

'Rise, and Take the Gospel Message [...] Far away to India's Daughters': The Bicultural Missionary Poetics of Ellen Lakshmi Goreh (1853-1937), a Victorian-Era Transracial Adoptee

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Abstract

This essay discusses the life and writings of Ellen Lakshmi Goreh (1853-1937), an ethnic Indian who was adopted by British missionaries in infancy, educated in Victorian England as child, and who returned to India as a Christian missionary in adulthood. Examining her poetical works as unusual examples of Indian-English Christian writings during the late nineteenth century, the essay seeks to establish Goreh's reputation as a Victorian-era transracial adoptee author, and, thereby, extend research on the history of transracial adoptee writing (which has to date been confined to the writings of the last fifty years) to the nineteenth century. To this end, Goreh's personal story is traced from her origins; adoption; negotiations with her personal and cultural identities in England; entry into print culture; return to India as a Christian missionary; revisions in the representations of Indian peoples; and conceptualisation of God as the faithful mother in her mature poetry. Her poetic developments are explored from her replication of English ethnocentric imperialist views in *"From India's Coral Strand"* (1883), her first volume of poetry published in England, which depicts Indians as helpless heathens damned to ignorance and hell without the intervention of salvific English missionaries, to her second collection of verse, *Poems* (1899), published some sixteen years later in Madras which inscribes her radically transformed understandings about Indian subjectivity and corresponding belief in the pre-existing immanence of the Christian God in India's innocents. The role of Goreh's religion as the agent through which she re-engaged with, returned to, and re-assimilated into Indian culture is explored, and it is demonstrated how her identification of a special work for herself among the Anglo-Indian community, a group which reflected her own dual identity, resulted in the production of a more sensitive, organic and indigenous form of Indian-Christian writing.

Key words

Poetry, India, adoptee literature, women missionaries

Introduction

The writings of transracial adoptees have become an emergent area of literary critical interest in recent years. In particular, texts inscribing the emotional and psychological strains of loss, racial dislocation, assimilation, and, later, re-identification with original roots have proved to be powerful sites for exploring the construction of cultural, racial, gender and sexual identities (Novy, 2001a, 2005; Honig, 2005; Oparah, Shin, & Trenka, 2006; Min, 2008). No doubt owing to the fact that large-scale transnational adoption emerged in the mid-twentieth century—in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Korean War—scholarship in this area has been largely confined to the analysis of contemporary literature. Indeed, Marianne Novy, one of the leading scholars in the field, suggests that this subgenre was a twentieth-century innovation when she asserts that it was “[i]n the 1970s, when for the first time a number of [transracial] adoptees began to write publicly about their search for biological ancestors” (Novy, 2001a, p. 5). Yet cases of transracial adoption did exist in earlier times, albeit more rarely, when making sense of hybrid identities was even more likely to be an alienating and liminal experience, and some of these experiences were also inscribed in writing.

One intriguing example of a pre-twentieth-century transracial adoptee who endeavored to negotiate the duality of her identity in her writing is Ellen Lakshmi Goreh (1853-1937), a daughter of Brahmin converts to Christianity who was born in India but brought up by British parents and removed to England for her education. Goreh may be viewed as a Victorian-era British Asian as she lived in England from 1867—when she was only about twelve years old - until 1880 when she returned to India as an educational missionary. An aspiring writer of devotional verse, she was encouraged to enter into print culture as a young woman by some influential English Evangelicals who perceived her as being uniquely placed as a literary Christian Indian woman to embody the possible fruits of educational missionary work among Asian women. As a consequence, very unusually for an Indian woman of her period, she published English-language devotional poetry, missionary reports, letters, and periodical articles, as well as two small volumes of Christian verse during her life. Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering her remarkable per-

sonal story, much of her writing speaks out of, and seeks to make sense of, her intricate multifaceted identity as an English-educated Indian Christian woman.

This essay strives to establish Goreh's reputation as a Victorian-era transracial adoptee author, and probably the first Indian-Christian poetess to publish in English. In terms of its contribution to the existing body of scholarship on adoption literature, it seeks to extend research on the history of transracial adoptee writing—particularly the gender and racial identity issues which have been examined in studies of contemporary transnational adoptee writing—to the nineteenth century. This represents a major shift from the existing scholarship on issues of adoption in nineteenth-century literature, which has tended to focus on the representation of the orphan in fictional prose narratives, and the imaginative possibilities of the adoption narrative in delivering social protest about class divisions, such as in *Oliver Twist*, *Jane Eyre*, *Silas Marner* and *Wuthering Heights* (O'Toole, 2001; Novy, 2001b). Instead of taking this approach, this essay will investigate the bicultural identity of the adoptee as the child of two different familial heritages, which, in Goreh's case, is exaggerated by racial difference. To this end, Goreh's writings will be examined in the context of her biography: her English upbringing, continued re-negotiation of her cultural identity in England and India, transforming ideas about Indian people, and evolving representations of them in her poetry.

A key factor in the examination of Goreh's negotiation of her adoptee identity will be her Christian religion. Recent scholarship on transnational adoption has drawn attention to the considerable influence of Christianity as a major contributory factor in the creation of the "international adoption phenomenon" (Kim, 2006, p. 152) in the twentieth century. Notably, in recent years, adoptee commentators themselves have often been critical of the role of Christianity (particularly Evangelicalism) in justifying the uprooting of eastern children for western parents through scriptural authority of Isaiah 43: 5-6: "I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth." Christian adoption has also been interpreted as a form of proselytization, and Protestant Christianity, with its work ethic, has been seen as sanctioning capitalist

wealth production, and, thereby, perpetuating adoption as a multi-million dollar global business (Kim, 2006, p. 156).

In Goreh's nineteenth-century case, before transracial adoption became a widespread trend and adoptees amassed a challenging political voice, the relationship between her religion (the Anglicanism of her adoptive family) and adoptee identity was understood differently. For Goreh, Christianity was the agent that enabled her to re-engage with her birth culture. For instance, at a time when women's roles were limited and international travel was exceptional, Christianity became the vehicle through which she returned to and re-entered Indian society, because overseas missionary service provided the opportunity and justification to return to India. For Goreh, her belief in a benevolent maternal God further provided her with the imaginative scope to reconcile of her orphan identity and surrounding issues of abandonment and loss, and she recorded this process in her verse writings. Thus, this essay scrutinizes the role of Christianity in the production of Goreh's hybrid missionary-adoptee writings and her attempts to make sense of her bicultural heritage.

A British Daughter: Performing Cultural Assimilation

Goreh was born in Benares (now Varanasi) on 11 September 1853, to Nehemiah Goreh, a convert to Christianity who later became an important priest of the Indian Church, and his wife, Lakshmibai Jogalekar. She was given up for adoption at three months when her mother died. At this point, she was "taken" and "brought up" (Bullock, 1883, p. ix) by an indigo planter's wife, Mrs Smailes, until 1857 when Mr Smailes "lost not only all his property, but also his own life in the Mutiny, and Nellie was once more homeless" (Batley & Robinson, 1937, p. 55). Therefore, at the age of five, when she would have been fully conscious to feelings of abandonment and loss, Ellen had to endure a second separation from familial figures. It was arranged that Goreh would be sent to the Christian Missionary Society Orphanage at Benares, but a young English missionary couple, the Reverend and Mrs W. T. Storrs, decided to adopt her instead to replace their first-born child who had died (Batley & Robinson, 1937, p. 55). Although biological children were later born to the Storrs, family members, including her adoptive father and

brother, insisted to her biographers that Ellen was considered “in every way one of the family” (Batley & Robinson, 1937, p. 55).

That the Storrs brought Ellen up to be “one of them” through a rigorous process of cultural re-identification – the prevalent model for the transracial adoptee’s integration into the adoptive family before the “age of pluralist multiculturalism replaced earlier models of full assimilation” (Kim, 2010, p. 94) – is demonstrated by that fact that, when the opportunity came, she was removed to England for her education. As the Reverend Storrs later recalled:

[in 1865] we brought “Nellie” with us [on furlough to England], and were, by the aid of kind friends, able to put her to a good school. When we returned to England, in 1871, she again rejoined us in our English home, and has been to us indeed as a daughter, and a most beloved one, and to our children altogether as a sister (Bullock, 1883, p. ix).

This was a normal pattern for the children of missionaries and it may be inferred that the Storrs wanted to give “Nellie” – Ellen was presumably her English adoptive name – the same opportunities. However, significantly, the extract intimates that the biological children of the family, presumably included in the plural personal pronoun “us”, were not sent to England before 1871.

Whatever the parents’ motives, the move to England was initially a great cultural shock for Goreh. The following extract recalls her feelings of displacement and anxiety:

When I arrived in England I wore a red flannel thing on my head called a *chaddar*. I used to have crowds of children running after me wherever I went, and one day on arriving at the house where I was staying, I got hold of one child and gave her a good shaking. Afterwards I always wore a hat, generally a sailor hat. The three girls, who were as my sisters, and I always dressed alike. Afterwards, when I was grown up, I wore a bonnet (Batley & Robinson, 1937, pp. 55-56).

Distressed and angry about being viewed as a conspicuous spectacle and figure of fun, she sought strategies to blend in, and performed an act of cultural transference. Taking off the *chaddar* and putting on the sailor hat signalled the beginning of the process of casting off her Indian identity and assimilating an English one. Goreh's penultimate statement that the "three girls, who were as my sisters, and I always dressed alike" further insinuates that the performance of Goreh's English identity was specifically gendered in feminine terms. In Victorian England, where gender behaviour was so strictly prescribed (we may recall, for instance, the famous example of the self-sacrificial "Angel in the House"), part of Ellen's process of English assimilation was to learn to be an English girl (in order to grow up to be an English lady). Novy has suggested that "Adoption is a more salient issue for women since family membership is in general more salient for women" (Novy, 2001a, p. 9), and, here, Goreh stresses her family membership as a replicant sister and points to the significance of gender performance in her cultural re-construction.

After the Storrs's return, Goreh lived very much in the pattern of a typical Victorian clergyman's daughter in Yorkshire: first, in the wool mill-town of Heckmondwicke, and, later, in Great Horton, a suburb of the industrial cotton manufacturing Bradford. Leading up to this reunion, Goreh had received an exclusive and lengthy schooling - she had first attended a private school in York, and, then, one of the first and largest teacher training institutions for women in the country, the Home and Colonial College, in London. In Yorkshire, she acted for some time as a governess to at least one of her adoptive brothers, and undertook local evangelistic work; she held Sunday-afternoon Bible classes for the local mill girls, which were reputedly popular with as many as seventy girls attending the meetings (Batley & Robinson, 1937, p. 56). These details suggest further that, once in England, Goreh had followed the "clean break" model of adoption (Duncan, 1993, p. 51). As Barbara Yngvesson elucidates:

The clean break separates the child from everything that constitutes her grounds for belonging as a child to *this* family and *this* nation, while establishing her transferability to *that*

family and *that* nation. With a past that has been cut away - an old identity that no longer exists - the child can be reembedded in a new place as though she never moved at all (Yngvesson, 2005, p. 26).

Possibly as a strategy of cultural survival, Goreh worked hard to enact an English way of life and, concurrently, underwent a process of dis-identification, erasing Indian ethnic markers.

In one interview, Goreh recalled her loathing as a young woman at being viewed as a foreigner/outsider in England. Looking back on her time at the Home and Colonial College, she remembered being taken to missionary meetings where she was “inevitably” told by female missionaries that they “hoped that one day I would return to my own country to teach my own people.” She recalled, “How I disliked those talks! I did not in the least want to go back to my own country and teach my own people!” (Batley & Robinson, 1937, p. 56). These talks seem to have infuriated her because, at this time, although genetically Indian, she had worked hard to assimilate into English culture and identified herself with the English. Through her adoption, she belonged to England and had cut her connections with India. Moreover, as Indians were popularly depicted in English culture as ignorant, morally feeble, and uncivilized at this time, it is not surprising that she would have wished to dis-identify herself from the race.

Indeed, when Goreh did eventually take up the call to become a missionary to India, it was not so much that she was relinquishing her English national identity in order to reclaim her Indian roots, but that she was entering into a nationalistic act which demonstrated her firm belief in the British imperialist mission. As Rowbotham has rightly observed, “part of the appeal of missionary work for women was that, as author Charlotte Tucker (1821-1893) commented, it was patriotic; part of British imperialism: “The National Church is the spiritual organ of the empire” (Giberne, 1895, pp. 56-57 [quoted in Rowbotham, 1998, p. 251]). Being a missionary was one of the few accessible means by which women could participate in the expansion of the British Empire, and Goreh was committing herself to this role.

Goreh's Suitable Identity as a Promoter of Zenana Missionary Work

Goreh's entry into print culture came about as the result of an epistolary exchange with the Evangelical poetess Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879), one of the most famous British hymn-writers of the Victorian period. Goreh sent some verses to Havergal in 1876 "as an expression of deep Christian regard and affection, as well as a tribute of gratitude for the benefit derived from her devotional books" (Bullock, 1883, p. x). After learning about Goreh's unusual blend of Indian birth, English upbringing, and Christian faith, Havergal wrote back enthusiastically with a singular proposal:

I believe that if you let your verses go forth as no Englishwoman's work, but as that of a Brahmin who is now one in Christ, you will be giving help to the Zenana Missions and Female Education in the East, which, so far as I know, none but yourself can give! It will be a testimony to many thousands of what His grace can do and has done (Bullock, 1883, p. viii).

Havergal was perceptive in comprehending that her admirer's writings validated the work of female *zenana* missionaries by demonstrating that Indian women could be educated and become pious Christians.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the education of Indian women was a critical feminist issue for many British Christians who felt the urgency of Christ's commission to: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16: 15). Although the Hindu scriptures (*snāstras*) did not prohibit female education, Indian women in the nineteenth century were largely denied access to formal education. As Basu (1993) has discussed, anxieties had developed that women's education was unorthodox and potentially dangerous; one nineteenth-century missionary commissioned to survey the state of education in Bengal documented the prevalence of a superstition that a man would die shortly after marrying a literate girl (Basu, 1993, p. 190). For Evangelical missionaries, who believed in the importance of studying the Bible - Bebbington (1989) has suggested that the four primary character-

istics of Evangelical Christianity are: crucicentrism, conversionism, Biblicism, and activism—women’s education seemed imperative as a fundamental means of spreading the gospel and bringing about conversion. However, female education in India was complicated by the fact that high-caste girls often practised *purdah* - the practice of keeping women separated from men or strangers - and could not risk public exposure by going to school. Even if girls did attend school, child marriages meant that long-term learning was often not possible. Under these circumstances, the *zenana* system, where female teachers delivered education to women in their homes (men were not permitted into the *zenana*—the part of the house set apart for women), was promoted as a solution for elevating Indian women through education. (*Zenana* educational missionaries taught reading, writing, music, and accounts, as well as needlework skills like embroidery and darning.) As this system became popular, a demand was created for women teachers to work in India, and female missionaries, who valued access to “natives” in their family homes, responded to this need most zealously.

Havergal believed that Goreh’s literary productions would support the work of *zenana* missions because they disproved prevalent nineteenth-century anthropological theories that Asians were biologically incapable of being as civilized as Caucasians. For instance, in the *History of British India*, James Mill, the philosopher, educational theorist, economist and political reformer, had asserted that Hindus were part of the “half-civilized” and “stationary” (Stocking, 1987, p. 32). Asiatic races who could only be restrained from self-destruction by despotic colonial rule (Stocking, 1987, p. 32). Through Havergal’s patronage, Goreh’s verses, which refuted such sceptical, racist beliefs, were distributed quickly and widely as evidence that Indian women could be educated:

I destine “The Secret of His Presence” for the *Christian*, “Onward, Upward, etc.,” for *Home Words*, and “Folded in Thy strong Arms” for the *Sunday Magazine*; and shall send a note and a little paragraph with each to the respective editors. Thus in two or three months your words would have reached not very far off half a million readers! as the circulation of these three *nearly* amounts to that, and with the *Female Missionary*

Intelligencer and *Woman's Work*, to which I wish to send "Who will go for us," will make up the half a million (Havergal, Letter dated 23 January 1877 in Bullock, 1883, p. xiv).

No doubt Havergal's recognition of Goreh's poetic talent and her assertion that she possessed a unique calling was powerful to her protégée. It offered a new, positive way of understanding her identity and experience that was more affirming and sensitive than the repeated xenophobic suggestions that she should go back to her "own people" in India.

"Who Will Go for Us?": Goreh's First Poem about Indian Womanhood

In 1883, continuing to carry out the special commission set by her literary heroine, Goreh published a collection of nineteen hymns and devotional poems entitled *"From India's Coral Strand": Hymns of Christian Faith*. The title is a quotation from Reginald Heber (1783-1826)'s "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" (1819), a favourite missionary hymn of the Victorians which appeared in the majority of contemporary hymn books:

From Greenland's icy mountains, from India's coral strand;
Where Afric's sunny fountains roll down their golden sand:
From many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver their land from error's chain (Heber, 1827, p. 137).

For the Victorians, the hymn was associated with the heroism of its author, Bishop Heber of Calcutta, the representative, according to Geoffrey Cook, "of the high moral strand of the British imperial project in the East" (Cook, 2001, p. 131). As J. R. Watson has observed:

The hymn is a conspicuous example of that fervent belief in the need to convert the world to Christianity which led Heber

and others to lay down their lives in the mission field. Heber, a distinguished scholar and poet, became an example for many, and his life of courageous dedication was followed by missionaries throughout the century. [...]

It is in the light of such heroism that this hymn is best understood (Watson, 2002, p. 243).

When Goreh's collection appeared, as established by her (or her publisher's) choice of title, it would have been within this context that her work would have been received.

The preface to Goreh's book was written by Charles Bullock, a close friend of Havergal who had died in 1879, and editor of the Evangelical magazine *Home Words*, to whom Goreh's "Onward, Upward" had been sent in 1877. It expressed the hope that the poems would "prove a stimulus to missionary effort especially on behalf of the women of India [...] whose lot is cast in misery" (Bullock, 1883, p. xvi). The last clause expresses the common belief that Indian women were downtrodden by barbaric customs including, as Emma Pitman listed in a pamphlet entitled *Indian Zenana Missions*: "1st, The rite of Suttee [widow burning]; 2nd, Child-marriages; 3rd, Polygamy; 4th, infanticide; 5th, social bondage in Zenanas, producing deepest ignorance; 6th, Cruel domestic customs" (Pitman, 1881, p. 6). Indeed, British feminist publications continually depicted Indian women's lives as overflowing with misery and hopelessness. One pamphlet published by the Female Education Society in 1884 promoted *zenana* education as alleviation from lives of emptiness, boredom and bleakness: "Nothing to do, nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing to learn, nothing to think of, nothing to hope for, nowhere to go, no one to expect from the world without [...] no books, no music, no pictures, no ornaments" (Donaldson, 1990, p. 433). In the postcolonial age, it is apparent that these Victorian discussions about the improvement of Indian women and international feminist solidarity were, in fact, also "powerful declaration[s] of feminist imperial authority" (Burton, 1994, p. 98) imbedded with ethnocentric notions of national moral superiority. As Burton (1994) has established, feminist institutions, like the International Council of Women and International Women Suffrage Alliance, founded before the First World War, con-

structed British women in “British feminist rhetoric as the saviors of the entire world of women” (Burton, 1994, p. 3). For many British feminists, it seemed to be their nation’s responsibility, and burden, as the presiding power to raise Indian women up in a civilising mission.

Despite the literal suggestion of its title, most (if not all) of the poems published in *“From India’s Coral Strand”* (1883) seem to have been written in England. All but one of the poems mentioned in Havergal’s 1877 letter are included, and none of Goreh’s works written in India and published in *India’s Women* (the periodical of the *CEZMS*) appear. Indeed, despite the exotic promise of the collection’s title, only one work, a missionary hymn entitled “Who will go for us?”—actually deals directly with Indian themes and people. The rest of the works in the book are contemplative texts about the internal workings of faith. Whether it was because Goreh could no longer remember India very clearly, or because, at this point, she wished to embrace the “English” aspects of her spiritual inheritance, none of the verses contain any descriptions or recollections about the Indian landscape or urban life.

Yet, for Goreh’s readers, her use of the collective pronoun “us” in “Who will go for us?” would have suggested that she was speaking on behalf of Indian womankind, and that she possessed special knowledge or authority to represent eastern women. In fact, this work, which pleads for English women to rescue their Indian sisters from oppression, actually replicates dominant imperialist assumptions about Indian life rather than offering factual insights about authentic Indian womanhood. Although her British readers may have believed that they were privy to the true thoughts of Indian women in her verse, Goreh actually speaks about Indian women from the perspective of her British knowledge:

1. Listen, listen, English sisters,
Hear an Indian sister’s plea---
Grievous wails, dark ills revealing,
Depths of human woe unsealing,
Borne across the deep blue sea!
“We are dying day by day,
With no bright, no cheering ray:

Nought to lighten up our gloom---
Cruel, cruel, is our doom.” (Goreh, 1883, pp. 21-22)

This work consciously replicates the message and ideas of Frances Ridley Havergal’s missionary hymn “Sisters!” (published in *Under the Surface* [1874]) which cries for “a fiery scroll, and a trumpet of thunder might, / To startle the silken dreams of English women at ease” to save their “Downtrodden, degraded, and dark” (Havergal, 1889, p. 527) Indian sisters. The main difference from Havergal’s work is Goreh’s narratological perspective. Expressed as the cries of “an Indian sister”, “Who will go for *us* [my italics]?” although not technically superior to Havergal’s work, intensifies the sense of urgency, adds a greater sense of veracity, and validates the missionary call with the authority of a real Indian woman. In fact, Goreh’s “us” emerges out of an imagined solidarity, which explores an experience which may have been hers, rather than true identification. In this context, the section in quotation marks may be recognized as a dramatization set within the self-expressive lyric frame which signals Goreh’s separate outsider identity from the collective voices of her “sisters”.

“Who will go for us?” is an emotive composition designed to increase heart rates, prick consciences through indignation, and rouse Englishwomen to answer the appeal for *zenana* missionaries:

[...]

This is no *romantic* story,
Not an idle, empty tale;
Not a vain, far-fetched ideal;
No, your sisters’ wrongs are *real*.

[...]

Rise, and take the Gospel message,
Bear its tidings far away;
Far away to India’s daughters;
Tell them of the living waters,

Flowing, flowing, day by day,
 That they too may drink and live.
 Freely have ye, freely give;
 Go disperse the shades of night
 With the glorious Gospel light (Goreh, 1883, pp. 22-23).

Indeed, this poem not only establishes Goreh's participation in contemporary Christian and feminist discussions about the need to rescue Indian women, but also demonstrates her ability to use her poetic skills to great rhetorical effect. For instance, she is accomplished in her use of metre: the fast pace of each stanzaic opening line achieved by the use of pyrrhic metre (e.g. "Listen, listen, English sisters") conveys a feeling of urgency and anxiety, while the spondaic final lines of each verse (e.g. "Cruel, cruel, is our doom") creates the effect of dread and gravity. Even the rhetorical title "Who will go for us?" is somewhat histrionic. Certainly, Goreh's work resonates with Rowbotham's (1998) observation that missionary discourse aimed not only at being "realistic", but also as emotional, as was possible" because women "of all ages and classes were presumed to be particularly susceptible to such messages because of the stereotypical assumptions made about women's essentially emotional nature" (Rowbotham, 1998, pp. 247-261).

"Who will go for us?" paints a picture of Indian women's lives as being characterized by misery, desolation and ignorance, and destined for hell without the knowledge of Christ. Many contemporary Indians would have viewed the situation differently; for instance, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was appalled by Heber's analogous paradigmatic nineteenth-century missionary hymn, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains", which he viewed as racist and offensive in its assertion that the Indian subcontinent it was a place "Where every prospect pleases, and man alone is vile" (Heber, 1827, p. 137). Gandhi asserted that:

I have read several missionary publications and they are able to see only the dark side and paint it darker still. The famous hymn of Bishop Heber's "Greenland's icy mountains," is a clear

libel on Indian humanity. I was favored with some literature even in the Yervada Prison by well-meaning missionaries, which seemed to be written as if merely to belittle Hinduism (Gandhi, 1927, p. 740).

In a similar vein, Gandhi could have accused Goreh of casting aspersions on Indian womanhood in her poem. Even though she had lived in India until the age of eleven or twelve, she had absorbed popular English prejudices about the country, and represented Indian women from the stance of Victorian English ethnocentrism. She was, somewhat uncomfortably for modern readers living in postcolonial times, validating and perpetuating imperialist thought in her missionary hymn. In fact, the persistence of such negative stereotyping about Indian women in late-nineteenth-century England must have been damaging to Goreh's understandings about India and Indian subjectivity; certainly, her experience would go against the advice of current experts on transnational adoption who advise that knowledge about the ethnic culture should be "seen in part as a way of instilling pride in adopted children who come to learn impressive things about the glorious civilization of the place of their birth" (Volkman, 2005, p. 92).

"The Great Refiner": New Christian Possibilities for Indian Female Subjectivity

Another hymn in *"From India's Coral Strand"* offers a more surprising and powerful model of Indian female subjectivity. "The Great Refiner" (the title is from Malachi 3: 2, "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire") conveys Goreh's re-vision of what it means to be an Indian Christian woman. This work, which, again, makes intertextual reference to Havergal's verse—in this case, her most famous hymn: "Take my Life, and let it be"—in the linguistic formulation of its opening line, expresses the common Evangelical trope of wishing for refinement from spiritual dross to gold:

1. Take my heart, O Great Refiner,
 Plunge it in the cleansing flame:
 Heat the furnace seven times hotter,—
 I shall still adore Thy Name.
 I shall hail its hungry roaring,
 'Twill be music in mine ear,
 If, amid its fiery anger,
 Thy sweet gentle voice I hear (Goreh, 1883, p. 26).

On the surface, this is a conventional piece of Christian devotional writing; for instance, its request for spiritual refinement is reminiscent of Henry Vaughan (1621-1695)'s "Love-Sick", which perceives divine love as an ardent agent of spiritual change:

[...]
 Refining fire, O then refine my heart,
 My foul, foul heart! Thou art immortal heat;
 Heat motion gives; then warm it, till it beat;
 So beat for Thee, till Thou in mercy hear;
 So hear, that Thou must open; open to
 A sinful wretch, a wretch that caus'd Thy woe;
 Thy woe (Vaughan, 1858, p. 150).

Furthermore, the central idea of clinging on to faith amidst the deadly flames of a furnace comes from the scriptural story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego whose faith enabled them to remain unharmed in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace in Daniel 3: 1-31. Goreh is asserting that trusting in and being faithful to God, she will withstand the enemy's attacks and be refined in an act of spiritual alchemy. However, she adds new meaning to this familiar idea when she applies it to her Indian female self returning to the intense heat of the Asian subcontinent, because she ingeniously transmutes the idea of *suttee*, which so many of her readers would automatically have associated with Indian women, from a Hindu to a Christian sacrificial act of devotion.

For readers who knew from the preface to *‘From India’s Coral Strand’* that Goreh had returned to India as a missionary, the hymn could be read metaphorically as a heroic embrace of all the difficulties that lay ahead in her work for God. At the same time, Goreh’s promise to withstand burning fire could also be understood as a literal pledge to endure the scorching temperatures of India; particularly as the extreme heat of the tropics, and the diseases associated with such conditions, were well known as enemies of missionary work. An additional important meaning would be that, labouring for God’s glory in burning climates, she would win Hindu souls to be transformed alchemically into Christian saints.

By subverting the meaning of *suttee*, the archetypal practice associated with the oppression and denigration of Indian women, and applying it to her own circumstances, Goreh offers an empowered example of Indian womanhood that is in great contrast to the helpless and hopeless models of “Who will go for us?” As the real agent of power in this work is “The Great Refiner”, the Christian God, Goreh is not applying her vision universally to the non-Christian women of India. Yet, her poem offers an original idea in imagining the possibility of an Indian woman filled with heroic strength that much more progressive in comparison with the visions of “Who will go for us?” or Havergal’s “Sisters”, which view the rescue of powerless Indian women by heroic English ones as their ultimate conclusion. In this way, “The Great Refiner” may be viewed as Goreh’s first attempt to move beyond the stereotypes of her Victorian British (Orientalist) education and re-envision what it might mean to be an Indian Christian woman.

Anglo-Indian Poetry

Goreh’s first years back in India were, in fact, less than satisfying. She was initially stationed in Jandiala, one of the main locations for the “village missions” where evangelists visited the surrounding villages grouped around a chosen centre. However, within a few months, she had to move to the Alexandra School in Amritsar, an institution “built for the education of the daughters of the higher class of native Christians” (Goreh, 1881b, p. 190), for health reasons. It seems that she could not ensure the physical conditions of village missionary work in the Punjab. For one who had declared that she would withstand all dif-

faculties to convert souls for God, the move was a great disappointment; in a report for *India's Women*, Goreh is regretful of her failure: “perhaps I shall not have left England in vain if He enables me to inspire these girls with missionary zeal, even though I am not allowed to be more actively employed in the actual mission field” (Goreh, 1881a, p. 267). She believed that God had called her to “go back” to India as a missionary, cultivating in her a sense of personal anxiety as well as a sense of vocation, but was shocked to discover that she was unfit for evangelistic work. Rather humiliatingly, she had to teach the privileged daughters of pre-existing Christian families.

Significantly, when Goreh finally located a more lasting and fulfilling ministry for herself, it was with the bicultural Anglo-Indian (mixed race rather than English people living in India) community. While visiting the Anglo-Indian community in Allahabad, she was moved by the sufferings of the sick, and this experience led her to train as a nurse. In the twenty-first century, Kim Diehl has written of her adoptive experience being “the most radicalizing force in my life”, one that allowed her to have solidarity with “the pain and victories of other displaced, abandoned, and re-birtherd people” (Diehl, 2006, p. 31). In Goreh’s biography, we seem to have a parallel example of a nineteenth-century adoptee whose life was also mobilized to action by such sympathy and solidarity. After working as a hospital nurse, she was elected the first superintendent of a new orphanage for Anglo-Indian children at the Bishop Johnson Orphanage in 1892. With her own dual identity, it is perhaps not surprising that Goreh was drawn to work with Anglo-Indians. Nancy Gish has written of the absence of mirrors which transracial adoptees have within their adoptive families and the lack of “a sense of knowing their identity [...] is continually mirrored back to them in the faces of relatives” (Gish, 2001, p. 182), and it may have been that, in the faces of her wards, Goreh found a group which reflected back something of her own experience. There must certainly have been a personal resonance for her working with Anglo-Indian orphans; she may even have mulled over the fact that she had once been destined for an Indian orphanage herself as Elizabeth Alice Honig has written of the narratives of possibilities which adoptees inhabit:

Many transnational adoptees live with phantom lives, lives defined as possible but unlived. [...] “What if my birth mother had been able to keep me? [...] What if a family in India had been able to adopt me? What if [...] my adoptive parents hadn’t seen my face [...]” (Honig, 2005, p. 215)

It would have been natural for Goreh to reflect that one of her possible lives was to have also grown up in an Indian orphanage.

That Goreh’s faith and sense of Christian vocation deepened during her time at the Bishop Johnson Orphanage (from 1892 to 1900) is indicated by the fact that she sought to become a Deaconess – that is, to enter into an official ecclesiastical order which signalled her full consecration to Christ (the closest position to priesthood for women in the Anglican church at this time) – and was ordained in 1897. Her spiritual development during this period is inscribed in a second volume of religious verse, *Poems* (1899), which evidently emerged out of her lived experience of caring for the Anglo-Indian orphans. In contrast to her first book of poetry, which contains little evidence of any authentic interaction with Indian people, and paints Indians from the stance of British imperialist knowledge, the second collection speaks out of Goreh’s revised understandings about the charm, sanctity and preciousness of Indian people derived from her personal encounters. This volume, a small run of 1,000 texts published in Madras, was not intended for the large Christian, feminist, or imperialist audiences of Britain as her first publications had been; instead, these poems, which were distributed only in India, illustrate how Goreh’s religion had been transformed by the orphaned interracial children that she served.

Poems inscribes Goreh’s compassion for the Anglo-Indian orphans in her care. Most of the poems in the collection relate to her experiences with the children. Speaking in response to the children’s (and perhaps also her own) orphan circumstances and needs, the works of the collection frequently envisage God as a loving and protective mother who will not fail her children. One work, “Isaiah lxvi. 13” (the text is: “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem”), uses the example of a human mother’s love to teach about God’s even greater care. The tone and language of the poem is soft, gentle and kind:

1. Little one, what ails thee,
Wherefore weepest thou?
Mother never fails thee,
Clear thy troubled brow.

2. See, her arm enfolds thee,
Hush thee, hush thee, dear,
Tenderly she holds thee,
Wipes away each tear.

3. Clouds are disappearing,
Tears to smiles give place,
Mother's words are cheering,
Bright the little face.

4. Child of God, now hearken,
Thou shouldst happy be,
Nought thy life should darken
When *He* comforts thee (Goreh, 1899, pp. 26-27).

The idea of a mother's love is accessible to adults and children alike, and the gentle tones of the kind voice of the poem reproduce successfully maternal reassurance. Despite the attempt to replicate childlike tones, Goreh does not produce a poem that is patronising to its readers; instead, her work conveys a tenderness which, although sentimental, is comforting and kind.

In the second verse, Goreh builds up associations of love and protection with soothing words including "enfolds", "hush" and "dear". The gentle and understanding voice of the speaker may be imagined as being that of a loving mother but also, by correspondence, to that of God, who is finally substituted as the ultimate comforting mother. "Isaiah lxvi. 13" is, therefore, a work that affirms the motherhood of God, a feminist theological concept which was not widespread or commonplace in mainstream Anglicanism at the end of the nineteenth

century. This suggests that Goreh's biographical circumstances led her to explore alternative ways of thinking about the divine which responded to her own needs and circumstances. In fact, that Goreh's conceptualisation of God as the ultimate mother may be intrinsically linked with her identity as an adoptee female poet may be illuminated by Jan Van Stavern's observation that the contemporary American poet Sandra McPherson (b. 1943)'s verses demonstrate "an adopted woman's inventive solutions for reinventing the absent parents, especially the mother" (Van Stavern, 2001, p. 154). The implications of this imagining are extremely powerful. The image of the mother who comforts her child is, of course, extremely powerful to the human memory, but, for orphans left parentless in the world through death or abandonment, the idea of a mother who "never fails thee" may well be more poignant and potent. Thus, through the articulation of this message, Goreh's poem develops along the lines of John Keble (1792-1866)'s influential theory about the function of poetry as a "divinely bestowed gift" for the relief of emotions, and acts as "a kind of medicine divinely bestowed upon man: which gives healing relief to secret mental emotion" (Keble, 1912, p. 22). In this way, Goreh's poetry offers consolation to the orphans in her care (as well as to herself) bereft of biological mother love, and affirms a personal identity which is located not in human bloodlines but in the infinite and unconditional love of God.

Furthermore, in terms of Goreh's changing attitudes to Indian peoples and their subjectivities, this poem constructs its understanding of Indians from her perception of God's care for them. It articulates her belief that God is not only maternal love, but also Emmanuel - indwelling with humanity, and the comforter who will never abandon his children: "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (John 14: 16-18). Here, Goreh has produced a poem which not only responds to the unhappy circumstances of orphans, but, more significantly, perceives God as inherently being among the innocent in India. This represents a shift in Goreh's soteriology, or doctrine of salvation, from her position in "Who will go for us?" which asserts that Christ's saving light needs to be taken to India by Englishwomen. Unlike the earlier poem, which places great emphasis on the salvific powers of English women, this poem makes no statement about the

missionary's or evangelist's role as a channel of God.

The final work of *Poems*, "Baby Preachers", goes further in elucidating Goreh's transformed theology regarding Indian people. Rather than explicating a West-to-East trajectory of Christian faith (from England to India), it reverses the model and argues that even an English-educated Deaconess such as herself may learn something about God from the simple faith of young Indian children. The poem opens with an adult voice narrating a scene about children engaged in bedtime prayers:

1. Tiny hands folded,
 Tiny eyes closed,
 Tiny lips moulded,
 Sweetly composed.

2. Tiny hearts beating,
 Full of His love,
 Angels are greeting
 Them from above (Goreh, 1899, p. 37).

As Goreh describes the scene further, she conveys the sense that she has been humbled at witnessing the faith of little children:

3. Baby words rising
 Upward to heaven,
 Is it surprising
 Answers are given? (Goreh, 1899, p. 37)

The final verse of the poem represents a reversal of power and authority, as it is the adult who asks to learn from the children:

6. Dear little preachers,
 Influence me,
 Help me, sweet teachers,
 Simple to be (Goreh, 1889, p. 38).

Two scriptural texts justify this idea: Christ's statement in Luke 18: 16, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God", gives scriptural provenance to the privileging of childhood simplicity and innocence; and Psalm 8: 2, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger", suggests that children are able to be channels for God's strength and wisdom. This poem suggests that even an experienced missionary may learn about God from the examples of Indian children, abandoned and orphaned as they may be, yet, according to scriptural promises, beloved and privileged by God (for instance, as stated in Jesus's Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit ... / the meek ... / the pure in heart" [Matthew 5: 3-12]). Although Goreh would have had a guiding role in the children's religious instruction, her poems suggest that, in fact, S/He already dwells among the pure-hearted in Indian society. Whereas in *"From India's Coral Strand"*, Goreh described a movement of Christian faith from the educated English to ignorant Indians; here, she recognizes a new trajectory: the holy examples of humble Indian children teaching the erudite English missionary deep truths about the love of God. By suggesting that older generations of Christians may learn from very new ones, Goreh is perhaps also restating the idea of Jesus's Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20: 1-16) that the newest members of the Christian family are just as favoured by God as the longest serving ones. Novy has suggested that representations of adoption in fiction can be utilized to protest against the "split and/or victimization of one group by the other", such as class oppression in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (Novy, 2001b, p. 3). Some parallels may be observed in Goreh's verse, which suggests that social structures such as parentage, race, economics, and age, are all broken down in the apportionment of God's love.

Conclusion

Goreh resigned from her post at the Bishop Johnson Orphanage in 1900 "owing to the death of a dear child, which nearly broke my heart!" (Batley & Robinson, 1937, p. 59). She worked in various other missionary roles in India until her health broke down in 1932, whereupon

she retired to St. Catherine's Hospital in Cawnpore, and she stayed there until her death in early 1937 (Batley & Robinson, 1937, p. 59). "[A]ppropriately enough", as observed by her biographers, her funeral service was led by two clergymen, one Indian and one English (Batley & Robinson, 1937, p. 63).

Shortly before her death, she wrote her final poem, "The Guardian", a poem expressing confident trust in God at the end of her life:

1. I lay me down in peace
 Beneath Thy wing,
 And safely sleep.
 Thy watch can never cease;
 For Thou, O King,
 My soul dost keep.

2. For all the tenderness
 Which Thou has shewn
 To me this day:
 For strength in feebleness
 To Thee alone
 My thanks I pay.

3. And if before the morn
 Thou bidst me rise
 And come to Thee,
 Then homeward swiftly borne
 Beyond the skies
 My soul shall be.

4. Or if it be Thy will
 That I should see
 Another day,
 Oh, let Thy presence still
 Remain
 And be my stay (Batley & Robinson, 1937, p. 63).

In the context of Goreh's personal history, it is significant that Goreh's swansong was entitled "The Guardian". Having lost her mother when she was only a few weeks old, and having been adopted by three different families during her childhood, at the end of her life, Goreh saw God as her true "tender" guardian, one who had never truly left her side. Therefore, in this poem, as well as in the compositions of her *Poems* (1899), Goreh was participating in a feminist theological discourse alongside other Victorian-era women, who also imagined the possibilities of a more gynocentric Christianity that could privilege the feminine and raise women up in society:

Both [Anna] Jameson [1794-1860] and [Frances Power] Cobbe [1822-1904] indicated their desire to modify a Protestantism which had too excessively masculinised its gods. For them, as for many religious feminists now, this single-gendered godhead [...] constricted the development of real women. [...] They] insisted on restoring a feminine side to divinity which would, as a corollary, upgrade human femininity which they saw as nurturant tenderess (Yeo, 1998, p. 129).

While the adoptee's literary quest is frequently to determine to what extent one's identity is linked with the birth family, in Goreh's poetry, this earthly dilemma is by-passed by construing God as the true protector and original source of human identity. Furthermore, significantly, if Goreh's conceptualisation of God as a "tender" guardian—a feminine parental force—is followed through in her final poem, it follows that her inevitable call "homeward", conflates death, normally an unwelcome prospect, with the exciting anticipation of reunion with the absent mother. Such interpretations suggest that Goreh's poetry, which first entered into print culture with the public rhetorical purpose of demonstrating to others the literary and religious possibilities of educating Indian women, may ultimately have functioned more personally and privately to soothe, reconcile, and impart "healing relief to" her own "secret mental emotion[s]" (Keble, 1912, p. 22) through her reimagining of God as the true mother whose love never fails.

Goreh's hitherto much neglected British-Indian Christian poetry is a powerful cultural site offering rare and fascinating insight into the experience of a nineteenth-century transracial adoptee. The subjects and discussions of Goreh's verse confirm that the themes of contemporary transnational adoptee literature—the negotiation of the adoptee's dual identity, confrontations with the birth culture, and the impact of maternal loss on the gendered imagination—extend back in history as primal wounds in adoptees' psyches. At the same time, Goreh's writings offer a different revisionist possibility about the role of religion in adoptee experience compared to the often negative discussions about Christianity found in contemporary adoptee writing and scholarship. As a missionary, Goreh was certainly implicated in the imperialist spread of British cultural belief systems over 'native' religions; however, in her own story, Christianity also emerges as an enabler of re-identification with birth culture because it was the agent for re-entry into the homeland at a time when opportunities for international travel were severely restricted for women. Goreh's missionary vocation working among Indians facilitated her re-valuation of, and movement away from, Orientalist views of Indian subjectivity. Finally, the example of Goreh's poetry skilfully demonstrates the possibilities of lyric poetry—a much older mode for the expression of feelings and thought in English literature than the autobiographical novel now so closely associated with adoptee writing - as an extremely apposite medium for the inscription of adoptee experience, one that may be viewed as a powerful cultural tool in what has been described as the adoptee's "extensive toolkit for survival and healing" (Diehl, 2006, p. 36).

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