CHAPTER - III
TRISHANKU’S ONION PEEL

I. Introduction: G. V. Desani paved the way for a new generation of novelists through his trend-setting novel All About H. Hatterr. This startling novel had to wait for a quarter century for K. M. Trishanku to follow suit with his Onion Peel, which was published in 1973 after a gap of twenty five years. Onion Peel is akin to All About H. Hatterr in several aspects. Onion Peel is analogous with All About H. Hatterr in its pursuit of subversive themes and technique. While All About H. Hatterr parodies the Upanishadic tradition through its protagonist ‘Hatterr’, Onion Peel parodies the Buddhist enlightenment through its protagonist Nathan. While the former exposes the decadence of Hindu spiritualism, the latter exposes the degradation of Indian culture. If former narrative is placed in the rustic backdrop, the latter is placed in the urban backdrop. As in the themes, they are similar in their technique also. The structure, characterization and diction in Onion Peel have consanguinity with the structure, characterization and diction in All About H. Hatterr. Therefore this novel can be taken as a pointer towards post-modernism.

Onion Peel is about Nathan’s ‘girl-savouring’ and its result in the loss of his procreative power. Nathan, a postgraduate in philosophy, is working with a magazine ‘INDIA’ as an editor in Bombay at present. Very many women fall prey to his handsome and select personality. They include Catherine, Sita Dixit, Martha, sweeper woman, Fareeda, Nirmala and Usha. The women also belong to diverse sections of society such as prostitute, married woman pursuing higher studies, nurse, low worker, lover, gambler and student. Nathan’s misadventures land him into trouble and he is likely to become impotent. When he realizes this, the truth that life is an empty Onion Peel dawns upon him. The narrative ousts some received notions which can be seen in the following analysis of the novel.

II. Subversive Themes: Three subversive themes are identified in the narrative of Onion Peel. They are as follows:

(i) Subversion of the of the notion of Enlightenment,
(ii) Subversion of the notion of Ethic,
(iii) Subversion of the notion of Indian culture.

(i) Subversion of the notion of Enlightenment: *Onion Peel* is a parody of the notion of Buddhist Enlightenment, for the novel has installed the doctrine of the Buddhist Enlightenment in order to subvert it. *Onion Peel* is a narrative of its protagonist Mr. Nathan. At the end of the novel, Mr. Nathan confesses in the Buddhistic manner as follows: "And between writing and wenching, perhaps I will soon learn the meaning of what the Buddha had said long ago - that life is a fake and a hoax, a hollow, empty thing like an onion, which vanishes in your hands as you take it apart, peel by peel. ...Life is like that. Life is a hollow nothingness. Life is a discarded Onion Peel".¹ This confession seems to project the protagonist as one who has attained the enlightenment. But a close examination of the protagonist's nature, character and motif will prove the contrary. Though Nathan is a student of philosophy, he works as a crime reporter for a press in Bombay. Like a playboy, he flirts with all sorts of women. He is so handsome that women of various kinds are naturally drawn towards him.

The first woman who is attracted by Mr. Nathan is Catherine who is a whore in Bombay. Nathan's nature is well described in identifying himself with Catherine: "You were my first love in Bombay, you know. A man's first love is always his greatest influence also. I want to be free like you, living off anything that comes my way. And if nothing is around - well, starve, hibernate, go underground, anything except marriage and children and a home and paying up insurance premia".²

The Buddha is parodied through the character of Nathan, who unlike the Buddha, is a flirt and to whom the discrimination between a whore and a virgin does not exist when he is sexually provoked. More over, Nathan wants sexual gratification without marriage. This is proved by his behavior with a series of women with whom he has affairs.

Sita Dixit is the next woman. Nathan seduces Sita Dixit who is pursuing her D. Litt. Though she is married and loves her husband, she could not resist the tempting Nathan, and becomes pregnant. Nathan's libertine character is essentially contractory to that of the Buddha.
After Sita, Martha falls prey to Nathan. She meets him in the hospital of Dr. Patil and develops infatuation towards him. He manages to elope with her to Baroda. On the way to Baroda he makes love to her in the train itself. More obnoxiously does he indulge in sex with her, knowing fully well that she is in her menses period. When they stay in a hotel room, he is sexually provoked to seek gratification through a sweeper woman. He leaves Martha asleep behind in the room and succeeds in his fornication with the sweeper woman stealthily in one of the unoccupied rooms. This element reflects Ben Jonson’s definition of Parody: “A Parody, a parody with a kind of miraculous gift to make it absurd that it was”.

On the eve of his operation, Nathan takes undue advantage of Martha’s guilt and makes love to her, though she remains indifferent in this regard. Nathan claims that he has sown the seed of his fatherhood. If one reads between the lines, Nathan has sown not his fatherhood but bastardy because Nathan is never ready to marry her at all. This also bears evidence to his lechery, which is contrary to the saintly renunciation of earthly pleasures by the Buddha.

Meanwhile, Nathan has a lady love Fareeda Ahmed to whom he proposes to marry. Both of them have dreamt of having a lot of children and so on so forth. Despite Fareeda knows Nathan’s affair with Martha and washerwomen and criticizes his bad taste, she does not decline his offer. Their affair goes on unchecked. When Nathan is brought to the recovery room for getting him prepared for the operation, he says to himself that Fareeda should marry some body else. He thinks that his dream of having a family is meaningless as he is likely to lose the power of procreation. To him, the whole life appears to be an onion the peeling of which leads to nothing.

So far as the statement at the end is concerned, Nathan’s vision of life approximates to the philosophy of the Buddha. But the means through which he acquires this wisdom loathsome and is parodic because Nathan goes through the immoral, filthy, unspiritual experiences without abiding by the ‘Middle Path’. Nathan’s philosophy has emerged from his anguish of losing his sex,
which is contrary to the Buddha's philosophy, which emerges from severe adherence to austerity.

Lord Buddha’s Philosophy of truth is called the Middle Path. According to this, one has to follow the eight-fold path of virtue to obtain complete salvation. They are: 1. Right Views, 2. Right Speech, 3. Right Actions, 4. Right thought, 5. Right Living, 6. Right Efforts 7. Right Meditation and 8. Right Remembrance.

Nathan’s life amounts to subvert the notion of Enlightenment in the context of Buddhism, which Nathan espouses hypocritically. Nathan does not abide by the rule of ‘Right Views’. His View of life is based on the principle of physical pleasure. He does not want to let any opportunity slip with regard to sexual pleasure. He fails utterly to discriminate between good and bad so far as sex is concerned. Hence his view amounts to subvert the notion of Right View.

He does not follow the path of Right Speech. His speech amounts to porno, filth and obscene on many occasions. The pornographic aspects of the novel will be dealt with later, but for the subversion of the code of Right Speech, an instance can be cited from the novel. While Martha eloping to Baroda, Nathan speaks to Martha in the train compartment: “Let me smell and lick you like a famished dog”.4 This is a clear evidence of the subversion of the notion of the Right Speech.

Nathan’s actions violate the virtue of Right Actions. He seduces a whore named ‘Catherine’ who indulges in sexual intercourse with Nathan during her menses period. He seduces Sita Dixit who is married. She becomes pregnant by Nathan and rushes to her husband in order to hide her adultery. He fornicates a sweeper woman. Indeed, he is a votary of lechery and prefers fornication to marriage. He deceives Fareeda and tries to seduce various other women also. The following extract bears witness to Nathan’s sinning through fornication: “I pounced on her and lifted her on to my lap. ... I turned her buried face upwards and started kissing her. I was aware of nothing but her soft, full lips. ... a corpse hugging on remorlessly to a pair of lips; dead, insensitive fingers, tugging hard at her clothes in a vain effort to undo them”.5 It
is needless to reiterate that such action of Nathan as the above amounts to subvert the notion of Right actions.

Nathan's thoughts also are contrary to the Buddha's code of Right Thought. Ever since he arrives in Bombay as a Crime reporter, his thought is filled with filth and sexual gratification. His relationship with Catherine bears ample testimony to it. When he meets Sita Dixit also, his thought is all about how to seduce her.

From the flash back, one learns that Nathan has somewhat improved in his thoughts after he develops relationship with Fareeda Ahmed. His secular attitude is evident in his not bothering about the religious difference between them while proposing to marry her. But the moment he learns that he is going to lose his power of procreation in a week's time, there occurs a sea of change in his thoughts. He wants to sow his wild oats in as many women as possible before losing his potency. He explains this to Fareeda: "you know how it is, Fareeda," I had gone on. "I suddenly felt like running all over the world and spilling my seed at random, everywhere, into every woman I could entice". Thus Nathan's thought spinning around sex also amounts to subvert the notion of Right Thought.

Nathan's living style too eschews the virtue of Right Living. Ironically enough, Nathan is a crime reporter in Bombay. He lives in a room in an apartment. Besides his fixation, meat and alcohol consumption, he turns a deaf ear to the advice of doctor. Nathan has just undergone a cystoscopic examination and been warned by Dr. Patil not to be rash: "But, my boy, you mustn't do anything rash. You aren't quite well yet - do you get me?" But Nathan does not heed the Doctor's warning. He makes love to Martha and experiences pain as soon as it is over. Yet he does not pay heed to the warning and seeks sensual pleasure in the company of a sweeper woman. This aggravates his pain, but still Nathan is not ready to let slip any chance of physical pleasure, even if it means to lose his life. Then he makes fun with Fareeda, love to Martha again on the eve of his operation. His living style cares not a bit for ethics. Thus Nathan's life style subverts the notion of Right Living.
Nathan's all activities are woven around the vortex of sex only. He is a crime reporter and the novel does not dwell upon his career in any way. All his efforts are geared towards utilizing his procreation power to its utmost, which he is likely to lose in a week's time.

Onion Peel has installed the Upanishadic background in which there is a brief debate on the practice of meditation. Nathan recollects his disquisition with a learned Hindu monk in Benares on the concept of truth. The Swamji argued that truth, in absolute terms, is changeless, but Nathan does not agree with him. The subversion of the notion of Right Meditation can be traced in the dialogue between the Swamiji and Nathan elucidated below: "Ramanathan," he said, "These questionings in your mind will disappear only if you undertake long and persistent meditation." I have thought deeply on this problem, Swamji." "Thinking isn't enough, my boy. Thinking is a discursive process which only entangles you further. Meditation disentangles you. But meditation is an art which has to be learnt and practiced with diligence."  

The argument continues for a long time without arriving at any conclusion. Nathan leaves the place without getting a convincing reply from the Swamiji nor has he agreed to practice meditation. Thus Nathan's refusal to follow the advice of the Swamiji to practice meditation has an ironic dig at the notion of Right Meditation. This also echoes the All About H.Hatter's subversion of sagehood.

Nathan's remembrance serves as an example of the subversion of the notion of Right Remembrance. Nathan remembers his relationship with Sita Dixit. In this remembrance, he visualizes how he conquered her sexually. He then remembers Catherine, which is an example of the subversive feature: "When I picked up Martha's sanitary pad and threw it into the commode, what I particularly remembered was how persistently Kate would plead with me to come to her when she was in her menses".  

Thus the remembrance of Nathan also fails to meet the norm prescribed by the Buddha's Middle Path. The characteristics of Nathan's life disqualify him for the attainment of the Enlightenment in the conventional sense. Their means differ, though the end message in the form of truth is the same. The mode of
parody employed to convey the truth makes Onion Peel a specimen of the postmodernist novel.

(ii) Onion Peel as a Subversion of the notion of Ethic. The purpose of discussing Onion Peel as a subversion of the notion of ethic is two-fold:

1. to highlight the decadence of ethic and 2. to highlight the features of pornography which is the warp and woof of post-modernist novels.

C. I. D. of English defines ethic as “a system of accepted beliefs which control behaviour; esp. such a system based on morals”. 10

Every person is governed by a certain moral code in the society and is expected to adhere to it. In Onion Peel, the characters do not measure up to the norm of ethic, and thereby they subvert the notion of ethic.

Ramanathan is a bachelor and works as a crime reporter for a press in Bombay. He is a postgraduate in philosophy. From the existing clues, one can presume that Nathan hails from an educated and cultured Brahmin family. Hence he is expected to live up to the moral norm of his community. But Nathan does not only pollute himself by visiting a whore but also defies the notion of purity by sharing bed with her during her menses period. The following extracts, which depict Nathan’s experience with women, illustrate two points - new cultural experience and pornographic treatment in Onion Peel: “But Kate, “I had once asked her, why do you always want me when you’re leaking like hell?” “Because I love you, honey, because that’s when a woman can give of her best. Because that’s when a woman most needs to be made love to by someone she’s crazy about”. 11

Nathan is a patient now. He has undergone a cystoscopic test and is placed in the Recovery Room. Forgetting his state as a patient, he adores the nurse's physical features: “... her breasts heaving. She was taking my pulse ... I felt ashamed at the helplessness of my condition. Even a corpse should have come to life the way her breasts heaved.” 12 and “My arm grazed against her breasts and I noticed I was still in hospital clothes”. 13

Nathan violates his ethic as a patient by casting lustful look at the nurse who attends on him in the hospital. Indeed, he has already got a lady love Fareeda Ahmed but he fails to control his passion for Martha. Not content with
drinking her only with his eyes, he manages to elope with her to Baroda and makes love to her in the train though he knows that she is in her menses period. It seems a cultural set back for such acts as these are out of place in the conventional society.

On the eve of his operation, the wickedness of both Nathan and of Martha comes to light, i.e., Nathan's making love to Martha and Martha's mis-administering medicine. Martha has failed in her ethic as a nurse because of her infatuation towards Nathan.

Though one may claim that the incident such as the misadministration of morphine of the nurse is not uncommon in the nursing profession, the reason for such misbehaviour i.e., her sudden infatuation for her patient cannot be overlooked. It should be treated as a violation of her ethic as a nurse. It also indicates a new cultural experience.

In addition to this, her notion of making amends for her failure in her duty reveals not only subversion of ethic and a new cultural experience but also the shame and ridicule of the notion of ethic. She is prepared to obey whatever Nathan commands including sex: “From that moment, Joe, I've been completely under your power. I knew no other way to make amends for my criminal error except by putting myself fully under your power and let you use me any way you liked, even as you could use a hired prostitute”. Indeed, they make love that night even though both of them are aware that Nathan is forbidden from it on the ground of his health. Their act amounts to double subversion of ethic.

Nathan's immoral behaviour is not confined to the upper class women but is extended to a woman as low as the one who belongs to the sweeper class. On one hand, it indicates that sex has no class, creed and caste consciousness, and it also highlights the decadence of culture and values. His temptation towards the sweeper woman of whose back only Nathan has seen is depicted as: “No woman with such a smooth, supple, well-proportioned back could be ugly”.

The irony of this situation is that the sweeper woman is also tempted towards Nathan whom she has never seen before. The mystery behind such an instant attraction of a woman towards Nathan can but be termed as magic only.
He overpowers her to yield to his urge at once so much so that she finds a vacant room herself and surrenders to his lust as: "Hurry up, Babuji," she said, pushing me in gently."  

This shows gross subjugation of the notion of ethic, for there is no control over one's own immorality. This does not represent any notion of social change or social transformation but a new cultural experience, which has little respect for conventional belief of morality.

The relationship between Nathan and Sita Dixit is depicted in such a manner that it distorts the age-old belief and pride of cultural heritage in India and represents nothing but stark voluptuousness. It tends to become a metaphor for immorality since it is depicted in an unprecedented manner as a pseudo modern cultural experience. Sita Dixit is a research scholar pursuing her D. Lit in the University. Nathan introduces her as:"... a plain girl, no curves to rave about and quite unbuxom in her proportions. But what made me hungry and famished whenever I saw was the crimson flush on her face as though she was either in great pain or in a permanent inner ecstasy". She is married and her husband is a Ph.D student in Delhi. Nathan and Sita Dixit violate their ethic by falling in love with each other. Nathan's act of loving Sita, knowing that she is married, amounts to unethic. In other words, Nathan cuckolds Shamboo. It should be noted that the metaphor of cuckolds are found in almost all the novels selected for the study in this thesis.

Sita Dixit breaks the ethic as a wife by having sex with Nathan. It amounts to extra marital relationship and there by it subverts the notion of the ethic of marriage. A stronger cultural shock is yet in reserve. Besides committing adultery, she tries to justify her act: "I love Shambhu very dearly. We've been playmates for ages. But then you broke into my life with that irresistible look of famishment in your eyes. What could possibly I do? My capacity for love isn't so penurious that I could have turned you away". She is also prepared to betray her husband by telling lies to him so as to enable herself to return to Nathan. Nathan proposes a new philosophy of love making by stating that instead of telling lies to her husband, she should educate her
husband about the new doctrine of polyandry and then indulge in her love with Nathan.

Sita Dixit is portrayed as a representative of the emendation that undergoes a new cultural experience by exploring the possibility of loving her husband Shamboo and her lover Nathan simultaneously: "Nath, is it really possible to give one's love to more than one man at a time—with the same intensity and passion? In other words, can we human beings—well, let me be precise—can a married woman be genuinely in love with her husband and at the same time in love other men?".19

It is not that Sita Dixit simply contemplates over this sort of experience; but that she has already betrayed herself and her husband by yielding to the lusty advances of Nathan. These experiences manifest a new cultural formation and the pornographic treatment in Onion Peel: "She took hold of my hand and pressed it against her cheek and then let it fall athwart her breasts. How tiny she was, I thought. "Nath, kiss me," She said. ... I'll be away in Delhi ...Shambhu will be the mirror in which I'll see your eyes and the endless puzzlement on your face. When he'll make love to me, it's your touch and breath and voice that I'll hear and feel. I sound crazy, don't I, Nath? I suppose I'm something of a split personality".20

This kind of relationship between Nathan and Sita Dixit continues for a long time. Consequently, she becomes pregnant. What is surprising is that Sita does not make Nathan responsible for her conception but conspires to make it appear as a result of her conjugal love by joining her Shambhu at once.

There is a cultural crisis here. Both Nathan and Sita Dixit commit a serious cultural crime. They have projected vice as virtue. This sort of depiction of cultural crisis is a break through in the Indian Novel in English. One may see a clear contrast of the rendering of this culture between Serpent and the Rope and Onion Peel. In Serpent and the Rope Ramasamy's extra marital relationship with Laxmi is swept away in the excess of mystic moulding, whereas there is a deliberate attempt to highlight the new cultural experience in Onion Peel.
The frank treatment of sex lends to the narrative a pornographic touch. *Onion Peel* as a post-modernist novel does not feel ashamed of its pornographic dimension, but in fact feels proud of providing unconventional and anti-traditional sublimity to the narrative.

Martha's description of the head nurse also reflects this very aspect. Her name is Uma Joshi. Without the sense of ethic of a head nurse, she discusses the novel "Lady Chatterley' in a voluptuous manner with the unmarried nurses as: "And do you know what she says? She says, the man used Lady Chatterley upside down." "She even says the Lady liked it better that way. And we asked her, how did she know? She says it's all there in the book".

This indicates that Uma Joshi spurns the ethic which she should abide by in her profession as a nurse. As a senior member of the staff, she should have avoided this sort of voluptuous references in her interaction with young unmarried nurses like Martha. One might feel that dialogues such as this may have aroused the unwanted and illicit desire in a young nurse like Martha due to which she fell a prey to Nathan in the hospital at first sight itself. So the responsibility of providing and maintaining discipline in the work place as a place of dignity is found repealed in the behaviour of Uma Joshi.

Towards the end of the narrative, though those, who are unethical in their life, are subjected to isolation, they do not feel guilty of their immorality. They seem to be undisturbed by their love for and separation from Nathan. It suggests that immorality is virtue in the postmodern world. They commit unethical acts to make amends for the previous ones. Thus the sins multiply. It has been highlighted in the acts of Nathan, Sita and Martha. For example, the revelation of Martha about her misadministration of medicine to him conducts him into the speculation as follows:

I still said nothing, but inside me I was gradually going to pieces. This kind of mishap could happen again. It could happen tomorrow, when I'd again be laid up in a stretcher and premeditated by the nurses in the Recovery Room. It could happen later in the Operation theatre itself, with an overdose of other anesthetics, with stainless steel blades cutting too deep into
me, with the surgeons suddenly losing their nerve or being struck down by polio ... "It could happen tonight when, with Martha in bed with me, I’d surely be firing my parting salvo as a spiller male. It could happen later, after the operation, when I’d be hunting out Usha for a spell of innocent, unspilling fornication. It could happen in Rishikesh on the placid banks of the Ganges, while I hold dialogue with my soul or secretly watch elder sadhus copulating filthily with young novices behind bushes or in rocky hideouts.22

One can easily understand how all characters except Dr. Patel have distorted the conventional notion of ethic. Nathan, like Shiva in *Midnight's Children* and Omar Khayyam in *Shame*, has a disregard for social, cultural and professional ethics. Nathan’s rhetoric at the end of the novel is a post-modernist strategy of parody of the Buddha. The declaration of his faith is contrary to that of the Buddha. While the Buddha practiced penance and austerity, and was absorbed in complete meditation in order to attain the Enlightenment consisting of the doctrine of Middle Path, Nathan indulges in seducing women which is metaphorically termed as ‘girl-savoring’.23 It challenges the preaching of the Swamijis, and undergoes the panic of losing his power of procreation and realizes in the end the truth of life as ‘nothing’, as an ‘Onion Peel’. This negative vision of life typifies western post-modernist tendency towards life.

All other characters Martha, Uma Joshi, Catherine, Usha, Sita Dixit are also devoid of the prick of ethic. Therefore, *Onion Peel* may be read as a novel of subversion of the notions of Enlightenment and Ethic. One is also cautioned not to read the novel as being against these notions but as a critique of the conventional notions of reality.

(iii) The Rise of New Culture as a Subversion of Indian Culture:

*Onion Peel* subverts the notion of Indian Culture with regard to man–woman relationship pertaining to love and marriage. The impact of the violation of the prescribed social code is also represented in this theme.

1. The Rise of Ultra modern Culture: India has been held in high esteem for its unique culture, which is founded on spirituality. Morality has been
considered an uncompromising and non-negotiable virtue in this culture of India. This is a prerequisite not only for the life before death but also for the life after death. However affluent and intelligent women may be, there is no freedom for them to choose their mates at all. The endogamy system has been a sort of social policing on the conduct of womankind.

But with the advent of English education, foreign travels, the Indian culture began to suffer from the aggression of foreign cultures. The exercise of self-control is absent from the conduct of adults. Onion Peel reflects the culture change adversely in Nathan’s relationship with Catherine, Sita Dixit, Martha, Nirmala, and sweeper woman, Fareeda, Usha and others.

They do not have an iota of guilty conscience about their adultery. In the case of Catherine, one may not find it wrong because, being a whore she allows Nathan to make love. But her craze for Nathan during her menses period is an assault on the culture. It is so because during the menses the woman is treated as impure and untouched until her period is over. This notion of impurity has been in use in all communities from time immemorial. The violation of such a tradition is reflected in the act of the protagonist.

Sita Dixit represents the ultra modern culture. Her wish to be in love with more than one person and her going back to her husband after her conception through Nathan comes as a cultural shock. The choice of her name is a double-edged sword to subvert the notion of sacredness. The name is subversive of the chaste and faithful wife of Sri Rama in the Ramayana. The surname clearly indicates that Sita Dixit belongs to the caste Hindu community, which is known for purity according to the Vedic texts. That by creating such an immoral character, Trishanku treats the old tradition irreverently is clear.

There is just one person Martha who feels the prick of conscience but worse only. Martha’s negligence in misadministering the medicine creates a guilty consciousness in her. Hence she wants to make amends for her wrong doing. Being a nurse, she should not have entertained him in love making at the time of her menses period and that too on the eve of his operation. Nirmala is depicted to gamble in the horse race. This character
seems to be a forecast of Ameena in *Midnight’s Children.* Nirmala also does not feel shy of extramarital relationship.

Fareeda is an M.A. graduate who also has no control over herself. She has had physical contacts with Nathan many a time. Despite the fact that Nathan has been flirting, she fails to control her passion for Nathan. Usha is found to be in love with one Mr. Ghosh. It is surprising that she is ready for love making with Nathan too: “Go on, Joe”, she whispered,” Kiss me”.24

Through the portraits of these women, who are proud of being vulgar, *Onion Peel* highlights the fact that Indian culture is undergoing a drastic change and that an ultra modern culture has not only already emerged but has also been dominant in the urban societies. Thus *Onion Peel* draws the attention of its readers to the rise of a new culture in India.

(i) The Devastating Impact of Immorality on Society: The new culture has no restraint over sex. It is warned that it affects the society adversely. It affects career, health and life. Sita Dixit has to discontinue her research career owing to her extra marital relationship: “Sita Dixit – that brilliant scarecrow of a girl who never could complete her D. Litt. because of an early pregnancy?”.25

Martha is also likely to follow suit. Nathan has seduced her and she is now willingly ready to leave for Kerala to nourish Nathan’s saplings. Fareeda has to either remain unmarried or die like Ephelia.

This new culture pollutes social environment also. Shambhoo has become a cuckold for no fault of his. The children to be born to Sita Dixit and Martha will become bastards. This culture breeds cuckolds and bastards:

Don’t you know how it is with girls of my age? What do you think we talk about most of the time – except men? It’s men and men for us all the time – except men? It’s men and men for us all the time - except when we’re with the men. Then we talk of women, other women. It’s a silly sort of merry-go-round. We talk of you and you talk of us - and thus round and round goes the wheel of life. We meet and marry and mate. And then our children meet and marry and mate. Isn’t this about all that we inherit and pass on to our children and our children’s children? Of course, if we’re ultra-
modern, we don’t mate – we just meet and marry and unmarry and marry again, until some day the condom slips or perhaps the Lady doctor is called in too late to do the squeezing and killing. Then we put on a brave face and engage a Goanese ayah to sing Lullaby Baby to the little bastard, so that we can go on with our courting and copulating, without let or hindrance.”.26

This culture assaults the health of people also. Nathan is about to lose his kidney and along with it his power of procreation owing to his over indulgence in sex activities. It affects the womanhood also:

Take my kidneys. How have I come so near to destroying them except by my own folly? . . . Or take this thing called cervical cancer in women. Why do so many women get it nowadays, except as a result of either too many childbirths or too many abortions? Really, Fareeda, the basic disease in man is his freedom – and his pathetic inability to learn the art of restraint. We’re either chain smokers or chain copulators or chain gormandizers.27

The parody lies in the fact that none of them bothered about the appalling impact of unrestrained sex on individual and the curse the society is going to receive. Yet the novel has unearthed the complications of this through the narrative of Nathan and a host of his women friends in both of whom- the absence of restraint and excess of freedom are predominant.

(ii) Population Explosion: The author has cleverly linked the first two to yet another threat to the country as a whole i.e., population explosion. The new culture has removed the restrictions in sex matters. As a result, many persons conceive and it has led to the abundant growth of population. If mankind fails to check it, a state of universal impotency is predictable. In the words of Dr. Patel the novel cautions as follows: “if the world is going to continue to breed at the present insane rate, a time is coming when enforced childless marriages will be the rule rather than exception”.28

Thus, ‘Onion Peel’ shows that excess in one thing leads to excess in everything. The Indian culture has been represented as an adherent of morality
in the conventional texts. The culture has survived the intrusion of various foreign cultures such as the Muslim culture, the Persian culture, the European culture etc.,. The image of Indian woman as an embodiment of purity, morality, and fidelity. This notion prevails all over the world. There is no doubt about it.

Sexual intercourse before marriage and extramarital relations do not have any sanction in the Indian culture. Among the married, faithfulness has been regarded as the ideal to be practiced unto one’s own death and beyond. But *Onion Peel* demystifies this popular notion in narrating a story, which is contrary to the Indian Culture from top to bottom. Lechery, adultery and street walking have replaced the sacred marriage and love. Polygamous and polyandrous aspects have superceded the notion of holy marriage, which advocates the doctrine of ‘one man to one woman’. The endogamy of Indian culture has been replaced by exogamy. Thus *Onion Peel* becomes a subversive narrative which parodies Indian culture.

III. Subversive Technique: *Onion Peel* typifies post-modernism in its experiments with Form and Technique. There is perceivable departure from the conventional novel in respect of structure, characterization and diction.

(i) Structure: In *Onion Peel*, the plot construction and its development are contrary to the conventional notion of plot. The plot of the novel may be construed as ‘persecution’ since the major part of the narrative is woven around the protagonist’s panic of becoming impotent. It conforms neither to notion of organic plot nor to that of loose plot, nor episodic exclusively, but seems to synthesize these.

In the first two chapters, the nucleus of the narrative is given. When one expects linear progression of the plot, the narrative moves in the reverse direction. In fact, flash back’ is a major device employed in the structure of the novel. If the novel is about Nathan’s encounter with six women, Catherine, Sita Dixit, Nirmala, Fareeda Ahmed, Martha and the sweeper woman, Nathan’s relationship with the first three is narrated through the mode of flash back or memory which Rushdie has immortalized in *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame* etc.,
At the same time, the novel does not move in the reverse direction only, occasionally the narrative leaps back to the present. This adds to the element of suspense in the novel. At the opening of the narrative, Nathan is found in the Recovery Room in the hospital. He is given a week time for operation. In between, he remembers his past experience of girl savoring, and continues it in the present too. On Saturday, Nathan is found again in the same Recovery Room, ready for operation. It gives us an impression that the structure of the narrative is in a circular form. When the much awaited anticipation to see Nathan through the operation mounts high, the narrative closes with the philosophical statements of Nathan with an open end.

Another feature, which is not only peculiar but also an unprecedented stylistic experiment of K.M. Trishanku is that, the chapters in the novel are not numbered at all. This supports the earlier point that the novel does not have a beginning, a middle and an end. The narrative is presented in such a manner that one can read the novel from any page without losing the link of the story. *Onion Peel* defies the traditional notion of having a beginning, a middle and an end. The flash back device is deployed to achieve this effect. Thus, *Onion Peel* makes a departure from the conventional notion of Form by incorporating a non-linear structure into the narrative.

**Intertextuality**: Intertextuality is a post-modernist device of incorporating various texts into one with a view to subverting the conventional notion of a single text. Trishanku has handled this device not only cleverly but innovatively also.

The author is innovative in the very prologue to the novel. Unlike the trend of incorporating the part of other text as a device of intertextuality, the author has used the part of text from within *Onion Peel* as a prologue. The following text of the prologue is taken from the conversation between Nathan and Martha on their way to Baroda under the Pseudo names Joe and Mary respectively. The prologue is cited from the novel:

*We’re funny creatures, Mary. You must learn never to take me at my word. When you have to live by writing, you develop a habit of fooling about with words. The words mean nothing, really,*
though others are taken in by what we say. We’re dissemblers, Mary- the whole lot of us.”

She was listening to me with open mouth. “What’s a dissembler Joe? she asked. “Just another word, Mary. When I say we dissemble, I don’t mean we dissemble really. It’s all a game of hide and seek with words. We’re like children. Sometimes we get lost in our own forest of words, we lose our way”.29

The above prologue occurs on the page number 57. This is Desanian style because in the very introduction of All About H. Hatterr Desani warns the readers not to rely upon the narrative to assess the message of the novel. It serves as a prologue to the main narrative. This resembles the device adopted in the prologue of Onion Peel.

The author has installed the text of Hamlet in various ways. Firstly, there are references to the characters such as Hamlet, Ophelia and Polonius. Secondly, he has imitated the pattern of certain expressions. For instance, Hamlet’s speech with Ophelia: “God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another”.30 is uttered by the vision of the sweeper woman in Onion Peel: God gives you one form and you make yourselves another!.31

Thirdly, the author has quoted some lines of Hamlet’s speech in Nathan’s conversation with Fareed with a slight modification. The lines from Hamlet are as follows: “If thou dost marry, I’ll give thee this plague for thy dowry - be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny; get thee to nunnery, go, fare well... [he paces to and fro] Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them: to a nunnery, go, and quickly too, farewell”.32

In Onion Peel most part of the above text is retained and a few new expressions are also comprised as: “If thou dost marry, I’ll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shall not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery- go! We are arrant knaves all: believe none of us. If thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool...”33

When compared, it seems Trishanku has taken liberty with the text of Hamlet to alter the punctuation marks i.e., colon after ‘dowry’ instead of slash

103
and full stop after calumny instead of a semi-colon. He has also inserted "We are arrant knaves all" believe none of us! in the original text of Prince Hamlet's speech.

On another occasion, the text of Prince Hamlet's conversation is incorporated in Onion Peel. The text from Hamlet is ---

Hamlet: Alas poor ghost!
Ghost: Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing.

TO what I shall unfold

Hamlet: Speak, I am bound to hear".34

In Onion Peel Fareeda responds to Nathan's mimicry of Hamlet in a lighter vein as: "'Alas, poor ghost!'" she said,

"'Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing To what I shall unfold'".

"'Speak', she said, "'I am bound to hear'".35

In the above instances, the text from Hamlet has been used as it is. With the difference that the dialogue between The Ghost and Prince Hamlet has been rendered in the form of mimicry, which shows that Shakespeare's Hamlet need not be confined only to the form of drama.

One more interesting aspect is that the text of Hamlet from the film version as well has been assimilated into this novel. The following is from the Oliver film:

'I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young word blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine'.36

The narrator acknowledges that this portion has been taken from the film version of Hamlet: "You remember the ghost in HAMLET – in the Oliver film – with a voice a like a tin-pan echo".37

There is also the incorporation of the text of Upanishads. The trans literati on of its wisdom is found in Onion Peel as subversive of the notion of love. Besides these direct borrowings, Onion Peel has subsumed such
texts as *The Portrait of Artist as a Young Man, Don Juan, Lady Chatterley, the Vedas, the yogas* etc. indirectly.

**Multi disciplinary Text:** Like the device of intertextuality, the incorporation of various disciplines is also a characteristic feature of post-modernism. Dr. M.K. Bhatnagar identifies this as: “Post-modernism as a literary phenomenon owes its existence to the cumulative impact of a number of pursuits and disciplines: anthropology, psychology, linguistic philosophy, literary theory, besides others, ... so much so that the post-modernist litterateur is to be seen as a new kind of polymath.”  

In *Onion Peel* also the cumulative impact of a number of pursuits and disciplines such as economics, philosophy, medicine, journalism etc is discernible. In order to highlight *Onion Peel's* alliance with post-modernism, a note on the incorporation of the impact of numerous pursuits and discipline is provided here.

Like *All About H. Hatterr*, *Onion Peel* also contains a discourse on the discipline of medicine. Nathan is diagnosed through a medical examination that there is a tumour in his kidney. It has to be operated at the cost of his power of procreation without which Nathan may survive hardly for a few months. Since the problem of Nathan is very serious and sensitive, Dr. Patel wisely handles the matter. He does not inform Nathan about his condition instantly. He discharges him on that day and asks him to meet him the next day. Like a good teacher of medicine and surgery, he first encourages Nathan to prepare himself to listen to what is going to be revealed to him. He explains very systematically how his condition would not amount to complete impotency. Dr. Patil's consultation reads like a text book on medicine:

> I'll explain the whole thing to you as graphically as I can. ... He took a piece of chalk and started drawing. These are the kidneys which we're trying to save," he said. "These are the ureters. And here is the bladder, let's say. This little opening here would be its neck and it's here our cystoscopic examination has revealed a tumour-like obstruction. Now, this by itself is nothing much. We could neatly cut it off and that would be the end of the matter. But there's a further complication. This little thing here is
prostate. It's rather congested around here and we'll have to do a little paring off. In the process the sphincter muscles are likely to lose their power. And it's here, Nathan, that your so-called impotency come in".39

Dr. Patel's counsel to Nathan at the beginning and to Fareeda at the end about Nathan's operation is exemplary. The register of medicine has artistically converted *Onion Peel* into a rhetoric of discharge on medicine. A.S.D Pillai's observation in this regard is worthwhile to note: "The book details the operation process with clinical precision".40

Population studies, which is a branch of economics, is also ingrained in the making of *Onion Peel*. The text ponders over the theory of Malthus. Indeed, Fareeda is an M.A. in Economics and Usha is at the School of Economics in the University. The author has installed the discourse on the population explosion in a very interesting manner. When Nathan is going to lose his fatherhood, it initiates the speculation on the merits and demerits of breeding. Fareeda is all for breeding and Nathan is not only against breeding but also against marriage. But Dr. Patil's analysis of the issue is scientific.

Nathan is least interested in leading a family life. Even prior to his operation, he had held the same view: "I had always wanted to live alone and die alone, unknown, unwept, a dry leaf in the storm".41

It reminds one of the will of Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Since Nathan always speaks against the process of breeding lest it should lead to the Malthusian conclusion, Fareeda calls Nathan's attitude a Malthusian nightmare. Fareeda is just the opposite of Nathan. She wants to bear a lot of children herself. In the counsel with Dr. Patel, she airs view on population growth: "But, Sir, the paramount need of our country today is to have more and more millions of people to fight the Chinese menace. In this hour of crisis we can't really afford the luxury of cutting down our population. It's primarily the colossal size of China's population that gives her the power and prestige she enjoys even in the United States. We must do no less".42

Though Fareeda's present concern is personal, as she is worried about Nathan's likely impotency, still her speech reveals her support for the growth of
population. She has already argued with Dr. Patel that the renunciation by only a certain percentage of people would cause adverse effect: "But, sir, 'I had argued, "If one section of the population puts a curb on its parenthood and the other doesn't, wouldn't it lead to a worse tragedy for our country?". 43

Besides showing her objection to the voluntary renunciation and prefers compulsion in respect of renunciation, her speech also hints at the burning problem in the Indian politics. It seems to suggest the disproportionate growth in population between the Hindus and the Muslims. It is held that the population of the Muslims multiplies faster than that of the Hindus as the practice of birth control is not applicable to the Muslims according to the Islamic Faith. Fareeda stands for the freedom for breeding as it is typical of her faith and community.

Dr. Patel's thesis on the issue is not only brilliant but also very interesting. His calibre, experience and wisdom are reflected in his counter argument as: " 'Why should you think so, my child?' he had said. 'Poor people are not necessarily poor in intelligence. In any case the population would go down appreciably, and with less people around to share the national cake we could create better and great opportunities for the education and advancement of our children'. 44

Dr. Patel's views which are contrary to the views of Fareeda present another dimension of Indian economy. For him birth control is preferable to poverty, illiteracy etc. His views cannot be set aside as irrelevant and anti-humanistic. They may help to find a solution to the contemporary crisis.

Nathan is also against the social evils caused by population growth. He is deeply disturbed by the present state of socialism as:

I felt sad and miserable within me. What kind of socialism was this that still, retained so much of the old British Empire squalor and rottenness? What kind of future were we building for our people if so many of our young women had nothing better to do than sit behind vertical bars night after night, dolled up as though for their wedding day? What kind of a society was this where
young and old, like wild beasts on the loose, roamed the streets in search of fleshly prey night after night.\textsuperscript{45}

In the lament of Nathan, the impact of bad socialism on the life of the people is emphasized. At the same time, it also forecasts the chaos as an impact of mismanagement of the issues pertaining to the population growth. It reflects on morality also because the demarcation between liberty and libertinisms does not exist for the so called champions of socialism.

The author seems to suggest 'non-procreation' as a viable solution to these problems after a great deal of deliberation on the impact of the population explosion. Nathan emerges as a representative of the future mankind as he calls himself the prototype of the future generation. Pillai notes this as: "The futuristic man of \textit{Onion Peel} is analogous to the post humanist protagonist of western Post Modernist fictions".\textsuperscript{46}

The following extract from the novel not only winds up the discourse on the Malthusian theory but also serves to illustrate \textit{Onion Peel} as an integrated and interdisciplinary text: "My only consolation is that I am probably the prototype of a future man who will inherit the earth after the present race of spiller men have so infested and over populated it as to render its continued existence on the same plane nugatory. I may well be the patriarch of non-spiller males, fornicators, but not- progenitors- the perfect answer to the old Malthusian dilemma".\textsuperscript{47}

The discipline of Journalism is also implanted in \textit{Onion Peel}. Nathan, the protagonist works as a reporter for a magazine 'India.' He has been popular as a crime reporter. He has been popular among the women. There are three occasions on which the novel has incorporated an epigrammatic discourse on journalism. Firstly, Mr. Jain the G.M. of the magazine 'INDIA' reflects in an editorial on socialism. In his counsel to Nathan, the complications of running a press by backing up the Leftist ideals only are highlighted despite the fact that socialism is not to be neglected. It highlights the politics of the maintenance of a press. He holds that the magazine is prone to win the wrath of the private investors if 'INDIA' goes on supporting the ideals of socialism blindly. In Mr.
Jain's comments, the intelligence of running a magazine by not hurting the interests of the capitalists is highlighted, which is the need of the press to day.

Also the discussion among Soli Metha, Mukerjee and Nathan throws ample light on journalism. Soli Metha insists that the journalists should be realistic in providing information to the people. He claims that he is right in having written about China and Russia realistically.

Nathan intervenes to suggest that the political stance of its own is very important for a magazine. He does not reject realism as totally irrelevant, but emphasizes that the point of view of the magazine should be reflected clearly: "So what I want to say is merely this, Soli: that what ever we write, the colour of our political skin must show through clearly".48

Lastly, at the time of departing from Soli and Mukerjee, Nathan leaves some hints, which depict the ethics of the professionals of journalism. It also shows his own professional commitment. The following words of Nathan will help us to wind up this discourse:

I'll be away for almost an age," I said, "Forty days is a long time for the rush and tumble of a Weekly office. By the time I am back, you'll have brought out six issues, including that special number. Although, I've had some hand in the general plan for the weeks ahead, what you say editorially in the Weekly is entirely up to both of you. We must be perceptive in our comment and analysis, but we must also be wide open, perceptible, in our sense of commitment. In fact, it is this latter that endears a magazine to its readers".49

Indeed, the disciplines like sociology, philosophy are also traceable in the minor scale in Onion Peel. They are touched upon in the analysis of Onion Peel as a novel of subversion. Since the discussion on theoretical and practical aspects of Medicine, Economics and journalism are meant to support the structure of Onion Peel, Onion Peel can be regarded as an interdisciplinary text.

The structure of Onion Peel comprises non-linear narration, intertextuality, and the multiple disciplines etc. With the technique of these
various narrative devices the novel subverts not only the conventional notion of traditional themes but also that of the ‘novel form’.

**Mixed Genre:** *Onion Peel* embodies various genres a mixture of which produces the effect of collage. By inseminating the characteristics of various genres, it transcends the conventional notion of a work belonging to a single genre. *Onion Peel* typifies Rhizome i.e., several roots, with regard to the incorporation of genres. *Onion Peel* can be treated as a campus novel, Psychological novel, Political novel, a parable, and what not? This does not mean that *Onion Peel* fits into all these genres perfectly for it is all these and yet none of these is complete for it is a mixture into which all genres merge.

**Magic Realism:** There is a magic touch in the description of Nathan stupour in which Nathan is visited by Kali in the form of a sweeper woman. Nathan sees the weird vision of the sweeper woman whom he has seduced in a room in the Baroda railway station. She squeezes the life out of Nathan. She says that she is Kali who represents all women in the world. She flicks off her blouse which exposed her breasts as in the magic : “Her breasts were shrunk and hanging loose like dead skin or like deflated balloon”. On another occasion Nathan’s confession astounds the reader: “I virtually make love with my nose. They say imagination plays in the experience of sexual pleasure. In my case it’s quite the opposite. It’s because my imagination is mostly quiescent that I’m at all able to make love. Then I’m done for. It pulverizes me. Then I realize with an unnerving suddenness that what I’ve been cohabiting with a naked corpse.”

This is nothing but fantasy. It describes Nathan’s mind which has been obsessed with sexual intercourse irrespective of caste, colour, age and place.

In other words, Nathan has no control over his passion which makes him mad and lose his sense of discrimination between the living and the dead. He copulates with any female body – dead or alive.

**Metafiction:** If metafiction is a novel about the novel or narration, there are ample instances to show that *Onion Peel* is a metafiction. Though Nathan is an Editor of a magazine called India, he has a literary bent of mind and he says that he is a writer himself. It has been reflected in his extensive citing from Hamlet. He compares himself with *Don Juan* which is an evidence of his knowledge of
the English Romantic poets like Lord Byron. This resembles Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman* in which Stephen shows his love for Byron. The word he uses to react to the beauty of Martha “drinking deeper and deeper draughts of her with my eyes shows that he has read Ben Jonson's *To Celia*. This is one side of Nathan as having a flair for literature.

In his dialogue with Martha now under the pseudo name as Mary, instances of literary criticism also occur. When she wants to complete the last page of a storybook, he asks her never to read the climax of a story because it would always be a disappointment. In a way, it is a self-reflection of Trishanku who has left the climax of this novel to its own fate. The following endorses this assumption:

> The climax is always a disappointment. It's a poor story that has a climax to it. In life it's always an anti-climax”. “Very well Joe. You say you're a writer yourself. How would you have ended the story?” “Of course, without a climax.” “But how?” “Well, I'd have left him at the point where he murdered his wife.” “Stupid”, she said, turning over on her back and bubbling with laughter, “That’s where the story begins. How can you end a story where it begins Joe?”.52

As a metafiction, *Onion Peel* anticipates Rushdie's *Shame, The Moor's Last Sigh* and Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* the narratives of which make a full circle and end where they begin. These instances form a text of literary criticism proper. Thus it emerges as a novel about the craft of the novel. It is an artifact rather than an art.

(ii) **Characterization** : According to Gao Xingian, “Literature is a universal observation on dilemmas of human existence and nothing is taboo”.53 Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is one of the earliest literary works which is not only the best example of the theme of dilemma but also the most perennial influence on the creative writers across the world. Trishanku is not an exception in this regard.

He has depicted the character of the protagonist Nathan on the model of Prince Hamlet to some extent. Nathan and Prince Hamlet are identical with
each other in respect of their mental obsession though their obsessions are
different. Nathan experiences the mental agony and expresses it in his
soliloquy like Hamlet, though the nature of his problem is different from that of
Hamlet's.

Nathan quotes Hamlet so frequently that Fareeda calls him half-Hamlet.
In his attitude towards marriage, Nathan is identical with Prince Hamlet
though the reasons for their hatred for marriage are essentially different. In
respect of psyche, monologue, and misogamy Nathan draws close to the
character of Prince Hamlet.

But as a post-modernist text, *Onion Peel*, is not an imitation of Hamlet in
the characterization of Nathan. It is rather parodic, because Nathan, unlike
Prince Hamlet, is quick in his decision making.

Nathan is also called "My Nietzsche" not unjustifiably, by Fareeda.
Nathan is a postgraduate in philosophy and has not only kinship with
philosophy but also is a philosopher himself: "you come from a philosophical
family. Your uncle has told me you are yourself a bit of a philosopher".

These are some similarities from their background as philosophers. Also
one can draw substantial parallel between Nathan and Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche,
Nathan too displays irreverence towards the notion of religion and God. While
Nietzsche announced the end of Philosophy, Nathan seems to announce the end
of progeny or procreation. He has expressed on various occasions his
disapproval of breeding.

Nathan is also modelled on Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *A Portrait of the
Artist as a Youngman*. At two levels, some parallel can be drawn between them.
Like Stephen, Nathan also repents for having committed adultery. There is a
contradiction in the motto behind their regret for their act. Stephen repents but
spiritually. He is worried about the punishment for his sin in the world of God.
The dread of Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell haunt them. But Nathan
suffers and repents physically. For him adultery is not a sin. So he does not
bother about its spiritual consequences whereas he is worried about infection of
diseases, as he has not adopted any contraceptive devices.

112
Secondly, like Stephen, Nathan also has his perception of the notion of “beauty”. He argues with the Swamji in Benares and disagrees with him: “What do you think should be the object of man’s eternal search?” Beauty, Sir.”. . . . But beauty is a very subjective thing - much more so than truth. What is beautiful to you may be ugly to me . . . though I was young and fiery, I had left without pursuing the argument any farther”.56

But Nathan and Stephen are not exactly identical in respect of the motto behind their inclination towards beauty. Stephen speculates the concept of beauty from the point of view of art. Finally he prefers art to religion. But Nathan’s notion of beauty is confined to sensuous and voluptuous beauty. Therefore there is a qualitative difference between Stephen and Nathan, which makes Onion Peel look like a parody of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young man.

Like Hatterr’s, Nathan’s identity also is hybrid. Besides there being allusion to various persons, he is called variously Ramanathan, Nathan, Nath and Joe. He has chosen the first three names himself, whereas Martha gives him the last one. Martha gives him the name ‘Joe’ to Nathan while they leave for Baroda for merrymaking.

No attempt is made to deal with the characterization of woman characters separately not because they are less important but because much has been said about them already. But for the sake of representing India in its true secular colour, the author has cleverly taken care to provide space for women from the major religions – Hinduism( Sita Dixit), Islam (Fareeda Ahmed) and Christian (Martha Matthew).

An attempt to advocate secularism and the doctrine of cutting across the religions is evident in the characterization of woman characters. A symbolic amalgamation of all religions is implied in Nathan’s relationship with the women of different religious communities. Though Nathan is a Hindu by birth, he transcends the notion of religion in loving the girls form the Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities: “She’s Fareeda Ahmed, but no more Muslim than I’m Hindu””.57

Sita Dixit carries his foetus. Martha also wishes to give birth to and rear his child in Kerala. Fareeda has decided to wait for him for any length of time
to marry him. Thus *Onion Peel* has visualized an India in which all religions must merge. This is the ideology Nathan upholds in the name of socialism.

In the creation of the character of Nathan with numerous identities, the notion of ascribing a single identity to the protagonist has been distorted. In the creation of Fareeda, Martha, and Sita, the author suggests cultural hybridity. The post-modernist culture is reflected in the amalgamation of three different religious women who carry the offspring of Nathan in their wombs. In the portrayal of the university students, besides Sita Dixit and Fareeda, the author shows the new generation, which is contrary to the traditional women. However, the selection of characters with ultramodern outlook is complementary to the subversive themes in the novel.

(iii) Diction: Just like Desani, Trishanku has also made experiments with language in *Onion Peel*. He has handled the register of medicine to explain Nathan’s problem. This sort of vocabulary includes words like ‘Cystoscopy’, trans-urethral resection, sphincter muscles, ejaculatory process, recovery Room, sulphamamide, morphine, micturition etc. With these words the text creates the impression that the situation is not completely imaginary.

Trishanku has also drawn a lot of words from the Vedic tradition. These include yoga, pranayama, kena kam pashyet, kena kam vijaniyat, antaryamin and Vigro. These are incorporated in the text because the novel’s motif is to parody the Vedic culture.

There are also Urdu words like a la Japonais, Choli, Saree, and Chappal etc. These words are included in the depiction of Fareeda’s wedding proposal. This helps to give the Muslim cultural colouring to the narrative.

He has also coined some new terms like ‘kissify’, ‘girl-savouring’ and ‘salaamed’. By introducing new words, which do not abide by the norms of word coinage, Trishanku subverts Shakespeare who has had 20,000 words to his coinage. While Shakespeare has coined verbs from noun forms, Trishanku has subverted that norm by coining verb from verb i.e., kissify from kiss. Salaam is a word of greeting in Hindustani, which has no implication of tense at all. It is a part of phatic communion, which is meant for maintaining cordial social bonds. But the author has taken liberty with this word and has converted it into a verb,
which is not permissible according to the grammar of its own language or that of English. This reminds Desani on the one hand, and anticipates Salman Rushdie, Ghosh, Tharoor and the cult of Rushdie, on the other hand.

There are expressions like Let’s marry, Let’s marry which exhibit the repetitive spoken style in the vernacular. This style is called leitmotif with regard to the novels of Rushdie. In general, the diction is in an informal style. Pillai’s observation may help to sum up the diction in *Onion Peel* as: “The author hasn’t chosen to either Indianize or idiosyncrasies the dialogues. Indian Writers in English have, as we know, opted for different modes in their deployment of English:

While Mulk Raj Anand has tried to capture the rhythm and feeling of Indian speech by free deployment of Hindi words into English and literature translation of Indian Idioms into English, Kamal Markandaya, for instance, has chosen to write faultless English, though she throws in as in *Two Virgins*, many a Tamil word like Appa (Father), Amma (Mother), dhavani (a young woman’s mantle) etc. Trishanku writes an impeccable English but his characters’ dialogues are more often than not too long and stylized to be realistic.58

IV. Conclusion: That *Onion Peel* deals with the subversive themes and technique has been noticed in the foregone discussion. In its subversion of the notion of the Buddhist enlightenment, the novel forms an alliance with the philosophy of post-modernism, in suggesting the end of religion and god. Nathan’s losing procreative power is a symbol of the end of the creation which suggests post-modernist theme of apocalypse. The theme of castration is subversive because it is opposite to the law of nature. The theme of castration is outrageous also, which is another characteristic of post-modernism.

*Onion Peel* is a novel of subversion in its depiction of the notions of ethic and Indian Culture. The novel exposes the decadence of ethic in the life of people. The focus is chiefly on the urban society, for the narrative is confined to Bombay only. By subverting Indian culture, the novel lays bare the immoral aspect of love and marriage, in the context, modern urban society.
Various narrative devices characterize the subversive technique in *Onion Peel*. The structure is not in agreement with the norms of a proper plot. The narration is marked by flexibility and dynamism; it moves freely which ever direction the author wants. Since the narrative does not have proper beginning, middle and end, the novel could be read from anywhere at one's wish and will without any loss of aesthetic pleasure. In a way the novel seems to redefine the notion of aestheticism itself.

Characterization is marked by cultural hybridity. Nathan, who is half-Hamlet, half-Nietzsche is a mixture of many persons and many cultures. Like Hatterr, he too is an anti-hero. In the creation of women characters, the post-modernist characteristic feature of 'decentring' i.e., distortion of one woman as heroine, is evident. Though there are several women with whom the protagonist has an intimate relationship, none of them is permitted to occupy center stage as a heroine. The cultural hybridity is yet another contrast to the traditional image of a Brahmin woman - Sita Dixit, a Christian duty nurse - Martha and a Muslim woman - Fareeda.

Diction also parts way with the notion of standard English. The diction is not simply an amalgamation of English and a few regional expressions as it is found in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan. In fact, there are serious attempts to subvert the notion of standard English by distorting the syntax, vocabulary and by incorporating various registers like the register of religion, medicine and journalism etc. With all these elements, *Onion Peel* emerges as a new novel with a strong tendency to subvert not only the conventional themes but the conventional novel form also. Therefore, the march of *Onion Peel* is towards post-modernism.

*Onion Peel* is more akin to the western post-modernist texts. Though the narrative grapples with the native traditions i.e., the Buddhist Enlightenment, Ethic and Indian Culture, the narrative has failed to provide a constructive note and to provide anything in place of the notions the narrative subverts, because the western post-modernism is destructive and indifferent in its nature. But Indian post-modernists have subverted these qualities and redefined post-modernism in the native context by being constructive and promising. They are
the votaries of optimism and enthusiasm in their efforts to identify and subvert
the beliefs which they view as a human construct and suggest an introspective
review of such ‘constructed beliefs’ which is the need of the hour. Since the
narrative has confined itself to subverting the received notions of traditions and
provides no alternative to Nathan’s negative approach to grapple with modern
man’s problem, *Onion Peel* is analogous to the western post-modernism which
also is negative in its approach.

After Trishanku, the evolution of Desanian cult is witnessed in Saros
Cowasjee. In a couple of years after *Onion Peel*, his *Goodbye to Elsa* appeared. In
many respects, *Goodbye to Elsa* forms an alliance with *All About H. Hatterr* and
*Onion Peel*. 
NOTES

15. Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 76.
17. Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 24
23 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 81.
24 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 160.
25 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 75.
26 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 123.
27 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 106.
29 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 57.
33 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 17.
34 Shakeapeare, *Hamlet*, 27.
35 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 103.
36 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 103.
37 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 103.
41 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 115.
42 Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 137.
43  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 137.
44  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 137.
45  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 129.
46  Pillai, *Post - Modernism*, 78.
47  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 173.
48  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 127.
49  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 128.
50  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 131.
52  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 80.
54  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 102.
56  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 22.
57  Trishanku, *Onion Peel*, 4.
58  Pillai, *Post – Modernism*, 78.