditional Hindu society, to see themselves no longer as despised and outcast, but in a different, more positive light. To "redefine" themselves, to use Chaudhuri's term (p xix). (In this century there is a move for Dalits, the current name for 'untouchables' to escape ancient stigmas by converting to Buddhism.)

The Indian Christians in the novel are not part of the "oppressed masses". By engaging with the education, the medical care, and the religion introduced by the outside agent (the missionaries) they are already bettering themselves, moving from a rural to an urban life, forming a new middle class. Shakuntala, the nurse, who started life in a village, but became educated and trained, is able to return to the village as a person with expertise. Unlike the younger Rosie, she has not looked to marriage as a route to advancement. Shakuntala is independent, described at first by Anand as "bold" and "free", but these are dangerous words in a conventional setting, so he settles on the word "strong". In a "male"

world of conflict and danger, Shakuntala is able to act effectively and earns respect in her own right. She is also free to contemplate unconventional sexual connections.

There are three rapes in the novel. The first is the incestuous rape of Rosie. The second is the incestuous connection between the fictional Nizam and his daughter by one of his concubines. In sexual matters, the historical Nizam had a feudal, seigniorial 'right'. His mother gave him, when a young, unmarried prince, a concubine as a birthday gift. (Bawa, 1993). The third rape is of a servant woman by a soldier of the Indian Army. After the historical "police action" of the Indian Army that incorporated Hyderabad into the Indian State, an investigation by Nehru officially uncovered what was known locally, that the Hyderabadi population suffered a great deal at the hands of the military, deaths, rapes, looting. (Bawa 1993). The Indian Army stayed on to fight the Communist insurgents. The villagers were caught between the wrath of the Communists who wanted their protection and the wrath of a military after information and assistance in capturing the insurgents. The soldiers in the main did not speak the local languages, and this may have contributed to the lack of care and compassion in their treatment of the villagers. A missionary was instrumental in getting the army to withdraw soldiers from Uttar Pradesh (a state in the north of India), who had a particularly bad reputation. (Jackson,1980)

In the novel, there are two historical characters, the Nizam and Major-General Chaudhuri. To my knowledge the historical Major-General did not eat with the missionaries, but they were asked to help the Army to approach the Muslim community in their town. (Tate, 1981).

Like the work of postcolonial women writers Boehmer describes, this novel has a "mosaic or composite quality" (p. 219)

The structure of the novel follows month by month from June 1947, when British withdrawal is announced, to September 1948 when the Indian Army enters Hyderabad and secures the surrender of the Nizam. Each month the stories of different characters are progressed in scenes or vignettes. So, for example, in the chapter July 1948, the first scene is with Anand, the second with Harriet, then a scene set in Archie's office, followed by a diary entry, and the final scene is again with Anand. The scenes are often in different places: Kalampett, Hyderabad, Cheddapalli, and the change of location is given as a heading for that scene. Different forms are used, letters and a diary, the device of "a story

within a story”, and there is much conversation and anecdote giving flavour and texture to the ordinary and, often, domestic lives.

At the end of the novel, it is another outside agent, the Indian Army, that comes to liberate the characters from a feudal political order and unite them with the rest of India, but this “liberation” also creates victims. Ordinary people, the characters of this novel, have to ride the storms created by the governments of whatever stamp, feudal or democratic, anachronistic or independent. While the general theme of the book is freedom, it is individual freedoms as well as a larger political freedom, that are important.

The novel is written in a formal, not a contemporary, register, placing the novel in the 1940s. Differences in vocabulary and syntax are used to distinguish the characters who are English speakers from the characters who are Telugu speakers. Language also denotes status and position and differing levels of education. Isaiahgaru, the Indian theologian, speaks in a precise high language, whether he is speaking Telugu or English. Benjamingaru, while speaking Telugu, has a penchant for breaking into English clichés.

The second to last scene, a brief scene with the Rimmer family, indicates circularity. Though the political landscape has changed forever, some events are repeating themselves.

The novel starts with a wide-angled view (the Prologue). As the narrative progresses, Indian viewpoints are given more importance than those of the missionaries. The final passage of the novel is in the first person as Anand reflects on events in gaol and looks to the future of the nation’s life and his own. As in the macro-narrative, a power shift towards self-government is achieved in the local church. When the Bishop dies, two Western missionaries in turn decline to stand for the position in favour of a Telugu, thus within the local community there is also a transfer of power.

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