

# Literary Voice

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Swarnjit Savi



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# LITERARY VOICE

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### *From the Editor's Desk*

*Literary Voice: A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies*, Number 22, Volume 1, March 2024 comprises insightful appraisals of literary texts drawn from British, American, Canadian, African and Asian literatures. The research articles essay probing leap into the nuances of disability, survival strategies in the war of attrition, and politics of nationalism. Narratives of Illness as manifest in Women Autopathographies delve into the financial and commercial aspects of healthcare that arise from the involvement of pharmaceutical and insurance companies that prioritise financial gains over patient care, thereby posing a threat to the integrity of healthcare institutions. Besides, the essays explore the literary cartography in understanding the themes of freedom, displacement, memory, trauma, identity, culture, complexities of human relationships, prompt contemplation on the ethical dilemmas inherent in the pursuit of human enhancement, and unravel the dynamics of the Partition through the process of biopolitics and biopower. The theory of EcoGothic has been investigated as a means of resolving the ecological crisis and expressing cultural anxieties about the relationship between humans and the non-human world. The dynamics of exclusionary politics and Cultural Violence in India's North East, Psycho-Sexual Health of Malayali Migrants and their Left-Behinds, and the Sri Lankan Tamil victims' discourses that contradict the State's accounts, have been deftly analysed. The write ups on the select movies explore the sociocultural construction of gender, the heteronormative conditioning of women, and the enforcement of gender hierarchy and hegemony, and show how the films negotiate a contested cultural landscape and solastalgia to act as a clarion call that marks the advent of a new era and species that defy conventional identity markers. The research studies focus on the quagmire emerging at the intersection of cutting-edge science and the human quest for transcendence, highlight the contradictions and complexities in the portrayal of women characters in myths, and underscore the power of art against the state of "the culture of silence." Literary Discourses, book reviews, and investigations centred upon the select Theatre, challenges in Communication and ELT, are value additions to the current number. The edition has adequate delight to offer to the devotees of the Muse! We look forward as ever to your responses.

*T.S. Anand*



# **Feminine Fear and Paranoia of the Ecology in Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black: An EcoGothic Reading***

**Virginia Kashyap\***  
**Dr. Prachand Narayan Piraji\*\***

## *Abstract*

It is a universal truth that nature's grand design changes over time and neither nature nor human society is static. As the gothic genre has continued to evolve, an increase in the growing focus on EcoGothic as a means of resolving the ecological crisis and expressing cultural anxieties about the relationship between humans and the non-human world has come to the forefront. In this paper, the researchers propose an EcoGothic reading of the text *The Woman in Black* (1983), concentrating on nature that is alive and uncanny, drawing inspiration from Andrew Smith, William Hughes, Simon Estok, Elizabeth Parker and others. It argues that the gothic elements in the novel combine a fear of nature with feminine fear. By doing so, the paper aims to demonstrate how Hill deconstructs anthropocentric myth through anthropomorphism and deep ecology to understand non-human entities.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Human-Nature, Gothic, Feminine Fear, Uncanny, Anthropocentric.

## **Introduction**

The Gothic, which originally referred to a type of building from the Middle Ages, quickly became connected with works of literature like Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) that belonged to the Romantic tradition of the sublime, which combined pleasure with dread. Gothic literature features themes of death, spirits, violence, and sexual transgression. In response to the Romantic concept of biophilia, William Hughes and Andrew Smith depict nature as an alienation rather than as a matter of belonging, tracing the emergence of an ecologically conscious Gothic in this tradition. Such a work of fiction comes under the EcoGothic genre. The term 'ecogothic' describes a style of depiction that emphasises the terrifying facets of the non-human environment. In such tales, ecogothic fiction focuses on previously overlooked non-human life, including ominous forests, beasts, or even violent humans that actively contribute to the fabrication of horror. In strands of earlier Gothic fiction, the 'wilderness' can sometimes serve as a place of refuge and comfort which has changed as current Gothic literature often depicts the natural world through images of the uncanny and the unexpected.

The EcoGothic genre integrates Gothic fiction and ecocriticism themes, analyzing nature's portrayal in literary texts. Significant themes include boundary crossing, expectations being reversed, dualities, and foreboding. The genre focuses on the relationship between humans and nature, highlighting the complex nature of human-nature interactions. Such writing is characterised by nature that repeatedly serves as a reminder of its sentience and power, whether through cataclysmic events, the regrowth of abandoned sites, or a sudden awareness of one's embeddedness in or

proximity to the non-human world, as first theorised by Andrew Smith and William Hughes in their 2013 book *Ecogothic*. A firm connection between Gothic fiction and environmentalism has been made by them:

“Debates about climate change and environmental damage have been key issues on most industrialised countries' political agendas for some time. These issues have helped shape the direction and application of ecocritical languages. The Gothic seems to be the form which is well-placed to capture these anxieties and provides a culturally significant point of contact between literary criticism, ecocritical theory and political process” (5).

They also argue that “ecogothic fiction creates a point of contact with the ecology as a space of crisis that serves as a medium for addressing climate change fears and environmental damage occurring in industrial societies” (3). The purpose of this genre is to integrate the themes of Gothic fiction with those of ecocriticism, including an analysis of what is meant by the term 'Nature', how it is described in literary texts, and how it is related to human beings. “An EcoGothic approach poses a challenge to a familiar Gothic subject- nature - taking a nonanthropocentric position to reconsider the role that the environment, species and nonhuman play in the construction of monstrosity and fear” (Del Principe 1). The Ecogothic genre appears in Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* (1983) as a tumultuous environment and the presence of Jenet Humfrye's ghost, which overwhelms and overpowers an unassuming Arthur Kipps. The plot of the novel centres around Kipps as he travels from London to the small town of Crythin Gifford in suburban England to settle Mrs. Drablow's affairs following her passing. This town is a damaged environment with hints of disorder rather than the imagined place of peace and calm. He sets out to discover the hidden truth about "the woman with the wasted face" (Hill 58) to find respite in his work at the Eel Marsh House. Still, he is impeded by hidden threats in a hostile environment, which results in a violent and overwhelming horror. An unfortunate event led to the loss of her young son, and this event became the catalyst for her descent into feminine fear. It is a universal fear among mothers to lose their children, resulting in a haunting depiction of the feminine vulnerability and pain that follows this loss. By blurring the distinction between the human and non-human, Hill emphasizes the interconnectedness of women's experiences and the environment.

This classic novel has gone through many examinations under the critical lens over the years since its publication. The body of work on *The Woman in Black* encompasses many literary, gothic, and cultural studies scholars contributing to different academic fields. Through the gothic ecocritical analysis, the human-nonhuman relation that is inherently contextualised within the novel can be considered to draw attention to the environment as a character and present the nature-culture dualism in *The Woman in Black*.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

This article is a qualitative study that uses the conceptual framework of ecocritical theory in Gothic literature with special employment of the concepts of 'deep ecology' and 'anthropomorphism'. The approach that views the world as the entire ecosphere,

shifting the paradigm from a human-centric to a biocentric approach to studying the world is 'ecocriticism'. It is in this form of study that the nonhuman world is seriously taken into consideration. The nonhuman world has long been an integral part of Gothic literature, both in terms of its setting and in terms of how it is depicted. The one common trait that all Gothic literary works share is fear, thereby denoting a text as Gothic where the readers are left with an impression of uncertainty and uncanniness, creating a sense of fear in the minds.

The environment also instils fear in people, a fear that originates from human failure to control their lives and the world around them. Ecophobia is the driving force behind ecogothic, which is “an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world as present and as subtle in our daily lives as homophobia and racism and sexism.” (Estok 208). Simon C. Estok also points out that control is an integral part of ecophobia, “at the constitutional moment in history that gives us the imperative to control everything that lives. Control is the key word here” (208). It is believed that ecophobia is responsible for our constant desire to tame the wilderness, weed gardens, control nature, and create sanitized spaces free of vermin, harmful microorganisms, and the like. “The ecophobic loathes the unpredictable. Ecophobia emanates from anxieties about control” (46). Anthropocentrism is based on the concept of ecophobia which is the concern that non-humans will one day take over if they are not already taking over. In the essay, Estok also builds the form of the term 'EcoGothic'. Gothic ecocriticism or 'EcoGothic' is a literary mode that presupposes the ecocritical lens on the gothic. EcoGothic is a term used to describe the fear of the environment within Gothic and from an EcoGothic perspective, nature can be perceived as a menacing threat grasping the interconnected nature of humans and their natural environment.

The forest is a space which plays an important role in any horror fiction giving fear a more constructive structure and enhancing it. Rendered as a binary space as either 'good' or 'bad', a house and its surroundings affirm the good when it provides a setting that has light, wonder and enchantment. To understand the house and the surrounding ecology in *The Woman in Black*, Gaston Bachelard's book *The Poetics of Space* (1964) and Elizabeth Parker's article “Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Woods? Deep Dark Forests and Literary Horror” (2018) has been taken as critical grounds to build the notion of EcoGothic, EcoHorror and Ecophobia in them.

*The Poetics of Space* (1964) by Gaston Bachelard focuses on the house, its interior places and its outer context applying phenomenology to architecture. Bachelard particularly talks about the house, as it hoards as a vault of human consciousness and all the emotional experiences. The house is both unitary and complex as it is composed of memories and experiences, despite its diversity it produces a sense of intimacy. It is a house with memories and experiences, and its components evoke various feelings and an intimate experience of living. This is the reason the house is also considered an embodiment of dreams and not merely “an embodiment of home” (51). The house is seen as a space of protection, a maternal figure who provides us shelter and comfort. The setting is an important factor in a gothic horror story to convince the readers about the supernaturalism present in the story. *The Woman in*

*Black* spreads over three main settings, the lonely house, its surroundings, and the marshes. The novel is about the vengeful spirit of Jennet Humfrey who haunts Crythin Gifford after the tragic loss of her child and the protagonist losing his everything to her vengeance.

### **Discussion**

In *The Woman in Black*, the combination of feminine fear and the eerie natural setting of Eel Marsh House produces a gripping story that weaves the supernatural and the ecological, eventually enhancing the sensation of terror. Susan Hill also reveals the difference between nature and culture in the novel by exposing the misery and pollution in the metropolitan city of London caused by urbanisation and industrialisation. This is depicted by the novelist as she writes about London in words like “it was a yellow fog, a filthy, evil-smelling fog, a fog that choked and blinded, smeared and stained”, “pools of sulphurous yellow light” and “red-hot pools of light from the chestnut-sellers on street corner” formed as the “road-menders spurted and smoked an evil red smoke” (Hill 23-25). It can be assumed that Hill included the fog and its effects as a reflection of the Great Smog of London which affected the city from 5th December to 9th December 1952. Because of the fog which had enveloped the city for three days by that time, the workers needed a lantern held high to see and work even during the day. Arthur Kipps, the protagonist, while going home from his work passes through the city in a cab and encounters the artificiality of urban life in the environment. There is no doubt that when a city appears humans have destroyed nature, neglected open spaces, and built huge buildings, railways, houses, etc., but human society is also not immune. Kipps' description of the City of London shows that the excessive use of scientific development endangers the environment. Portraying the London scene, Hill reveals her concern for environmental degradation concerning the actual encounter with one such calamity. She is thoroughly conventional in depicting the polluted and affected townsfolk through the raw atmosphere of the place and mentioning the fog that had filled the streets of London. In this novel, Kipps attends the funeral of Mrs. Drablow, who is a customer of the company he works for. The reference to the train running through the “Gapemouth tunnel” (41) into the womb of the earth is a clear instance of culture violently encroaching upon the world of nature. Kipps feels no pain when he sees how urbanization is progressing and culture is overwhelming nature. His views and statements about London indicates that he is a man committed to urban life and seeks pleasure in a city where culture permeates. The unnatural life in the city fosters a dualism between man and nature and he finds himself alienated from and opposed to nature.

Taking the concept of deep ecology which highlights the position that all life exists in an inter-connected web and one cannot separate humans from the natural environment, the ethereal ghost woman can be seen as a castigating symbol of nature in this novel. Referring to the fact that humans are seen as mere extensions of the natural environment, the ghost of Jennet Humfrye, also known as the 'Woman in

Black', can also be considered as the mere extension of her spiritual form which lives on even after her death. Deep ecology also suggests that it is not only about the interconnection of objects that are not human but also about the strangeness and otherness of the objects and places that their intermeshing generates. As the woods become an escape route where one feels freer and less constrained by the modern world, the spirit of Jennet becomes a part of nature creating a sense of fear and horror in the minds about the place and the ethereal being which is present in nature, hence the presence of ecogothic and ecohorror in this novel. Considering humans at the centre and no matter how superficially, there is a sense of raising environmental awareness with the humans being attacked and punished by Nature. There is also a strong and complex emotion of feminine fear that is central to the narrative. Susan Hill paints a nuanced picture of feminine fear in *Jennet Humfrye*. Fear can have a significant effect on people, and Jennet's unrelenting pursuit of justice and retaliation exposes how powerful it can be. The unsettling truths of feminine fear are brought to the readers' attention as they join Jennet on her eerie trip, and they subsequently get a greater grasp of its intricacies and persistent force. The tragic loss of her child, Nathaniel, marks Jennet's journey along the way. Angered by her rage and anguish, her maternal instincts drive her relentless pursuit of revenge, creating an unsettling sense of impending doom throughout the narrative, "the intensity of her grief and distress together with her pent-up hatred and desire for revenge permeated the air all around" (Hill 185). Unlike traditional depictions of female victimhood, Jennet is depicted as a character consumed by feminine fear. Even though Jennet has suffered greatly, she does not become a passive victim; rather, she becomes a powerful agent of terror, embodying the raw power that fear can possess. Due to this fear, she pursues revenge relentlessly to make her presence and suffering known to the living.

In *The Woman in Black*, the ecogothic portrayal of feminine fear is entangled with the powers of nature. The EcoGothic environment creates a foreboding mood and acts as a mirror of the feminine fear that permeates the narrative. Eel Marsh House's inhospitable environment serves as a metaphor for the forces that work against women, especially Jennet, escalating their dread and isolation. The marshlands' shifting moods and Jennet's erratic emotions create an unnerving equilibrium between the story's supernatural and natural elements. Jennet is an EcoGothic personification of the power that may come from fear and sadness because of her tireless desire for revenge, which contradicts the idea of female passivity. The representation of feminine fear in the novel is given depth by the EcoGothic tapestry, which also emphasises how deeply it affects the characters and the story, "...the atmosphere surrounding the events: the sense of oppressive hatred and malevolence, of someone's evil and also of terrible grief and distress" (Hill 174). Readers are left with a lingering image of the complicated connection between nature, emotions, and the everlasting power of fear in literature through Hill's tale, which blends parts of the EcoGothic tradition with the uncanny portrayal of feminine fear.

Susan Hill also presents the revenge of the earth figuratively in the novel through the 'Woman in Black' and this can be associated with the anthropomorphic concept.

Anthropomorphism is the imposition of human characteristics, emotions and behaviours onto animals, plants or supernatural beings. The ghost's worn-out face turns into an indication of the outcomes of men's abominations incurred on earth. Her resentful sign makes Arthur Kipps shiver for he has intruded into her circle. Through Kipps, the readers come to know that Jennet Humfrye's child was forcefully snatched from her and he died young. She does as such with Mr Kipps who loses his significant other, Stella and their child, Joseph. Retribution and anger toward mankind show that her psyche is brimming with malignity and danger. Hill skilfully explores Jennet's psychological depths of fear and presents her as a complex character driven by her desire for her lost child and her unwavering need for validation and recognition.

“The living world of plants and animals is not empty and inert, acting meaningfully only when possessed by human spirits or ghosts, but possessing sentience and agency” (Monnet 161-162).

Thus, nature seeks retribution for the atrocities perpetrated against it through the representation of the spectral form of Jennet. The haunting appears to be the result of nature's response to human exploitation of the land that surrounds Eel Marsh House, where the ghost's appearance is triggered by human activity and disturbances to the environment. Arthur Kipps's intrusion into the Eel Marsh house is also not welcomed so whenever he is in trouble, nature does not help him. The 'Woman in Black's malevolent appearance creates fear in the mind of Kipps hinting toward the fear of nature. It is vital to take note that nature causes aggravations in human affairs and it is particularly valid for Kipps. For the first time on his way to the Eel Marsh House, while crossing the Nine Lives Causeway Kipps noticed that whenever the tide came it would be “submerged” and “untraceable” (Hill 71) cutting him from the rest of the world along in the house. When he first arrives at the house, the sight of the area around the house, the water and the marshes, welcome him accompanied by emptiness and harsh, weird cries from birds striking his ears and making him feel lonely and empty, as if he was devoid of any emotion.

Gaston Bachelard's concept of the house is not merely to provide shelter and protect the individual but to also understand the soul. And just like he justifies that a house should not be considered as a mere object, but “a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (4), Eel Marsh House starts exhibiting as if it has a soul of its own. Kipps feels the evil place is calling for him:

“And yet, there was a strange fascination in looking out over the wild wide marshes, for they had an uncanny beauty, even now, in the grey twilight. There was nothing whatsoever to see for mile after and yet I could not take my eyes away. But for today I had had enough. Enough of solitude and no sound save the water and the moaning wind and the melancholy calls of the birds, enough of monotonous greyness, enough of this gloomy old house” (Hill 85-86).

Before long Kipps comes to grasp that the earth, the sky, and the water, the entire nature has turned impassive towards him. He follows the way to the Eel Marsh house and notices the response of the environment in the following way

“I had never been quite so alone, nor felt quite so small and insignificant in a vast landscape before, and I fell into a not unpleasant brooding, philosophical frame of

minds, struck by the absolute indifference of water and sky to my presence” (88). He gets frightened to find that the Eel Marsh house has become imperceptible not because of darkness but rather because of a

“thick damp sea-mist that had come rolling the marshes and enveloped everything, myself, the house behind me, the end of the causeway path and the countryside ahead” (88-89).

In the last reason why people fear the forest, Parker reveals that the space is associated with a landscape of sin, wicked and ungodly, taking one back to the Garden of Eden as it stands as “the archetypal image of godly and idyllic nature” (286). Whenever nature is in the form of a wilderness, which is not in order, is disoriented, and is the hub of evil, sinister and monstrous elements. The tree in the garden can be connotated with Deep Dark Forest and the Devil residing there brings forth the Gothic elements, thus the forest becomes “an *antichristian* space” (285). Hill too portrays nature in her novel as cold, unwelcoming, and full of sinister elements. This also matches Bachelard's examination of the relationship between the house and the outside world where he notes that the natural space is full of wilderness and ferocity. No help reaches him as nature is unsympathetic as well as an obstruction joined not by Providence but by the ghost. In such an anguished situation the wind plays the trick and the sound of a pony trap accompanied by the whinnying of a horse in panic is heard. Kipps indicated many times in the novel that it was a “treacherous place” (Hill 95,184), “dreary weather” (137), “desolate spot” (160), “treacherous quicksand” (162), “haunted” (179), “Untraceable” (68), “mysterious, shimmering beauty, to smell the strange” (71), “bleakness and eeriness of the spot” (74), “bound to be permanently damp” (80) and “wild wide marshes”

(82). Often found in literature, anthropomorphism involves assigning characteristics or emotions of humans to non-human entities to develop a deeper connection between the reader and the subject. Anthropomorphism is an effective technique employed by Hill to humanize the ghost, thereby evoking sympathy as well as terror at the same time. Kipps reflects on this by saying “Whoever haunted it and whatever terrible emotions still possessed them would continue to disturb and distress anyone who came near” (176). It is through Hill's attribution of humanlike emotions to the ghost that the readers are reminded of the consequences of disregarding the environment and of the possibility of nature's retaliation when pushed to its limit.

## Conclusion

The analysis and exploration provided above demonstrate that *The Woman in Black* puts forth the concept of nature-culture dualism, along with nature's revenge, which instils fear in individuals. Elizabeth Parker highlights seven theses on the fear people have towards the forest and accordingly, the deep dark woods open themselves to superstition, and magic and through sinister ways devour the individual's sanity. It creates a separate world where one is removed from the modern world's secured space. A common association with Gaston Bachelard is phenomenology, which emphasizes how phenomena are perceived by us and how meaning is assigned to them. Due to this,

the house, and the objects within it serve as a place of intimacy and are of great significance to him. It is important to remember that objects and their spaces are not just possessions, but rather they are symbols and indications of the human spirit. The house and the natural spaces in *The Woman in Black* sit firmly by the above theories.

As Susan Hill explores the complex relationship between humans and nature in her novel, she masterfully integrates anthropomorphism and deep ecology. The haunting presence of the 'Woman in Black' serves to symbolise nature's response to ecological neglect, encouraging readers to think about how they can contribute to the preservation of the environment. Further, the depiction of the ghost in an anthropomorphic manner reinforces the idea that our actions have consequences, and we must be conscious of the effect our actions have on the environment. A deep connection is drawn between Jennet's fear and the natural world, and as the story progresses, her presence becomes inextricably linked to the landscape as a whole. By blurring the distinction between the human and non-human, Hill emphasizes the interconnectedness of women's experiences and the environment.

By depicting Eel Marsh House and its surrounding marshlands, the complex relationship between human emotions and environmental consequences is also examined. It is through this exploration of EcoGothic elements that the portrayal of feminine fear is enhanced, emphasizing its connection to the natural world and illuminating the many facets of horror. In its examination of human experiences, environmental decay, and the enduring power of fear, *The Woman in Black* is a testament to the lasting influence of EcoGothic literature. As part of the Gothic tradition, an ecological element plays a profound role in the depiction of fear and terror within the novel, which demonstrates how fear of the natural world is intertwined with feminine fear. This paranoia of Nature reflected in written work sets the groundwork of the novel as an inherent part of the EcoGothic studies to interrogate environmental anxieties and to look at both the ecology *in* Gothic and ecology *as* Gothic.

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## Writing the Nation through Literary Criticism: A Study of Dr. Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare*

Dr. Arnab Chatterjee\*

### *Abstract*

The Enlightenment did not only give rise to the British nation-state as a political entity but also ushered in a strong sense of nationalism. There was a marked tendency to locate Englishness and engage in nationalist self-fashioning in the socio-cultural ambience of the 18th century England. With the spectacular rise of the narratives and discourses on English nationalism, there was a search for a cultural icon who could be projected as the quintessentially English. The establishment of the name and fame of William Shakespeare as a British cultural icon is enmeshed in the grand narrative of English nationalism foregrounded by the Enlightenment. Canonisation of literary figures and works are never apolitical and the Bard of Avon is not also an exception in this case. The Neo-classical critics left no stone unturned to canonise him because his works supplied all the constituent elements of Englishness. This paper argues Johnson's critical appraisal of Shakespeare is enmeshed in the politics of the Enlightenment project of writing the nation.

**Keywords:** Enlightenment, neo-classical, Shakespeare, nationalism, Englishness

### **Introduction**

The neoclassical aesthetics and literary criticism are quite inseparable from the politics of nationalist self-formation. This paper will seek to explore how Johnson's appraisal of Shakespeare is a response to the urgencies of a cultural nationalism which itself derived from material and ideological competition with other would-be European empires. It will also try to address why William Shakespeare became an important constituent in neo-classical literary criticism and the politics behind the institutionalisation of his reputation. During the Enlightenment, the bard of Avon was not dismissed as "small Latin and less Greek" or an "upstart crow" but projected as a national icon. The nationalist concerns, of course, came into play behind the canonisation of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century and a new sense of British community (the *imperium Britannicum*) was being brought into effect by consolidation of power at home and overseas. The struggles for state and local power within Britain and the battles for expansion of geographical territories and dominance of trade routes demanded the priority of national glory. The political nation-state of 18th century England needed a discursive production of cultural nationalism at home and the world. Newman demonstrates: "The concept of national identity is propagated not only in poetry- though this medium, uniquely given to symbolic representation, is often of major importance-but in an immense variety of literary, artistic and educational processes (Newman 1987: 126). Johnson and other neo-classical critics have a more complex relationship to national identity than appears at first sight.

## Shakespeare as a National Icon in Eighteenth Century England

The British writers were trying to search nationalist symbols for the discursive production of their nationalist self. Linda Colley contends that the formation of the sense of the British national identity began with the union of England and Scotland in 1707 (1992: 1). Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* came out in 1768 when, according to Colley, the project of 'forging' nationalist self was gaining momentum. Dryden had already discovered Shakespeare as a national icon in *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* (1668). Shakespeare exerted profound influence on the 18th century England. The neo-classical critics like John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Dr. Johnson paid exclusive attention to him. He was not merely taken as a subject of critical interest. His works were being adapted and changed according to the demands created by the Augustan socio-cultural milieu. Dryden's *All for Love*, Nahum Tate's *King Lear* which provided a happy ending to the play, are famous instances of how Shakespeare's plays were being recycled during the Enlightenment. Dryden onwards there was a tendency to foreground Shakespeare as a national icon. There was a huge proliferation of adaptations, critical discussions and staging of Shakespeare's plays. It is pertinent to quote Fiona Ritchie and Peter Sabor in this context:

Memorialized in art and sculpture, mobilized against the French in the cause of English nationalism, used to inaugurate literary tourism at the Stratford Jubilee, and employed as the subject of interior decor in the homes of polite society, Shakespeare exerted a profound influence on eighteenth century culture. And not only was the figure of the Bard appropriated by the period, Shakespeare offered the Eighteenth Century myriad ways to understand and display itself (7).

With the rise of commonwealth, the Restoration courtly culture came into being. When Charles II came back, he reopened the English theatre which was officially closed in 1642. But the predominant dramatic mode prevalent in his time was the French. Molière and Racine provided the models for Restoration comedy. A strong sense of English selfhood paved the way for the resistance to the pervasive influence of the French playwrights. The English artists and literary critics felt an urge to fall back upon a vernacular tradition. They strove to weave their models of persuasion in patterns that combine classical and more vernacular motifs. This is the age when the English wanted to register their superiority and myth of being civilised. Thus, they needed a systematic foregrounding of national culture and heritage. The literary, cultural and historical past is not merely resource to be mined for present creativity but also an indicator of the glorious national future. The neo-classical literary critics did not highlight Ben Jonson who strongly adhered to the classical rules. Instead of Ben Jonson, Shakespeare became a figure of paramount importance who defied the classical norms. It was Shakespeare rather than Ben Jonson whose plays seemed suitable for projecting the image of England. Shakespeare's plays bristled with the spirit of English Renaissance. He wrote a number of History plays where the grand narrative of Renaissance history and contesting micro narratives criss-cross each other. He could go beyond the entrenched prestige of classical rules and models in his time and therefore, he was conceptualised as more English than any of his

contemporaries by the neo-classical critics. Dryden and Johnson defended his violation of unities and intermingling of the comic with the tragic. The projection of Shakespeare in adaptation and literary criticism is an attempt on part of the English to showcase their own rich dramatic tradition and to carve out a unique space for themselves unsullied by the influence of French dramatists. Apart from the anxiety of French influence, we should keep in mind the 1737 Licensing Act which that Robert Walpole passed to stop vitriolic satire against his government. Scathing vituperative attack through staging plays could not be sanctioned under this stringent act. Under these critical circumstances, it was not possible for the playwright to come up with the theatre of protest. They looked back certain practices already prevalent in English culture. Thus, the master artist of subversion, Shakespeare was brought into spotlight. He had the potential to subvert the dominant ideology of his time.

### **Print Culture, Popular Culture and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century**

The eighteenth century witnessed an explosive rise of print culture. Cheaper techniques of printing meant lower prices of books, higher sales and higher profits. The rise of nationalism is, in many ways, dependent on the unprecedented development in print capitalism. Benedict Anderson and Kathleen Wilson have argued that print culture played a vital role in the formation of nationalist identity. Anderson points out that nations are not determined by geographical boundaries. Nations are 'imagined communities' with deep horizontal unity. The rise of print culture across the board spawned an imaginary bonding. But this rise of a vibrant cheap print culture appeared as a potential threat to the dominant metropolitan high culture. The print market was stamped as Grub Street, which Dr. Johnson described as "a street near Moorfields, much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries and temporary poems" (Rogers 20). The neoclassical debate between good literature and bad writing foregrounded the growing anxiety against rapidly emerging 'popular' culture. I wonder why the writers like Dryden, Pope and Johnson felt the need to engage critically with Shakespeare who primarily belonged to 'popular culture.' They almost appropriated Shakespeare and established him as part of 'high' culture. It was a matter of considerable difficulty to elevate Shakespeare from 'popular' culture to 'high' culture and therefore the critics adopted the process of simultaneous critique and appreciation. In an essay titled "Samuel Johnson and the Illusions of Popular Culture," Paul D. McGlynn points out:

Johnson, in fact, was intensely aware of, and interested in, what we would today call popular culture. And while he would surely rank, say, a singing commercial low on the scale of aesthetic achievements his criticism assumed the traditional hierarchy of genres with epics on the top and, I suppose, puns on the bottom—he was remarkably cognizant of the wide range of such culture and never scornful of it. He scorned only the misperception of it or the undifferentiated equation of it with pursuits more essential to human existence (30).

### **Johnson's Defence of Shakespeare**

In *Preface to Shakespeare* Johnson projected Shakespeare as a classic writer of high

culture. He realised that Shakespeare's drama was directed towards the lower classes. But his objective was to highlight an indigenous dramatic tradition and a native genius. He used the rhetoric of moderation strategically and ascribed Shakespeare's defects largely to the Renaissance cultural milieu. Shakespeare's genius lied in providing an authentic representation of life. Johnson says: "Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and life" (Enright & Chickera 133). The shadow of Aristotle's theory of mimesis is quite discernible here. Johnson eulogised Shakespeare as realist. According to Johnson, Shakespeare's characters are concretised by contemporaneity and liberated by their universality. His characters are "genuine progeny of common humanity" (Enright and Chickera 133). While talking about Shakespeare's qualities, Johnson frequently speaks of 'other' dramatists without referring to their names and argues Shakespeare is better in comparison to that of them. When he discusses Shakespeare's characters he says: "In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is a commonly a species" (Enright and Chickera 133) and "Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbolic or aggravated characters" (Enright & Chickera 135). He also adds "Other writers disguise the most natural passions and most frequent incidents. . . Shakespeare approximates the remote, and familiarises the wonderful . . ." (Enright and Chickera 135). Who were the 'other' writers whose writings are deemed as inferior to Shakespeare? Perhaps the pervasive presence of the French dramatists in post-Restoration English theatre became a source of anxiety for Dr. Johnson. This was an attempt to get free from the hegemony of French theatrical tradition and to establish a national dramatist who would be estimated as a genius across time and space. Shakespeare is admired as his plays are full of "practical axioms and domestic wisdom" (Enright and Chickera 133).

Johnson radically departs from neo-classical precepts when he defends Shakespeare's violation of three unities and mixture of the comic and the tragic. As a critic, the argument that he puts forward to justify his departure is the thesis of holding up mirror to human nature, thereby underlining the utility of mimetic theory. Prior to Dr. Johnson, John Dryden also defended Shakespeare on these grounds. For Johnson the unities appeared as constrain to the dramatist and the playwright. The audience is aware of the fact that a play is a play. Johnson interrogated the nature and relationship of art and reality. Shakespeare possessed the artistic quality to play upon reality. Johnson argued that unities can be violated in theatrical space as it is built upon the principle of illusion. Dryden in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) also defended Shakespeare's violation of unities and opined that the rules of Aristotle are not absolute. Like Dryden, Johnson also argued that Shakespeare's intermingling of the comic and tragic provided a faithful representation of life as laughter and tears are woven out into the fabric of life. Both Dryden and Johnson departed from the stance of Sir Philip Sidney who strongly argued against the simultaneous existence of the tragic and the comic in *An Apology for Poetry*. The departure of both Dryden and Johnson from the orbit of Augustan humanism was not innocent. It was deeply politicised

strategy of foregrounding a shared national culture. Johnson also answered Voltaire's criticism of Shakespeare as Voltaire wondered how the English nation could endure Shakespeare's extravagances which had seen Addison's *Cato*. Johnson answered: "Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakespeare of men" (Enright and Chickera 150). The dispute between the English and French critics over the merits of Shakespeare mirrors the social antagonism between England and France. Voltaire's charges against Shakespeare were also answered by Elizabeth Montagu in her "An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare" (1769). Johnson saw perfection to neo-classical rules as trivial. He eulogised Shakespeare's profound sense of translating human nature as opposed to Addison's shallow and restricted representation with a rigid adherence to neo-classical rules. The sense of the nation was not merely caught up with overseas exploration, trade and territorial control. Literary criticism also attempted to forge a national identity in myriad ways.

### **Johnson's Neo-Classical Eye and the Faults of Shakespeare**

Johnson, the neo classical critic underlined some faults of Shakespeare. But he strategically uses the rhetoric of objectivity and moderation. The rhetoric of objectivity is an adroit ploy used by Johnson as he ultimately ascribed the faults of Shakespeare to the cultural milieu of his time. As a neo classical critic Johnson strongly adhered to the Horatian dictum of combining 'utile' and 'dulce'. He attacked Shakespeare on the moral ground. Johnson says: "He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose" (Enright and Chickera 140). His jokes are marked by grossness and licentiousness. Shakespeare is more comic than tragic. The subversive quality of laughter is deterrent to the greater moral concerns. The notion of plenty in Shakespeare both in terms of language and elaboration of plot was critiqued by Johnson from a neo-classical stance. The neo-classical Johnson was also deeply critical of Shakespeare's use of rhetoric. He pointed out that in Shakespeare's narration there is much pomp of diction and circumlocution. According to Johnson, "a quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra" (Enright and Chickera 143). There are disproportionate use of diction and bombast. The notion of propriety was of paramount importance for Johnson. In terms of dramatic language Johnson is purist and neoclassical. He tried to establish the postulates of objective criticism vis-a-vis Shakespeare. But this objectivity is a highly politicised stance as his ultimate aim is to underline Shakespeare as an English genius and blame his cultural atmosphere for his faults.

Johnson asserts that the Elizabethan age was largely unrefined and uncivilised as opposed to the refinement of the eighteenth century, thereby foregrounding a progressive notion of history where history is seen as a grand movement to sophistication and refined taste. Thus, Johnson saw Shakespeare's age as barbaric and therefore antithetical to his own age. Through Shakespeare, Johnson tried to historicize the English nation. Johnson constructed linear model of history where the history of the English nation was projected as gravitating towards the path of

progress. No writer is free from his/her milieu. In Shakespeare's time English nation was in its infancy. According to Johnson: Nations, like individuals, have their infancy. A people newly awakened to literary curiosity, being yet unacquainted with the true state of things, knows not how to judge of that which is proposed to resemblance. Whatever is remote from common appearances is always welcome to vulgar, as to childish credulity; and of a country unenlightened by learning, the whole people is the vulgar (Enright and Chickera 149).

What is interesting to note is how, in the context of Shakespeare's age, Johnson uses the rhetoric of colonial narratives that construct the Other as childish, ignorant and vulgar Johnson here seems to suggest like Immanuel Kant that the Enlightenment is the harbinger of maturity. Kant's thesis was about the conceptual category called the Enlightenment and he defined Enlightenment as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage" (Kramnick 1). Johnson particularly talked about England's emergence from the state of 'infancy' through the projection of a national genius.

Language is an important marker of national and cultural identity. Though Johnson was critical about Shakespeare's use of rhetoric and a lack of sense of 'propriety,' he unequivocally admired the way Shakespeare brought perfection to English blank verse. He had the ability to move the audience with familiar everyday language and at the same time he could elevate the local dialect into an aesthetic plane. With Edmund Spenser, he discovered the harmony of English language and imparted to it both softness and vigour. Language became a crucial aspect for Johnson as national identity is inextricably interlinked with the language and imperialism operated through the claim of superiority of language and culture.

### Conclusion

Johnson thought that it was the time to claim a British literary achievement that is equal or even better than any continental tradition in an age that took pride in fashioning its self as Augustan. The British required not only military and political heroes but also national cultural icon with their phenomenal mercantile and colonial ascendancy. Johnson's ultimate objective was to claim that Shakespeare's faults are the faults of his age and his genius is fundamental and perennial. His rhetorical toil built and sustained the national consciousness conducive to the formation of empire. Thus, rather than a mere critical engagement with Shakespeare as an artist through the lens of neo-classicism, Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* is part of the Enlightenment cultural dialogue wherein a clear, self-conscious and motivated exercise in the production of the image of the British nation can be located.

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## The Representation of Magical Doors in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

Dr. Gök en ARAS\*

### *Abstract*

Mohsin Hamid presents migration as one of the most debatable global themes in his *Exit West* (2017). The author fictionalises not only migrants' crises of dislocation in the contemporary world but also their escape to safety through magical means in his novel. *Exit West* mainly depicts the existential struggles and anxieties of the two migrants, Nadia and Saeed, and their toilsome experiences in their journey to the West after they leave their homeland. The two protagonists of the novel trespass physical borders and walls, like heavily guarded frontiers or oceans through magical doors to create themselves a safe space. It is clear from the very beginning of the novel that Nadia and Saeed try hard to survive in an unnamed South Asian country, which is fraught with political chaos, violence and bloodshed. Having been guided by a number of bribed dark agents, the couple flee their country by passing through some magical doors, towards a future marked by uncertainty and unpredictability. Their first Western destination is the Greek island of Mykonos where they settle in a refugee camp, their second destination is London, and the final stop is Marin, San Francisco. The objective of this paper is to explore the actual and symbolic function of magical doors as the main characters journey to the West to start a free and secure life.

**Keywords:** *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid, Nadia, Saeed, Magical Doors.

Migration is one of the most debatable global themes as Mohsin Hamid depicts in his *Exit West* (2017) as follows: “We are all migrants through time” (109). However, Shazia Sadaf (2020) states that “no one is really a migrant, and geographical fragmentation means no one is really 'native' to a place. Rather, abstract spaces created through social structures replace what would otherwise be concrete places with protectable physical borders” (637).

*Exit West* is the fictional representation of migrants' crises of dislocation in the contemporary world and their existential struggles and anxieties, and toilsome experiences in the quest of a safer place to the West after they leave their homeland. The two migrants, Nadia and Saeed, try hard to survive in an unnamed South Asian country, which is to Sadaf (2020), “(yet quite identifiable as Pakistan,)” and the city where Nadia and Saeed live is fraught with political chaos, violence and bloodshed, “taken over by unspecified militants (yet recognizable as the Taliban)” (639). Prior to their Westward journey, the couple's native city is ironically drawn as a setting abound with refugees from a neighbouring war-torn country. Nadia and Saeed meet in such an atmosphere. They trespass physical borders and walls, like heavily guarded frontiers or oceans through magical doors to create themselves a safe space in the novel. Having been guided by a number of bribed dark agents, the couple manage to flee their country by passing through some magical doors, towards a future marked by uncertainty and unpredictability. Their first Western destination is the Greek island of Mykonos where they settle in a refugee camp, their second

destination is London, and the final stop is Marin, San Francisco.

Magical doors in the novel enable the two migrants, Nadia and Saeed, to go to Western countries safely. With reference to these doors as the magical transportation vehicles, Paula Brauer (2019) says that the couple do not use conventional ways of transportation but "... mysterious, black doors that when one steps through them [the doors] transport one to a different country in a matter of seconds. But still, their journey closely resembles that of many real-life migrants so that the novel is firmly anchored in the socio-political context of its time" (296-297). Thus, it is detected that although Nadia and Saeed are able to travel through these magical doors, this possibility is still an issue for cultural and political debates. As Mohsin Hamid states, "...in our world, distance really is collapsing. People are getting pushed together in new ways. And the doors are a slightly magical way of capturing that" (Brown 2017, n.p.). It is seen in the novel that migrants can easily get access to a new country as detected in one of the scenes in which a magical dark door allows a dark man to appear suddenly in a white woman's bedroom in Sydney, Australia. Similar magical trespassings also occur in other geographies of the world in the novel. These magical doors are also open to the ones who are exposed to either gender discrimination and oppression or who have sexual preferences conflicting with heteronormativity. For example, one of the black doors opens to Tokyo through which two Filipina girls pass to lead a free and prosperous life. Two other magical black doors allow two same sex lovers to meet in Amsterdam and Rio de Janeiro respectively.

In this regard, the political and strategic significance of the doors, which remove socio-cultural and national barriers, is explained in the novel as follows: "...cutting across divisions of race or language or nation, for what did those divisions matter now in a world full of doors, the only divisions that mattered now were between those who sought the right of passage and those who would deny them passage..." (Hamid 2017, 82-83). Particularly, the poor are denied passage to developed rich countries. In that sense, Brauer (2019) interprets the doors' function as a resistance, indeed a challenge, to the neo-colonial looting practices of the West (303).

One of the first references to the doors in the novel is given through rumours saying that all the doors could become magical means of transportation. Interestingly enough, the existence of magical doors is accepted, and widely "... discussed by world leaders as a major global crisis" (Hamid, 2017, 49). According to Brauer (2019), magical doors in *Exit West* have several tasks such as reducing distances, making migration faster, easier, safer, and cheaper (303). Brauer adds the last feature of these magical doors as follows: "... taking a door requires much less physical effort and hence is not dependent upon physical health. As a result, the possibility to migrate is open to more people in the novel" (2019, 304). It is also worth mentioning that the doors are generally associated with darkness or lack of light as the novel suggests that whatever hidden behind the doors is not known which points to the ongoing discussions on refugee and migration crises. Blackness or darkness, and mystery and uncertainty of the doors are further illustrated in the following paragraph in the novel. Nadia sees one of these doors and "... she was struck by its darkness, its opacity, the

way that it did not reveal what was on the other side, and also did not reflect what was on this side, and so felt equally like a beginning and an end..." (Hamid 2017, 57). This black uncertainty provides people with "access to largely ungovernable networks of instantaneous travel across vast distances... and the potential for those networks both to be emancipatory and to exacerbate inequalities" (2019, 197) as Michael Perfect states in his article. Likewise, one of the major functions of these magical doors is to reduce inequalities within and among countries and people.

Different adjectives and terms are used to describe magical doors in the novel; one of them is related to their being an element of surprise and magical realism. Suzi Feay describes the doors as "...mysterious, Narnia-like portals [which] have begun to open up in people's cupboards and basements. They lead from conflict zones directly to the west, and their appearance and disappearance is random, as is each destination" (2018, 31). Obviously, the major focus is on the doors in the novel as they are the indispensable means for the migrants to lead them to other secure destinations. Perfect explains the magic of the doors as follows: "In Hamid's novel, there are no barbed-wire fences being scaled by refugees as they hide from border guards; no lorries crammed with human cargoes; no precariously overcrowded dinghies making their way across the Mediterranean" (2019, 194).

Nadia and Saeed escape from their country and pass through some magical doors to their first destination to the Greek island of Mykonos on which there is a refugee camp, "...with hundreds of tents and lean-tos and people of many colors and hues... and these people were gathered... speaking in a cacophony that was the languages of the world..." (Hamid 2017, 58).

The couple's second route is London. It is discovered that other migrants also arrive in London by means of magical doors in darkness: "When it was dark people began to emerge from the upstairs room where Nadia and Saeed had themselves first arrived: a dozen Nigerians, later a few Somalis, after them a family from the borderlands between Myanmar and Thailand. More and more and more..." (Hamid 2017, 67). One part of London is also described in the novel in darkness, where xenophobic attitudes toward migrants are detected: "At night, in the darkness... fights would sometimes break out, and there were murders and rapes and assaults as well. Some in dark London blamed these incidents on nativist provocateurs. Others blamed other migrants..." (Hamid 2017, 78). In such an atmosphere, it is also narrated that to have the chance to find a private room is of primary significance and the couple are always ready to escape from the rooms they rent in case of emergency.

The final destination in the novel is Marin, San Francisco where "... THERE WERE almost no natives, these people having died out or been exterminated long ago, and one would see them only occasionally, at impromptu trading posts—or perhaps more often, but wrapped in clothes and guises and behaviors indistinguishable from anyone else" (Hamid 2017, 103). Saeed is expected to feel happy and free in the couple's final destination because in Marin there is no difference between the native and the migrant. Yet, ironically Saeed falls into deep melancholy and silence, and becomes a strict devout.

The refugee crisis in the novel refers to a constant migration process and thus a never-ending displacement. Perfect (2019) points to the fact that migration is not only a physical act of displacement but also an act of parting in emotional terms. In the novel, while Nadia and Saeed migrate to other places, they are definitely displaced in spatial terms, but whenever they begin a new life in new settings they are also displaced emotionally and they become distant not only to their hometowns but also to each other: “Hamid encourages us to believe that the refugees in his novel will build not just a new city but also new, fulfilling lives for themselves. It is in this new, largely optimistic city [Marin] that the two protagonists part ways. Having begun in an old city that was being destroyed, their relationship ends in a new city that is being built. In a sense, Saeed and Nadia migrate away from each other” (192). Sense of loss and separation due to migration is also narrated as follows: “... and so by making the promise he demanded she make she was in a sense killing him, but that is the way of things, for when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind” (Hamid 2017, 54).

It is worth noting that the term border indicates separation and loss; a space, hidden and closed; (in)stability, (im)mobility, and (dis)equilibrium in social, cultural and financial terms, and also the division of the West and the East, the North and the South; safety and security concerns, and the struggle for survival. For the refugees, occupying liminal spaces resembles standing in-between freedom and captivity. In relation to that, it is also seen in the novel that some refugees struggle to survive and move, and some others are motionless and choose to live under death threat for the fact that they can neither return to their native countries nor are accepted by the Western countries. Within this context, the refugee issue fictionalised in the novel is explored in the following quotation with reference to refugees' varied defence strategies related to the displacement crises and adaptation to the new socio-cultural atmosphere of the host country: “Some seemed to be trying to re-create the rhythms of a normal life... Others stared out at the city with what looked like anger, or surprise, or supplication, or envy. Others didn't move at all: stunned, maybe, or resting. Possibly dying” (Hamid 2017, 18).

It is also interesting that although Nadia and Saeed seem to be free from long suffocating queues of border controls and interrogations as they pass through magical doors, they are swindled by bribed dark agents as well. Refugees also feel the reluctance of the host country whose native citizens act “...as if someone was entering their private property” (Brauer 2019, 301). In this respect, it is argued by Nurettin Uçar that *Exit West* fictionalises the nativists and their ideological concerns related to the issue of migration and borders: “... Britain is plagued by nativist ideologies... Hamid narrates that “wholesale slaughter” and “massacre” is advocated by nativists as a way of clearing the migrants from the country... Hamid does not write about the possibility of obliterating national borders, but rather about the danger of drawing invisible borders in societies” (2019). In this socio-political context, Hamid underlines the necessity of removing both visible and invisible borders to provide the refugees with their fundamental human rights. The representation of

migration and refugee crises in the novel points to atrocities against “the other,” and chauvinistic movements due to ideological, socio-political and cultural concerns of the host countries. As Étienne Balibar claims, “racism is constantly emerging out of nationalism, not only towards the exterior but towards the interior... And nationalism emerges out of racism...” (1991, 53).

As Sadaf explains, “through the symbol of a 'door' Hamid alters the connection between time and space, history and geography” (2020, 642). It is also declared that “seeing the doors as both beginnings and endings supports a circular rather than single view of history. Beginnings and endings are also a metaphor for the cycle of birth and death” (Sadaf 2020, 642). The doors have a great impact on the relationship of Nadia and Saeed as the couple's “... metaphoric twin birth through the door changes their identity and, as a result, their relationship” (Sadaf 2020, 642).

The doors serve the purpose of removing the geographical or physical boundaries and make the journeys faster and easier. The doors are represented in the novel as the only means for a secure future which is dimmed by both dark and hopeless minds and souls, and physical obstacles such as dangerous “overland routes” and surveillance by militants, ready for mass killing, and both “Saeed and Nadia... had dedicated themselves single-mindedly to finding a way out of the city” (Hamid 2017, 49). The travel by magical doors subverts the common understanding of migration “as an abnormal phenomenon and a threatening force that must be circumvented by rigorous border control” and enables Nadia and Saeed to “bypass national borders... for instantaneous transfer between different locations, if not worlds” (444) as explained by Eva Rusk Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek (2021).

In addition to toilsome, traumatic and bleak migration experiences such as the fear of militants, bombs, bullets, shootings, surveillance, and so on, the novel depicts the prohibition of cultural activities and the lack of some life-sustaining equipment as well: “... music was forbidden by the militants... there was no electricity, not even enough to charge the apartment's backup batteries” (Hamid 2017, 47). Due to the problems listed above, the couple and other migrants will be either “trapped” in their native countries or they will have to find doors to lead them to “undesirable places” and some of these migrants have to go to (un)familiar places, “when they thought anything would be better than where they had been” (Hamid 2017, 62-63).

One of the most painful experiences of refugees in the novel is their unceasing mobility as elucidated by Lona Moutafidou (2019): “...the most traumatic part, the heart of the refugee nightmare, lies in the journey itself” (321). Such negative feelings of disorientation, segregation, isolation, surveillance, fragmentation, confinement and terror that the refugees experience are illustrated in the novel through the main characters who “... enjoyed a degree of insulation from remote surveillance when they were indoors, owing to their lack of electricity... as soon as they stepped outside they could be seen by the lenses... and by the eyes of militants, and of informers, who might be anyone, everyone” (Hamid 2017, 52). What the couple, Nadia and Saeed, experience in the process of passing through the doors, and their struggle to discover an exit route to reach a new setting are depicted as a matter of life and death: “... the

passage was both like dying and like being born...” (Hamid 2017, 57).

It is not just by means of magical doors but through the use of cellphones and other technological devices and social media the couple visit other far and near geographies. *Exit West* emphasises these communication facilities such as “fibre-optic cables under the oceans” which remove the political and spatio-temporal borders and unite human beings as represented through Nadia and Saeed who are “...a future vision of all humanity as migrants in a technological world that changes rapidly around them...” and it may also be added that “Hamid's future is based on the hope that in time humanity will come together to use technology in overcoming divisions and drawing the world closer together, so that physical migrations are not really necessary” (Sadaf 2020, 645). Mohsin Hamid believes in the power and magic of technology, and puts emphasis on the analogy between technological advancements and the travel by means of magical doors in one of his interviews: “But the doors, although they're not true to physics, I think they're emotionally true to our current technological reality. You can open your computer and look at somebody via Skype. And it looks like you're looking at a window. Or I can step on an airplane... and within a few hours be in New York” (Inskeep 2017, n.p.). As Hamid claims in another interview, “...what would happen if your body could move as easily as your mind can move? I think technology is obliterating geographic distance. And so the doors in a way give life to that” (Brown 2018, n.p.).

Despite the ongoing political instability, violence, and bloodshed, Hamid's positive and optimistic vision displays a hopeful future. For example, the wish of Saeed's father foreshadows the ending of the novel. He says, “Let us hope” (Hamid 2017, 50). As Hamid notes, “...part of the job of a novelist, is to start imagining those futures” (Brown 2017, n.p.). According to Sadaf, the novel's “parallel universes suggest possibilities of making better choices, and, in this way, offer consolation and hope” (2020, 644). The hopeful atmosphere in the novel, which begins as a dystopian text but turns into a utopian story, is interpreted by Sadaf with reference to the symbolic meanings of the names of the two protagonists; Nadia, “hope,” “a caller; announcer” and Saeed, “fortunate” and “lucky,” who “symbolize an optimism and a belief in a social Utopia” (2020, 644).

The last destination, Marin, not only ends the journey of Nadia and Saeed but also offers a glimmer of hope for other people. The sense of optimism felt in Marin, is recounted in the novel with reference to its welcoming medley of people and cultures; thus, representing a utopian vision:

But there was nonetheless a spirit of at least intermittent optimism that refused entirely to die in Marin, perhaps because Marin was less violent than most of the places its residents had fled, or because of the view, its position on the edge of a continent, overlooking the world's widest ocean, or because of the mix of its people, or its proximity to that realm of giddy technology. (Hamid 2017, 101)

The protagonists, Nadia and Saeed, are deemed to be universal figures with whom many individuals can identify themselves in different parts of the world and they stand for the courage to make a new beginning. They can be regarded “as the ordinary Everyman or Everywoman to whom one can easily relate as they grapple, each in their

own way, with extraordinary circumstances and explore hopeful new communities and new maps of belonging, or being-with” (Knudsen E. R. & U. Rahbek 2021, 445). Related to the issue of migration, Mohsin Hamid in one of his interviews points out that “...we are descended from refugees, all of us. Our people have migrated” (Brown, 2018, n.p.). In this respect, it may be said that migration is a never-ending process, and the doors help people or migrants cross borders in spatio-temporal and socio-cultural terms and suggest a substantial change and transformation, and a new perception of space and culture in the novel. The last lines of Chapter Ten in *Exit West* read as follows: “...and now all these doors from who knows where were opening, and all sorts of strange people were around... it seemed to her that she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can't help it. We are all migrants through time” (Hamid 2017, 108-109).

Perfect also postulates that the above statement of Hamid in *Exit West* makes the novel universal as it refers to the fact that migration is not only limited to certain spaces, times and people; however, it is experienced by everyone, embodying distinct racial, social and cultural traits, and “forcibly displaced by war, persecution, or natural disaster...” and the novel “makes the far less imprudent suggestion that we are all 'migrants through time' and, to Hamid's credit, poignantly shows that any one of us could become a refugee” (2019, 199).

In conclusion, Mohsin Hamid represents his global concerns of migration with reference to its capacity to divide societies into two poles. This division occurs on account of disrespecting different racial and ethnic identities, and religious and cultural ideologies. Hamid attaches importance to equality in all aspects describing it as a great motivation for reducing migration, and criticises racial hatred and intolerance in one of his interviews. The author refers to “the echoes of partition” which “are not simply for people who live in Pakistan or India” and points to “a partition impulse in Britain,” adding that “... the way that people who are anti-Brexit are spoken of as traitors, the kind of language that we're using, the rise in hate speech and racist violence; these are things we've seen in other places like Pakistan... Pakistan has lessons... for the rest of the world and this novel is about some of those lessons” (Hamid, 2018a, n.p).

Hamid in *Exit West* designs magical doors for the two migrants, Nadia and Saeed, to help them flee their war-stricken country by proving that borders are not always the visible ones, but there are also the invisible ones hidden in people's hearts and heads. Nadia and Saeed by stepping through all these magical doors set themselves free. Thus, it is explored in the novel that magical doors incorporate both actual and symbolic functions as the two migrants journey to the West to start a free and secure life. It is detected in the novel that refugee crisis emerges due to othering and hostile attitudes towards refugees. Nadia and Saeed have their own jobs and families as well but they become distant not only to their families, and countries but also to each other at the end of their journey. They also suffer from such problems as shortage of food, accommodation and medical aid in a traumatic world of segregation, surveillance, isolation, xenophobic violence, and poverty. However, magical doors, which have

both literal and figurative meanings, allow the couple to go beyond the boundaries and divisions, hence to experience cultural hybridity. Thus, magical doors signify a new beginning, security, and freedom, and hope for people, removing socio-cultural borders, and making their long, time consuming, and dangerous journeys easier and safer. Within this framework, Hamid claims that “if we can't find a way to be hopeful and optimistic and find beauty in that, we're in real trouble” (Brown 2017, n.p.). In this regard, a final remark on Hamid's discussion of optimism reads as follows:

... pessimism is a deeply conservative and reactionary position. It tends to lead towards defence, towards the strong and powerful, towards powerlessness and a kind of surrender. The end of *Exit West* feels like a kind of blueprint for humanity, a path out of our nightmarish political squabbling and towards a more socially balanced future. Putting forth an optimistic vision like that makes that vision, in some small way, more likely to come true. (Hamid, 2018b. n.p.)

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## Geographical Contours and Historical Tapestries: A Vital Musing on Historiography at the Postmodern Crossroads in *Manhattan Beach*

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*Abstract*

The art and craft of fiction-making seems to have experienced sea changes in the postmodern milieu, where tiny narratives of independent existence are looked at with awe. The historical fiction *Manhattan Beach* (2017) by Jennifer Egan, chronicling the Great Depression and World War II, exemplifies how fiction in the postmodern crossroads is engrossed with unhackneyed narrative strategies interweaving history with geography at specific junctures. The narrative ladles out Brooklyn's urban geography to pose reflections about the historical, cultural ebbs and underlying sociopolitical, economic realities of the time, making it a true-blue historiography. The past and present eventually collide because the narrative is set in a cityscape as well as in a historical silhouette. Owing to this, identity of the protagonist Anna Kerrigan and those around her appear to be significantly shaped by the location and history, opening room for fresh perspectives on the plot. On a closer look, the critical contemplation of the text insinuates not just the mundane historical and geographical dimensions, rather accentuates the concrete-physical spaces of Brooklyn in New York, particularly Manhattan Beach. Geographical characteristics are undoubtedly chronotopes in Mikhail Bakhtin's terminology; therefore, the beach serves as a catalyst in binding the people to the accelerating movements of history and time. With reference to Linda Hutcheon's take on the postmodern theory and Mikhail Bakhtin's 'chronotope,' the current investigation aims to ponder over how the representative text espouses the postmodern narrative elements like blurring of the real-fictional, irony, flashback, switching narrative voices to bring up innovation, thus earning the calibre of a historiographic narrative.

**Keywords:** Chronotope, Geography, Great Depression, Historiography, History, Postmodern, World War II

### Introduction

A harbinger of changes, postmodernism frantically spurs sentiments of mistrust and inquiry while calling for drastic subversions from the ground up. In literature, postmodernism entails a new craftsmanship of narratives that are truly independent which fuels incertitude about the indisputable validity of master narratives. The art and craft of fiction-making, thus seems to have experienced sea changes in the postmodern milieu, where tiny narratives of independent existence are looked at with awe. Jean Francois Lyotard famously construes postmodernism as the disseminator of 'scepticism towards metanarratives' in his most influential work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* where metanarratives are comprehended as overarching tales about history and the objectives of people that ground, justify, corroborates knowledges and cultural practices. Parallel to this, he quizzes on the prevalent philosophical tradition and the ontology of master discourses. This Lyotardian revelation elicits a critical detour to the shared vocabulary of past, individual's connection to past and history.

In tracing the evolution of fiction over the time, Mikhail Bakhtin delineates that western novels were severely lacking in actual historical time. The contemporary novels advance a little bit to a broader sense, incorporating concrete geographical regions and history in its fictional cosmos, unlike earlier ones that dealt with abstract metaphysical time space. The coinage of the term 'chronotope', its later development propounding diverse surplus meanings of the concept have been instrumental in addressing this flaw. In the analysis of Bart Keunen, according to Bakhtin, "a chronotope is the elementary unit of literary imagination" (qtd. in Bemong 35) and can be considered as the "cornerstone of aesthetic experience" (35) which explicates how humans conceptually navigate time and space in literature. Though the etymological roots of the word in Greek reveal that, 'chronos' and 'topos' stand for 'time' and 'space' respectively, an unrivalled referential prowess to produce multidimensional meanings exists in chronotopes. Hence,

The chronotope [...] provides the ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events. And this is so, thanks precisely to the special increase in density and concreteness of time markers – the time of human life, of historical time – that occurs within well-delineated spatial areas. It is this that makes it possible to structure a representation of events in the chronotope (around the chronotope). It serves as the primary point from which 'scenes' in a novel unfold. (45)

In the early stages, Bakhtin's theoretical slants on the chronotope of space/ geography/ place (inextricably related to time) were fundamentally neo-Kantian. However, straying from Kant's tiresome argument of human subjectivity as wholly divorced from the outside world, Bakhtin made his contributions to the chasm between human and his concrete environments and invented the term 'chronotope'. He continued by describing a few of the ways how people and societies interacted with space and, also resorts to this concept in part to investigate how novelistic discourses acquire their defining generic traits. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* clarifies the meaning of the entry "chronotope" (Baldick 40) as "the co-ordinates of time and space invoked by a given narrative; in other words, to the 'setting', considered as a spatio-temporal whole" (40). In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin remarks that the literary 'chronotope' serves as the "primary means of materializing time in space" (250) and is thus the unifying concept of the novelistic form. This time-space designates "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationship that are artistically expressed in literature... Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). An expert on linguistic anthropology, Keith Basso too spoke about the widespread usage of chronotopes in western literature.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jennifer Egan is a notable postmodern American novelist and short-story writer who has won praise for the breadth of her output. Paul Smethurst poignantly observes that "the best way of approaching post modernism is to examine its peculiar arrangement of space and time and consider the chronotopes (time-spaces)" (65) highlighting the inherent potential of chronotopic framing in a postmodern novel. For that reason, the novel *Manhattan Beach* by Jennifer Egan gives the impression of being a postmodern masterpiece with evident chronotopic bending.

The plot of the novel was written by the author after her tryst with Andrea Motley Crabtree, the first female diver in the US Army, and Alfred Kolkin, an eighty-six years old man who had worked at Brooklyn Naval Yard in the early 1900s. The book fictionalises Andrea Motley as the character Anna Kerrigan and explores her struggles to distinguish herself as a female diver. The New York Stock Exchange's cataclysmic collapse caused the Great Depression, which lasted from 1929 to 1930. The consequences of the Great Depression and the World Wars were felt to varied degrees by Americans all around the world. Because of poverty, unemployment, and extreme financial weariness, people had to work for deplorable salaries, and Americans in collective were compelled to embrace new lifestyles. Some experienced homelessness and some were at the brink of death. Egan's narrative is flawlessly woven around this distressing whirlpool of turmoil that had catastrophic aftermaths on the lives of people at that point of time, making it in some respects a work of historical fiction. Highly experimental in terms of form and content, the novel thus reiterates the complexity of Jennifer Egan as a writer who associates her narrative technique with postmodern strategies, which makes this novelist an important voice in contemporary American letters.

### **Discussion**

The novel opens in an extremely crucial and symbolic scene with the picaresque exploits of the twelve years old protagonist Anna Kerrigan with her father Eddie Kerrigan. Introduced as an everyday girl in her dust stockings, she is brought to Dexter Styles' house by her father (a union member) for a business meeting, which dutifully dispenses a thorough backdrop of the setting. The story progresses, positing a detailed account of Eddie's fall from riches to rags. The economic recession had irrevocably altered his outlook on life and destroyed his identity as a successful man. This unfortunately forced him to work under the criminal Dexter Styles and the corrupt unionist Dunellen for meagre income. Eddie's dislike of human greed and corruption ran counter to what he did. Gradually losing all confidence in himself, he concluded that he is a failure. His relationship with his devoted wife Agnes grew more distant, his daughter Lydia's disability felt intolerable, and he viewed his family as a terrifying, dismal place. The incapacity to manage his new financial circumstances and lack of determination to confront the new reality, worsened the situation and finally he chose to go beyond its bounds, leaving his family behind. Together, the descriptions of Eddie's dysfunctional family, hate for his disabled daughter, and his errant sister Brianne give contrasting perspectives on life.

The readers will discover a changed Anna working at the Brooklyn Naval Yard in the middle of the 1940s, while the nation is at war. A time when women held jobs that were hitherto exclusive for men, she did the dangerous of occupations- measuring and repairing ships that will help America win the war. Supporting her mother, and her speech-impaired, introverted sister with unwavering devotion, Anna remained courageous even after her father vanished. One day while having lunch at her workplace, Anna saw a diver diving in a barge, reminding her of how proficiently her

father could dive and how he had once taught her the foundations of swimming. It inspired her to pursue a career in diving. Her misogynistic coach was shocked when she passed the trial with her skilful preparation and was allowed to dive in the Naval Yard after several dissuasions and warnings. She reconnected with Dexter Styles one night at a nightclub and began to figure out the intricacy of her father's life and the reasons for his disappearance.

In an equally fruitful observation, Timo Muller underscores a radically different perception of chronotopes, which is analogous to Bakhtin's argument shedding insights into the environmental aspects of a work of literature, where they are primarily deployed to capture attention to the physical settings/ spaces where stories happen. By associating this awareness to Egan's novel one can see that having links with the places/ geographic locations which serve as backgrounds, the narrative legitimately comments on history, time, and culture in the fictional space. The critical rumination of the chosen narrative in American fiction, arguably, a reservoir of chronotopes, sounds pertinent at this juncture. The scrutiny of the chronotopes articulated by Egan's historical fiction constitutes a series of images, symbols, and conventions. The prologue of the work meticulously quotes from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* as given below indicating the indispensable roles played by the geography of Indian and Atlantic oceans in the novel.

Yes as everyone knows,

Meditation and water are wedded for ever. (qtd. in Egan 1)

Geographical characteristics are undoubtedly 'chronotopes' in Mikhail Bakhtin's terminology; therefore, the beach/ocean serves as a catalyst in binding the people to the accelerating movements of history and time. In addition to the uncommon blend of strong emotions, personal, impersonal traumas, and experiences, the author sketches the image of the Brooklyn society where the lives of the characters furl, unfurl, in the past and present. In the light of Bakhtin's analysis, Egan appears to adopt the minor chronotope of cityscape/ metropolis and beach, astutely introducing geography into everyday life and history into the universal, individualised, and emotional spheres. Likewise, history, geography and culture are intertwined in the present of Anna Kerrigan, paving way for a perception of her's and an entire society's past. Even though time is a core theme which is recurrent in Egan's novel, the prime focus of *Manhattan Beach* falls on water. Water is used as a vehicle of destiny and as a symbol of continuity. So, the sea/beach/ocean becomes the determiner of Anna's fate, echoing Bakhtin's take on how powerful chronotopes are in overseeing the environment of the novel, both inside and out, stimulating the novel's evolution.

Anna watched the sea. There was a feeling she had, standing at its edge: an electric mix of attraction and dread. What would be exposed if all that water should suddenly vanish? A landscape of lost objects: sunken ships, hidden treasure, gold and gems and the charm bracelet that had fallen from her wrist into a storm drain. *Dead bodies*, her father always added, with a laugh. To him, the ocean was a wasteland (Egan 7).

The scene establishes the identity of New York City as a seaport, which gained popularity during and after the Second World War, foreshadowing the watery

parallels between the characters and the imminent bleakness of postwar time. In this postmodern narrative, the watery link is genuinely revelatory, holding a fatalistic quality subtly hinting a turning point. When translated into words, it draws conspicuous analogies between human life and nature. In the beginning of the novel, Anna the child met Styles with her father at the Manhattan beach. The meeting and its memories signal an essential link in both their lives and the novel's series of events.

The narration will take readers from Anna's modest flats and family to Brooklyn water fronts, pubs, saloons, Grand Central Pen Station, and ships sailing into the port and the magnanimous Germaine U boats attacking the merchant maritime vessels and to the African coastlines as well. All these descriptions and invasive allusions not only aid Egan in demonstrating the veracity of her story but also pay homage to the cityscapes of New York and its harbour. The lived geography and time are other themes that permeate the majority of Anna's and the other key characters' daily experiences. The encyclopaedic elucidation of her diving and nostalgic past in flashbacks underlines the novel's unbreakable connections to its chronotopic locales. In this sense, 'Manhattan Beach' takes on the function of a strong chronotope with a variety of implications. The beach is a silent, yet powerful observer to the historical shifts and economic changes in the past, present, and irrefutably the connection point, bridging the gap between history and present, anticipating a future in flux. It energises the portrayal of history, emoting the grim reality of the central figure and other characters. In short, chronotope of New York's urban topography is symptomatic of the collapse, construction, and reconstruction of private and public life with historical and spatial dimension. Owing to this, identity of the protagonist Anna Kerrigan and those around her appear to be significantly shaped by the location and history, opening room for fresh perspectives on the plot because "society and the individual are inseparable" (Carr 31). On a closer look, the critical contemplation of the text posits not just the mundane historical and geographical dimensions, rather emphasises the concrete-physical spaces of Brooklyn in New York, particularly Manhattan Beach. To put it another way, the author shows a strong desire to concentrate on historical changes and geographic features, as is noted by Keunen which is firmly in accordance with Bakhtin's "keen interest in the view of mankind implicit in concrete chronotopes" (qtd. in Bemong 35).

Postmodernists recognise that great narratives always conceal and dismiss inconsistencies rather than embracing them. It is obvious that the novel is seriously attentive to and incorporates multiple topics rather than just one. Characters are carefully placed in each circumstance, divulging cognizance on their predicaments, social and cultural practises, by articulating the instabilities and disparities present in social systems. Socio-economic crisis, gender inequality, history, geography all has adequate room in this single literary work to express the postmodern philosophy's diversity. Because she blends internal tensions with potent social realism, Egan's writing exhibits and encourages diversity over unity. With this, Egan tries to mention precisely those images pertaining to contrasting representations of "lived time" (Bemong 41). One such textual instance can be cited as follows:

And thank God he'd maintained those ties-thank God! After the crash, when the accoutrements of a wealth Eddie discovered he'd never possessed vacated him one by one- sable, pearls, apartment, matching Cartier cigarette cases-when he lost his job (the theatre closed), Dunellen had welcomed him back, bought the Duesenberg off him and given him a union card...His family would have starved otherwise...Driving on Wall Street one afternoon, Eddie spotted a familiar-looking man selling apples on a corner. Only when he'd passed did he realize who it was: his stockbroker. (Egan 48)

Thus, *Manhattan Beach* resonates Bakhtin's ideology on the shift towards a story that bases its plot on social, economic, and geographic circumstances. Here, a relational picture and matter of the physical/concrete context are at play. It is clear from Egan's writing that the novel is built around periods of tragedy, epiphany, and catastrophe. The characters transform into the playthings of the environment they live in, as is evident in the description of Eddie's psychological turmoil, who eventually becomes just as dispersed as Brooklyn society during the American post-depression era. When seen in an abstract way, New York's urban landscape represents the societal upheavals. Anna, though, views it as more of a psychological realm than a physical landscape. The protagonist in her surroundings undergo changes in the "real historical time, with all of its necessity, its fullness, its future, and its profoundly chronotopic nature" (23). She gains a strong sense of psychological direction and belongingness as a result. The sea having the power to alter, and resolve problems is a life giver too. Anna's identity dilemma and its many facets, self-empowerment is therefore affected by her environment. When tied to geography, the heterogeneity of the characters' and the local populace's behaviour takes on physical manifestations. It is found that the protagonist's true experience is made up of the past, present, and future, which are interconnected in a constantly changing movement sparked by the environment. In the case of Anna, New York, is both the creator of suffocations and liberations of the individual. Consequently, the individual draws lessons from the culture's elementary philosophy of history, that is closely welded to the emotionally charged concrete physique of the cityscape.

Postmodern fiction in general employ irony, blurring of the real and fictional, flashbacks and ever switching voices. As a result, the characters are placed in situations where they cannot escape the network of ironies. Linda Hutcheon views "postmodern as ironic" (203) and the novel *Manhattan Beach* is structured around a long series of ironies. The characters are binary opposites and their lives, especially Anna's appears very tragic and ironical. The author deliberately follows a fragmented plot construction in which each piece of the plot floats separately. To reflect the fragmentation the story's characters encounter in real life, the narrative device is completely jumbled and uneven. When Anna flashes back to her youth, it becomes clear that she had a complicated character as a young child. Anna never mourns the loss of her father, in contrast to sentimental heroines. She is old enough to understand that she is both a good girl in the eyes of society and a wicked girl because of her own actions. Understanding Anna's character can be challenging because she is so contradictory. Irony and contradiction, two hallmarks of postmodern fiction, are

evoked by Egan's discoveries of Anna's dual identity.

The readers might expect a story line explaining how the relationship between Eddie and Styles grows. Egan thwarts all these possibilities and takes a sudden leap to the 1940s, further oscillating to the past in flashbacks. The past and present eventually collide because the narrative is set in a cityscape as well as in a historical silhouette hinting that expecting a straightforward narration from Egan is a fond hope. A completely diverse understanding of time and plot that rejects linear time as intrinsically defective is what postmodern novels are most frequently known for. Contrary to modern novels, which under the influence of the Kantian revolution demand a linear narrative framework, postmodern novels argue that it is difficult to build a linear narrative. In effect, there is an unnatural play of flashbacks and foreshadowing. Beginning with a third person omniscient point of view, Egan slips to the perspectives of Anna, Styles, and Eddie. A thorough review proves that the narrating style is intricate. The author chose to include numerous narrative voices instead of the more typical techniques. They portray the inevitability of subjective realities, character views that vary, and the experience of ever shifting historical and cultural dynamics.

### **Conclusion**

E. H. Carr, a trailblazer in the field of history, shares a similar view while expressing his scepticism regarding the nature of historical knowledge in his seminal work *What is History?* His insights played a decisive role in refining common-sense understandings of historical facts. Carr likened history to a colossal, unsolvable jigsaw puzzle, shedding light on the gaps in our understanding of the past that are often pre-determined. In defying philosophical subtleties, he emphasized how certain perspectives are intentionally overlooked, deeming them insignificant in certain historical accounts. By delving into these lacunae, he implicitly suggested that history exhibits a multitude of pathways leading to historical reality and those associated with it. This revelation dismantles our conventional comprehension of history as a mere collection of generalizations, urging us to reconsider our weary adherence to the cult of generalized versions of historical facts. The selected text demonstrates how history can encompass irrefutable subjective facts, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of the intricate nature of historical narratives. It would be pertinent to note down that as historiography is the art/ science of writing history, Egan's historical fiction upholds ostensible inclinations to the conventions of historiography, where history of the place as well as that of the individual are the key concerns. The work inspects ontological concerns about the stability of historical reality, as though denouncing conventional narratives that are the so-called purveyors of truth. Consequently, this paves way for a distinct orientation on subjective historiography. The temptation to establish authoritative and incontestable objective history is perilously challenged by the continuous blurring of lines between past and present. This drives home the impulse of a postmodern fiction to contest the formulation of a cogent interpretation of the past. As a matter of fact, this pre-supposes the growing



incredulity towards metanarratives. As is evident in the discussion, Egan comes across as a nuanced novelist especially regarding *Manhattan Beach*. The novel examines the postmodernist emphasis of social realism. The narrative technique of discontinuous chronology also plays a part in the profundity of the novel. Therefore, it may be argued, as the author of such sense fiction, Jennifer Egan qualifies to be a significant author of contemporary American fiction. The current investigation intended to scrutinize how the select novel, an exemplar of historiography, where historical tapestries and geographical contours are remarkably contested highlights its preoccupation with Bakhtin's theory of chronotope in a wholly postmodern juncture.

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## Healthcare, Commodity, and Illness: Explorative Insight in Samuel Shem's *Mount Misery*

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### *Abstract*

This study delves into the financial and commercial aspects of healthcare that arise from the involvement of pharmaceutical and insurance companies. These corporate entities prioritise financial gains over patient care, which poses a threat to the integrity of healthcare institutions. Health insurance providers prioritise their organisational interests instead of patients, thus rendering uninsured patients vulnerable to their circumstances. The study borders on Samuel Shem's *Mount Misery* as a reference point to illustrate how patients suffer at the intersection of these corporate entities. Several shortcomings of the current healthcare system, which mandates insurance for medical treatment, have been identified. Additionally, the involvement of monetary benefits thwarts the essence of care as the primary and basic fundamental unit of healthcare. This study also proposes that legislative measures are necessary to dismantle the status quo of multi-national insurance companies. Therefore, legislative reforms are required to limit exorbitant insurance rates, which are currently unaffordable for patients. The discussion section of the research further elucidates how uninsured patients suffer because of their inability to acquire expensive health insurance.

**Keywords:** Patients, healthcare, insurance, suffering

### **Introduction**

In the recent past decade, the U.S. has seen exponential growth in personal bankruptcy cases because of huge medical expenses (Jacoby 313). The insurance, insurer, and insured—these three cords relegate medical care to a mere marketplace. Illness, suffering, vulnerability, and frailty of patients become invisible if their insurance is not covered. Patients turn out to be consumers (Rosemary et al. 86) and seek “information about services and prices to make good decisions about hiring doctors and buying care” (Hall and Schneider 645). However, the decipherable fact about medicine is that it “is one capitalist enterprise to reveal its price tag only after the purchase or transaction is completed” (Stein 11). The truth is that scholars have realised with consternation about the policy-making process dealing with medical insurance. In addition, there is a dearth of scholarship that shows the enthralling response of disabled, rebelled and defeated consumers (patients) who fell into the trap of “unfamiliar things in unfamiliar situations” (Hall and Schneider 650).

*Mount Misery* (2009), a novel by Samuel Shem as a sequel to the controversial but significant *The House of God* (1978), portrays the professional life of its protagonist, Roy Basch. After completing his internship in the *House of God* (hospital), Basch joins *Mount Misery* (hospital) as a psychiatrist. The novel recounts the encounters of Basch with mentally ill patients in different wards categorised on the classification of illness. Shem brings the socio-economic realities of the patients to light by critiquing the American healthcare system not directly but through the patient-physician

interaction in the novel. *Mount Misery* (2009) illustrates exploitative designs that mould the inflection of a physician towards a pejorative phenomenon bringing monetary tableau into the healthcare system. This statement is illustrated aptly in the lines, “Every single day, we doctors have to make sure our patients are sick” (Shem 54). Moreover, “in the United States today, an illness does not count as an illness unless an H.M.O. certifies it” (ibid.). As Satyarajan and Chinmay have rightly observed, “the Affordable Care Act (Obama Care) of 2010 was expected to provide insurance coverage to the underprivileged sections; it did not resolve the crisis” (37) and further “strengthened the pro-profit insurance industry by transferring public tax-generated revenue into the private sector” (Waitzkin and Hellander 99). The healthcare system of the U.S. is remarkably different “in many ways compared to other developed countries. On an average, the United States spends more than twice as much per capita on health care, yet nearly 50 million people are uninsured, and tens of millions more are grossly underinsured” (Gottschalk 01). To resolve this difficulty, the U.S. government introduced the Obama Care Act, which has been unsuccessful for certain reasons. This study does not delve deeper into the causes because this is not the main subject of the paper. However, the failure of the Obama Care Act brings out the seriousness of the crisis of reasonable insurance policies to get insured and avail medical facilities. Health Maintenance Organisations (H.M.O.s), primarily private in nature, decide, and dictate the terms to insurers to get insured. This is another kind of paternalistic approach where armchair philosophers decide insurance plans in the light of the organisation's profit, not for the sake of the patient's interest. Therefore, in this paper, the authors have tried to establish a link between the attitude of healthcare professionals towards patients and patients' crises in managing healthcare access. Further, this study foregrounds how the greed-mongering policies of insurance companies tempt healthcare professionals through the profit maximisation phenomenon, thereby rendering the pressing needs of patients ineffective.

Keeping these issues in mind, the present paper uses American healthcare culture as a primary subject and tries to establish its link with general medical practices to give the readers an overall picture of the global healthcare system, which is more or less struggling with the same economic interventions. Further, an explorative method employs the conceptual framework of 'Pharmocracy' that manifests as 'power', a critique of power politics in the healthcare system, to reveal the intricacies that the modern monopolised healthcare system enmeshed. The disjuncture between doctor-patient relationships erupts because of the monetary benefits involved in it. In this regard, Kaushik Sunder Rajan has coined the term *pharmocracy* to describe the monopoly of pharmaceutical and insurance companies over the healthcare system. This concept establishes a connection between healthcare and health insurance companies and shows how the involvement of profit-mongering companies in healthcare has detrimental effects on patients. Furthermore, it reveals that there are no possible ways to curb the intervention of such private companies but proposes that only legislative intervention is possible. Healthcare policies should be framed and governed by the government in keeping in mind the patient's low income, which helps

them get insurance. The guidelines should be followed so that they minimise private companies' interventions in the healthcare system.

### **Monetary tactical considerations: Privatisation of public health**

In stating the dark side of the dilemma, exploitation is so embedded in the medical profession that it leaves irremediable scars on the visage of patients. Elizabeth Rosenthal, in her book, *An American Sickness: How Healthcare Became Big Business and How You Can Take it Back* (2017), argues against the political-economic structure of healthcare by using the term 'the medical-industrial complex', where the illness is relegated to a mere commodity that deals in monetary profits only. Mr. K is an old, kind gentleman who was hit by a misfortune coalesced with catastrophes like “his son had come out as gay. His wife was drinking again, and his daughter had run off with a drug dealer. He'd come to Misery a month ago for a rest” (Shem 16). The innate feeling with which Mr. K. came to the hospital was to enjoy the hospitality that the healthcare promises to offer. But this feeling met with disastrous fate when the therapist says, “Fifteen-minute sessions, a hundred twenty bucks a shot. They talk finance. Mr. K.'s trust fund will keep him in misery until he dies. He's been here forty years” (Shem 16). These structural dynamics of monetary tactics culminate in disarray, instigating the feeling of detachment from the physician and healthcare and putting healthcare policies in question.

Sunder Rajan's coinage *Pharmocracy* refers to “the global regime of hegemony of the multi-national pharmaceutical industry” (06), which forms governance across various institutes serving their interests. The echo of this kind of governance is visible when Roy Basch explains his job as “every single day, we doctors have to make sure our patients are sick enough to stay in the hospital, but not so sick that INSURANCE says they're not improving and have to be discharged. Sick, but getting well. Getting well, but still bad. Bad, but getting better” (Shem 54). Elizabeth Rosenthal (2019) argues that “our healthcare system today treats illness and wellness as just another object of commerce” (264). The whole healthcare discourse neglects the innate experience of the symptoms and suffering associated with the illness. One can simply be seen as cynical. To comprehend the hegemonic power structure portrayed as naturalised harmony, it is imperative to scrutinise the underlying logic, forces, and production relations that facilitate it. However, it may only seem like a blatant display of power by corporations with a global presence and influence manufacturing ethical justifications for their profit-driven actions, but the origin of their power still remains a pertinent question. It is crucial to examine the institutional and political mechanisms through which their power is exercised and how it is normalised to be perceived as an industry striving for innovation while acting ethically. A comprehensive understanding of the intricate concept of power embodied by the notion of hegemony is necessary to address these queries. Profit-minting insurance companies mould the governance of medical institutes, where harmony is preceded by hegemony, and care is restricted to managed care. The biggest challenge for healthcare in this profit-mongering economy is to dismantle the hegemonic economic structure of insurance companies and

pharmaceutical industries.

Many critics, like Arrow (2009), Ginsburg (2011), Hackbarth, Reischauer, and Mutti (2008), have argued against the continuation of service-provider healthcare at the cost of financial enactment. This can be found in the deleterious motives of the interaction between Basch and Malik, “Genius, Basch,' Malik said, 'genius'. Did you catch it? I mean, the first question you ask in the psychiatric interview? The first question is, Tell me, how are things? Nope. The first question is, 'What is your insurance coverage?’” (Shem 29). This promulgation of corporatisation has a detrimental effect on the 'psychosocial' dimension of the patient. The exorbitant financial fervour that culminated in the recent worldwide economic downturn instigated profound transformations in the financing, administration, and conceptualisation of healthcare. Hospitals have become an avenue for investment by capitalists (Davis et al. 647). Due to such capitalist ventures in healthcare, insurance companies exert their influence on “achieving a reasonable rate of return (profit) for the assets under their control” (Davis et al. 132). Despite extensive modifications in the structure of the healthcare system, there remains a dearth of anthropological inquiries into the domain of healthcare finance. Although Shem does not explicitly discuss this in his novel, Dr. Malik's excessive emphasis on insurance embodies the financialised healthcare model, where the money comes much before the patient. In this financialised capitalist enterprise, the seriousness of the disease is felt only after the inquiry into finances. This orientation in the healthcare system is a serious threat to capitalist pharmaceutical multi-national companies. The influence of commercial aspects in the medical profession degenerates the doctor-patient relationship. The apathetic attitude and callous nature affect the doctor-patient relationship by compromising with the fundamental principles of healthcare: autonomy, beneficence, maleficence, and justice.

### **Invisible wound: Psychological violence, Healthcare and Health Insurance**

“Nothing was predictable. Mostly the ones who ought to have died lived, and the ones who ought to have lived died.” (Shem 82)

Noticeably, Shem delineates dramatic imagery before the readers to show the deplorable condition of patients in the modern healthcare system where everything is possible, which a decade back is impossible to imagine. Then why are healthcare services degenerating with each passing year despite such advancements in bioengineering, gene modification, and the invention of various drugs that can cure many mortal diseases? Consider the following examples from the novel:

“You have 'Mood Disorder, Major Depression, Recurrent, with Melancholia, 296.33.' Your insurance will cover seven days in Misery. We'll start you on antidepressants. If we find you are suicidal or psychotic, we will rediagnose you and your insurance will cover more. Any questions?” It looked like George had a lot of questions, but before he could start, Nash was saying, “Thank you very much Dr. Basch will do your physical and have a pleasant stay in Misery,” and was gone. (Shem 95)

The fundamental premise of narrative medicine is not only a means to understand the

patient but also a fresh means to understand the disease itself, which is doomed in the context of medical care. Robin et al. have conducted a study on patient satisfaction within the medical practice. They have discovered that the amount of time the physician devoted to health education and the impact of treatment were significant factors that influenced patient satisfaction. In this active-passive model, where physicians are active and patients are passive, the physicians must base their interaction on the therapeutic ends that will provide satisfaction and relief to the patient. This will lead us to question whether Dr. Nash's way of consultation is right for George, who feels psychologically abandoned by the unattended plight of his suffering. The medical healthcare system should “offer as one of its greatest promises the possibility of empathy” (Shuman 152). Understanding the disease better with information regarding the patient's social, cultural, biological, and lifestyle-related cues is essential for eradicating the disease's cause. This goal can be achieved through increased time of interaction with patients. Additionally, as propounded by Rita Charon, listening to the stories of patients attentively also gives the patient a sense of reliance, trust, and satisfaction that helps relieve the agony of suffering caused by disease (Charon 66). The question we asked at the beginning of this paragraph conglomerates many answers. Still, this study provides a solution instead of an answer that helped patients like George, who felt psychologically abandoned when left with unaddressed queries in their minds only. Franz Kafka rightly observes, “To write prescriptions is easy, but to come to an understanding with people is hard” (223). However, this novel provides numerous examples where physicians prioritise patients with insurance, thereby leading to the psychological abandonment of uninsured patients and exacerbating their conditions. This draws the picture of doctor-patient relations in the U.S. in particular and around the globe in general, where inadequate understanding is at the core of these problems. The knowledge of patients' expectations, needs, requirements, uncertainties and fears profoundly affects the doctor-patient relationship. It is very easy to trace the repercussions of a monopolistic profit-driven healthcare system in all the dimensions, whether it is a conversion of patients into consumers or excessive use of drugs (as in the case of Prozac, discussed in the subsequent paragraphs) that are adversely affecting doctor-patient relationship. Szasz and Hollander argue that “it has been emphasised that different types doctor-patient relationships are necessary and appropriate for various circumstances. Problems in human contact between physician and patient often arise if, in the course of treatment, changes require an alteration in the pattern of the doctor-patient relationship. This may lead to a dissolution of the relationship” (592).

## **Conclusion**

Thus, we find that healthcare is a major sector serving the whole human race worldwide. The phenomenon of governance in medical institutes is now changing at an alarming rate. With the advent of new 'techno-scientific' pharmaceutical giants that claim to work for the betterment of humanity, the fundamental tenets of healthcare are at severe risk. The occurrence of new technologies like gene modulation, advancement in bio-engineering, inventions of vaccines, organ transplantation, and

many more bring a revolutionary era in the field of medical sciences. These new inventions possibly may better and prolong the life of any patient. But it comes with a caveat that it only works for those patients with monetary leverage. In the U.S., healthcare facilities are very costly, and it is imperative for every citizen to get insured to avail the best facilities. This is the buffer zone where insurance and pharmaceutical companies play their sinister moves. Samuel Shem, a professional psychiatrist and novelist, feels patients' discontentment very closely. Being a psychiatrist, he saw how patients suffered not only from their illness but from the fear that they were not insured. In the novel, in many instances, it has been shown that the hospital denies admission of a patient if a patient is not insured. This marks the shift of 'prioritisation and privatisation of medical healthcare' and, therefore, converting healthcare into a marketplace where the patient's identity is changed into a consumer. Many lingering questions regarding the doctor-patient relationship arise when a patient is not asked about their medical history; instead, only their insurance status is taken into account before being dismissed. The basic principle of beneficence is getting lost in the practice of modern medicine. However, it is not a universal phenomenon but is majoritarian. The major problem of healthcare is the financialisation of healthcare commodities and services. We've argued that the healthcare industry can be redesigned with a newer motto that can be achieved through legislative change. The politicisation of medicine has significantly impacted the governance of medical services. The newer motives would be endorsed as 'back to birth', which signifies the original and real cause for which medicine as a field came into existence. The remembrance of the Hippocratic oath, a collated document of the 4th century B.C.E., can resuscitate the genuine concept of autonomy that can help in enforcing the lost values of medical practices. The four principles of Beauchamp and Childress, viz. autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice, need a relooking and relocation that can bring humanness into the system through the effective technique that appeals to the emotional side of human beings. The other hypothesis of this study suggests changing the nature of healthcare from profitable to non-profitable entities. This would be a gargantuan task, but it would ensure the sanctity of healthcare and provide sufficient care at nominal prices. This would end the external stimulus that triggers most cruelties in care practice because of monetary profits. Already, a wave has been mounted in the form of medical humanities, a step towards humanitarian healthcare and "this mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon (Tennyson 01-02).

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## Cybernetic Conundrums: Unveiling Transhumanism in Stephen King's *The Institute*

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### *Abstract*

In Stephen King's *The Institute*, the narrative intricately explores the ethical and philosophical dimensions of transhumanism. This evocative story prompts a thorough examination of how technological advancement, human experimentation, and morality intersect and interact within its chilling narrative framework. This study engages in a meticulous exploration of characters, plot elements, and ethical quandaries through close reading and textual analysis, seeking to elucidate the overarching transhumanist themes interwoven into the narrative. *The Institute* urges readers to contemplate the boundaries of human augmentation and the moral implications of pushing the limits of humanity. As King's narrative unfolds, it compels readers to confront the moral quagmire emerging at the intersection of cutting-edge science and the human quest for transcendence. This exploration leaves an indelible sense of the precariousness of unchecked technological innovation, serving as a cautionary tale that prompts contemplation on the ethical dilemmas inherent in the pursuit of human enhancement. It underscores the moral complexities entwined with the relentless march of scientific progress, urging a thoughtful consideration of the consequences of advancing technology.

**Keywords:** Transhumanism, Technology, Superhuman Abilities, Cybernetics, Conundrums, Human enhancement.

### **The Intersection of Transhumanism and Cybernetics**

In the expansive realm of literature, transhumanism intricately examines the intricate connections between human enhancement through technology and its far-reaching societal impacts. Donna Haraway's, *A Cyborg Manifesto* lays the groundwork, dismantling the rigid boundaries between human and machine with her evocative notion of the cyborg: “a creature of our own invention, made of flesh and wires, software and wetware” (Haraway 149). This blurring of lines finds echoes in narratives exploring the convergence of human and machine, often culminating in the concept of the technological singularity, as Ray Kurzweil envisions in *The Singularity Is Near*: “an event horizon in time beyond which we cannot see... the technological creation of superintelligence that surpasses human intelligence on every dimension” (Kurzweil 7). Yet, amidst the awe of potential transcendence, Nick Bostrom injects a dose of caution in *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*: “We can be confident that many branches of Artificial Intelligence research will continue to make rapid progress, and that eventually superintelligence will be created” (Bostrom 25) This stark reminder underscores the need for a critical examination of the potential consequences of unchecked technological progress. Michel Foucault's exploration of power in *Discipline and Punish* becomes particularly relevant, highlighting how technology can facilitate pervasive surveillance and control, a recurrent theme in

transhumanist narratives. Foucault aptly expresses, “Discipline means the production of useful bodies” (Foucault 137), emphasizing the potential for technology to be used for manipulation and control in these fictional worlds. Stephen King's stark quote from *The Institute*, “If you can control the brain, you can control reality,” lays bare the ethical tightrope we walk in the age of transhumanism” (King 489) This emphasizes the seriousness and gravity of the ethical dilemma. By synthesizing these diverse perspectives, we gain a nuanced understanding of transhumanism. Authors like Stephen King grapple with the multifaceted implications of technological progress, forcing us to confront the ethical dilemmas inherent in the transformative interplay between humanity and technology. Literature, thus, becomes a vital tool for navigating uncharted territory, ensuring that the future we create benefits all of humanity.

Beyond the literary realm, cybernetics provides an additional lens for unraveling the complexities associated with technological advancements. Anchored in principles of control and communication, cybernetics furnishes a framework for comprehending intricate systems through feedback mechanisms. As Wiener defined, cybernetics is “the science of control and communication in animals, machines, and organizations” (Wiener 1). This definition underscores its broad applicability and relevance to understanding the complex interplay between technology and societal structures. A cybernetic examination of *The Institute* goes beyond the narrative, unveiling the institution as a complex system governed by feedback loops. This perspective mirrors wider societal impacts, emphasizing how the dynamics within the institution reflect broader implications in the external world. The intricate web of control mechanisms depicted in the novel aligns with the fundamental principles of cybernetics. In the convergence of transhumanist literature and cybernetics, ethical debates surrounding control, interconnectedness, and the impact of technology intricately interweave. Kevin Warwick's assertion that “In cybernetics, we find ourselves in the middle of a revolution; it's about the interplay between humans, machines, and the information that flows between them” (Warwick 29) resonates harmoniously with the themes explored in *The Institute*. King's work serves as a vivid illustration of how the ongoing revolution in cybernetics mirrors its profound implications on complex systems and societal structures. This perspective offers an invaluable lens through which to comprehend the intricate connections between transhumanism and cybernetics, revealing a tapestry of ethical considerations and technological transformations.

### **Traversing Stephen King's Literary Landscape**

Stephen King's mastery of fear is encapsulated in a disturbing excerpt from *Nightmares & Dreamscapes*: “I think we're all afraid of the same things: spiders, the dark, and what's under the bed” (King 203). This introductory glimpse into universal fears sets the stage for King's exploration of the supernatural and his positioning as a master of horror fiction. Moving beyond individual fears, King demonstrates his adeptness at probing societal anxieties through character development. In *The Green Mile*, he delves into profound societal fears, stating through his characters, “No one is

born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite” (King 45). This quote showcases King's ability to transcend the horror genre and engage with broader societal issues. As King's thematic exploration evolves, a notable shift towards transhumanism becomes evident in *The Institute*. “The future isn't made, it's grown. And sometimes, the seeds are planted in the darkest corners of the human heart.” (King 113) This quote emphasizes the potential for technology to be used for both good and evil, reflecting King's awareness of the ethical complexities surrounding transhumanist advancements. King's thematic versatility is further highlighted in his writing advice, emphasizing the importance of saying no. As he states in *On Writing*, “The difference between the successful people and the really successful people is that the really successful people say no to almost everything” (King 78). This quote showcases King's wisdom beyond storytelling, offering insights into success and decision-making. Thus, Stephen King's impact on literature is aptly captured in his reflection on books: “Books are a uniquely portable magic” (King 215). This quote emphasizes the enduring and transformative power of literature, encapsulating King's profound influence on readers and the literary landscape. As we navigate the intricate terrain of Stephen King's works, we encounter a masterful storyteller whose ability to evoke fear, explore societal complexities, engage with emerging themes like transhumanism, and offer timeless wisdom cements his legacy in the world of literature.

### **The Transhumanist Tapestry of *The Institute***

Within the captivating narrative of Stephen King's, *The Institute*, a profound exploration unfolds into the transhumanist paradigm. This journey delves into intricate layers of transhumanist concepts, the indispensable role of cybernetics in superhuman genesis, and the profound dilemmas of tampering with human potential. “The future wasn't something preordained. It was a field of possibilities, and every choice, every action, every thought, was a seed falling, taking root in the fertile soil of time.” (King 451) This quote, narrated by Luke, explicitly states the idea that the future is shaped by individual actions and choices, highlighting the power of the human heart to influence its direction. This echoes the sentiments of Max More, who saw it as “a celebration of human potential and faith in transcending current limitations through science and innovation” (More 9). In the clandestine corridors of *The Institute*, a visionary transhumanist paradigm emerges, resonating with More's articulation. Rooted in humanism, transhumanism anticipates transformative shifts in human existence, similar to Aldous Huxley's vision of humanity “standing on the threshold of a new existence, distinct from our own as ours is from that of Peking man, consciously fulfilling its true destiny” (Huxley 17). *The Institute* becomes the crucible for these ideals, experimenting with posthuman entities. Children with psychic abilities transcend mere subjects, envisioned as heralds of the next phase in human evolution. Ethical quandaries unfurl, mirroring King's observation that “The

future...was a dark tunnel, and they were hurtling toward the end of it at breakneck speed” (King 482).

The genesis of superhumans intricately weaves with cybernetic--a framework to comprehend intricate systems, especially the human body and mind. Transhumanists, grounded in cybernetic principles, aspire to engineer entities transcending human limitations. This intricate process amalgamates cutting-edge technologies guided by cybernetic principles, pivotal in enhancing human capacities. As the lines blur, “Brain, body, blur...the line between man and machine was getting thinner by the day” (King 288), echoing the redefinition of human existence through cybernetics. As *The Institute* unravels, the pursuit of transhumanism unfurls profound consequences across ethical, social, psychological, and existential dimensions. Humanity, daring to tamper with potential, navigates a precarious path. Genetic engineering, brain-computer interfaces, and artificial intelligence aim to transcend biological limitations, raising ethical quandaries, illustrated by King's quote, “He'd crossed a line, and there was no going back” (King 483). Decisions on trait enhancement risk exacerbating social inequalities, birthing a divisive socio-genetic hierarchy. The arena of identity emerges as individuals grapple with redefining themselves through technological augmentation. Socially, the emergence of enhanced humans introduces a specter of a two-tiered society, accentuating existing disparities, a theme echoed by King's observation, “They were the vanguard, the first wave of what was to come. A future where the line between man and machine would blur, and the very definition of humanity itself would be called into question” (King 248). The psychological challenges are profound as individuals navigate implications of immortality, cognitive enhancement, and intertwining human consciousness with artificial intelligence. Geopolitically, transhumanism may instigate a novel arms race, blurring traditional warfare boundaries. The potential misappropriation of technologies poses a threat to global security, challenging ethical foundations. Philosophically, transhumanism challenges the natural cycle of life and death, probing fundamental questions about the intrinsic value of mortality. The potential realization of effectively immortal individuals could disrupt traditional notions of generational continuity. As King aptly notes, “The Institute...was a microcosm of the world to come, a place where the future was being built, one brick at a time” (King 512), reinforcing the cautionary tale within the ethical labyrinth of human enhancement.

### **Characters in the Cybernetic Web**

A cast of complex individuals in *The Institute* navigate the psychological and ethical firestorm of transhuman experiments. Luke Ellis, a young prodigy with psychic abilities, emerges as the central protagonist, symbolizing resistance against the dehumanizing forces of the clandestine institution. As King poignantly writes of Luke, “He was just a kid, trapped in a nightmare...but the boy inside him refused to go quiet” (King 74). This defiant spark embodies the broader ethical and existential struggles associated with transhumanism, where “the line between man and machine was getting thinner by the day” (King 288). The institute personnel, led by the ruthless

Mrs. Sigsby, represent the cold logic and ambition driving the transhumanist agenda. Their chilling indifference, exemplified by Sigsby's pronouncement, "There's no humanity here. Not that kind" (King 157), fuels the tension between protagonist and antagonist, making it more than a mere battle of wills. It becomes a clash of ideologies, mirroring the ongoing debates surrounding the boundaries of human enhancement.

Within this cybernetic web, secondary characters like Kalisha, Nick, and Avery contribute to the nuanced exploration of human struggles, illustrating diverse responses to the challenges presented by the institute. Kalisha's unwavering loyalty and courage in the face of adversity, captured in her vow, "We'll survive, Luke. I promise" (King 352), showcases the strength of human bonds amidst technological manipulation. Nick's internal conflict, torn between loyalty and rebellion, highlights the complexities of navigating a morally ambiguous landscape. Avery's yearning for autonomy, reflected in her desperate plea, "Let me go! I'm not...I'm not an experiment!" (King 421), resonates with the universal desire for self-determination in the face of external control. King's portrayal of characters transcends traditional hero-villain dichotomies, delving into the intricate interplay of humanity and transhumanism. His characters grapple with the blurring of ethical boundaries, testing the essence of what it means to be human. As Luke ponders, "What was a soul, anyway? Was it just meat and electricity, or was it something more?" (King 402), his existential quandary speaks to the broader anxieties surrounding the future of humanity in a transhuman era.

*The Institute* masterfully delves into psychological transformations, unraveling the intricate dynamics defining characters' responses to transhuman challenges. Luke undergoes a profound psychological journey, navigating isolation, fear, and moral quandaries imposed by the institute. His initial fear, captured in his thought, "He was in a cage, and the bars were closing in" (King 83), gradually evolves into steely resolve as he embraces his role as a symbol of resistance. His transformation becomes a microcosm of the broader human experience confronting the unknown and ethically ambiguous. The psychological impact on characters like Kalisha, Nick, and Avery adds depth to the narrative. Kalisha's resilience and empathy, Nick's internal conflict, and Avery's struggle for autonomy contribute to a rich tapestry of human responses to transhuman experiments. King meticulously explores the emotional toll of cybernetic manipulations, highlighting the fragility of the human psyche when subjected to forces beyond its control.

The cybernetic web in *The Institute* serves as a metaphorical crucible for examining the complexities of character dynamics in a transhuman context. The narrative transcends traditional character analysis, inviting readers to contemplate the intricate interplay between external forces and the internal landscapes of the protagonists. Through psychological transformations, King elevates the exploration of human struggles in a transhuman realm to a realm of profound introspection and literary depth.

### **Transhuman Experiments: Unveiling Ethical Complexities**

From stolen childhoods to augmented minds, *The Institute's* child subjects detonate the ethical minefield of transhumanism. The institute's secretive experiments on minors, conducted without consent, act as a moral crucible, urging contemplation on rights, autonomy, and the moral responsibility implicated in pushing the boundaries of human potential. As King aptly describes, "They were pawns in a game they didn't understand, subjects in an experiment that might or might not make the world a better place, but which in the meantime was making their own lives a living hell" (King 118). As the narrative unfolds, meticulously exploring the nuanced interplay between individual agency and the exertion of institutional control, it navigates the delicate tension between the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the imperative to respect the rights and dignity of human subjects. The institute's actions, shrouded in secrecy, compel readers to question the ethical foundations of experimenting on vulnerable individuals and challenge the ethical boundaries of scientific inquiry, as Mrs. Sigsby chillingly declares, "There are no rules here. Not like in the outside world. We're not playing a game with toys. We're building a new future" (King 157). Moreover, the narrative delves into the psychological and emotional repercussions of cybernetic enhancements on children, adding intricate layers to the ethical considerations. Luke Ellis, the protagonist, grapples with the loss of his childhood and the manipulation of his mind, lamenting, "He wasn't just a kid anymore. He was something else. Something engineered. Something dangerous" (King 398). This exploration of the loss of innocence, traumatic experiences, and the moral ambiguity surrounding the manipulation of young minds contributes to the novel's status as a cautionary tale. Readers are prompted to introspect on the principles of informed consent, the safeguarding of vulnerable populations, and the establishment of ethical boundaries in the pursuit of scientific experimentation.

Venturing beyond the ethical quandaries, the narrative critically examines transhumanist themes as a malevolent organization, represented by the institute, abducts children with psychic abilities for exploitation. This exploration leads to ethical inquiries, probing the boundaries of enhancing human capabilities through scientific and technological means--an inquiry deeply aligned with broader transhumanist discourse. The narrative further unravels the psychological consequences of these enhancements, echoing transhumanist interests in comprehending the emotional and psychological impacts of transcending human limitations. As Luke reflects on his altered perceptions, he realizes, "The world was different now. Sharper, brighter, more alive than he'd ever known. But it was also colder, harsher, and more unforgiving" (King 389). At the heart of *The Institute*, technology emerges as a transformative force that not only blurs traditional boundaries between the human and mechanical domains but becomes a driving narrative force. The institute's use of advanced technology to augment the psychic and telekinetic abilities of captive children propels readers into poignant ethical questions about the consequences of tampering with fundamental aspects of human nature. The seamless integration of advanced technology into the narrative fabric highlights the

potential for redefining human potential and challenges established notions of humanity. As Luke and his friends struggle against the institute's control, their desire for autonomy becomes a powerful symbol of resistance against the dystopian future transhumanism could usher in.

The relentless pursuit of enhanced abilities through scientific means compels readers to engage in profound ethical and philosophical deliberations about the extension of human enhancement boundaries via technological interventions. *The Institute* stands as a compelling exploration of the multifaceted ethical dimensions inherent in the convergence of technology and human enhancement within the intricate depths of the novel's narrative. Through the characters' struggles and the institute's actions, the narrative acts as a mirror reflecting the ethical complexities intertwined with the pursuit of scientific progress and the manipulation of human potential.

### **Conclusion: Humanity's Enduring Resilience**

In conclusion, Stephen King's *The Institute* navigates the intricate web of transhumanism, intertwining the thrilling exploration of human enhancement with the chilling ethical labyrinth it constructs. The novel serves as a cautionary beacon, urging us to scrutinize the potential consequences of unfettered technological advancement on our psyche, societal structures, and moral bedrock. King masterfully weaves transhumanist themes with cybernetic elements, adding layers of complexity to our understanding of the ever-evolving relationship between humanity and technology. Through a diverse cast of characters, he delves into the psychological and ethical maelstrom unleashed by transhuman experimentation. The cybernetic web within *The Institute* becomes a metaphorical crucible, where the complexities of human relationships are exposed and reshaped under the harsh glare of technological manipulation. This narrative depth elevates the exploration of human struggles within the transhumanist framework, transcending the realm of traditional character analysis. The ethical minefield exposed by the children's experiments in *The Institute* compels a profound reflection on rights, autonomy, and the moral burdens inherent in pushing the boundaries of human potential. King's chilling narrative sheds light on the devastating impact of cybernetic enhancements on young minds, the irreversible loss of innocence, and the moral ambiguity surrounding scientific experimentation on vulnerable populations.

Yet, amidst the bleak landscape of transhumanist ambition, King's narrative also offers a glimmer of hope. He reminds us that even in the face of unchecked progress, where “science was God and humanity was clay, to be molded and shaped at will” (King 207), the human spirit endures. As Luke observes, “the morality of it all, the rights and wrongs, they seemed to blur and fade like watercolors left out in the rain” (King 312), but the children, even as “victims of ambition and greed and a thirst for power that knew no bounds” (King 489), never truly lose sight of their humanity. This enduring spirit is perhaps best captured by Kalisha's poignant words: “Hope...it grows like weeds even in the cracks of despair” (King 332). This quote emphasizes the human spirit's ability to persist even in the darkest scenarios, offering a beacon of light

amidst the bleak landscape of transhumanist experimentation. Ultimately, *The Institute* leaves readers with a heightened awareness of the ethical tightrope society walks in the face of transhumanism. As we stand at the precipice of technological evolution, King's work serves as a potent reminder that the pursuit of scientific progress must be guided by ethical considerations, unwavering respect for human dignity, and a vigilant commitment to prioritizing human values above the allure of technological supremacy.

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## The War of Attrition and Fighting God: An Analysis of the Survival Strategy in *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel

Alex. K.O\*

### *Abstract*

The protagonist, Piscine Molitor Patel, in Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi*, applies an effective strategy called the “war of attrition” or the “waiting game” to survive in between the sea and the devil. 'Waiting' in a normal sense is an act of inferior submission by a helpless being, but an intense philosophical analysis of this concept will elucidate the truth that 'waiting is conquering time,' in which a man can control and redeem the relentless flow of time and its consequences. In the second part of the novel, after the shipwreck Pi, that innocent child uses this 'art of conquering time' along with two of the most remarkable allies of mankind, 'hope and trust.' In this paper, *The War of Attrition and Fighting God: An Analysis of the Survival Strategy in Life of Pi by Yann Martel*, I attempt to analyze the whole novel from two different perspectives, one from the angle of the life of an innocent child and the other, Richard Parker as the reflection of the 'duality' of God. In all religions, irrespective of caste, creed, and sex, God has two faces; 1) a face of love and care, and 2) a face of doom and destruction. By attributing this 'dual image' of God to Richard Parker, I argue that after the shipwreck, throughout this novel, Pi was dueling with God himself. At one point in the novel, Pi says, “It is the irony of this story that the one who scared me witless to start with was the very same who brought me peace, purpose, I dare say even wholeness.” The supremacy of God abides as long as we live in fear, and that is why, in his fight against Richard Parker, Pi says, “You must fight hard to shine the light of words upon it (fear). Because if you don't . . . you never truly fought the opponent who defeated you.” Though Pi bravely fights against the tiger, who stands as the ferocious manifestation of God, finally it is the child who earns the respect of Richard Parker and readers from across the globe.

**Keywords:** God, Waiting, Child, Pi, Richard Parker

Ever since the release of the book or film *Life of Pi*, audiences around the world have come to understand this acclaimed work of fiction as a portrayal of a man's struggle to overcome all obstacles in his life. The main protagonist, Piscine Molitor Patel, is seen by viewers and readers as the embodiment of optimism. Richard Parker, the vicious adversary, on the other hand, was thought to stand for all of life's challenges, tribulations, and taboos. Against this backdrop, I look at this great literary work from a completely different perspective, drawing on my personal experiences as the son of a fisherman who has lived on the Arabian Sea shores in search of daily sustenance and negotiated death at every turn. The most fascinating aspect of this survival struggle, nevertheless, is the men's steadfast faith in God and their unwavering determination to survive. It is in such a scenario that I intend to illustrate the gradual transformation of Richard Parker from a foe to a friend by attributing to him the dual image of God as a detached tyrant and a kind ally. The question of whether or not there exists a God has been a critical one that has haunted mankind since its inception. Primitive men perceived God in many forms as trees, plants, animals, rocks, and other natural entities, whereas medieval men extended this attribution to individuals with flesh and

bone. Finally, modern men see him in the magical equations and theories of science. Regardless of men's perception of the Lord Almighty, fear of God was essential to keeping humanity's moral balance between good and evil. The notion of this duality plays a vital role in framing the face and foundation of this world. Whether it is man or God, everyone is being perceived based on this dual representation. It is in such a scenario, that the novel *Life of Pi*, written by Yan Martel becomes a masterpiece on the struggles of men between the devil and the sea.

On a peripheral level, this novel depicts an encounter between a man and an animal in the open Pacific Ocean, but a little more intense analysis of this gripping narrative renders the idea that this is a fight between the two inner voices of one's soul in the face of an ordeal, the voice of life and the sound of death, in the presence of a ferocious being named Richard Parker, who emblemizes the dual image of the almighty as the face of love and punishment. Therefore, in this paper, *The War of Attrition and Fighting God: An Analysis of the Survival Strategy in Life of Pi by Yann Martel*, I attempt to analyze the novel *Life of Pi* from two different angles of human existence. First, from the point of 'waiting' in Piscine Molitor Patel's life, and next, as mentioned earlier, by attributing the dual image of God to Richard Parker, the Bengal tiger. The implied meaning of the fight of a teenage boy against a ferocious Bengal tiger demands a rigorous analysis; for instance, "It is the irony of this story that the one who scared me witless to start with was the very same who brought me peace, purpose, I dare say even wholeness" (144). The resonance of these words in the light of Piscine Molitor Patel's adversity brings a lot of powerful meaning to the narrative. Despite the initial fear of the large animal, Pi undergoes a significant transformation in terms of his attitude and mentality to cope with the challenges in the presence of that large bundle of violence and death right in front of his eyes. It is this very source of fear that becomes the catalyst for positive change. Though the opponent is extremely powerful, Pi uses certain strategies to overcome the barrier—Richard Parker. Pi quotes German philosopher Martin Heidegger to illustrate the intensity of the situation: "When two creatures meet an encounter in some circumstances may be enough" (46). Here, Heidegger's observation suggests that just a glance is enough to emulate violence between opponents, and it doesn't have to be a prolonged or elaborate one. These recollections of Pi amplify the depth of his dangerous situation. A helpless young boy's willpower was shaken by the anatomy and animal instincts of a Bengal tiger, but the refusal of this boy's will to give up and his relentless attempts to survive by fighting against all odds at sea are what make this narrative more engaging. For him, life in the middle of the Pacific Ocean was a miracle because he was thrown into the lifeboat as 'fodder' by the sailors on the ship, but he survived. Now, in Pi's own words, "he has learned the art of turning miracles into a routine" (131). At this point, readers might raise concerns about a young boy's capacity to transform miracles into 'routines', and the answer to that question lies in a simple word, 'waiting'. Pi uses an effective strategy called 'The War of Attrition or The Waiting Game' to survive in the sea with four wild companions. When individuals become helpless in the face of adversity, don't quit; hang on. That is what Pi teaches us throughout his inspiring

narration of the events at sea. Men survive hardships in life not by staring at the consequences of incidents but by learning lessons from them, and that is what Pi does when he is surrounded by those animals. He recollects the lessons he has learned from his zoo-keeping family business to live with those wild beings. That is why, at the outset of this work, he informs the reader that “Animals are territorial. That is the key to their minds. Only a familiar territory will allow them to fulfill the two relentless imperatives of the wild: the avoidance of enemies and the getting of food and water” (23).

When Pi begins to live with them, he creates his territory by using a separate temporary raft with some poles and a net; thus, he defines his boundary in terms of survival and food, and in the course of the events, this territorial power and survival of the fittest can be easily learned when the hyena kills the zebra and monkey in the lifeboat. Finally, Richard Parker breaks this food chain by feasting on the hyena. Pi, as a man, was fortunately left with some essentials on the lifeboat, though he had to surpass his savage fellow being to use them. He says, “When your own life is threatened, your sense of empathy is blunted by a terrible, selfish hunger for survival” (108). At its core, this statement reflects the instinct for self-defense that is deeply ingrained in human nature. When faced with a life-threatening situation, the primary and instinctive goal becomes survival, and at times it will create a monster out of a man. That is what happens to Pi when he lives with wild animals in the Pacific; the experiences in the middle of the ocean change his attitude and outlook, and that is the reason he says, “It is true that those we meet can change us, sometimes so profoundly that we are not same afterward, even unto our names” (25). These words represent the dynamic nature of human experience, suggesting that encounters with others contribute to a continual process of growth and change. And in life, the impact of this is not one-sided, rather, it is a reciprocal process where both parties involved in the encounter contribute to each other's transformation. In the novel, Richard Parker changes Pi tremendously by presenting himself as a formidable opponent. Later, after waiting so many days, “Richard Parker started growling that very instant as if he had been waiting for me to become a worthy opponent” (132).

In both of these instances, 'waiting' plays a crucial role in shaping the lives of a teenager and an animal. John Milton, in his famous sonnet, 'On His Blindness' writes, “They also serve who only stand and wait”. This particular line aligns with the broader philosophical insights that Yann Martel tries to deliver through the character of Piscine Molitor Patel. Waiting is one of the most underrated notions among mankind because everyone has been taught by the system that in waiting, people become outdated and outcasts due to their inability to cope with the change. It is in this context that Pi's waiting becomes an extraordinary defensive mechanism. His life is a testament to human resilience in the face of extreme adversity. That young boy's ability to endure, both physically and mentally, contributes to his survival, and he does that by relying too much on his faith, which encompasses multiple religious traditions. While waiting, he forgets his ordeals and recollects his wisdom.

Waiting is conquering the present and future by forgetting the past. Forgetting the past

means learning lessons with no regrets or complaints and moving forward as a warrior in the present to be the owner of your destiny or future. Warrior might seem like a fashionable term to decorate Pi with, but he deserves that strong label because he observes that “I had to tame him. It was at that moment that I realized this necessity. It was not a question of him or me but of him and me. We were, literally and figuratively, in the same boat. We would live-or we would die- together” (145). When Pi is met with an extremely violent and cruel opponent, he has no other option other than to either die with the tiger or live with it. For a teenage boy, it is unimaginable to live with such a ferocious being, and that is how he decides that “it was natural that, bereft and desperate as I was, in the throes of unremitting suffering, I should turn to God” (247). When Pi's opponent is more powerful and intimidating than him, he has no other option but to turn to God, the omnipotent.

I would argue that here the novel raises a fundamental concern by raising two questions: who is God? and where is he? Pi gives an interesting response to that question by explaining that “some people say God died during the Partition in 1947. He may have died in 1971 during the war. Or he may have died yesterday here in Pondicherry in an orphanage” (32). Here, the reference to specific historical events, such as the Partition in 1947 and the war in 1971, raises questions about the role of a benevolent deity amid human-created catastrophes. It prompts reflection on whether God, if believed to be omnipotent and compassionate, would allow or intervene in such traumatic events. And finally, the metaphorical death of God in an orphanage symbolizes a cultural and philosophical shift in the modern world from faith to material reality. I would argue that though this statement might seem to be a sarcastic one, it is the sad reality of the modern world, where men always look up to the heavens in search of God and end up making such sarcastic comments. Now, I would like to portray an alternative image of God. For instance, people perceive the Almighty in many forms; some see him as someone who sits in a heavenly abode, some perceive him as a virtue, and a few see him in other men as well. But in the backdrop of Pi's life experience in the Pacific Ocean, I attempt to attribute this godly image to Richard Parker, the Bengal tiger. This ferocious 450-pound animal might be a merciless carnivore, but it is much more than that in the eyes of Pi, and that is why he says, “Richard Parker has stayed with me. I've never forgotten him. Dare I say I miss him? I do. I miss him. I still see him in my dreams. They are nightmares mostly, but nightmares tinged with love” (13-14). These lines indicate that, despite the initially terrifying circumstances of being stranded together on a lifeboat, Pi developed a unique bond with Richard Parker. This bond is not just one of fear but is tinged with a complex mix of emotions, including love. The survival situation forged a connection between the two, rooted in the shared struggle for life. In this sentence, nightmares and love are the two strong emotions Pi uses to narrate his experience with Richard Parker. This tiger was brought up by human beings and trained by zoo keepers, so naturally, Pi might have certain inhibitions about his new companion, but at the end of the day, it is a tiger, a wild animal. That is the reason Pi uses certain social terms to illustrate their life at sea: “Once this moving-in ritual is done and the animal has settled, it will not

feel like a nervous tenant, and even less like a prisoner, but rather like a landholder, and it will behave in the same way within its enclosure as it would in its territory in the wild, including defending it tooth and nail should it be invaded” (23). This passage philosophically touches upon the transformative nature of one's relationship with their environment, emphasizing the profound impact of a sense of ownership and territoriality on behavior. The act of settling into a space, be it a physical enclosure or a metaphorical territory, represents a psychological shift from a state of unease or confinement to one of ownership and agency. It suggests that a living being, once established within its space, undergoes a fundamental change in perception—from a nervous tenant or prisoner to a landholder. This transformation alludes to the primal instincts of territorial defense observed in the wild, highlighting the innate connection between one's sense of space and their behavioral responses. By exposing this wild animal instinct, I want to emphasize that at times, God can be cruel when men break the boundaries of virtue and civility, and that is his fierce face. Being a child born and brought up in a zoo-keeping family, Pi also has some elements of animal instincts in his blood, which is much more than other men. His father once took him to the tiger enclosure to teach him a lesson. In the presence of little Pi, a goat is given to the tiger as fodder, and he says, “I heard two things at that moment: Father saying, "Never forget this lesson" as he looked on grimly; and the bleating of the goat” (38). This was the first lesson that was taught by his father on 'disobedient beings', that those who disobey will be punished. The real frightening image of God is being propagated by religion and faith based on this notion of 'disobeying' or simply 'sin'. Pi continues to call this experience ironic by saying, “If I still had the will to live, it was thanks to Richard Parker. He kept me from thinking too much about my family and my tragic circumstances. He pushed me to go on living. I hated him for it, yet at the same time I was grateful” (146). The acknowledgment that Richard Parker is a crucial factor in the narrator's will to live reveals the tiger's dual role as both a source of resentment and a lifeline. Despite feeling hatred for Richard Parker, who serves as a constant reminder of the tragic circumstances and separation from family, the tiger becomes a vital distraction. Richard Parker's presence occupies the narrator's thoughts, preventing an overwhelming focus on the distressing reality. The narrator's gratitude arises from the realization that, paradoxically, the tiger's companionship and the shared struggle for survival motivate him to continue living. This is one of the most suitable situations where the tiger becomes an ideal image of God by intimidating the existence of Pi and also pushing him to his maximum limits of survival by bringing hope with fear. And that is what religion is all about—bestowing blessings behind the scenes of fear. For a teenager like Pi, an ordeal at sea in the middle of those extremely dangerous wild animals is hell, but it is his limited experience that makes him perceive it as hell. I would like to portray it as heaven, from where men learn more about love, kindness, and compassion. *Brahman* is not a concealed cruel soul, but as Pi says, “Brahman expressed not only in gods but in humans, animals, trees, in a handful of earth, for everything has a trace of the divine in it. The truth of life is that Brahman is no different from atman, the spiritual force within us, what you might call the soul” (50). These words reflect the core tenets of Hindu philosophy, emphasizing the concept of

*Brahman*, the ultimate reality, as omnipresent and manifesting in diverse forms. The idea of god here crosses the traditional association of divinity solely with gods, extending to encompass all aspects of existence, including humans, animals, trees, and even the smallest elements of the natural world. This perspective underscores a profound interconnectedness, asserting that everything carries a trace of the divine. Furthermore, the passage introduces the concept of *Atman*, the individual soul, and posits that *Brahman* and *Atman* are ultimately inseparable. In this philosophical framework, the truth of life lies in recognizing the inherent unity of all existence, with *Brahman* being synonymous with the spiritual force within each individual, the *Atman*. This holistic understanding encourages a deepened sense of reverence for the interconnected web of life and the recognition of the divine essence permeating all aspects of the cosmos.

This tiny teenage boy is expounding an enigmatic philosophy that heaven and hell are what men make out of themselves through their deeds and words. When he stands in between the sea and the devil, he realizes this truth, and that is why he refuses to give up. He says, “Some of us give up on life with only a resigned sigh. Others fight a little, then lose hope. Still others- and I am one of those-never give up. We fight and fight and fight. We fight no matter the cost of battle, the losses we take, the improbability of success. We fight to the very end” (131). These lines are about different ways people face challenges in life. Some people feel like giving up and accept their difficulties with a sigh. Others try to fight for a bit but eventually lose hope. Then there are those, like Pi, who never give up. They keep fighting, even when it's really hard, even when they lose a lot, and even when success seems unlikely. The message here is about having a determined spirit that doesn't quit, no matter how tough things get. It's about fighting until the very end, even when the odds are against you. In the novel, Pi holds on to life by believing in his inner voice. He was raised in a family where they believed '*Atman* is equal to *Brahman*', “The truth of life is that *Brahman* is no different from *atman*, the spiritual force within us, what you might call the soul” (50). It is this *Atman* who helps him later turn everything into a miracle in life. For an adult, a miracle is a magic, something surreal, but in Pi's life, a miracle is not something extraordinary; whatever little comfort he gets in the middle of the Pacific Ocean is a miracle that helps him to survive, along with Richard Parker. The change from fodder to a survivor was a miracle for him, and that is why he points out that “only when the sailors threw me overboard did I begin to have doubts” (94). Pi made the miracle of transforming doubts into convictions by believing in his inner voice. All these experiences and explanations uphold the notion of *Brahman* in Hindu tradition: that God is not an invisible dominating power, but rather he is present in everything. Unfortunately, mankind has been blinded by too many things, which prevents them from finding the truth. Only when Pi is left alone, he realizes the power of that inner voice because he was completely left in an isolated environment with a few wild beings, and that makes the whole difference when he says, “I will put in all the hard work necessary. Yes, so long as God is with me, I will not die” (131).

This conviction makes his life more meaningful in the face of all those ordeals and challenges. Richard Parker was just a tiger in the beginning, but gradually the tiger

became like a brother to Pi. His inner voice helped him say, “my dear brother shrieked in my face like I’ve never heard a man shriek before. He let go of me. This was the terrible cost of Richard Parker. He gave me a life, my own, but at the expense of taking one” (222). I would argue that Pi was a coward in the beginning, Richard Parker-the god, made him brave by making him fight in the middle of the ocean and also by pushing him to the edges of the end of his own life. Throughout all these adversities, Richard Parker taught Pi that life is tough and not to take it for granted. In the end, when they reach land, Richard Parker walks straight into the jungle, and at the edge of the jungle, he stops, and Pi recollects those moments, “I was certain he would turn my way. He would look at me. He would flatten his ears. He would growl. In some such way, he would conclude our relationship. He did nothing of the sort” (247).

At that crucial moment on the jungle's borders, the narrator anticipates a dramatic farewell from Richard Parker. Expecting aggressive gestures, the narrator is surprised when Richard Parker, instead of turning towards them, gazes fixedly into the jungle. This departure symbolizes the end of their shared struggle for survival, as the fierce tiger moves forward and disappears forever from Pi's life. This departure is not just a silent goodbye, I would argue that this dramatic and sad ending without bidding farewell is the crux of this fiction work. In reality, I believe their real friendship begins in those moments of profound grief, which is why Richard Parker stares at the jungle and disappears forever by making his powerful marks of existence in the mind of Pi. And as long as he breathes, he will remember the tiger not as a being but as an invisible power that gave him a second chance in this world, and that is the beauty of farewells with silence and without glances. As I attribute the godly image to Richard Parker, this climax has a significant meaning following the concept of moksha, or redemption. Pi attains salvation by believing in his inner voice and the shadow of the tiger. Hence, the inner voice or *Atman* of Pi and Richard Parker, the extension of *Brahman*, thus merged and became one through the farewell of silence, the real essence of existence.

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## [En]Tangled: Analysing Synaesthesia and Empathy in the Select Novels of Ellen Marie Wiseman and Charlotte McConaghy

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### *Abstract*

This paper is an attempt to scrutinise the connection between synaesthesia and empathy. Synaesthesia is a neurological trait in which the individual experiences cross-connection of the different senses such as colour-taste. There are various types of synaesthesia but a particular type known as Mirror- Touch Synaesthesia (MTS) differs from the rest because of its inter-personal nature. However, presumably due to its rarity, there are scarcely any literary works written using MTS as a psycho- literary element. Recent studies prove that MTS is interrelated with empathy. But there is little to none research on this topic in the literary arena. Therefore, the main goal of this paper is to shed light on the same by analysing its connection with various components of empathy. The researcher proposes to analyse Ellen Marie Wiseman's *The Orphan Collector* (2020) and Charlotte McConaghy's *Once There Were Wolves* (2022) in both of which the protagonists are young women with mirror touch synaesthesia.

**Keywords:** cognitive psychology, synaesthesia, neurohumanities, mirror neurons, neuroscience

Synaesthesia is a neurological phenomenon in which the stimulation of one sense triggers the involuntary experience of another sense. For instance, a synaesthete might experience seeing colours when listening to music or tasting a specific taste when hearing a particular sound. The word 'synaesthesia' is derived from the Greek word "syn" meaning union and "aesthesia" meaning sensation, therefore, synaesthesia is defined as a "subjective phenomenon in which an individual may experience a "mixing" of sensory modalities" (Murray). The condition has long fascinated psychologists and neuroscientists for its mysterious nature and the potential insight it provides into the workings of the human brain. Though the first documented case of synaesthesia was done as early as 1812 by George Tobias Ludwig Sachs, who also coined the term, the condition still lacks a detailed study.

The research on synaesthesia began in the 1990s and has dwelled deeper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is noted that most of the works written until recently deal about the sensory experiences and the connection between two senses. However, a rare type of synaesthesia known as "Mirror- Touch synaesthesia" involves a connection between sense and feeling. A mirror-touch synaesthete experiences the sensory effects of another individual on themselves upon coming in contact with that individual (Rogowska 215). For example, someone with mirror-touch synaesthesia might feel a sense of pain or discomfort when they see someone else getting hurt. Among other types of synaesthesia, this can be considered unique because, while others bring about a connection between an individual's senses and insensate elements, mirror-



touch synaesthesia develops a connection between two living beings: the synaesthete and the individual whose senses the synaesthete mirrors. Thus, making it a noteworthy topic to be analysed. Ironically, rather due to its rarity, there are scarcely any literary works written using mirror touch synaesthesia as a literary element. This provides a necessity to shed light on this lesser-known neurological phenomenon. The researcher attempts to do the same using the characters of Pia Lange and Inti Flynn in Ellen Marie Wiseman's *The Orphan Collector* (2020) and Charlotte McConaghy's *Once There Were Wolves* (2022) respectively.

Ellen Marie Wiseman is a contemporary American novelist, known for her historical fictions that depict the abominable and disparate treatment of women in twentieth century American society. So far, she has penned six novels since her debut in 2012, all of which are listed on the New York Times best-selling list. *The Orphan Collector* (2020) is her fifth novel, which depicts the story of thirteen-year-old Pia, a German immigrant in 1920s America. The novel revolves around her survival as a mirror touch synaesthete in a society that views immigrants as unwelcome guests who steal away their job opportunities and livelihoods. Wiseman uses Pia's character to explain how the situation was even worse for German immigrants after 1917, when anti-German sentiment rose due to which Germans were considered national enemies. It is important to note that the novel is set in the period when the outbreak of the influenza pandemic was heightened. Therefore, to live as a synaesthete who can literally feel others' sickness in the time of a pandemic elevates the idea of this research on the connection between synaesthesia and empathy. The researcher proposes to use Pia's resilience towards hardship and her journey of understanding and utilising her synaesthesia as a tool to help people in need.

Similarly, the novel, *Once There Were Wolves* (2022), written by Charlotte McConaghy, also deals with the neurological condition of mirror touch synaesthesia through the character of Inti Flynn. Charlotte McConaghy is a contemporary Australian novelist, who is known for her novels that deal with environmental sensibilities, ecological balance and survivor's guilt. Though she debuted in 2005 with her children's fiction, *The Pearl*, her 2020 novel *Migrations* brought her worldwide acclaim. The novel *Once There Were Wolves* (2022) is her second novel, for which McConaghy was awarded the 2022 Indie Book Award and the Nautilus Gold Award. The novel revolves around the Flynn twins, Inti and Aggie, who are practically inseparable. Inti works as a wolf biologist involved in the project of reintroducing wolves in the Scottish Highlands to bring back their crippling ecosystem. She is portrayed as a mirror touch synaesthete, who can feel the physical sensations of others just by looking at them. The novel shifts between Inti's work life as a wolf biologist, where she tackles the local people who are against reintroducing wolves in the highlands and her personal life as a synaesthete sister who cares about her emotionally disturbed twin, Aggie. McConaghy brilliantly uses Inti's synaesthesia to build her character as someone who is overly empathetic towards everyone, which in turn puts her in difficult situations. She introduces her neurological condition to the readers as follows:

I am unlike most people. I move through life in a different way, with an entirely unique understanding of touch. Before I knew its name I knew this. To make sense of it, it is called a neurological condition. Mirror-touch synaesthesia. My brain recreates the sensory experiences of living creatures, of all people and even sometimes animals; if I see it I feel it, and for just a moment I am them, we are one and their pain or pleasure is my own. It can seem like magic and for a long time I thought it was, but really it's not so far removed from how other brains behave: the physiological response witnessing someone's pain is a cringe, a recoil, a wince. We are hard-wired for empathy. Once upon a time I took delight in feeling what others felt.

Now the constant stream of sensory information exhausts me. Now I'd give anything to be cut free (McConaghy 5,6)

Mirror touch synaesthesia can be seen as an extreme manifestation of the mirror neuron system, which is a network of neurons in the brain that become activated both when an individual performs an action and when they observe someone else performing the same action. That is, the mirror neuron system appears to be hyperactive or hyperconnected, leading to the direct physical experience of others' sensations or feelings such as pain and disgust (Corradini & Antonietti). These heightened mirror neurons are suspected to play a role in understanding others' actions and intentions and are believed to be involved in empathy or contribute to an enhanced capacity for empathy in individuals with mirror touch synaesthesia. They may have a more vivid and immediate understanding of what others are experiencing on a sensory level, which could facilitate a deeper empathic connection. Research published in the *Nature Neuroscience* journal proves the above hypothesis as a possibility through a series of experiments using mirror-touch synaesthetes (Banissy and Ward).

It is important to analyse why and how empathy is connected with synaesthesia. Fundamentally, empathy is a "personality trait or ability to know another person's inner experiences or to perceive the emotions of the other person" (Bošnjaković and Radionov 123). Individuals with high levels of empathy are often described as being able to "imaginatively transpose oneself in someone else's shoes" (Walsh 2) and understand their experiences in a more holistic way. Therefore, the heightened sensitivity to sensory information that characterises synaesthesia may make it easier for synaesthetes to empathise with others and understand their emotional states. The character of Inti in *Once There Were Wolves* can provide insights into the foretold premise. Inti's mirror-touch synaesthesia fixes her in a complex realm of life, where she is able to sense the movements and feelings of her beloved wolves; on the other hand, she is also able to feel the pain of domestic-abuse victims and animals that are being hunted down, which crushes her soul. She is not only able to sense but also feels exactly how others feel just by looking at them. This ability to live in others' skin only makes her more understanding and empathetic towards those around her. She feels a strong sense of responsibility to protect those who are weak and in pain.

On analysis, one can find several reasons why mirror-touch synaesthesia may be linked to empathy. First, both synaesthesia and empathy involve the ability to perceive and process sensory information in a unique and nuanced way. Mirror-touch

synaesthetes experience the world in a way that is fundamentally different from that of non-synaesthetes, and this may give them a deeper appreciation for the complexity of sensory experience. Wiseman in *The Orphan Collector* uses Pia's character to brilliantly visualise how even a normal act of hugging a long-lost friend can feel different to a synaesthete. After her mom's death and losing her siblings, Pia is forced into an orphanage with no emotional support. Therefore, later, when she meets her friend Finn in the orphanage,

She laughed and threw her arms around him, not caring what she might feel when they touched... he hugged her back, his cheek against hers, his warm breath on her skin. Thankfully she felt nothing but joy at seeing him alive... no weight on her chest or aches in her bones. No discomfort in her throat or head. (Wiseman 202)

Here, a non-synaesthete might feel happy or overwhelmed when meeting an old friend, but being a synaesthete, Pia's first response is to invalidate her synaesthetic abilities, which will only provide her the comfort to hug her friend. She does not forget about her condition but overrides whatever response she may feel upon their physical contact to express her joy of being reunited with Finn. Even more so, this ability enables her to be more thankful for all the little things in life that she comes across, like hugging a friend. She realises that “even though she normally didn't want to be touched, embracing Finn felt like being covered with a warm blanket after months of being cold. She felt like she'd been wandering lost and alone for an eternity and now, finally, someone else was holding her up” (Wiseman 203). Thus, proving that the inclusion of synaesthesia in everyday life makes a seemingly normal activity or feeling different from that of a non-synaesthete, making it unique and nuanced.

Likewise, empathy is also a unique ability that allows an individual to understand and connect with another on an emotional level. Empathy itself involves various components, which primarily include cognitive empathy and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy can be defined as an “attempt by one self-aware self to comprehend nonjudgmentally the positive and negative experiences of another self” (Wispé 315). It is when an individual is able to understand the feelings of others but is able to keep the self without blending in. Whereas, affective empathy is the ability to not only feel but also share the emotions of one individual with another. Unlike cognitive empathy, affective empathy enables an individual “to feel distress or even experience a willingness to help people in distress” (Bošnjakovi and Radionov 129). Mirror touch synaesthesia primarily relates to the affective component, as it involves sharing the physical sensations or feelings of others. This shared experience of touch or tactile sensations may enhance the affective aspect of empathy by allowing individuals to feel what others are directly and viscerally experiencing. Pia's mirror touch synaesthesia enables her to sense the physical distress of others when she comes into direct contact with them. She develops her affective empathic personality at a very young age since she can literally feel what others are feeling. Moreover, by the age of thirteen, Pia develops into a young woman who is filled with maternal affection towards every child she sees. She takes the responsibility of taking care of children wherever she goes. For example, when she is put in the orphanage, she is ordered to

take care of the newborn babies and while working in the Hudsons house, she primarily takes care of their children and bonds with them with a motherly nature. In both places, she, at first, is afraid that when she touches or holds the babies, she might feel that they are sick which would further break her heart, but later she could not stop herself from caring for those babies. Wiseman captivates Pia's empathy for voiceless children as follows:

Taking care of the Hudson children weighed on her mind too, and the possibility that she might discover they were sick or hurt when she touched them. At St. Vincent's she had hardened herself to the fact that there was little medical help available for the orphans, and tried to ignore her aches and pains unless they were severe. Even then, the nuns wouldn't find a doctor. The sickest babies were sent to the sick hall and never came back... it was like losing her brothers all over again. she couldn't stop crying the rest of the day. (Wiseman 231)

Second, synaesthesia and empathy both involve the ability to create mental associations between seemingly unrelated concepts. Synaesthetes often experience synaesthetic associations between different senses, such as the sound of a trumpet evoking the colour blue. Similarly, individuals with high levels of empathy are often able to make connections between seemingly disparate pieces of information and understand how they relate to one another. In the case of Pia, she has the ability to feel the physical sensations such as pain, difficulties in breathing, etc that other individuals experience. On the other hand, Inti's synaesthesia enables her to connect with everyone around her on a personal level, which helps her see all of their perspectives. For instance, when she sees her father teaching her sister, Aggie, to ride a horse, Inti feels it too. She says,

I am perched with one leg either side of the training yard fence, watching. There is coarse timber under my hands, a splinter beneath my fingernail. And I am that horse, too, I am my sister, pressed to the warmth of the trembling, powerful beast, with my father's large, steady hand holding me still, and I am my father's hand, too, and I am the stallion, the light load he carries and the cold metal in his mouth. (McConaghy 8)

She is not only a spectator but also all the characters involved in the scene. This ability to create mental associations may help synaesthetes better understand the emotional experiences of others. That being the case, these empathic abilities of Pia and Inti caused from their synaesthesia deeply impact them throughout the novels, which further serves as a catalyst for their actions and shapes their characters in several ways, such as:

a) Emotional Connection: Pia's ability to feel others' pain creates a strong emotional bond with those around her. It allows her to empathise on a profound level, making her more compassionate and understanding. She forms an emotional bond with a little girl when she is in the orphanage, but at first she does not let the little girl near her. Wiseman explains that "Pia held up her hands, partly in surprise, mostly because she didn't want to touch her...one of the girl's bare legs rested against hers, but to Pia's relief, she felt nothing". Clearly the little girl longed for affection and for some reason, trusted Pia to give it to her. Just like Olie and Max had trusted her. "Overwhelmed with fear and misery and love, Pia's eyes filled and she wrapped her arms around the girl, rocking her back and forth, and trying not to cry. She had failed her brothers; she didn't have to fail this little girl!" (Wiseman 135). Therefore,

shebonds on an emotional level with everybody she meets, which is a result of her gradual development from being a scared little girl who did not want to be touched.

b) Motivation for Helping Others: In mirror-sensory synaesthesia, “stronger empathy is expected because synaesthetes experience on their own body any unpleasant sensation they observe on others: being more sensitive to other people's misfortunes, they would be more motivated to relieve others' suffering” (Ioumpa et al.). Likewise, Pia's sensory phenomenon compels her to help those in need. She is driven to alleviate their suffering and provide support, often putting herself at risk in the process. When Pia is ordered to take care of the newborn babies in the orphanage, she feels whatever discomfort the babies have when she holds them. When she holds a particular baby, she feels a “horrible ache in her chest” (Wiseman 152). When she mentions that the baby might be sick and needs care, the Sister in the orphanage dismisses her, saying that thousands of children are dying due to the prevailing pandemic. But when Pia insists on it, she is told that “there aren't any doctors to check on orphans right now... God will take care of his precious soul” (153), she feels so powerless and angry. However, towards the end of the novel, when the Hudsons try to adopt a baby, Pia wants to make sure that the baby is healthy. She is afraid that after the loss of their baby not long ago, the Hudsons will not be able to handle another loss. Therefore, Pia holds the baby in fear that she should not feel “anything worrisome” (286).

c) Moral Dilemmas: In *Once There Were Wolves*, when Inti finds Stuart dead in the middle of the forest, she thinks that it was a wolf who killed him. She presumes that if people find out the truth, they will hunt all the wolves, which pushes her to make the hasty decision of hiding the body by herself. When she finds out that another person was also killed, she decides to kill the wolf herself without letting anybody know. But only later does she realise that it was Aggie who killed those people and Inti's imprudent decisions, because of her love for wolves and her responsibility to protect them, made her kill one on her own. Though she realises that gunning down a wolf will make her feel that way as well, her love for wolves and the reason to protect them create a dilemma in her, which results in a negative outcome that makes her feel guilty all through her life.

Overall, Pia's sensory phenomenon of feeling others' pain adds depth and complexity to her character. It shapes her relationships, challenges her emotionally, and influences her choices throughout the novel. On the other hand, Inti's synaesthesia is different than that of Pia because Pia can only transfer the sensory images through touch, that is, only if she comes in contact with the individual can she feel their senses, but Inti's phenomenon lets her experience others' senses and feelings through observation even before she could physically feel the other party. However, both novels provide a nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of the link between mirror touch synaesthesia and empathy. Through the experiences of Pia and Inti, the novels illustrate the potential for synaesthesia to enhance empathic understanding of others and the complex interplay between sensory experience and emotional understanding. At the same time, the novels acknowledge the potential challenges that synaesthesia can pose for empathetic understanding and the need for individuals with synaesthesia to develop strategies for managing their emotional boundaries. By examining the link between synaesthesia and empathy through both psychological and literary lenses, the novels *The Orphan Collector* and *Once There Were Wolves* provide a valuable contribution to our understanding of these complex and intriguing phenomena.

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## Traversing the Landscape of Illness: Analysis of Select Women Autopathographies

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### *Abstract*

We live in an age where narratives are prevalent. Narratives sensitively reflect human concerns and have inclusively mapped the various thresholds of life in all hues. The experiences narrated in/as narratives are usually memories and events connected to a particular situation or circumstance. Within the realm of life narratives, a distinct subgenre emerges in the form of illness narratives, also known as pathographies/autopathographies. These narratives provide an opportunity for the afflicted to reinstate their voices which are consistently silenced by medical narratives. By analysing the select autopathographies *Past Perfect: Letters to Aditi* by Anna Varughese and *Not in the Pink* by Tina Martel, the paper uncovers the multifaceted nature of women's health experiences, the challenges they face in navigating the complex landscape of illness and the pivotal role these narratives play in shaping our understanding of women's health. With reference to Arthur Kleinman's and Arthur Frank's take on illness narrative theory, the paper aims to ponder over the transformative power of storytelling, illustrating how individuals especially women contending with illness often turn to narratives as a means of introspection, interpretation, and ultimately, healing. Furthermore, autopathographies hold significance in the medical realm, as it encourages healthcare professionals and caregivers, to have a paradigm shift in their approach to individuals facing illness.

**Keywords:** Autopathography, Health, Illness, Narratives, Women.

### **Introduction**

We live in an age where narratives are prevalent. With the democratization of the institution of life narration, people turned to narratives as a means of self-discovery, offering solace and solidarity. Life stories play a significant role in communicating and conveying multiple human conditions. The narrative turn within various disciplines outside literary studies began in the early 1980s. It is universal to tell stories, whether about oneself or others. The importance of narratives lies in them being one of the main forms through which one perceives, experiences, and judges one's actions and the course and value of one's life. Narratives are, most of the time, written/oral markings of lived experiences. The experiences narrated in/as narratives are usually memories and events connected to a particular situation or circumstance. Illness can be situated as one such experience that develops as a disrupting force in people's everyday lives and practices. Life narratives yield fruitful insights for representing illness and disability as they embody a new opportunity to explore how the body mediates identity or personality. In the last twenty-five years, there has been an explosion in the number of literary works like memoirs and auto/biographical accounts of disability and illness.

Writing about illness started as a genre way back in the 1980s when history witnessed

a surge of texts that appeared in response to the outbreak of HIV/AIDS. Across the globe, people with AIDS published numerous texts about their journey through the disease and brought to light the trauma they had endeavored in the course of their illness. Doctors, nurses and caregivers, journalists, poets, memoirists and diarists came together to record and pen down the pandemic. Together, they created memorial art, which, in due course, bestowed meaning to the suffering and loss of individuals inflicted with AIDS. A notable portion of these could easily be slotted into the category which medical humanities terms as 'Illness Narratives'. They are narratives spoken/written/sketched/painted/photographed by the patients in the form of autobiographies, memoirs, diary entries, etc., about the illness they had to battle and how they emerged as survivors. Initially, disease was viewed as a purely biological incident. Over time, our understanding of illness has expanded to include social, cultural, gendered, economic, and psychological dimensions. This shift has led to the evolution of medical humanities, a domain situated at the crossroads of medicine and the humanities. Medical humanities has elevated the individual beyond the diseased body emphasizing the patient's perspective of the illness experience conveyed through stories and personal narratives which has become a subject of profound examination and analysis.

In 1982, scholars in the field of medical humanities founded the journal "Literature and Medicine" to facilitate interdisciplinary exploration of literature and medicine. The rise of narrative medicine, which recognises, narrates and interprets the stories of both doctors and patients about their experiences, is one of the most significant developments in the field of medical humanities. Patients' stories give voice to their emotional and psychological suffering, which lies outside the domain of the biomedical voice. Illness narrative, as expounded by A H Hawkins in *Reconstructing Illness*, is a personal testimony within the medical world that "returns the voice of the patient to the world of medicine, a world where that voice is too rarely heard, and it does so in such a way as to assert the phenomenological, the subjective and the experiential side of illness" (12). These accounts came to be known as illness narratives, pathographies, autopathographies, and so on by different writers and academics and by the end of twentieth century illness and disability narratives were established as a distinct subgenre of life narratives.

Illness, being an inevitable reality, has been critically examined and addressed across disciplines and accordingly occupies substantial space in literature. Penning down real, lived experiences of an illness subjectively and inter-subjectively by means of language opens up space for the afflicted to come to terms with the disease. However, it's essential to note that the initial diagnosis is frequently perceived as a significant moment of biographical disruption. Though the diagnosis of the illness becomes a devastating moment for the afflicted, the writing process brings in a spurt of new hope and rejuvenation. The diagnosed is gradually initiated into different possibilities for devising future plans of sustenance and other biographical projects. Thus, eventually, today, illness narratives are categorized as a genre that moulds illness as a meaningful event. Perceiving from another angle, these autobiographical illness narratives



provide an opportune moment for the afflicted to reinstate their voices, which are consistently silenced by biomedical narratives written by modern medicine. These narratives push the boundaries of a patient's thought process and facilitate them with a chance to illuminate the readers with their experiences, perceptions and interpretations of a life that revolves around an illness. Memory is a sapient scheme in literary representations and hence has long been a subject of interest in the scholarly consciousness. Illness narratives or autopathographies can be closely examined within the field of memory studies as they serve as a lens through which one can explore the intricate processes by which the memories of illness are shaped, remembered, and shared by individuals and communities. It can also contribute to the collective memory of a community or a particular health condition. Memory studies can investigate how these collective memories are formed, shared, and transmitted within a society. By analysing two different autopathographies, the paper uncovers the multifaceted nature of women's health experiences and the pivotal role these narratives play in shaping our understanding of women's health, illuminating the physical, emotional, and social aspects of their experiences. These narratives provide a rich tapestry of individual stories that contribute to a broader comprehension of health, identity, and the challenges women face in navigating the complex landscape of illness. Psychiatrist and medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman and sociologist Arthur Frank emphasizes the therapeutic and empowering role of illness narratives in helping individuals cope with their health challenges and navigate the complexities of their experiences. Their work underscores the idea that storytelling is not just a means of communication but also a way to make sense of illness and regain a sense of self in the face of medical adversity. "Telling stories about illness is to give voice to the body, so that the changed body can become once again familiar in these stories" (Frank 3). This is evident in the select accounts as both women are giving voice to their ill bodies through the embodied narrative. Furthermore, in the contemporary context, pathography/autopathography encourages healthcare professionals, caregivers, and medical practitioners to have a paradigm shift in their approach to individuals facing illness where Kleinman argues that the medical world must learn "Ethnography, biography, history, psychotherapy—these are the appropriate research methods to create knowledge about the personal world of suffering" (28).

## **Discussion**

Through the poignant memoir titled *Past Perfect: Letters to Aditi* (2013), Anna Varughese offers a vivid account of her life beginning at the tender age of four when she was diagnosed with the rare and debilitating abdominal condition known as Ulcerative Colitis. What stands out as remarkable in her narrative is her ability to craft a compelling and engaging story imbued with humour and laughter despite the unique medical condition she has faced as a woman. By writing this book, she is fighting her battle with the illness and emotional turmoil that has accompanied her since early childhood. Since then, medications, food restrictions, doctors and hospitals circumscribed her life. A life-saving trip to London for a liver transplantation was the

major turning point in her life and her narrative. Varughese's storytelling about her life, illness, and survival constitutes a form of individual memory. Memory studies often emphasize how individuals shape their past through autobiographical narratives, and Varughese's storytelling aligns with this aspect by providing a subjective account of her experiences. By remembering and preserving her experiences she is creating a record that not only captures her journey but also contributes to the broader understanding of illness and survival. Waiting for a cadaver organ for nine months, she finds solace and purpose in chronicling her life story for her five-year-old daughter, Aditi.

There is no single way of understanding illness from a medical perspective; instead, personal, subjective stories about one's illness help to understand an illness better and provide proper treatment and support. Chronic illness can be viewed as a disruptive force in an individual's ongoing life, implying a disruption of the person's identity. Such a condition fundamentally alters the patient's relationship with their body, self, and surroundings. As a result, for the chronically ill, reconstructing their life story is crucial. Varughese openly says that, "I can feel that I am deteriorating every day" (227) as her condition was becoming worse. So, for Varughese, her pathography served as an empowering device, allowing her to transform the disruption caused by her illness into an integral facet of life. Thus, it forms an emphatic bond between Varughese and the reader, and this, in turn, leads to a healing process not only for her but also for the reader.

*Past Perfect: Letters to Aditi* is an example of autopathography in which Varughese has blended the incidents from her life with the medical world. In the context of illness narratives, focusing on the temporal dimension of memory, exploring how events are remembered over time, Varughese recalls the onset of symptoms, the diagnosis, treatment experiences, and post-treatment phases, reflecting a dynamic interplay between past, present, and future perspectives. The plot revolves around aspects like childhood, youth, marriage, familial bond, acceptability, adjustment and dependability intertwined with her illness days-prognosis, diagnosis, treatment and survival. Thus, the narrative offers Varughese a unique avenue for comprehending the intricate interplay between health and identity. In the context of chronic illnesses like Ulcerative Colitis, Varughese engages in constant negotiations with her body. Applying Judith Butler's performativity theory, where she claims that "Identity is performatively constituted" (25), Varughese's experiences with illness, her daily routines, medical treatments, and coping mechanisms become repetitive performances that contribute to the ongoing construction of her identity. As Butler's theory suggests, Varughese, through these repeated performances, serves to reinforce and authenticate her sense of self/identity in the context of her health struggles. Varughese elucidates trivial things, enabling the doctors and caregivers to know her arduous life better. She had diarrhoea and itchininess of the skin from her childhood, and her body adjusted to it as she grew up. ". . . my body is used to it, that I can carry on as usual" (Varughese 208). She tried everything: Ayurvedic medicines, homoeopathy, and others. As a person with long-standing Ulcerative Colitis, she underwent a liver

transplant at a young age. Varughese remained and continues to remain a strong woman throughout her life. It might be because she bloomed out of a family that pours incessant love and affection. She was at the “top of mind of everyone” (Varughese 172). Her younger brother, Appu, was prepared to donate a portion of his liver for her survival, which is one of many instances that reflects the caring nature of her family. She never felt depressed as she had a supportive family to rely on, which gave her immense power to handle everything with great ease. Another feature of any journey into and out of illness is the tiring four-letter word 'WAIT'. This word never diminishes. Though she loses hope, she never gives up. The nine-month wait in London for a cadaver organ serves as a profound testament to her firm belief and resilience. Furthermore, the author's unwavering faith in herself is evident, as she articulates, “I find faith a strength that arises out of my weakness” (Varughese 185).

According to Arthur Kleinman, “the meanings of chronic illness are created by the sick person and his or her circle to make over a wild, disordered natural occurrence into a more or less domesticated, mythologized, ritually controlled, therefore cultural experience” (48). By narrating, Varughese is not merely reflecting her experience of illness. Instead, she gives coherence, symbolism and meaning to what might otherwise have been a chaotic experience. Varughese initially embarked on her writing journey with the intention of creating a personal record of her illness for her daughter, Aditi, and her book has remarkably evolved into an inspiring chronicle that resonates with women confronting various health challenges. Diverging from conventional illness narratives, Varughese's storytelling approach is marked by its uniqueness and a light-hearted tone, effectively weaving the tapestry of her life and her enduring battle with illness. Her narrative strikes a harmonious balance as she skillfully interlaces different characters and events into her life. Through this artistic fusion, she endeavours to rescue herself from the dehumanizing clutches of the medical world, successfully reclaiming her individual identity and personal agency. Devoid of melancholy, her prose manifests her will to survive. This is encapsulated in her concluding words, “To decide to be happy” (Varughese 248). By giving voice to her lifelong suffering, she is elevating herself. Therefore, she actively contributes to the expression and construction of her identity. The second book taken for analysis is *Not in the Pink* (2014), in which visual artist Tina Martel, who gets diagnosed with Stage Two B Breast Cancer, decides to document every phase of her illness through a pictorial memoir. As her treatment progressed, she compiled a set of sketchbooks, photographs, paintings and videos that brought together a stream of images that represented her shock, pain, frustration and coming to terms with her ill body. *Not in the Pink* is a graphic narrative that breaks the conventional layout of an autobiography or memoir as it predominantly consists of paintings and sketches embedded with writings that reflect the journey the afflicted's body had to undergo during the span of illness. As a visual artist, she plays with the medium and the medium plays with her perceptions, creating a fluid and enchanting experience.

The narrative begins with a pencil sketch of two long legs with torn pants and artist like pointed shoes. The page also contains a professional camera, some spilt paint and a dull coloured collage of some pastel colours and drawings of flowers enmeshed into the

background. The page shows the reader a vivid picture of an artist's normal life, before the diagnosis. The only phrase typed and foregrounded on the initial page is the phrase "the artist" (Martel) which suggests that the protagonist of the narrative to be an artist. But then, the following page has just the picture of a female leg with black boots and the words typed "the diagnosis" (Martel). The pale brown and skin coloured texture of the page suggests the image of a living body/skin/plain surface of prognosis which is suddenly disrupted by the words "the diagnosis" (Martel). The next page eventually follows with the announcement of the statement "you have cancer" (Martel) and the doctor's proclamation of Martel's biopsy result and being diagnosed as having Stage Two B Breast Cancer. At first, she was not able to cope with it, she says "I have split myself into two people, one has cancer. One is here in this room. I can't reconcile the two versions" (Martel).

The body, in an illness narrative, is the sole agency for the illness to spread into a mental and physical space. Much before the artist realized it, the illness spread into her body, and now the question arises, 'why me?' Every single body facing illness undergoes this 'why me?' phase as it is a transition from prognosis to diagnosis to accepting the truth. Martel, too, shares the news with her husband and wonders why her body had to go through this illness. Martel testified that the lump she found in her breast was different as it ached in the middle of the night, and she could somehow sense that it was not an ordinary one. 'Pain' becomes a constant companion to the afflicted body. The body tends to adapt or somewhat adjust itself to the pain. The afflicted's tolerance of pain levels up, and their body works with the pain each time, setting a new milestone. Right from taking samples for biopsies to surgeries and chemotherapies, anything that remains constant is pain. The body is tampered with by external devices and instruments like needles, blades, etc. The body gets divided neatly into two categories – 'body' before diagnosis and 'body' after diagnosis. It gathers all strength and conviction to endure pain, failure, and ambiguity, but in the end, it is easily turned down as the 'weak' and 'sick' body.

In the work "Chronic Illness as Biographical Disruption," Michael Bury argues that illness can be viewed as a form of "biographical disruption" (167). When considering Martel's situation, the impact of illness is not perceived as a complete rupture or break in the individual's life story; instead, it serves as an opportunity for the emergence of a fresh, redefined identity. This newly articulated identity within the patient memoir is believed to have its roots in the person's pre-illness self. Martel's illness narrative mentioned here is broken down not into chapters but into chunks of experiences wherein the beginning of the narrative is named "the artist" (Martel). This section particularly hints at the 'prognosis' phase of her journey into cancer, "diagnosis," and "surgery" (Martel) are the second and third sections of the text wherein she places on record the shock and the pain that she had to endure physically and mentally. She experienced terrible side effects from chemotherapy and radiation, like "mouth sores, haemorrhoids, nausea, bone-crushing fatigue, and peeling/burning skin" (Martel). She presents her journey through cancer in a profoundly humorous and sarcastic way, and it is evident as she compares her radiation peel to a bad sunburn at Chernobyl and also when she humorously calls her breast as "Frankenbreast" (Martel) after the surgery. She expresses

gratitude to her beloved husband, Doug, as well as her family and friends for their support.

As witnessed in Varughese's story, Martel too patiently waits for diagnosis/reports/tests/results. Most of the time, the illness narrative shows the readers instances where the mind and body lose hope as waiting slows down the pace of the entire world of the afflicted. 'Patience' and 'tolerance' are the two essentially important traits that the patient requires in order to pull oneself through the illness. The written/drawn/ photographed illness narratives thus grow out as ensembles of references between body, self and society that are configured in time. By plotting images of her days with breast cancer, Martel is expressing her frustration, anxieties and worries. Her life revolved around "acupuncture, infusions, oncology appointments, treatments, sleep, nap, walk, sleep, yoga ... rinse, repeat..." (Martel). As a woman living with breast cancer, Martel found that the medical community did not provide her with the guidance and support she needed. To them, she was just one of the many individuals dealing with this increasingly common chronic illness. However, she embarked on a journey to explore all available treatment options, seeking answers to her questions and ultimately making informed choices for her well-being. Through her detailed documentation, spanning from diagnosis to recovery, she is trying to create awareness as well as empower numerous women about breast cancer. For Martel, her disease has come as a theme in artistic ventures. In the end, she surpasses all the odds and fights against cancer. Thus, Martel's memoir contributes to the cultural and collective memories of illness. In the context of breast cancer, the book delves into personal and collective memories related to illness, treatment, and recovery. Martel's experiences, as pictured in her narrative, become part of a broader cultural understanding of living with chronic illness, undergoing medical procedures, and confronting mortality. Her story contributes to the collective memory of those who have faced similar challenges.

As propounded by various illness narrative theorists, by sharing their stories, women like Anna Varughese and Tina Martel reclaim their voices in the face of medical challenges. Ulcerative Colitis and Breast Cancer, the respective illness condition of Varughese and Martel, have disrupted their bodily autonomy. Even though illnesses imprison our bodies, deranging the physical, mental and psychological metabolism, Varughese and Martel have succeeded in envisioning their diseased condition in a productive, inspirational and artistic manner. By engaging in a pathographic detour, they have regained their bodily autonomy, which was snatched away by respective illnesses. They have released their bodies from the cuffs of illness by subjecting them to medical treatments. However, what truly liberated their bodies was their involvement in the performance of pathographic documentation. By narrating the tale of their health conditions fraught with malady and their survival story, they have re-established the sovereignty over their body in a private as well as public domain. These autopathographies have reinstated the body, which is our hold of the world and a sketch of our being.

## Conclusion

In both these autopathographies, either through words or images, these women find ways to cope with the problems of their illnesses. It is their individuality, surroundings and circumstances that enable them to adapt, embrace or shirk themselves from the complications of illness. While the recording of an experience of illness is not a new phenomenon, as Michael Bury has observed, it is only recently, with the rise in chronic illnesses and the lengthening of human life facilitated by advancements in medical science, that stories about the individual's experience and examination of illness became more prevalent. Both memoirs are a fine example of autopathography that foregrounds nuanced experiences of illness and calls for a humanistic understanding of illness, dismantling the stereotypical and lending an emancipatory bend. Thus, pathographies/ autopathographies play a crucial role in assisting both the afflicted as well as the readers to have a broader understanding of health, identity, and the challenges women face in navigating the complex landscape of healthcare. It has become common for individuals, especially women grappling with illness, to become the subjects of life stories as they look to narratives as a way of reflecting, interpreting their experiences and, ultimately, healing.

Furthermore, by highlighting the subjective dimensions of illness, including the emotional, psychological, and social aspects that are integral to the overall illness experience, these narratives hold significance in the medical realm, as they encourage healthcare professionals, caregivers, and medical practitioners, to pay heed to, respect, and comprehend the narratives of those who are suffering. Understanding the patient's story is not only crucial for diagnosis and treatment but also for building trust and facilitating effective communication between healthcare providers and patients. These accounts shed light on the interplay between literary, popular, and medical narratives, enriching the discourse around illness and their impact on shaping the collective experience of illness contributing to a more inclusive and empathetic healthcare landscape. To conclude, pathographies/autopathographies, whether conveyed through words or visuals, offer a valuable outlet for individuals to cope with the intricacies of their health challenges and contribute to the broader understanding of illness in contemporary society.

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# Gendered Narratives of the Partition and Pandemic: A Study of the Second Sex in Crises

Kavya Prasad S\*

## *Abstract*

Vulnerability and sustainability in crises are consistently gendered, often labelled as 'feminine', while masculinity remains unquestioned over time. Simone de Beauvoir's coinage of the term 'second sex' addresses women's plight of being used, abused and disused and this paper is a deconstruction of gendered narratives and the portrayal of women during and after catastrophes. Two polarised disasters- the Partition and Pandemic, where feminine lives assert a prominent role are explored in this study. Their insecurities and their potentialities during these two critical upheavals and reinstating the power of women form the groundwork for this paper. Analysing narratives from personal to collective representations, the paper employs the crisis as a 'chronotope' to position the female amidst the chaos. This work on gender contemplates two contexts, 76 years apart and still finds narratives of misrepresentation, negligence, or overstated emphasis on female capabilities as an otherwise impossible accomplishment. Chosen for analysis are Khadija Mastur's *Women's Courtyard* and Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*, narratives that depict women from distinctive perspectives.

**Keywords:** gender narratives, feminism, crises, pandemic, partition, space, temporality, Khadija Mastur, The Woman's Courtyard, chronotope.

## **Introduction**

In an era marked by the indiscriminate characterization of any assertion advocated by a female individual as 'feministic', such deployments of the term demote the intrinsic meaning encapsulated in its etymology, devolving it into a cliché. Etymologically grounded in the advocacy for female equality as a fundamental right within the societal sphere, feminism is an endeavour to secure a rightful societal position on merit rather than being bestowed as a benevolence by the prevailing patriarchal milieu. Misinterpretation and dilution of the core ideology of feminism is evident in the contemporary discourse and in this context, a scholarly investigation into the realm of feminist and gender-based research is a commendable effort given all the multifaceted nature of challenges and constraints at hand. An idea that was brought up around the third century in Rome when women protested laws that contested them from using expensive goods to its development as a subgenre and to a leitmotif for ages, feminism as a concept has been understood, misunderstood, and manifested in disparate ways. The main aspect is the correspondence of any gendered study or indagation to feminism, which in its own right proves the exclusive attitude towards the feminine. This always creates an impression of women as aliens in a world created for men by men. An unbiased acknowledgement of both masculine and feminine attributes, devoid of prejudice, is essential to foster an environment of progress and security. This paper adopts a women-centric approach to illuminate the female experience, crucial for a society that still stigmatizes or downplays women-centric



topics.

Mary Wollstonecraft, an early feminist writer, talks about women and gender inequality emphasising that women may perform diverse duties, but the principle guiding them should be the same as men (Wollstonecraft 203), forming the basis of any feministic ideology. From equal rights to women's suffrage movements, this ideology has evolved globally, but the resistance underscores the enduring social mindset that remains challenging. The outset of the fourth wave of feminism in 2012 with the Nirbhaya case in India is fighting numerous cases of violence and brutality against women to date. Denying any progress has occurred may seem scathing. Opportunities and women's voices are being heard and noticed, but the significance and substantiality of these changes for women are often over emphasised. This attitude needs a major shift for real progression to happen. This paper is a study of women and the irr representations during times of crisis. The researcher focuses on the individual and cultural identities of women, the spaces they occupy and their portrayal and misrepresentation in critical situations along with the memory of women in narratives of crisis.

### **Why Partition and Pandemic?**

In the post-pandemic era, probing into a historical catastrophe that took place 76 years ago and exploring the same in a contemporary outlook must be abnormal. The Partition of India, 1947 which was a planned but abrupt event almost resonated with a country in war. The pandemic of Covid-19 was a highly unexpected health crisis that enkindled forceful shutdowns, fighting and fear of the novel coronavirus, seeing the world and its people helpless, witnessing deaths of people irrespective of age, isolation, breakdowns, starvations, and poverty in every level of the society. The Kolkata Partition Museum Trust conducted an exhibition titled, *Legacy of Loss: Perspective on the Partition of Bengal* that offered a contemporary take on Partition and as stated by Rituparna Roy, “it has ironically developed a deeper resonance during this pandemic” (Ghosh). She continued to state the various aspects that connect the pandemic to the partition thereby asserting the correspondence of the two distinct yet comparable catastrophes: “the suddenness of the event; the sheer contingency of the times; the government inability to tackle the crisis; forced migrations and destitution and above all, the overwhelming sense of pain and loss as people die in their millions, with their corpses once again filling up rivers” (Ghosh). Crisis at an individualistic and societal stratum is studied with reference to time and space and the memories that correlate forthwith. A catastrophe can be conceptualised as a 'chronotope' as stated by Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin and can be studied in the context of the pandemic by analysing the possibility of perceiving the pandemic as a 'crisis chronotope' (Parui and Raj 1431). The concept of the chronotope is simultaneously being worked on both the pandemic and the partition to study how time and spaces in such disastrous and difficult times were turning into sites of crisis and the representation of the same through narratives. Bakhtin defines the idea of “chronotope” as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial

relationships that are artistically expressed in literary narratives” (Bakhtin, *Forms* 15).

Unlike previous theories that treated space and time as separate entities, Bakhtin proposes an integrated perspective where temporality and spatiality coexist. This concept facilitates the examination of physical spaces within relevant temporal contexts, emphasising the interdependence of space and time in character analysis. In this study, the chronotope is employed as a literary technique to investigate the gendered perspective of women's physical and mental spaces. Both partition and pandemic narratives highlight the significance of space and time, emphasising how specific geographical places delineate and impose boundaries on femininity. We must acknowledge that time progresses differently for different individuals, that while time had been “racing across on the rollerblades for some, for others, it seemed to have come to a grinding halt” (Kannan). Familiar spaces had transformed into crisis sites, affecting temporality within the same household, visibly bringing women's lives to a standstill. Various narratives interlink time and space, with the crisis/threshold chronotope, fundamental chronotope, and the Flaubertian idea of the time loop emerging prominently in works focusing on women's lives during the Partition and pandemic. Gender is best understood through spatial representations, emphasising vulnerabilities and potentialities in both mental and physical spaces.

Taking a feminist standpoint in reading partition novels, the social experience is interwoven into the personal experiences and this acts as a motif in evaluating the influence the partition has on the characters presented. The prominence of the kitchen space and the space of the courtyard and the household, in general, is an important narrative technique that the writers had implemented in picturing the lives of women stuck within the inner walls as a direct effect of the patriarchy-bound society they live in. The setting of certain women narratives revolves around such household spaces even when they bring to light the events of the outside world through the male members of the family or conversations that happen within the household. In the novel, *The Women's Courtyard*, Khadija Mastur, one of the Bronte sisters of Urdu literature establishes as its setting the courtyard of all the houses the protagonist has resided. Translator Daisy Rockwell exclaims that “limiting the narrative and dialogue to the courtyard is a formal feminist experiment on the part of the author” (Rockwell 378). However, in the novel male voices do play a significant role and the household setting does not possibly erase men and their voices. They are strong elements in the narrative as in any social setting and promote the entitlement of the feminine in the family and society. Critics came up with the question of how women's lives could be studied without the involvement of male dialogues and activities. The novel narrated in the backdrop of the Indian independence, the Partition, rallies, and protests can deviate from the purpose of foregrounding women's voices if the narration had to follow men outside the doors or even the men's talk in the sitting room, says Ms. Rockwell (Rockwell 377-78).

Pandemic narratives likewise are accounts of the individual, social, and psychological dynamics of communities that combated any health crisis universally.

Beyond the realm of storytelling, these archives are a navigation into the reception and response to a real-world crisis. The pandemic disease “is a motif by which” writers “demonstrate the human condition as subsumed to the force of nature” (Lupton). Pandemics like the Partition discuss tragic lives, the intricacies, and the indeterminacy of the crisis. The existential dilemma of man is pitched for deliberation, letting the readers question life's meaning.

Unlike earlier pandemic narratives, like Albert Camus's *The Plague* and Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*, which vividly portray horrifying deaths, Covid-19 narratives take a subtler approach. Recent narratives like Ian McEwan's *Lessons*, Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*, Anne Tylers' *French Braid*, Sarah Moss's *The Fell*, Roddy Doyle's *Life without Children*, Gary Shteyngart's *Our Country Friends*, and Michael Cunningham's *Day* have all explored the dark, claustrophobic, and isolated pandemic. Shobha De's *Lockdown Liaisons*, Udayan Mukherjee's *Essential Items*, Juhi Jaisinghani's *Unlocking the Lockdown Stories*, and Sudeep Nagarkar's *Can't Quarantine Our Love*, not only convey the loss and despair in human relationships but also shed light on marginalised communities and their challenging lives during lockdowns. These stories, like others, capture the fear and uncertainty of life during the pandemic and address the nuanced intersections of women and sexuality amid difficult times. Life of men and women in despair during lockdowns is explored highlighting the difficulty individuals and communities face in grappling with a deadly infectious disease, changes in everyday life and perceptions of risk, the shallowness and depth of relationships and the political contexts shaping medical and public health responses (or lack thereof). (Lupton)

These pandemic discourses address the health crisis while also exploring the "shadow pandemic" acknowledged by the United Nations. The UN, in its 2021 report, likened the surge in global domestic violence cases (25 to 33 percent) to a pandemic (Mineo). Writers discuss gender-based violence exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, but the term "pandemic" may not aptly capture the longstanding nature of this global issue, however, its pervasiveness justifies it. The term is open to interpretations and assumptions as to whether it suggests the permanent existence of the shadow or how gender-based violence is concealed or overshadowed. These narratives focus on the family sphere, foregrounding everyday realities rather than offering a broad overview. The household's chronotope is significant, emphasising female insecurities both at home and work and the shadowed oppression in society and the household. Despite the limited fiction on the Covid era, notable literary narratives, like Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*, a futuristic post-apocalyptic narrative, envisions and imaginatively reverses the male-dominant universe through a feminist lens (Xausa 24), revealing and intensifying gender disparities. The narrative serves as a cautionary tale about the unsettling time and space thrust upon humanity by the pandemic.

### **The Chronotope of the Household**

The narratives of crisis, particularly discussing a war-like disturbance and a health

calamity find themselves in a threshold where the historical time and biographical time are intertwined with each other. For women writers like Mastur, Attia Hosain, Veera Hiranandani and many others the courtyard or the *angan*, the kitchen or the household altogether are the spaces of intersections of the spatial and temporal sequences. But apart from an intersection, time was mostly a cyclical representation of the lives of the women within these feminine spaces. It corresponds to what Gustave Flaubert opines in his *Madame Bovary* and what happens in most nineteenth-century novels. However, in this context, external events are unfolding, viciously impacting the lives within the household. Meanwhile, the experiences of women themselves are characterized as mere 'repetition'. Here there are no events, only 'doings' that constantly repeat themselves (Bakhtin, *Forms* 20). Partition and Pandemic narratives represent the threshold a catastrophe evokes and they act as a crisis chronotope that emblemizes, "crises and breaks in life [...] decisions that determine the whole life of a man" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 248). Chronotopes, in agreement with Rachel Falconer, depict the temporal and spatial frameworks that facilitate characters to reside and engage in specific behaviours (qtd. in Krogstad). In these women's narratives, the household acts as the space of action. The characters unfold their entire lives within this space and they metaphorically represent and symbolize the claustrophobic lives led by the women in the Indian household during the times of crisis. Lisa Lau states that literature on South Asian women emphasises the pre-eminence of home in their lives: "their writings frequently include detailed descriptions of the interior spaces of the home, the negotiation of roles and hierarchies, and the emotional lives played out against the background of the bedroom and kitchen" (Lau 1098).

Khadija Mastur has titled her novel *The Women's Courtyard* to portray the significance of the space and its different approach to the typical partition narratives of violence, rapes, and abductions. The narrative is a tale of liberation and freedom from the suffocating space of one's family. It is a deliverance of female lives depicted through Aliya who escapes the emotional clutches of patriarchy, paving for a more peaceful and rightful existence. Transcending traumatic experiences, the novel is a reminder of the upheaval of patriarchal norms and the empowerment of women precipitated by migration like that of the Partition (Rockwell 382). The novel is a unique narrative that is a powerful and true representation of women who are doomed to be within the household and run the family receiving total neglect from the husbands, brothers or any male member of the household solely engrossed in politics. The character of Aliya's Amma is an anecdote of women who perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and live with them and impose them on others as well. Aliya herself comments, "she doesn't have a heart in her breast, just a stone" (Mastur 355). While Amma and her mother-in-law represent the brutally cold-hearted women of the society who work desperately to keep the class structure and traditions in place, even ready to kill their children for ruining the family's honour, the uncle's wife is a symbol of all the suffering and tolerance, who spent her entire life mourning the ill fate of her family and the heedlessness of her husband and sons. Chammi on the other hand was the disowned woman, looked down upon by the family. She unlike other women had

her political stances against her uncle but she again ended up as a typical woman of the system- married to some older man only to suffer and get divorced after a baby when she refused to move to Pakistan after the Partition. Women's lives as stated by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* are always represented with reference to men and not with reference to her. She is the incidental, the “inessential” (212). He is the subject, she is the “absolute other” (212). In the novel *The Tiger Flu*, Larissa Lai presents to the reader women protagonists and characters in a dystopian world which can be contextualised to the coronavirus pandemic and whereby accentuate the unacknowledged gender roles that are imposed on women during times of crisis. Chiara Xausa in the article titled, “*Feminist Intersectional Perspectives on Pandemic*” discusses the character Charlotte, who working on the frontline additionally shoulders the responsibility of taking care of the unwell family members while also managing the provision and preparation of food for the family. This kind of unpaid work has always been unnoticed and with the pandemic, “families were burdened with more domestic and childcare tasks and studies show an unequal distribution of labour between men and women, consistently to women's detriment” (Reich-Steibert et al. 475). Larissa describes the woman and her appearance as imagery to portray her unrewarded hardships when she writes: “Charlotte looks exhausted. Although she's not yet forty, her dull black hair is streaked with white, and dark pockets of loose skin sag beneath her eyes. She's the only family member who still has the job, as a night nurse at a nearby hospice, and she looks after the whole family on top of that” (Lai, 26).

### **A Contemporary Interpretation of Crisis**

The pandemic era purports to be a crucial epoch for all human beings and as stated earlier, situations of vulnerabilities and sustainability are always gendered. Researches prove that women suffer physically, mentally, emotionally, and economically during the pandemic. A women-centric study of the partition coherently adheres to the pandemic circumstances and positionality of women in the Indian household context. In any state of crisis, women are bound to care work roles which include nursing, elderly care, child care, food service and domestic labour. Confinement in the home has rendered the double burden of everyday domestic labour into an untenable situation (*Feminist Response* 1-2). Women are burdened with all these tasks along with office work in cases of working women. In India, a significant proportion of all healthcare workers are women and they form 80 per cent of the nurses and midwives. But the bias truly happens with the understanding that women are least considered or largely absent in the executive or administrative positions in the health sector, according to records (*Your Questions* 1). Wage inequality and the burden of unpaid service have pushed more women out of employment into poverty. The pandemic women and the women during the partition have similarities in their household spaces and significantly insignificant positions within the family. Studies explain the quandary of working women, stating the loss of spaces and strict boundaries considering that personal spaces turned out to be office

cubicles during the lockdowns with the work-from-home culture thereby affecting both professional and personal responsibilities (Chauhan 396). Women in the families are also subject to grappling gender-based violence due to forced confinements during lockdowns. “As much as a third of married women in India have reported experiencing spousal, physical or emotional violence” (Lal). Parallely studying the partition through Mastur's novel, we see how Aliya gets physically and emotionally assaulted by her male cousin in the name of love. Chammi is emotionally hurt by her unrequited love and ends up in an unhappy marriage. Betrayal and emotional violence by the family led to Tehmina's death. Kusum's story of love, abandonment, and death is also a representation of emotional trauma faced by women in the name of love and marriage. The elevated risk of intimate-partner violence is associated with the constrained mobility of Indian women, rendering them unable to exit their residences, thereby potentially enabling the perpetrators who tend to be men in the closest circles or even within the household. Statistical and narratorial evidence proves the same in cases of both the Partition and the Pandemic. Throughout the novel, we also find the negligence of men about their family's financial needs as much as moral support. They act more obliged to their nation, religion, and party than their mothers, wives, and sisters. *The Tiger Flu* meanwhile discusses “indeterminacy, precarity and vulnerability to others as the very conditions of our time.” (Tsing 2) and as a contemporary take on any form of crisis, it is essential that we adapt to the presence of economic decline, eco-catastrophes, and the possibility of future pandemics (ibid.). Xausa's approach to ecological disruptions can be utilized here to reconceptualise the pandemics in a more positive outlook by “dancing with disaster”, a usage by environmental literary scholar Kate Rigby. It is a suggestion to comprehend the “pandemic not as a war but an opportunity to expose structural inequalities, build and sustain new alliances and intersectional rationalities and claim a future that does acknowledge the current rupture” (Xausa 31).

## Conclusion

The women folk and the spaces of the household intend to picturise the discrimination and docility of the so-called second sex since generations. The adversities of the Partition and the Pandemic can be conceptualised as a 'crisis chronotope' whereby time and space are homogenised to foreground the positionality of the characters and the female in particular. The narrative uses this concept in the study of women's lives which are seldom discussed in popular narratives. Women are often portrayed as family material and no narrative discusses women as subjects of importance and value. The chosen novels provide a different outlook on women through the liberation of a protagonist from the clutches of marriage, an intended symbol of patriarchy in our society while the other breaks the stereotypical male as lone warriors by shifting the narrative to women as survivors and men flushed out in pandemic. Similarly, the real-world pandemic in every sense saw women as frontline warriors and prime ministers tackling the crisis with strong willpower, attitude, and determination. More narratives of such nature and portrayal of such spaces must be

the prominent gendered narrative in the future. It is high time that narratives that are neither progress tales nor ruined, tragic narrations evolve to enforce a ray of hope to human lives and lend meaning to survival.

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## Kamiriithu Theatre and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Anti-colonial Resistance: A Critical Perspective

Dr. Sandeep Kaur Brar\*

### *Abstract*

The Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of the foremost African writers known for raising voice against colonial legacy. Ngugi's resistance against the hegemonic colonial legacy is grounded upon the direct battle against colonial language. This paper seeks to critically engage with this kind of resistance and tends to explore Ngugi's language politics along with the politics of performance space at Kamiriithu Theatre, which eventually led to the exile of this celebrated author. Simultaneously, this paper attempts to highlight the significance of Kamiriithu theatre in Kenyan anti-colonial resistance. Like Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal, Ngugi adopts theatre to educate the people in a cultural and political sense. His commitment to use African languages is both a cultural pride and ideological demand for a theatre that seeks to educate the people for radical change. Ngugi's involvement in the Kamiriithu Community Theatre project seems to be a noteworthy instance of how an artist can become an active agency of social transformation. The core concern of this paper is to critically evaluate the sustainability of Ngugi's reliance on the power of art against the state or "the culture of silence." An attempt will also be made to celebrate Ngugi's power of the pen in creating "an empty space" in which humanity's dreams of freedom can be realised.

**Keywords:** Art, Epic Theatre, Kamiriithu Theatre, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, State, Theatre of Oppressed

### **Introduction: Art is at war with the State**

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's discourse of dramaturgy is an initiative to raise the awareness of Africans about the subjugation of their cultures by imperial powers and the oppression of the masses by the ruling neo-colonial elite. Ngugi employs the power of art not in negative terms, but as a positive force to act for the betterment of African society. At Kamiriithu theatre, Ngugi tries to explore the complex relationship between art and the state, and concludes that the nature of the state and the art are inherently at odds with each other. His assertion that "art is in war with the state" is a reflection of his belief that the nature of art and literature is inherently political. Ngugi's perspective aligns with the idea that art can be employed as a form of resistance against oppressive state structures. Throughout history, artists and writers have used their works to challenge authority, critique government policies, and expose social injustices. Ngugi further emphasizes that art is not just a passive reflection of society but an active force that can shape and influence it. By presenting alternative narratives and perspectives, art can challenge the state's official discourse and policies. In Kenya, he believes that the postcolonial state constantly interferes with the performance space of the artist and wants the artist to work according to its needs. In *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, Ngugi begins his argument with a quote from Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*, which reads "I can take any empty space and

call it a bare stage” (39). However, Ngugi questions the emptiness of space and argues that there is no bare space in this world. Every empty space has some kind of historical, political, or social connection with other spaces. Due to its relationship with internal and external factors, this performance space “becomes a magnetic field of tensions and conflicts” (41). Artists in Africa are politically independent, but not liberated. They are restrained by the various agencies of the state, and their counter discursive practices are often denied any free space.

Despite being harassed by Danial Arap Moi's repressive government, Ngugi rejects authoritarianism in all of its ingrained forms. In *Penpoints*, Ngugi talks about performance in general and the conflict between art and the state over the performance space in particular. He calls this constant ongoing war between the state and art over “the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state” as “enactments of power” (38). Under these enactments of power, the state acts as a repressive machine like it was during the colonial era and tries to target the performance space of the artist.

In independent Kenya, the state tries to tame art by banning the works of artists who do not cooperate with the authorities. Artists, playwrights, and political activists are “crippled by the state” (Ngugi *Penpoints* 1). As a result, many writers are detained or exiled. The state attempts to constrain the power of art to represent reality. In response to the African scenario, Nawal el Sa'adawi suggests that pen and paper are “utterly forbidden” here (49). Detaining writers, confiscating literature, and banning theatrical performances are all forms of censorship that are politically motivated. Ngugi is involved in a struggle for a “democratic space”, a space that promotes “creativity and self-expression” (*Penpoints* 6). He is aware that the people of Africa are confined and cannot assert themselves freely. Their cultural and psychic spaces are shrunken. Their cultures and languages are being destroyed. However, people do not have the power to alter their social environment. Despite the smothering circumstances, Ngugi hopes that art can help people assert their space.

Ngugi firmly believes in the power of art to liberate people. Hence, his slogan is: “Where the state silences, art should give voice to silence” (*Penpoints* 129). He contends that art and politics are inextricably linked and interdependent. Art is more potent as an ally of the powerless than as an ally of repression because its nature is freedom, while the state's nature is to restrict and regulate freedom (*Penpoints* 33). This illustrates how art can be a powerful force in challenging authority, amplifying marginalised voices, and effecting change.

### **Ngugi's Involvement with Kamiriithu Theatre: A Homecoming**

Ngugi believes that “drama is closer to the dialectics of life than poetry and fiction” as it incorporates the conflicting social forces that shape human existence (*Penpoints* 54). The theatre, he believes, is a platform for cultural, social, and political utterances that have the potential to change society. He claims that theatre can break down barriers between artistic production and reception, as well as transform the audience into agents of social change. By concentrating on African traditions, culture, music,

dance, storytelling and mime, Ngugi aims to revive Kenyan theatre and intends to use it to fight against imperialism and neo-colonialism. Simon Gikandi aptly argues that Ngugi's plays “provide the space in which he can fulfil his dream of turning artistic production into a communal enterprise” (Ngugi 161).

His experiences at Kamiriithu have made him realise the power of people and language in initiating social and political changes. He understands the political significance of theatre not only in its performance but also in its content, language, and form. These concerns prompted Ngugi's involvement with the Kamiriithu Community Education and Culture Centre. Ngugi believes that “Kamiriithu was not an aberration, but an attempt at reconnection with the broken roots of African civilization and its traditions of theatre” (*Decolonising* 42). He mentions that it was Kamiriithu that forced him to return to Gikuyu. He identifies it as “an epistemological break” with his past. About his dilemma of language choice, Ngugi remarks, “the question of audience settled the problem of language choice, and the language choice settled the question of audience” (44). Ngugi's shift to writing in Gikuyu aligns him with the masses, distancing him from the African and international elite. Nicholas Brown argues that Ngugi's choice of language in his play does not simply “address” the Gikuyu people, but rather creates new social relationships between intellectuals, peasants, proletarians, and bourgeois within the Kamiriithu collective. Composing in Gikuyu enables these different groups to come together and interact in a way that was not possible before. Brown's assertion highlights the power of language to facilitate social change and promote inclusivity (62).

According to Simon Gikandi, the performance of Ngugi's first play *Ngaahika Ndeena* (*I Will Marry When I Want*) brought radical changes in his writing career as it enabled him to “overcome the boundary separating him from his audience and his text from its context” (Ngugi 161). This play is based on Kenyan history and tells the story of Kenyans' struggles to reclaim their land, which was taken away “by conquest, unequal treaties or by the genocide of the part of population” (Ngugi, *Decolonising* 44). The play was written in the language of the people. The actors of the Kamiriithu were not professionals but taken from real life. They had actually participated in the Mau Mau rebellion. Ngugi says that “the one who made imitation guns for the play at Kamiriithu was the very person who used to make actual guns for the Mau Mau guerrillas in the fifty” (55). It seems that the participants of Mau Mau have expressed their memories through this play. The dialogues presented in the play accurately depict their real experiences, history, and traumas during the state of emergency. The play aims to expose the inequalities and injustices inflicted on Kenyan society. It argues that peasants and workers have gained the least since independence, and their situation has not improved as they continue to suffer in neo-colonial Africa. Sometimes, the play poses serious questions to the neo-colonial governments, such as these:

To have factories and even big industries  
Is good, very good;  
It is a means of developing the country.  
The question is this: who owns the industries?

Whose children gain from the industries? (Ngugi, *Decolonising* 54)

Through this play, Ngugi aims to expose the exploitation of the common masses at the hands of the local elite. This class is so obsessed with its self-enrichment that it cannot see the needs of the poor. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon points out that the national bourgeoisie of the newly independent nations “is not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labour; it is completely canalised into activities of the intermediary type” (120). In Fanon's words, “the national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European settlement” and has played the role of “intermediary” in a most dignified manner (122). Their primary motive is to “replace the foreigner” and occupy top positions (127). Ngugi boldly asserts that this class is nothing but a caricature of the Western bourgeoisie, corrupt, and lacking in creativity. He further contends that they are merely “hired policemen of Western interests” (*Barrel* 85). This class, “created within the cultural womb of imperialism,” has the mentality of the former masters (*Moving* 84-85). It has facilitated a close relationship with its former colonial powers, providing them with a comfortable environment. This parasitic relationship between the bourgeoisie and colonial powers has resulted in the exploitation, oppression, and denigration of newly independent nations like Kenya. Ngugi refers to this independence as “independence with a question mark” because it has only produced a “new class of rulers” (*Moving* 65). Through his plays, Ngugi attempts to pen down the experiences of the workers and the peasants at the hands of these elites and writes:

The owners of these companies are real scorpions  
They know three things only:  
To oppress workers,  
To take away their rights  
And to suck their blood. (*I will*, 33).

Ngugi strongly condemns imperialism as it results in economic inequalities and social injustices in society. Due to this monstrous system, peasants are unable to receive their fair share and suffer at the hands of greedy oppressive forces that exploit them. Ngugi employs his theatre as a weapon to educate the masses and bring their oppression to the forefront. Through his plays, he aims to liberate the oppressed people and encourage them for social change. Ngugi shares the same views as Augusto Boal on theatre. Boal, the founder of “the theatre of the Oppressed,” insists that theatre is meant to help the oppressed and prepare them for revolution. Boal clarifies that the theatre “itself is not revolutionary, instead a rehearsal of revolution.” In the theatre of the oppressed, Boal uses techniques that can promote social and political change. Boal's approach to theatre invites the audience to participate in the action taking place on stage rather than remaining passive observers. Inspired by Bertolt Brecht's concept of “epic theatre,” Boal's theory represents an advanced stage of Brechtian theatre. While Brecht sought to create critical awareness in the audience using alienation techniques, Boal aims to demolish the barrier between actors and spectators by allowing the audience to suggest different options for the actors. This way, Boal seeks to free his spectators and make them an integral part of the performance.

Boal suggests, "If the oppressed himself performs an action, this action performed in a theatrical fiction, will allow him to change things in his real life" (*The Cop* 42). Following Boal, Ngugi adopts his techniques to empower the peasants and the workers of Kamiriithu. Both are committed political activists who have used their theatre to voice their opinions and grievances against the rampant exploitation of the masses by the dominant class. At Kamiriithu, the spectators not only watched but also directed and actively participated by providing comments, suggestions, and criticism. The performance of Kamiriithu group proved that Kenyan theatre could thrive beyond the walls of the National Theatre building. They boldly transformed "the empty space" at Kamiriithu into a "seeing place" thus reviving the performance traditions of African theatre "where the theatre was not a physical building but a space in which there were performers/actors and an audience" (Ndigirigi 72). By performing for a primarily "rural audience with low levels of literacy, Kamiriithu also redefined the audience for Kenyan national theatre" (72). Hence, Ngugi's plays challenged colonial legacies, empowered indigenous languages, and promoted social and political awareness. He chose to write in Gikuyu to strengthen the "national patriotic tradition" and foster cultural pride by making African literature more accessible to the local population (*Moving* 44). This groundbreaking move contributed to a broader movement of cultural revival in post-colonial Africa.

### **Razing of Kamiriithu Theatre and Continuation of war through *Mutiiri***

As language and culture are interrelated, the introduction of English has undeniably caused colonial alienation and mental colonisation. Ngugi personally feels this alienation and boldly states that "my opting for English had already marked me as a writer in exile" (*Moving* 107). However, Ngugi found a kind of homecoming through his involvement with Kamiriithu, which helped him in exploring his roots. His life took a drastic turn after the performance of *Ngaahika Ndeena*, as he was detained without trial on December 31, 1977 and imprisoned for his involvement in the Kamiriithu Cultural Community. In his *Detained Dairy*, Ngugi reveals that the state sought to teach him "a lesson in submission, silence and obedience" (xi). The KANU government banned the play, citing that it was inciting class struggle which could pose a threat to public security. This has forced Ngugi to claim that there is no room for Kenyan theatre in Kenya as the Kenyan government is busy promoting foreign theatre on Kenyan soil. Ngugi considers it an attempt to stop the revival of an authentic language of theatre.

During his detention, Ngugi decided to write exclusively in his mother tongue, Gikuyu. He resumed his involvement with the Kamiriithu theatre group after his release. In March 1982, the Kenyan government prohibited all theatrical activities and destroyed the Kamiriithu Committee Education and Cultural Centre with armed police. Ngugi accused the government of following in "the footsteps of its colonial predecessors" (*Decolonising* 59). He labelled the leaders of the KANU party, Jomo Kenyatta and Tom Mboya, as "betrayers" who "concealed compromise under nationalist slogans" (*Barrel*, 14). After the incident, Ngugi left for the United

Kingdom, while Ngugi wa Mirii moved to Zimbabwe. The Kamiriithu Cultural Community had a profound impact on their lives. The Kenyan authorities even changed the name of the centre to Kamiriithu Polytechnic and Adult Literary Centre. The destruction of Ngugi's theatre by the Kenyan state authorities illustrates the war between art and the state. His experiences at Kamiriithu demonstrate how power is vested in the state and its apparatus, including the army, police, detention camps, hospitals, and asylums. These institutions cannot be underestimated in their role in maintaining power in the African context.

Ngugi continued his battle against the English language even in exile. He founded a journal named *Mutiiri* in Gikuyu to promote Gikuyu as a medium of intellectual and literary expression. Simon Gikandi appreciates Ngugi's effort to start a journal in Gikuyu, which demonstrates "Ngugi's need to "Africanize" the practise of producing knowledge within the Western academy and also to "Westernize" Gikuyu discourses on subjects ranging from romance to multiculturalism" ("Travelling" 195). This journal was a continuation of the Kamiriithu project, providing Ngugi with a space to continue his cultural project even in exile. However, Gikandi critiques the concerns of this journal, stating that it is a "forum for representing the cultural disenchantment of a Gikuyu émigré intelligentsia" and not for the peasants and workers of Kamiriithu (195). Gikandi opines:

*Mutiiri* was being driven not so much by the concerns of Kenyan workers and peasants, but by the rhetoric of American identity politics and postcolonial nostalgia. The peasants and workers whom Ngugi had invited into the institutions of cultural production during his Kamiriithu phase seemed to have disappeared in a project produced in their own languages. (195)

Some critics, like Joseph Mbele and Gikandi, argue that Ngugi's emphasis on writing in local languages is misplaced. He errs, as it implies that if literature is not written in one's native language, it cannot bring about a revolution. Mbele acknowledges that Ngugi has emerged as a key advocate of writing in indigenous languages, but points out that Ngugi ignores the poststructuralist view of language (145). This view holds that the meanings of the words are not fixed and language is indeterminate. Mbele argues that writers may not be able to convey their message to readers successfully because of this indeterminacy. He also believes that Ngugi fails to recognise that the reading process is problematic because language is not transparent. While Ngugi believes that effective communication is possible between peasants and workers through native languages, Mbele argues that the reception of language is never unproblematic. He suggests that Ngugi assumes that the Gikuyu masses enjoy his works because they understand the message he intended to communicate. However, readers may misunderstand the texts and appreciate them for personal reasons. Mbele and Mao Tse Tung believe that the upliftment of the masses is possible through the acquisition of foreign languages. They argue that peasants and workers should be encouraged to learn foreign languages to become part of the global world and access knowledge across linguistic barriers. Mbele further argues that Ngugi should look at the question of foreign languages in a "dialectical and forward-looking manner" (147). He argues that even Karl Marx believed that global languages are essential for

revolution and that European languages could be used as a weapon of protest by the masses. However, Ngugi asserts that the use of native languages is essential to resist imperial dominance. He strongly believes that the global spread of English has contributed to the degradation of native languages and their respective cultures and myths. Ngugi is convinced that the existing neo-colonial world, framed by European languages, is “a disaster for people of the world and their cultures” (*Moving* xvi). Therefore, he advocates for “a new, more equitable international economic, political and cultural order within and between nations” to counter the Western-based new world order (xvi).

### Conclusion

It can be concluded that Ngugi attempts to dismantle the imperialist structures by empowering the masses through language. He acknowledges that African masses are marginalised from the political process due to the use of European languages. This empowerment through language can help strengthen the nation's roots and enable the masses to connect with the marginalised groups of the world facing similar issues of neo-colonialism and imperialism. Ngugi's return to his native language has helped him alter the concept of colonial silencing. Kamiriithu Theatre has played a significant role in this alteration. Through community theatre, community members sang about their experiences, exploitation, history, and languages in a loud voice that could be heard by the authorities. Although the state attempted to silence their voices, the community theatre resisted all forms of domination by upholding traditional forms of expression. It seems that Ngugi is saying “yes” in response to the controversial question raised by Gayatri Spivak in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” It can be argued that Ngugi endeavours to give voice to the silenced and attempts to create a counter-hegemonic public sphere in African society. He believes that the struggle of African national languages against European languages is part of a wider historical struggle against imperialism and capitalism. Ngugi's involvement with the Kamiriithu Cultural Centre and publication of the journal *Mutiiri* in Gikuyu demonstrate that he is a language warrior, attempting to join anti-imperialist struggles through native languages. He believes that a culture can be rejuvenated by creatively utilising its language of expression.

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## **Politics of Mothering: A Look into Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning***

**Dr. Pragti Sobti\***

### *Abstract*

One of the significant strategies adopted by hegemonic patriarchal structures to counter the forms of resistance adopted by females is to glorify their reproductive functions. In African literature the dominant trope supporting this discourse is “Mother Africa”. African mother has been presented by male writers as the embodiment of the earth, the nation and the culture. The image of African mother has been idealized, glorified and romanticized in the male oriented literature. But with the passage of time some Black women writers took up the task of reconstructing this stereotyped image and instead bring to surface the real image of a woman who tries to break away from the socially constructed notion of motherhood and to live life to fulfill her own dreams. The present paper will be an attempt to analyze Yvonne Vera's two novels from this point of view.

**Keywords:** African Mother, Black Women Writers, Motherhood, Patriarchal Structures

### **Introduction**

Fostering and caring are taken as the inherent qualities of women ubiquitously. But in patriarchal social set ups women are held accountable for the primary child care and men are absolved from this duty. Firestone believes motherhood as the modus operandi for female desolation when she opines, “at the core of women's suppression lies their child bearing and rearing role” (72). She further adds that the biological phenomena of being a reproducer has proved to be detrimental for women's identity and has corroborated in establishing patriarchal power. The male hegemonic societies have designed several strategies to relegate women to margins, glorification of motherhood is one among them. In her seminal work *The Reproduction of Mothering* Nancy Chodorow opines, “women's nurturing capabilities as a mother are the few universal and timeless elements on which sexual division of labor depends” (3). She believes that social conditioning and pressure force a woman to confine herself just to the task of 'being a mother' and proscribes her involvement in public domain. Due to lactation and childbearing capacities of women, society asseverates on holding women solely responsible for child care. De Beauvoir in *Second Sex* scrutinizes this glory related to motherhood. It is not easy for her to accept that women who are otherwise deported at the margins by society are given the sole responsibility of child rearing.

The dominant trope in African discourse is that of Mother Africa. African women are valued in the society solely for their procreative function. African literature by males tries to envisage the trope of “motherhood” in a highly dignified and glorified manner. Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* conceives a mother as one.... “To whom one turns, of whom one speaks of when nostalgia grips . . . When distress clouds the vision of moment . . . when there is sorrow and bitterness . . . the other is there to protect you

and that is why we say Mother is Supreme” (123). Similarly, Leopold Senghor in his poetry promotes an almost mythical representation of women: “I grew up in your shadow. The softness of your hands/Shielded my eyes . . .” (89). Michele Wallace in landmark text gives an all-encompassing definition of the superwomen stereotype

From the intricate web of mythical which surrounds the black women, a fundamental image emerges. It is of a woman of inordinate strength, with an ability for tolerating an unusual amount of misery and heavy, distasteful work. This woman does not have the same fears, weaknesses, and insecurities as other women. She is the embodiment of Mother Earth, the quintessential mother with infinite sexual, life-giving, and nurturing reserves. Through the years this image has remained basically intact, unquestioned even by the occasional black woman writers or politician.” (107)

But as time progressed, the contradiction between the portrayal of black women in literature and their subordination in the real world changed the views of African writers, especially women writers. In their works women writers disencumbered themselves of the idealistic image and instead present realistic multidimensional characters.

Yvonne Vera is one among those female African writers who have tried to deconstruct the enigma of “motherhood” in her fictional works. Born in 1964, in Bulawayo, Vera was brought up in an environment of restlessness, resulting from the conflict between wavering colonialism and the second Zimbabwean *Chimurenga* or struggle for independence. Being a woman her experiences during the period of unrest were quite different from her male counterparts as women were oppressed by the dual forces of patriarchy and colonialism. The advent of independence failed to improve either the condition of women or that of the majority of subjugated and deprived citizens of the country. Vera in her writings criticize both colonialism and post-colonialism for excluding the marginalized from the dominant discourse. However, her writing zooms in on women's struggle to escape the fetters of patriarchal ideologies in order to articulate their dreams of an autonomous identity. She focuses on an important aspect of femininity: motherhood, and attempts to rectify the tampered notions of motherhood prevalent in society and literature through her writings. Her novels explicitly delineate the societal pressures which have shoved the young women into a heedless acceptance of role of wife and mother. Most of the mother figures portrayed by Vera are independent, self-seeking and strong, through them she tries to question the social constructions of maternity which fail to accept the individuality and identity of a mother apart from her child.

In her novels *Butterfly Burning* and *Without a Name*, Vera lashes out against the stereotypes that have been built around the African mother figure by the black community. Mothers in Vera's these two novels are rebellious and undaunted. They are forced to resort to unnatural acts to resist the oppressive hegemonies. Mazvita (*Without a Name*) is set to dispose of her new born which has permanently scarred not only her body but also her soul, on other hand Phelphelaphi (*Butterfly Burning*) is forced to evict the unborn as the growth of baby in her womb might lead to death of her dreams. Through these acts the protagonists expropriate themselves from the traditional discourse of motherhood in a male hegemonic set up which tries to

“cannibalize black women's sexuality in the circumferences of reproduction and motherhood and thus distract their individual identity” (Desiree 21).

### ***Without a Name: Conceiving Freedom, Disencumbering Motherhood***

*Without a Name* gives vent to the atrocities committed on women during the war (The Rhodesian Bush War, also called Second Chimurenga). Mazvita's story is representative of the ugly realities that were forcefully silenced and kept under cover by the nationalist historians. Mazvita after her rape and her failed relationship with Joel, realizes that she is valued only for her body. She, by murdering her own child sets out to decolonize her body. She defies the dominant order to reclaim her body and make a new start. After the rape, Mazvita decides to move to the city. The city of Harare offers freedom from social codes and her oppressive relationship with Nyenenzadi, in Harare “freedom came in circles” (55). She feels that there she can think of building a future which can redeem her. Nyenenzadi, on the other hand, represents the traditional valorizing attitude of African men towards the land; “it is inevitable.... land is everything and without land there's no day or night... it shapes the destinies” (39). As a result, he is devoted to the land and feels safe to stick to the history and culture of the community. It has given him a sense of selfhood and kinship that has not been jeopardized by the war. Mazvita is not similarly attached to the land as her village has been torched in the war and she has lost her communal identity. She associates the land with the man responsible for her condition: “she connected him only to the land. It was the land that had come toward her. She saw him grow from the land, from the mist from the river. The land had allowed the man to grow from itself into her body” (36). It is not only her desire for liberty that has brought her to Harare, but also the desire to flee the trauma of rape. Mazvita on reaching Harare is enticed by the illusory freedom that the city offers to the naïve rural girls; freedom that is based on the total absence of identity and of the past. The fact that Mazvita can recreate her identity and have no accountability to anyone fills her with a false sense of independence. In city young women are entrapped by the descriptive freedom that is based on self-denial. Black women blindly try to copy the fashions meant for the colonizers, and in the process forget their African origin. They use harsh chemicals to lighten their skin tone, burn their hair or wear wigs and red lipsticks to resemble the dummies lining the shop windows. The freedom in the city is “purchasable” (27). But such freedom is only meant for a lucky few who can afford it. Mazvita, like many other rural girls, have to trade in their body for an accommodation in the city. She moves in with Joel under the pretext that he “was being extremely helpful” (70) and that she would soon get a job and leave him. Joel, unlike Nyenenzadi, never had any desire of taking responsibilities, and “they live as though they had no pasts or futures” (59). When Mazvita fails to secure any work in the city, she slowly limits herself to the domestic sphere and masks her failure like other city women. As an obvious consequence of the relationship, Mazvita becomes pregnant. She feels betrayed as the unwanted pregnancy terminates her “design to be free” (64). She is also aware of the fact that Joel will not accept the baby. Their relationship falters,

and Joel accuses Mazvita of deception. Devastated by Joel's rejection and the trauma of homelessness, she hardened herself against the child. She does not name the child as "A name could not be given to a child just like that" (89). For her name symbolized a sense of acceptance and was like a binding chord between mother and child . . . but she had no such promises to give to this child. Mazvita is unable to cope with the disillusionment of her hopes of a new beginning, the burden of an unwanted child and the pressure of survival, now that Joel has given the ultimatum to "Leave, Tomorrow" (83). She is left with no option other than killing her child and in a moment of frenzy she murders. At this time we notice two different personas of Mazvita: one the hardened persona propelled by reason and the need of the moment: the other more humane driven by emotions. The first persona enabled her to cope with the horrors of rape and now to perform the murder of her child so that she can "claim her dream and freedom" (189). But as soon as she is stuck by the reality, the second persona emerges and she wishes the act to be undone. Instead of the feeling of freedom, which she thought the killing of the child would bring, she is burdened with "a fathomless and heavy guilt" (97). Had Mazvita the spirit of the super mother, she would have survived the ordeal. But she is not Mother Africa valorized by Achebe and Senghor in their writings. She represents the vulnerability, the helplessness, the quests for liberty and the struggle to comprehend one's relationship with the land at the wake of the changing socio-political period. The infanticide here is an endeavor to repossess her body and mind, and deterge the traces left by the psychological and sexual outrages. Mazvita carries the dead child on her back like mariner carrying the dead albatross round his neck in Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner." She decided to go back to Mubaira, to bury her child. This gesture on her part, reconciles her to the past that she always tried to erase from her memory. She relives her past once she arrives at the site of her rape. She recalls the fateful day when her village was razed to the ground and she was ravished by the soldier. The acceptance of her past and her deeds gives her the strength to unite her two personas and be at peace with herself. She gathers some burnt grass as a token of the past, conscious that new grass will soon grow. She unburdens herself of the child shrouded by the "abysmal and desolate silence" (116).

### ***Butterfly Burning: Quest for Self, Denial of Motherhood***

Vera's *Butterfly Burning* also deals with the theme of patriarchal concept of maternity curbing women's freedom and negating their identity against the backdrop of Zimbabwean social set up. As the urban space is full of promises of a changing social order and consciousness, women long to break away from the cocoon of domestic rural life to experience "a birth of their own" (69). On the other hand, Zimbabwean men under the colonial regime have lost their land and along with it their livelihood and their virility. They try to overcome this sense of loss by bestowing on women the reverence they have for the land. Women give birth and nourish the life and sustain it just like the land. Hence, women are considered the embodiment of Mother Earth. The glorified image entails sacrificing of identity and choice of maternity. Motherhood is considered innate and any deviating is a slur on the family. Men try to possess the

women just as their land and stifle their subjectivity. The conflict between the two perspectives is manifested in the relation of Phephelaphi and Fumbatha in the novel. Fumbatha's love for Phephelaphi is directly equated with his love for the land: "Fumbatha had never wanted to possess anything before, except the land. He wanted her like the land beneath his feet from which birth had severed him . . . (28-29). Fumbatha's love is more like the vanity of a man in possession of a cherished object that he can control and rule. To Phephelaphi, Fumbatha represents "hope larger than memory". The "hope" is the wish to share her desire "to be something with an outline" (106). Fumbatha requires a dutiful wife, who would willingly sacrifice herself for him whereas Phephelaphi is driven by the desire to recreate her own self. Slowly they discover that their needs can never be reconciled. Disheartened by Fumbatha, Phephelaphi develops a kinship with Deliwe. Deliwe cares nothing about social stigma. She flouts rules openly by selling liquor in her Shebeen. She engages in prostitution, defies society as she puts her sexuality before maternal instincts. Deliwe's independence attracts Phephelaphi- for her Deliwe was like a "sun, and she herself was some kind of horizon" (63). The relationship catalyzes her metamorphosis and gives her the strength to think beyond her guarded life with Fumbatha. The Kwela music played in Deliwe's Shebeen entices her with hopes of emancipation. In Deliwe's association she learns to reveal in her own self and overcomes the need for the approving male gaze: "She wanted a birth of her own. [...] It was about loving her own eyebrows before he passed his fingers over them and showed her that she had a smile that was tucked down on the edges [...] She wanted a sense of belonging before that kind of belonging that rested on another's wondrous claim." (69) Deliwe becomes a maternal substitute for Phephelaphi who never had a mother figure in her life. Under Deliwe's influence Phephelaphi qualifies as a trainee to the United Nursing School, only to discover that she is pregnant. A pregnant woman will not be accepted as per the rules of the institutions. The long-nurtured dream is shattered just at the moment it was about to be realized. Phephelaphi knew that pregnancy implies the end of her search for "self". It will tie her forever to the domestic world and keep her away from the pursuit of knowledge and happiness. Phephelaphi rebels against the dictates of the patriarchal ideology. She lays down her claim for her life. Motherhood should be a woman's prerogative, and Phephelaphi claims it by deciding to abort her baby. Ironically, Phephelaphi chooses the banks of the Umguza River as the site of the abortion. It is the place where she was once courted by Fumbatha. Here she naively succumbed to the dominant discourse of patriarchy embodied by Fumbatha. The bitter experiences resulting from her marginalized position in the society has made her wiser. She wants to abort the baby and sever the connections between her and the land. She has an active mind and therefore can never be equated with the passive, fecund land. As Mazvita in *Without a Name*, Phephelaphi experiences no harmony with the land. The land where she performs her abortion is impassive to her suffering- "the soil was still. It does not move, had no kindness. It is a tempestuous serenity" (105). She emerges triumphant from the abortion. She transgresses the cultural boundaries set for women. It is almost like her second birth as she claims her identity

back.

The pain inflicted by Phephelaphi on herself induces a psychological trauma: “. . . folded into two halves, one part of her is dead, the other living [. . .] something has cast a terrible shadow into her being, split her mind into irreconcilable parts” (109). This reaches a peak at Fumbatha's rejection of her and Deliwe's betrayal. Fumbatha revenges himself on her by impregnating her a second time. Phephelaphi's decision to end her life is not acknowledgement of her defeat. She is not daunted by the negation of identity enforced by the dominant hierarchy. Her suicide is again an act of defiance against the community. She refuses to sacrifice her rights, her body and her womb to the maternal ethos of the community. She achieves her victory and union with her own self through self-annihilation: “A touch, that is hers, she can love her own body, her own eyebrows and knees, ultimately she has achieved this by, embracing herself with flame” (129-30).

### **Conclusion**

Both historically and culturally the ideology of black maternity has been mythologized in Africa. The slavery system nourished this ideology further and it was believed that “the myth of black mother earth was ineffaceable” (Witt 135). This ideology marginalized black mothers and reprobated the chances of their autonomy and growth. Vera's explorations on the discourse of motherhood allude that there are no invariant definitions or set boundaries to explicate the notion of motherhood, rather there are fundamental contradictions found in the concept of black motherhood as pointed out by Collins:

African-American communities value motherhood, but the Black mothers' ability to cope with race, class, and gender oppression should not be confused with transcending those conditions. Black motherhood can be rewarding, but it can also extract high personal cost. The range of Black women's reactions to motherhood and the ambivalence that many Black women feel about mothering reflect motherhood's contradictory nature. (133)

Like her contemporaries Vera has successfully presented the conflict between the individual desire and African traditions related to motherhood. By allowing her female characters a release from the burden of motherhood she has tried to challenge status quo. Vera tries to emphasize that maternity ties woman to the domestic sphere, thus denying them active participation in the history of the nation. She highlights the false aura that is created round maternity to conceal the entailing subjugation of women. Through her novels she explodes the myths associated with motherhood and gives a realistic picture of how maternity is often enforced on women. Phephelaphi and Mazvita are rebel figures who stand up against the injustices of enforced motherhood and emerge as the pro-active characters moving to centre and leading a life of their choice free from fetters of motherhood. These characters are nowhere near the fictional Mother Earth or Mother Africa figure. The novels bring to the fore the dichotomy between the fictional representation of motherhood as a glorious moment in the life of women and the experience of stagnation and alienation involved in unwanted pregnancy. The Zimbabwean nationalist narratives have ignored the

women's standpoint of the *chimurengas* and independence. Yvonne Vera's novels have countered this tradition and are considered the gendered narratives of the Zimbabwean history.

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## Wounded Bodies: Vulnerability and Violence in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

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### *Abstract*

Vulnerability is a universal shared experience that is experienced by humans and animals alike by the virtue of their embodiment. Yet vulnerability is experienced in complex, even contradictory ways with particular markers of identity like sex or species aggravating one's condition of vulnerability. Korean author Han Kang's provocative novel *The Vegetarian* (2007) is a subtle study in vulnerability, weaving together the oppression experienced by women and animals in a patriarchal meat-eating society while problematising the traditional dichotomies of victim/oppressor and passivity/resistance. Using the ethical theory of Cora Diamond as a critical foundation, the present article focuses on Han's portrayal of vulnerability in *The Vegetarian*, exploring the complex ways in which the text enacts the experience of and exposure to the condition of vulnerability.

**Keywords:** Vulnerability, Woundedness, Vegetarianism, Multioptic Vision, Entangled Empathy

### **Introduction**

Vulnerability is much more than a philosophical concept or abstraction – it is an ontological reality arising from the corporeality of our existence. As embodied creatures, human beings are vulnerable not only to affliction caused by natural law but by their fellow mortal beings as well. However, vulnerability, despite its universal nature, is not experienced equally by all people. Some people are more vulnerable than others because of the position that they occupy in the social hierarchy. People are vulnerable to systemic violence on the basis of factors as diverse as their colour, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, nationality, language, and economic condition. The disparity that persists in terms of distribution of vulnerability becomes even more appalling when one takes into consideration nonhuman animals that are subject to vulnerability as 'the condition of fragility and finitude shared by everything that lives, and as susceptibility and exposure to orchestrated violence that impacts on some lives more than others' (Pick 410). This manufactured aspect of vulnerability that crosses over species boundaries has been brilliantly, albeit ambivalently, dramatised in Korean author Han Kang's Man Booker International Award-winning novel, *The Vegetarian*. Han depicts the inextricable relationship between vulnerability and violence through a viscerally unsettling portrait of an ordinary middle-class woman's gradual progression towards insanity because of her decision to stop consuming meat in a conservative meat-eating society. Using strategic narrative and symbolic parallels, Han not only foregrounds the structural similarities that exist between the oppression of women and animals, but also engages with the problematic question of facing not only the vulnerability of others but also of the self.



## Wounded Bodies

In 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,' Cora Diamond writes about the “woundedness... a terrible rawness of nerves” (47) experienced by Elizabeth Costello, the protagonist of J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, 'a foundational text on vulnerability and affliction' (Pick 420). Costello's response to the systemic killing of animals for food is not merely adopting vegetarianism, but a visceral horror that is precisely, argues Diamond, the opposite of what she calls 'deflection' or an escape into the rational sphere of philosophical abstraction on exposure to the vulnerability that human beings share with their fellow nonhuman creatures. Reason can only be preserved by a blindness, an evasion; the alternative is a “profound disturbance of the soul” (Diamond, “Difficulty” 54) which is exemplified by the character of Costello – she transforms into a 'wounded' creature because of her square-eyed acknowledgement of the violence inflicted on animals in practices such as factory farming. The significance of the term 'wounded' as applied to Costello by Diamond cannot be gainsaid – it not only underscores the corporeal fragility that is common across species but also the moral sensibility that arises once one accepts the irrefutable reality of vulnerability. Costello is unable to present a logically coherent defence of her eating habits given the fact that she wears leather shoes, and causes great offence by comparing the abominable realities of factory farming with the horrors of the Holocaust. But this is exactly what the condition of woundedness entails, pushing “moral response to our treatment of animal beyond propositional argument [and] the decorum of polite society” (Wolfe 12). Sanity is kept intact by refusing to confront 'presences that may unseat our reason' (Diamond, “Difficulty” 74).

Coetzee's portrayal of Costello has striking similarities with Han Kang's depiction of Yeong-hye, the titular protagonist of *The Vegetarian*. The latter is an ordinary Korean housewife whose sudden decision to abstain from meat upends her entire life. Costello and Yeong-hye are united by their experience of visceral horror at the violent treatment of animals - the revulsion they feel is neither abstract nor intellectual but an affective response. Yeong-hye foregoes eating meat because of a recurrent nightmarish dream that involves acts of violence perpetrated by an unspecified individual inside a barn. The dreams, presented in an impressionistic style, form interludes in the sense these constitute the only portions of the text which are narrated from the point of view of Yeong-hye herself, the rest being focalised through the perspectives of her husband, brother-in-law and sister respectively. This is an excellent narrative strategy, the textual silencing of Yeong-hye echoing the way in which the world she inhabits clamps her voice. The text presents her vulnerability in an incremental manner, while simultaneously dramatising her newly awakened sense of horror at the powers of violence possessed by human beings and actualised with the least amount of resistance against animals. Like in the case of Costello, Yeong-hye's reasons for adopting vegetarianism baffles others, her refrain of “I had a dream” (Han 24) falling on unapprehending ears. When she accompanies her husband for a formal dining session with his superiors, she makes everyone uncomfortable with her

insistence on eating nothing except pieces of vegetable extracted from salads. The luncheon scene, one of the most striking tableaux presented by the novel, establishes the isolation of the wounded subject: Yeong-hye's new state of consciousness, well beyond rational articulation, renders her virtually unfathomable. While others try to justify vegetarianism on rational grounds such as attempting to reduce susceptibility toward particular bodily ailments, Yeong-hye merely reiterates her answer of having had a dream. Later in the text, when she is recuperating in the hospital after slitting her wrist because she was violently coerced into eating meat, Yeong-hye feels curiously detached from everybody around her, but there is an unmistakable feeling of there being a lump in her chest:

Yells and howls, threaded together layer upon layer, are enmeshed to form that lump. I ate too much meat. The lives of the animals I ate have all lodged there. Blood and flesh, all those butchered bodies are scattered in every nook and cranny, and though the physical remnants were excreted, their lives still stick stubbornly to my insides. (Han 49)

Yeong-hye's refusal to eat meat transgressing all kinds of social norms is an attempt to exorcise overwhelming feelings of horror and guilt that remain incomprehensible to everybody else. Hers is not "a simple case of vegetarianism" (Han 16) – it is the response of a haunted creature grappling with the unimaginable violence inflicted upon her 'fellow creatures... fellows in mortality, in life on this earth' (Diamond, "Eating" 329).

*The Vegetarian* enacts a progressive dehumanisation of Yeong-hye after her transformation into a vegetarian. Not only is the reader denied access to the story from her point of view, but narrative parallels and linguistic choices reinforce her new status as a less-than-human subject, a condition that eventually gains paradoxical connotations of liberation as Yeong-hye exhibits a relentless desire to shed off her humanity by becoming a tree. Yeong-hye's will to arboreality stems from a haunting knowledge of the powers of violence present within all human beings including herself. Though the identity of the aggressor in her violent dream is never clarified by the text, the reader is led to assume that it's Yeong-hye herself, the assumption gaining credence by the fact that she actually bites a bird to death during her stay in the hospital following her attempt at suicide. It is revealing that Yeong-hye confesses that she likes her breasts best because they cannot subject another to any kind of suffering. She says, "nothing can be killed by them. Hand, foot, tongue, gaze, all weapons from which nothing is safe. But not my breasts" (Han 33). It is a testament to Han's subtlety of characterisation that she refrains from showing any simplistic dichotomy of victim and perpetrator in the text. *The Vegetarian* depicts not only Yeong-hye's vulnerability and her oppression at the hands of others; it also alerts us to her capacity for violence herself. Once this epiphany dawns on Yeong-hye, she is desperate to negate this fact – the desire to transcend this unsettling ontological truth is what causes her to abstain from eating meat at first and when that proves insufficient, she stops eating completely. It might be easy to dismiss this as hysterical behaviour, but Han seems to be exactly counting on that sort of knee-jerk response to interrogate the fact that while starving oneself as a method of actively abstaining from violence is construed as

lunacy but the methodical killing of animals on a daily basis, intentional or accidental, is perfectly acceptable.

### **Sibling Species**

In her seminal work *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams proposes that consumption of meat and violence against animals is structurally related to violence against women. Adams connects the male objectification of and violence against women to human violence against animals. While recent criticism has highlighted Adams's problematic essentialisation of the category of 'woman' which neglects the crucially different ways in which women experience subjection and the varying degrees of agency they may possess in diverse contexts, the contribution of Adams in connecting the dots between the oppression experienced by women and nonhuman animals in a carnophallogocentric society remains foundational. More nuanced feminist approaches toward vegetarianism have since emerged, like Deane Curtin's theory of contextual moral vegetarianism which substitutes a universal ethical principle of abstaining from meat with "the injunction to care... should be understood to include the injunction to eliminate needless suffering wherever possible" (qtd. in Gaard 14). Similarly, Marti Kheel cautions against the tendency to subscribe to "truncated narratives" (qtd. in Gaard 14) that posit ethical questions in univocal terms that are often guilty of gender and cultural essentialism. Claire Jean Kim's work highlights the ways in which violence against animals is sanctioned in the name of protecting the cultural diversity of racialised others. According to Kim, scholars misapprehend "the workings of power by focusing exclusively on one hierarchical relationship" while neglecting the issue of human domination over animals, thus naturalising "species meanings - what it means to be human, what it means to be animal" (12). Kim proposes instead to adopt "a multioptic vision" which "entails seeing from within various perspectives" (19), an approach which resists simplistic categories of victim and oppressor by acknowledging the complex nature of positionality as "fractured, contingent, and continually disputed" (20). *The Vegetarian*, with its shifting narratorial perspectives and symbolic parallels between the violence enacted upon women and nonhuman animals, perfectly manages to capture the ambivalence inherent in the notion of positionality.

In an insightful article analysing the ideological and ethical underpinnings of veganism in reference to Han's novel, C. E. Stobie uses the term 'sibling species' to underscore the fact that the vulnerability of women and nonhuman animals in a carnophallogocentric setting is deeply intertwined. The phrase becomes doubly potent when one takes into consideration that the novel dramatises the issue of vulnerability by a structural juxtaposition of the ways in which two literal siblings, Yeong-hye and In-hye, respond to the lived reality of suffering. While one progresses from vegetarianism towards the complete renunciation of food, the other painstakingly graduates from an initial lack of understanding to compassionate empathy. The behaviour of the other characters falls between these two attitudes to vulnerability: some, like Yeong-hye's father and husband, are secure in their

traditional patriarchal status and incorrigible in their socially sanctioned tendencies toward violence; while characters like In-hye's husband are portrayed with more ambiguity in relation to their willingness to commit violence. Yeong-hye's vegetarianism is brought into sharper focus by the resistance of her family toward her decision. This resistance swells from annoyance to violence in a climactic scene in the first section of the novel where, in a manner reminiscent of rape, Yeong-hye is forcefully fed meat by her father. She reacts to such brutalisation by slitting her own wrist. The inarticulate anguish of Yeong-hye, which bodies forth in an animalistic shriek, is a mirroring of a childhood incident in which a dog was dragged to death after it had bitten Yeong-hye. The wounded creature's snarls as it is dragged about by Yeong-hye's father while being chained to a motorcycle is a symbolic anticipation of Yeong-hye's wordless cry of outrage as her autonomy is cruelly violated. It is important to note here that the perpetrator in both the cases remains the same, thus clearly establishing a link between the violence committed against women and their 'sibling species.'

The text tells us that “an animal cry of distress” (Han 40) bursts out of Yeong-hye's lips before she cuts her wrist at the savage family gathering. Such language reinforces the fact that Yeong-hye is gradually losing the trappings of humanity, as it were, becoming less than human. This not only unsettles the subject categories of 'human' and 'animal' but also draws attention to the inherently problematic nature of what is ordinarily considered to be human in a carnophallogocentric discourse. Yeong-hye's refusal to perform the role of dutiful wife and daughter seem to sanction even greater violence against her, a punishment for her transgressive behaviour. After her epiphanic disavowal of meat, Yeong Hye develops an aversion towards sex, which culminates in repeated events of rape on part of her husband. While Yeong-hye protests that her husband's body “smells of meat” (Han 17), the latter rapes her “as though she were a 'comfort woman” (Han 30). This explicit comparison drawn between Yeong-hye and comfort women, who were victims of sexual assault by Japanese soldiers during Japan's occupation of Korea, fuses together the dynamics of colonial and patriarchal oppression along with the additional dimension of the power wielded over animals by humans. Along with the disturbing force-feeding scene alluded to previously, such joint focalisation of women and animals as vulnerable subjects deftly portrays through an “intersectional matrix” (Deckha qtd. in Stobie 10) the “complexities of vocalising trauma when multiple power struggles are at play” (Stobie 11).

### **Confronting Vulnerability**

In *The Vegetarian*, the choices that Yeong-hye makes after her haunting nightmares begin steadily entrench her in the realm of otherness, thus rendering her “utterly unknowable” (Han 25) to the people around her. This unintelligibility proves to be a failure of moral sensibility or, in other words, a failure of empathy. Yeong-hye cannot be deciphered as being human unless she eats meat and fulfils her conventional filial and spousal obligations. Her “wound marks her and isolates her” (Diamond 46). Her vulnerability further underscores the similar absence of empathy characterising the

relationships between humans and animals. Yeong-hye's desire for an arboreal existence that depends exclusively on sunlight for sustenance is a testament to her wounded-ness: once she becomes painfully conscious of the violence intrinsic to the condition of being human, her own potential for violence imagined in the bloody dreams and disturbingly materialised during her brief stint at the hospital, she chooses to renounce her humanity itself. This is the principle of *ahimsa* or nonviolence as propounded in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy taken to its logical extreme. While this desire to become vegetal is a transgressive example of the opposite of deflection as argued by Cora Diamond, perhaps a more pragmatic approach is offered by In-hye who, over the course of the novel, cultivates a more compassionate relationship with her younger sister even if she cannot completely accept or understand the drastic choices of the latter. In-hye can be said to embody what philosopher Lori Gruen has called “entangled empathy”, a form of “empathetic perception [that] is directed toward the well-being of another” (Gruen 45) in a specific context. Gruen's concept acknowledges the problematic aspects of adopting a universal ethical rule and advocates instead a form of being that “acknowledges the dependence and fragility of others, and by extension, our own” (Pick 412). By the virtue of being sensitive to the particularities of circumstances and repudiating blanket ethical injunctions, entangled empathy acts as a concrete rather than abstract response to vulnerability. Gruen's exhortation to cultivate a caring mode of perception has ringing similarities with Cora Diamond's plea for a “kind of loving attention to another being, a possible victim of injustice” (qtd. in Wolfe 12).

After Yeong-hye has been disowned by both her husband and her parents, it is In-hye who assumes the role of a caregiver for her sister. To use the words of Cora Diamond, “the difficulty of reality” proves to be too much for others, who would rather disown Yeong-hye who has become unfathomable in the sense of the human as commonly understood. In contrast, In-hye refuses to take refuge in the safety of ontological certainties which, the text seems to suggest, can only signal a fundamental absence of empathy. As In-hye grows in compassion, so does she grow in self knowledge, realising her own vulnerability as she pays attention to the frailties that implicate Yeong-hye's life. Not only does she come to acknowledge how close she was herself to committing a social taboo by abandoning her child if not for Yeong-hye's apparent breakdown, almost expressing a sense of envy towards her sister for being able to transcend the oppressive barriers in a patriarchal society; but she also realises that Yeong-hye had to bear the brunt of their father's violent tendencies during their childhood because she had assumed the role of a caretaker being the older sibling. What In-hye had previously understood as self sacrifice comes to be reinterpreted as an unconscious form of self defence. The early relationship between the two siblings manifests what scholar Jennifer McWeeny calls “intercorporeal asymmetry” - in a context of shared vulnerability, “one being offers another instead of herself in order to prevent her own harm” (282). McWeeny conceives of an alternative form of ontology which “conceives of... beings not in terms of essential properties but in... lines of lived intercorporeal relations” (284). The novel's use of the symbolism of birds to

connect the oppression experienced respectively by Yeong-hye and In-hye is precisely underpinned by a multioptic vision that illumines the fluidity of subject positions in terms of vulnerability without resorting to stable dichotomies of resistance and passivity. Vulnerability is experienced in ambiguous, contradictory ways, and *The Vegetarian* is always aware of this fact.

## Conclusion

Vulnerability is an unwelcome yet unavoidable facet of existence. While it is shared by all creatures alike in their embodiment, it is experienced unequally by people and becomes even more egregious in the context of human-animal relationships. However, the power dynamics and epistemological concepts that engender these disproportionate effects are themselves unstable, hence open to interrogation. Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* addresses the issue of vulnerability with subtlety and ambivalence in equal measure. It portrays the connection between the exploitation of women and animals in a society circumscribed by norms of patriarchy and carnism. At the same time, it subverts simplistic categories of victim/ oppressor and passivity/resistance, opting instead to depict the ambiguities, asymmetries and complexities involved in the experience of vulnerability. Thus, *The Vegetarian* engages both productively and provocatively with the unsettling yet inevitable condition of creaturely vulnerability.

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## **Border Stringency and the Crisis of Belongingness: (Dis)Locating the Politics of Nationalism in Manto's 'Toba Tek Singh'**

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### *Abstract*

The soaring politics of nationalism resulting in India's partition conveyed a social crisis when the larger mass underwent rigorous territorial migrations. Saadat Hasan Manto's appeal lies in locating the tumult of spatial uprooting within characters residing at the threshold of conscious historic perception. This paper examines 'Toba Tek Singh' and the psyche of its protagonist, Bishen Singh, afflicted due to national stringencies. The discussion involves the extent crisis resides in imposing exclusive identities as Indian/Pakistani or Sikh/Muslim on asylum lunatics, thereby creating ruptures within their domain of belongingness. In the related bigotry, emphasis has been given towards illuminating the spaces these inmates preoccupy naturally. The ambiguity generated by borders within Bishen Singh's already complex mental state, has been reciprocated through analysis of the homeland of Toba Tek Singh as a fruition of existential tumult. The study has been used to evaluate Manto's belligerence towards the standards spawned by partition on the majority.

**Keywords:** nationalism, crisis, identity, border, belonging

### **Introduction**

To understand partition is to enter a discourse of buried fear and trauma that was the consequent result of erupting violence. It is not so much a historic migration which it entailed as much as the transition influencing the necessity in being affiliated to new national roots. The haste of the Radcliffe Boundary Award in drawing new contours across Punjab and Bengal was done to solidify a feeling of home. At the time, this was especially meant for the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who were becoming more exclusive of their faith. However, behind this landmark decision there had always been those minorities who somehow found themselves on the wrong nation. Referring to the differences in political rhetoric and grounded realities, Pallavi Ghosal stated, "the migrants, hoped that they would not have to leave their homelands and silently wished that their homes would fall on the right side of the border" (553). The significant truth behind this statement is that the inhabitants were mostly content to be in their own site of belonging constituting their landed property even if it meant being in a different country.

The mass influx following the Partition of India generated a hassle faced by migrants/refugees predominantly in connection to their faiths. It became a sturdy albeit nefarious means of determining whether they could remain back or move across. The accompanied shift in social lives could not undo the trauma of territorial breakdown in the wake of riots. As a result, the identity of migrants coincided with the border formations and the burden of belonging, conforming to the ideas of either country was rooted in the politics of nationalism. This paper is an attempt to unfold the ambiguity in the very concept of belongingness and the extent communal politics



defamiliarizes its notion. Frontiers construct the communal hostility that is born out of a sense of consciously associating regions to one particular country, thereby giving continuity to spatial uprooting. The uniqueness in the story of Saadat Haasan Manto is locating this deeper crisis within characters unfamiliar with the structure of partition's unfolding. I will be attempting to explore this crisis in search of belongingness against the dominant nationalist rigors through an analysis of 'Toba Tek Singh'.

### **Sane Lunacy against the Insane Borders in 'Toba Tek Singh'**

The literary works of Manto reflect the workings of what Gyanendra Pandey calls “specific historical consciousness” (*Construction* 20). According to Spivak, though narrative literature has often been treated as “gossip about nonexistent people ... in doing so we go against the specific nature of literature” (337). From this perspective, even Manto's stories can come as gossip rather than a delineation of the period. However, in his illustration of the hardships the Sikh character Bishen Singh endures, he disrupts the existing meta-narrative and de-territorialize the nationalist discourse. The representation carried out is what Ian Talbot terms as the “human impact” and “personal experience” (38) stating that such experiential narratives have the status of reality about them. Belongingness and the agonies at its breakdown constitute a part of this experience. 'Toba Tek Singh' is a peculiar reflection of how some characters get caught in the cross-fire of intolerance and religious bigotry. They hit back at the “British colonialism ... distorted Islamist or the Hindutva world-views which have, in equal measure, created widespread confusion in the minds of the common people and, in the process, caused incalculable damage to State and civil society” (Hasan 58).

The story is a shunning of the optimism reciprocated by N. N. Vohra in the lines, “I hope that one day ... displaced families on both sides of the fence will at least be able to freely cross the borders and show their grandchildren where their grandparents had once lived and belonged” (qtd. in Hasan 53). The feeling of idealism expressed here has been countered by the narrative through the image of deliberate suffrage territorial division brings to the asylum prisoners in general and Bishen Singh in particular. The political interpretation of freedom conveys it as something not individually sought after but imposed upon by the policies and decisions of the government made on nationalist grounds. The task of transporting prisoners has been used to narrate this twisted meaning of freedom. The veiled idea behind it is not actually granting them a new home or space that hopefully lies across the border but snatching a familiar livelihood. The narrative backs the ambiguity behind this decision by the claim that these prisoners are in fact lunatics. Their position, both physically and mentally, has been grounded in a situation where their demands and choices have been rendered pointless and fruitless. The power play behind categorizing them as lunatics is a manner of justifying their incapability of making any decision which have to be made for them. A peek into their warped state of mind also elaborates their helpless detachment from the workings of national vivisection. When one Muslim lunatic is asked what actually constitutes Pakistan, he states “after

careful deliberation, 'an area in India where razor blades are manufactured'" (Manto 1). An allusion to the shaving of hair which is typically forbidden by the Sikh religion, it is a queer manner used by the narrator to convey Pakistan as a soon to be land of Muslims.

The very textual opening and this small dialogue provides assumption to the extent agenda has been taking over the psyche of individuals. The obtrusion of it is inescapable even for asylum lunatics – an identity expected to be homogenous due to their general uncanny existence. Manto's sarcastic reaction to the depth of discrimination has been presented boldly in the governmental decision that an exchange of lunatics should follow a "cordial exchange of prisoners" with Muslim lunatics given to Pakistan and Sikh/Hindu lunatics to India (1). They bore their own private marks of being secluded as the unfit until their space is invaded by partition when they are deemed 'fit' to be transferred as per their communally appropriate identities. The only truth they are aware of is that the asylum has become a part of Pakistan, a country formed due to the efforts of Jinnah.

With the narrative centering on the impressions that begin to be carried by them, Manto's introspection of partition lies in the understanding of an apparent complexity in the given situation. In their detachment, the lunatics start to interrogate their situation through some fundamental questions. The neutral space they preoccupy for most of the story renders contextually vivid their pondering on a Pakistan or an India:

Where it was, what its shape and size were ... those lunatics who were not entirely deranged, were forced to wonder whether they were presently in India or in Pakistan. If India, then wherewas Pakistan? And if Pakistan, how was it that they had ended up here, despite never having moved and having been in India only a short while ago?  
(2)

Such contemplations surrounding the two nations draws attention to another question placed by Debjani Sengupta, "what does it mean to imagine oneself into the nation especially if one's location is outside it?" (220) The entirety of the story is a form of the narrator's response to this crisis as if to imply the emptiness behind locating nations – relocating populations. The reality is that the motto behind the Indian Partition was solely directed towards this task emerging as a result of consistent power struggle and communalism during the early twentieth century. The consequences as such were mostly, if not fully, borne by the larger mass amongst whom the seeds of enmity had been gradually sown and from which they sought an emancipation. In 'Toba Tek Singh' they are represented by the lunatics. Within the confines of the asylum, there are moments of rivalry, unity, as well as desperate struggle to exist beyond the stringencies of an India/Pakistan. However, it cannot be overlooked that these 'moments' have sprung not from a proper comprehension of these new national identities but a wild imagination as to their nature burdened by history.

Within their already disturbed mental states is added the "existential marginalization ... within and outside the nation-states" (Sengupta 222). All their actions and reactions are bordered on insanity, but they are aligned to the communal foreplay of the two ruling factions – the Congress and Muslim League carrying opposing beliefs based on which partition became imperative. This is portrayed in the roles some of the

lunatics take upon themselves to play. While one Muslim declares himself to be the Quaid-e-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the instantaneous reaction to this is made by a Sikh inmate who becomes Master Tara Singh. The performances continue to be hilarious until “there was nearly bloodshed in the cell until both men were declared dangerous lunatics and separated” (Manto 3). The madness and absurdity of religious politics behind the border formations has been summed up by Manto in this very line. As an antithesis to these wild acts, there is another noteworthy incident when one inmate in a stupor declares neutrality to this binary opposition by climbing a tree and proclaiming it his home (2-3).

Though these asylum patients do not exist under the guise of a community, they nonetheless live within a bond of harmony fostered by memoirs of the time spent together. Belongingness constitutes such memoirs, reminiscences which “cannot be taken on face value alone. There is a deeper meaning ... which can be unearthed by a closer reading of these memoirs” (Ghosal 555). The strength of this bond becomes decipherable to them only when it is at the risk of being fractured. The land of Toba Tek Singh which exists only in Bishen Singh's memory seems to allude to such a harmonious living space. The character's perplexity in being unable to locate it despite several inquiries, therefore, drives him madder still. For in all the turmoil and anxiety following the news of their inevitable transport to a new country, it is this place that appears to retain some elements of sanity. Bishen Singh's constant inquiry and craving to return to it represents his indirect desire to escape the tumult of being transported. It marks his skepticism as he gradually begins to comprehend hostility on both sides. That he retains some aspects of a healthy mind is evident when he dearly misses his daughter Roop Kaur and those who visit and offers him sweets. However, the thing he actually craves after is freedom to forge his identity as one who has vast holdings in the imaginary homeland of Toba Tek Singh. There he will have the autonomy beyond all crisis wrought by nationalist agendas. This is his stand aloof from the sanctioned identities as Sikh and Indian.

The liberation struggle of the lunatics as depicted by the narrator is unlike the struggle for independence with the aim of breaking or reforming intercommunity ties from religious/nationalist perspectives. The belongingness carried forth is nothing exclusive or awkward but a metaphor of a population who do not wish to be swayed by the governing rhetoric. Bishen Singh is not conditioned to be a lunatic. Though the strangeness of him being committed for fifteen years and his complete lack of sleep is evident, it is something of a decision he himself has by all means taken. The same can be stated about his deep interest in listening to the others discuss India, Pakistan, and the prospect of exchange (Manto 4). It nonetheless also stems from the fact that he is in a place where he existed for so long. The growing pangs at being uprooted cannot be attributed to insanity. It is the most significant part of the story where Manto connects the fictional element with the truth, the actuality of a population to whom the journey to a new country had been a degradation from being citizens to refugees.

Bishen Singh resembles the voice of those characters sharing common interests, who are in jeopardy because of the sudden decision to plot the two-nation history by the actual lunatics – “hot-headed and cynical politicians who failed to grasp the

implications of division along religious lines” (Hasan 54). Therefore, despite the cross-border transfer and few bitter instances of passionate rivalry through raising slogans, there are moments showing attachment to pluralism and religious values. The brief exchange between Bishen Singh and Fazal Din conveys that in the narrative:

Fazal Din began to say, 'They asked me to check up on you routinely. But I hear now that you are also to go to India. Do give my salaam to Bhai Balbir Singh and Bhai Vadhawa Singh ... Tell Bhai Balbir Singh that I am well and happy. Of the two brown buffaloes he left behind, one has given birth to a calf. (Manto 8)

Partha Chatterjee states that in contrast to the material domain of the outside, the spiritual:

is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa. (6)

Though Manto does not deal with these specific domains of knowledge, his characters in their occupied spaces bear similar cultural markers that has so far been free from demarcation. The final scene where Bishen Singh stands “on a nameless piece of earth” (Manto 10) between the borders of India and Pakistan has been interpreted by Gyanendra Pandey as “a resolution of the paradox that he sets out at the beginning of his story through the suggestion that, in this time of “madness,” it was only the “insane” who retained any sanity” (“Prose” 219). Bishen Singh's expressive stance of standing in the no man's land is where his crisis of identity reaches its zenith. It is done in an attempt to illustrate all the contradictions and ambiguities formation of national identities brought forth during partition (Didur 55). The textual grounding stands as a “triumph of ambivalence ... because it proclaims the in-betweenness of its protagonist and his triumph over those who want to fix his identity” (Saint and Saint xvi).

## **Conclusion**

'Toba Tek Singh,' therefore, come as a literary fragment of importance in challenging the line drawn by the politics of nationalism. The sentiments of asylum inmates or their sense of natural belonging cannot be divided by it. Through the fractured space of Bishen Singh's existence, the narrator offers a renewed idea of place by reinstating the human subject at a historic moment when it had been the most impersonalized. Against the violence on communal grounds affecting the social reality of India and Pakistan, the word 'refugee' or 'migrant' becomes a trope. While they differ in the nature of displacement both have the burden of crisis generated by predetermined means of recognition. The loss, carried as a result, has been depicted in the narrative within the context of the asylum and the unity it embodies. Further, the crisis emerging out of the unwanted shift leads to another on a much deeper level for Bishen Singh who is unable to fixate on a new sense of dwelling like before. The culmination of his struggle to locate Toba Tek Singh on the land between the borders is where the narrative dislocates the historic purview of a nation. Manto implicitly conveys a strong message that the events partition unfolded cannot be grasped in its entirety

unless it is brought to notice the way people remember it. Their actions depict the extent impact of border formation turns out separately from its causes. The afflicted people have been stylized comprising of out of the ordinary characters. However, through their feelings and actions, the effect of stringencies on the ordinary majority and the need to recognize plurality in understanding partition has been expressed. The diverse albeit richer definition of the limitations in border crafting has been shown to generate nothing but adverse circumstances for the least involved participants. The constitution of nation as home to distinctive communities stand in contrast to the home that has a more prevailing attachment no matter the circumstances. It sums up the relation between the author's own perception of partition and the event itself.

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## **Of Death and Democide in Frances Harrison's *Still Counting the Dead: Survivors of Sri Lanka's Hidden War***

**Rincy Saji\***

### *Abstract*

This article sets out to prove the hypothesis that civilians' deaths during the war can be termed democide, a concept developed by Russell to conceptualise death employed by the government. The novel understudy, *Still Counting the Dead: Survivors of Sri Lanka's Hidden War* (2012) by Frances Harrison, is of significance due to its collection of testimonies by surviving civilians who narrowly escaped from the clutches of death and atrocities of the civil war. By considering R.J. Rummel's theory of democide presented in his seminal book, *Death by Government* (1994), this paper sets to interrogate the specific elements of death, namely the employment of death as an institutionalised political weapon during the civil war. In doing so, this article investigates the possibility of Tamil victims' discourses through Harrison's testimonial account to give counter-narrative elements of the civil conflict that contradict the state's accounts.

**Keywords:** Sri Lankan civil war; death; democide; testimonial; politics; Frances Harrison's *Still Counting the Dead*.

### **Introduction**

Sri Lanka was one of the South Asian countries that drew international attention owing to the three decades of brutal ethnic war. According to UN estimates, up to 100,000 people were murdered during the civil conflict. However, the Sri Lankan government insisted that there were no civilian fatalities during various phases of the civil war. After years, in 2011, the government “acknowledged some civilian deaths and announced a census of the war dead, but its results were vague” (“Sri Lanka starts count to civil war dead”). It was not until January 2020, in a meeting with the UN convoy in Colombo, that Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa admitted that over 20,000 vanished individuals had died and that “steps would be taken to issue death certificates for those missing people” (“Sri Lanka President”). Instead of addressing claims of severe Human Rights violations by both sides upon the LTTE's defeat in 2009, the Rajapaksa administration repressed the media, targeted human rights advocates, and proceeded to arbitrarily imprison and torture perceived opponents (“World Report” 2019). This shows how the authorities wanted to conceal the facts of the war from the outside world. The government wanted to depict an image of a nation whose objective was eradicating terrorism; therefore, other countries could emulate counter-insurgency strategies to fight terrorism. Since human lives were diminished to bare life during a conflict, it warrants reconsidering the deaths of thousands of millions of individuals killed in the power struggle. The essay seeks to interrogate the significance of human lives under the political superstructure.

### **Frances Harrison's *Still Counting the Dead***

Even though multiple literary works rhapsodically narrate events of the Sri Lankan

war, such as Michael Ondaatje's famous novel *Anil's Ghost* (2000) and *Running in the Family* (1982), Anuk Arudpragasams' fictional account of refugee life through *The Story of a Brief Marriage* (2016), Nihal De Silva's *The Road from the Elephant Pass* (2003), Nayomi Munaweera's novel from a feminist vantage point in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2012), Gordon Weiss's documentary book *The Cage* (2012), Samanth Subramanian's travelogue as, *This Divided Island* (2014), Shyam Selvadurai's fictional take on the civil war in, *Funny Boy* (1994) and more. Nonetheless, Frances Harrison's *Still Counting the Dead* (2012) is significant in providing the testimonies of those unheard voices politically silenced during and after the war.

Frances Harrison is a British journalist who was a BBC correspondent in Sri Lanka from 2000-2004. The book taken under study is Harrison's *Still Counting Dead: Survivors of Sri Lanka's Hidden War* (2012), based on the testimonies of Tamils who survived the horror. The book includes testimonies of a journalist, a Tamil Tiger spokesman, a doctor, a nun, a teacher, a rebel mother, a Volunteer, a shopkeeper, a warrior, and a wife. These testimonials can be considered as a paradigmatic of thousands of civilians in Sri Lanka, spanning ethnic, gender, and class lines, whose lives became volatile as the conflict winds down. Harrison's writing approach included interviews with Tamil survivors who were still living to recount the horrific experiences of the past. Most interviewees hesitated to reveal their true identity to Harrison for fear of jeopardising their personal and family life. A kaleidoscope of suffering unfolds from this testimonial account compiled by Harrison. As a journalist who worked in Sri Lanka's conflict zones, she criticises the Tamil Tigers' policy of using people as human shields as "callous brinkmanship" (Harrison 106) while simultaneously criticising the Sri Lankan army on the slaughter of civilians by mimicking No Fire Zone. The survivors bear testimony to a catastrophic humanitarian disaster, a political delusion, and, ultimately, the resilience, if not victory, of the human spirit. As a result, through their voice, they provide a parallel narration of the conflict, contrasting the facets and distorted reports by the government.

### **The Concept of Democide**

It is essential to conceptualise further the highly disputed notion of collateral damage that occurred during and on the battlefields of the Sri Lankan civil war. In such circumstances, where the state is accused of appalling carnage, there are several methods of killing, predominantly termed mass murder, massacres, or genocide. These terms are used to describe the "intentional and indiscriminate murder of a large number of people by government agents" (Rummel 35). However, given the complexity of politics, it was necessary to reconceptualise the notion and coin a new name for government-sanctioned killing. Although Rummel investigated the notion of democide by focusing on four regimes, namely the Soviet Union, nationalist China, communist China, and Nazi Germany, the research expands the principles to comprehend the disputed disparity of the perpetrated collateral damage in the case of the Sri Lankan civil war. This study will investigate how killings were used as a last

resort in war-torn Sri Lanka by including the notion of democide in R.J. Rummel's seminal book *Death by Government* (1994). Rummel proposed the democide theory, which is similar to private murder. Democide, according to him, is "the murder of any person or people by a government, including genocide, politicide, and mass murder" (31). The book attempts to conceptualise government-sponsored killings, torture, concentration camps, and killings done for ideological, revenge, or other causes. He further differs democide from other types of killings. Democide includes the execution of prisoners during wartime, the indiscriminate bombing, shelling, or bombardment of civilians, and the forced removal of all foodstuffs from occupied areas, causing the death of the inhabitants from starvation. Although international conventions and treaties expressly ban democide, these killings were not labelled as such. As a result, civilian deaths during World War I and II, or any other infamous war, were not deemed democide. Thus, death by bombing a school or hospital is not democide unless it is apparent that the attack was executed carelessly, considering the substantial risk to such civic facilities. Democide is also neither the killing of civilians caught in the crossfire of enemy forces nor the death of troops when willingly assisting troops in transporting supplies or weapons. To summarise, one can say that democide is defined as "the intentional killing of an unarmed or disarmed person by government agents acting in their authoritative capacity and under government policy or high command" (Rummel 42).

### **Of Death and Democide in Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict**

This study will investigate how killings were used as a last resort in war-torn Sri Lanka by integrating the testimonial narratives from Francis Harrison's *Still Counting the Dead* (2012). Harrison defines the last phase of the Sri Lankan civil war as "slaughter on an apocalyptic scale" (Harrison 45). She defines the island as "a tropical beach transformed into a place of random slaughter" (Harrison 71). In reading *Still Counting the Dead* (2012) by Harrison under the lens of democide, it substantiates that the deaths of hundreds of thousands might be considered an act of democide during the war. Rummel, in detail, defines democide as an action by the government where the purpose is "designed to kill or cause the death of people" (Rummel 36). He further provides the myriad reasons the authorities employ death to its civilians. One of the prominent reasons for inflicting death can be "religion, race, language, ethnicity, national origin, class, politics, speech, actions construed as opposing the government or wrecking social policy, or by their relationship to such people" (Rummel 37-38). Rereading Frances Harrison's *Still Counting the Dead* (2012), one can see how the government engaged in barbaric killings while also attempting to conceal and destroy countless documents associated with the actual incidents that unfolded on the island during the civil war's last resort. Harrison describes the Sri Lankan army's brutality, writing, "Now they wouldn't think twice about shooting at anything that moved" (28). One of the priests in Harrison's testimonial book describes his ordeal as follows: "The soldiers were like animals, they were not normal. They wanted to kill everything. They looked as if they hadn't eaten or slept for days. They were crazed with blood lust" (28).



However, the authorities had a contradictory account of these killings, as evidenced by statements made by Sri Lankan government officials or soldiers. Harrison recalls how “The victorious soldiers were using their mobile phones to take trophy photos of the dead rebels – some of the disturbing images that soon appeared all over the Internet” (30). The banality of death is reflected in Gotabaya Rajapaksa's statement in an interview with *The Indian Express* about whether he had sleepless nights after issuing orders and killing hundreds of thousands of civilians and LTTE militants. Gotabaya says,

I know I haven't done anything wrong, I know I have done the correct thing. My conscience says that. . . . War is not a good thing, it is not a nice thing. But in Sri Lanka, I didn't create the war, I ended the war... Today it (Jaffna) is a free country... Bombs do not understand who is enemy and who is friend, or if it is a civilian or military van. So I do not regret. I used to sleep every day during the war too. (Janardhan)

The second type of government-employed killing is “...death by virtue of an intentionally or knowingly reckless and depraved disregard for life (which constitutes practical intentionality)” (Rummel 37). As in concentration camps, lethal prisons, torture and beatings, rape or looting, using murderous medications, or when the government withholds assistance to perpetuate fatalities during a national emergency scenario such as famine, epidemic and so on. In Harrison's *Still Counting the Dead* (2012), the Sri Lankan authorities withdrew UN employees off the island so that “there would be no independent witnesses to what was coming” (Harrison 46). The Sri Lankan Government constantly wanted to conceal and distort the realities of the war, as aforementioned. Sri Lankan doctors were forbidden from speaking out about the island's carnage. Harrison says they were “caught and compelled by the Sri Lankan government to recant what they had stated” (122) if they talked to international media about the fatalities. She vindicates this she includes the testimony from a doctor who narrowly escaped from the clutches of the Sri Lankan government. Dr Niron describes the harrowing realities of hospital circumstances during the conflict. People would arrive with all the flesh blown off their limbs, the white bones visible like chewed joints of raw human meat”, he recalls. Dr Niron says that despite sharing the GPS coordinates or painting their rooftops in the large Red Cross, the buildings were attacked within hours or days. He adds that there were five hospital details, which they exempted from the authorities, and to their surprise, they were never attacked or shelled. Thus, eventually, Dr Niron said that they had their lesson, stating that “the military were deliberately targeting hospitals. They were attacking purposefully; they wanted to kill as many as possible” (126). Harrison writes:

It's a war crime to cause starvation... the United Nations found there were credible allegations that the government deliberately underestimated population numbers to justify sending less food. American diplomats also commented that the Sri Lankan government wanted to keep civilians hungry enough that they would have an incentive to abandon the rebels. (128)

Rummel defines this kind of delay in assisting or intentionally withholding medical or food supplies as democide. He characterises democide as “government authorities

withhold aid, or knowingly act in a way to make it more deadly” (37). Thus, via Dr Niron's testimony, one may envision the fatalities that occurred in hospitals, during shelling, or as a consequence of medical incompetence as part of democide, a deliberate act of killing by a government institution.

The Sri Lankan civil war is one such conflict in which people have suffered severely. It was described as an “unimaginable humanitarian catastrophe” by the Red Cross (Harrison 127). Lokeesan was one of the few surviving Tamil Journalists who “actively sought out and recorded other people's tragedies” (Harrison 74). He was a journalist for the pro-rebel news site *Tamilnet*. Lokeesan witnessed thousands of dead bodies through his camera lens. Harrison says: “He observed people take their last breath, the life going out of them before his very eyes” (73). Once, Lokeesan recounts that he witnessed a dying woman nurse her infant. He says, “She probably had not eaten herself for days, but knew her child must feed if it was to have any chance of survival in a world where milk powder was more valuable than gold” (82). Despite the terrible aspects of the civil war, just as physicians remained prohibited from disclosing the mortality rate or suffering of citizens caught in the crossfire, journalists were similarly outlawed from disclosing images and information from the battlefield. Lokeesan testifies for how the government intervened with the media to spread false propaganda and deny news that exposed the actual nature of the war. He describes how the Sri Lankan government monitors all war-related reports:

...which checked his reports every morning and must often have been choking with rage at what they read. They loathed *Tamilnet*, calling it terrorist propaganda, furious that the international media quoted Lokeesan's casualty figures to balance those of the Sri Lankan military. That was because, unlike all the rest of the media, *Tamilnet* had a reporter on the ground. (Harrison 74)

Rummel further adds that death inflicted through “forced deportations and expulsions causing deaths” as well as “forced labour, prisoner of war, or recruit camp conditions” (37) are also part of democide. This characteristic of democide is mirrored in Pulidevan's statement included in Harrison's testimonial book. Pulidevan or Puli, an LTTE member who was “the spokesman for one of the most successful and brutal ethnic insurgent groups in the world” (97). As previously stated, both the state and the LTTE played a role in endangering civilians. Taking LTTE ways throughout the conflict include forced conscription of children into militant organisations, suicide murders, and LTTE militants always wearing cyanide capsules around their necks to avoid arrest by the government. “Surrender was not an option; martyrdom was the mantra of the group that pioneered the art of suicide bombing”, Harrison writes (97). The final phase of the civil war was filled with violence; the battleground was explicitly analogous to a situation in which living or dying was as arbitrary as throwing a coin. The testimony, named *The Shopkeeper*, portrays the hardships of refugee camp residents through the eyes of a couple, Karu and Gowri. As Hannah Arendt puts it, “There are no parallels to the life in the concentration camps. Its horror can never be fully embraced by the imagination for the very reason that it stands outside of life and death” (444). Refugees are depoliticised in rehabilitation facilities and forced to live within. The Manik Farm was one of the largest refugee camps in the

world back then, located in Sri Lanka. The camp was renowned for its violence and cruelty toward its detainees. They were held for months while officials vetted them for any connections to the Tigers or were tortured and killed during interrogations. Harrison writes, “The failure of the United Nations to protect Tamil civilians was symptomatic of the indifference of the world as a whole. Even when the guns fell silent, in late May 2009, the killing did not stop – only the counting of bodies” (63). Rummel expressly stated that “capital punishment, actions taken against armed civilians during mob action or riot, and the deaths of non-combatants killed during attacks on military targets so long as the primary target is military, are not considered democide” (Rummel 38). Therefore, the killings, with the death of the military's armed men, of LTTE commander Velupillai Prabhakaran and all other militant groups, cannot be considered as democide. Terrorism needs to be destroyed inevitably, as Slavoj Žižek argues in one of his landmark works, *Against the Double Blackmail* (2016). *Zizek is one of the current world's most prolific intellect and philosopher*. In this work, he examines ISIS terrorism and suggests how the world's superpowers should collaborate to combat this kind of terrorism. He argues that to defeat terrorism, “What we must avoid doing is engaging in the usual Left-liberal litany of 'One cannot fight terror with terror, violence only breeds more violence’” (Žižek 9). In this case, by eschewing the left-liberal sentimentality, Žižek urges the West to engage in terrorism or violence to defeat ISIS. Bringing in this radical equation of confronting violence with violence to the bloody Sri Lankan civil war, it becomes arduous to criticise the Government of Sri Lanka for the brutality and violence with which they defeated LTTE. The manner of death and the politics that drive the act of death may differ from one country to the next. However, once dead bodies get piled up in conflict zones, they are instantly reduced to war subjects. These war subjects either induce fear among the resistance group or are suppressed internationally to safeguard the nation's image. “It is the death of the Other, the Other's physical presence as a corpse, that makes the survivor feel unique” (88), says Mbembe in his book *Necropolitics*.

## **Conclusion**

Achille Mbembe mentions, “War is, after all, a means of achieving sovereignty as much as a way of exercising the right to kill” (66). In a world where politics is kind of the manifestation of war, there arises the rhetoric on the place given to life, body and death. Death is one aspect of war that warrants interrogation. Sri Lanka has received foreign assistance in combating terrorism. Only in the closing hours of the battle and its aftermath did the multinational organisation shift its priority from eliminating terrorists to protecting civilians. Both the Sinhalese majoritarian Government of Sri Lanka and LTTE had to manage the international perception of the conflict. The Sri Lankan government validated their brutal indulgence in violence as counterterrorism or their strategy of defeating terrorism. The LTTE's track record of violence against civilians, forced recruitment of minors, and suicide assaults contradicts their initial ideology of protecting the Tamil community. The LTTE's engagement with violence

“legitimised the government's counterinsurgency operation in the eyes of most governments” (Kurtz and Jaganathan 99). In Sri Lanka, the military adopted Rajapaksa's paradigm of fighting terrorism at any cost, while on the other side, LTTE employed a human shield strategy as their final resort. In this case, one must comprehend how a large group of people follow the will and philosophy of some people in power. As included in Harrison's testimonial account of how the troops were obeying instructions when one army soldier declares, “We are going to kill you,' the soldiers shouted in their language, Sinhala. 'We have orders to shoot everyone” (28). This is what Arendt defined as the banality of evil concerning the case of Adolf Eichmann, saying that “the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil” (Arendt 118). Arendt criticises the unreasoning power of the army or military, who follow orders and not their reasoning power, which causes war. And, in this chaotic universe, it is the reasoning power alone that can impede violence and killings, thus saving humanity.

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# **Cricket as Politics: Mapping Spaces of Appropriation and Hegemony in Shashi Tharoor's *An Era of Darkness***

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## *Abstract*

*An Era of Darkness* is a recent work by Shashi Tharoor that examines the British Raj in India. Tharoor argues that British colonialism was out and out an exploitative enterprise and that there was nothing redeeming about the way it carried out its colonial agenda of consolidation and expansion in the social, cultural and political spaces. In one of the chapters of the book Tharoor discusses how the game of 'cricket' becomes an instrument of colonial culture. Popular perception about cricket refers to its status as a colonial import; it was the British who supposedly introduced the game to the subcontinent that later on came to symbolize the exclusivity, refinement and superiority of colonial culture. Tharoor argues how the ideas of masculinity and colonial culture were interconnected through the perception of the game of cricket as a gentlemen's game. This paper attempts to critically analyze the idea how 'cricket' was fashioned into a discourse of cultural domination during British rule through an examination of the role cricket played in consolidating and perpetuating colonial domination in a systematic fashion. Through an analysis of the construction of cricket as an 'English' sport introduced as a civilizing tool and its subsequent subversion and appropriation by the subject people and its current representation in popular culture, this paper will attempt to engage with the issue of how 'cricket' becomes a pivotal signifier in mapping the cultural geography of colonial and postcolonial societies.

**Keywords:** Discourse, cricket, masculinity, colonization, appropriation.

## **Introduction**

Cricket, the Gentleman's Game, becomes one of the sensational and mesmerizing games for the Indian spectators. From T-20 match to World cup, cricket has won the favor of the people and has become a priority for enjoyment over any other game. As a sport cricket enjoys widespread popularity across the world and is watched and celebrated by many people even when it is not the national game of the country. The sensitivity, excitement and tension noticed during the matches played between India and Pakistan is nothing new. As a sporting event it offers a great opportunity for promotion and publicity commercially. At the same time such an event also becomes a way of political and diplomatic engagement for better or for worse as evident in many of the sporting events between the two feuding nations. Overall, it is almost a truism to state that an undeniable discourse has formed out of the sentiments as observed in the performance of cricket. This discourse of cricket has drawn attention of critics in recent times. Writing about the discourse of cricket in the erstwhile colony of West Indies, one critic states that the discourse of 'Englishness' and 'Blackness' are significant to understand the discourse of cricket. He explains how the binary of English/West Indies plays a vital role in reaffirming the discourse of cricket as a colonial mechanism. Cricket reproduces Englishness which is envied in West

Indies (Diawara 830-832). This analogy about cricket as a statement of Caribbean identity is very similar to the way how the Indian subcontinent embraced the game during colonial times not only as a sport but also provided a new language of political assertion and racial identity. Ashish Nandy (2001) in the book *The Tao of Cricket* mentions that while the origin of cricket as an English game in itself has been questioned in postcolonial times, its role in shaping a culture of resistance and national pride has been commented on by many historians and scholars (Majumdar 2001; Chakraborty 2003). Through an analysis of the construction of cricket as an 'English' sport introduced as a civilizing tool, its subsequent subversion and appropriation by the subject people and its representation in popular culture in contemporary times, this paper will attempt to engage with the issue of how 'cricket' becomes a pivotal signifier in mapping the cultural geography of colonial and postcolonial societies.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

In the book *An Era of Darkness* there is an analogy of the performance of cricket with that of the Indian classical music. Just like one can improvise the classical music on the basis of the prescribed rules, the game of cricket has also been improvised to make it look and feel like a game of Indian origin. So much so that the game of cricket is no longer a mere reminder of our colonial legacy and all the significances attached to it but has undergone a transformation that has eventually reproduced in its current format which is very far from its initial days of emergence as a sport that was a symbol of Britain's cultural and imperial supremacy. It happened so in Bengal during the colonial period that the winning or losing in the game of cricket became a sign of triumphing over colonial authority. Together with an attribute of racial and cultural superiority of the colonizer, cricket became the ground for the construction of a new binary: that of the robust athletic masculine Englishmen as against the weak, flaccid and effete native. This provided a new dimension to colonial authority. Cricket came to be associated with not just the cultural vigor and superiority of the Englishmen but it also effectively legitimized British hegemonic impulses by investing the sport with a brand of colonial authority. Cinematic representations like *Lagaan* have well demonstrated this point. This movie represents the intersection between British colonization and cricket. Originally considered a colonial game, the British brought the sport to their colonies with the aim of assimilating the colonies by reinforcing a hegemonic cultural order. However, over time it was adopted as a national sport. In fact, it played a significant role in creating a sense of community and solidarity that cut across the division of caste and class (Chakraborty 1879-1882). That is how the discourse gradually changes from being the colonizer's weapon towards a reverse appropriation by native Indian people. It is interesting to probe the question of how this change occurs. It does not happen overnight. It happens through improvisation over a period of time as more people begin to play the game. It gains in popularity. These contrast with the other native sports such as Kabaddi or Hockey which failed to garner the popularity of cricket. Tharoor's analysis indicates the way in which cricket

came to acquire an aura of 'nationalist overtone' (Tharoor 172). Commenting on its colonial antecedents Tharoor states that

Cricket is, of course, the only sport in the world that breaks for tea and for many amateurs, tea is the highlight of experience. (Tharoor 169)

This hints at the ingrained colonial bias of the game. It will not be an exaggeration to say that cricket developed in the British colonies and there is an intimate connection between tea and cricket. It is not difficult to understand why cricket flourished in the colonies with the major players being England and its colonies. This is hinted at Tharoor's statement highlighting tea breaks in cricket, perhaps the only sport in the world that breaks for mealtimes. In a way cricket may be said to be a colonial artifact. Hence the statement about cricket and its observance of 'tea time' as a ritual. When cricket was introduced 'accidentally' by the British, it worked as a metaphor of the colony. The field of cricket is the colonized nation where the Englishmen must prove and display their physical prowess. The norms and disciplines to play the game thus came to carry a certain class privilege in its association with upper-class mannerisms and gentility. It is because of this reason that the people winning the game began to be invested with a lot of pride and purpose; it had the twin effect of vanquishing one's oppressor and proving one's masculinity.

But the game has departed from the original hue of its colonizing influence. The performance and reception of the game is still the same. But anyone now can break the stereotypes associated with the game. In one way it can be stated that the stereotypical understanding of cricket has been replaced with a new repackaged format in a form of reverse appropriation by investing it with just the right amount of nationalist fervor and cultural diversity. While talking about the Bengali young players trying to escape 'effeminacy' by excelling in the game, Tharoor's work shows how the colonial discourse around cricket had the effect of creating the binaries of masculinity/femininity and civilized/barbaric. By claiming that the game is no longer a mechanism of colonial culture and is much more sympathetic to the native sentiments and culture, Tharoor deconstructs the binary and opens up plurality of meanings underneath the performance of cricket. Cricket sustains in the form of 'hard' culture in the sense that it does not change itself but changes the people associated with it. Cricket is played through the 'puritan' rules and henceforth unchangeable from the value it presents (Appadurai 2). However, Tharoor's idea is quite contrary to this assumption. He has reinterpreted the discourse of cricket for a multicultural audience. In the discussion of narratives of radio broadcast about cricket, one critic affirms that every narrative has counter narratives and cricket is not an exception and thus, the narratives of the commentary of Test Cricket has changed with the emergence of T-20 series (Watson 226-230). The changing narratives about cricket by Watson stand in line as that of Tharoor. Watson's comment offers an interesting insight into the nature of cricket, where while the rules of the game itself do not change, the ideas and images associated with it undergoes a radical transformation as a response perhaps to the mutating conditions of political and cultural exegesis between the colony and the metropolis. Tharoor critically dismisses colonial cricket-culture and points out the Indian way of playing the game. There are analogy,



metaphor, symbols and rhetoric through which Tharoor does not only destabilize the embedded meaning in the game but also reorients the mutating values of the game when played by the Indians. Ben Carrington (1998) in his essay "Sport, Masculinity, and Black Cultural Resistance" discusses the idea of cricket as performance, that represented a mode of cultural resistance by Black people to White racism as well as a marker of community (290-292). It is, therefore, not wrong to say that there are multiple discourses formed around the performance of the sport. Beyond the periphery of reciprocity that characterizes any sport, cricket and its history, give us a view of racial, ethnological, gendered and colonial testaments of its own times. While Indian cricket emerged as an elite sport in the colonial times patronized by the aristocratic and royal families who had the means and the resources to promote the game, in due course of time it slowly percolated down into the masses who enthusiastically embraced it and played it in their own ways so much so that far from imitating the game as the English played, Indians improvised it and made it their own after a fashion. It was not long before it lost some of its elite aura and soon everyone was playing it. In a very subtle way cricket became a source of anti-colonial mobilization which included subaltern groups as well who were not immune to colonial influences. This is shown by recent scholarship on cricket nationalism how "subaltern groups pursued their political projects quite independently of anyone else at all times" (Chakraborty 1881). British imperialistic mission involved importing cultural products as tool to civilize native populations. With the passage of time it, however, turned into a means to subvert British rule; from its status as a symbol of imperial power the meanings associated with cricket was appropriated to communicate indigenous responses and their resistance to British rule in colonial settings (Majumdar 3400-3402).

## Conclusion

Right from the looting of India, till the "messy afterlife of colonialism" (Tharoor 190) Tharoor's *An Era of Darkness* points out the details of colonial depredation on the nation and its remnants in the new postcolonial imaginary. Tharoor's work can be read as an entry point into an understanding of the colony as the sporting ground literally and metaphorically. Cricket in India has reinvented itself in a new form with a complete paradigm shift not only in terms of format but also in its styles of playing. The T-20 or the IPL as it is popularly known has completely Indianized cricket. Apart from its culture of commercialism that makes it great business model for big money, lucrative contracts and mega advertising, the new form of the game goes beyond business to become a cultural and political phenomenon. What was once a relic of the colonial past has now been appropriated and reimagined as an India led sport for a global audience. The traditional pace of play has been replaced with a new template: a more fast-paced, adrenaline filled, aggressive version of old school in a shortened, condensed form. Distinguishing itself from its colonial past cricket in India has added many new elements and has challenged past traditions of the game. Indian cricket has reinvented itself as a new kind of public entertainment for global consumption. In

doing so it has also tried to present a new vibrant image of the nation to the world as a “young, urbanized, confident India taking the lead on a formerly colonial sport” (Agur 552). This essay also highlights the commercial aspects and the cosmopolitan outlook of cricket developed specifically with the emergence of IPL and India becoming the centre point of the same. Cricket in India has come to represent a new aspirational identity attuned to the sensibilities of a consumerist, globalized, cosmopolitan elite very comfortable with its own hybrid roots and to whom cricket is a symbol of its own potential and privilege. In recent times its appeal has dimmed somewhat because of the many scandals and charges of match-fixing against some of the teams, its promotion of celebrity culture and rampant corruption. Even then cricket in India has rebranded itself as a global commodity with multinational presence with great success. In its current trajectory cricket in India seems to have come full circle.

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# Mapping the Physical and Emotional Landscapes: Exploring the Literary Cartography in Anuradha Roy's Novel *All the Lives We Never Lived*

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## *Abstract*

This paper aims to explore the literary cartography employed by Anuradha Roy in her novel *All the Lives We Never Lived*. Through a detailed analysis of the novel's geographical settings, the article investigates how Roy utilizes the interplay between physical and metaphorical landscapes to convey the characters' emotional and psychological journeys. By examining the novel's intricate mapping of both real and imagined spaces, this study aims to explore the interplay of lived experiences and unfulfilled potentials, offering insights into the human condition and the complexities of longing, freedom, and the uncharted territories of personal histories within Roy's evocative storytelling. It also highlights the significance of literary cartography in understanding the themes of freedom, adventure, culture, and the complexities of human relationships.

**Keywords:** Literary cartography, geography, emotional landscapes, journey, freedom

## **Introduction**

Anuradha Roy, born in 1967, is an acclaimed Indian novelist, journalist, and editor whose debut novel *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008), showcases her mastery in weaving intricate narratives set against the backdrop of India's social and political changes. Her subsequent works *The Folded Earth* (2011) and *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015) delve deep into human emotions, cultural complexities, and the nuances of relationships. Her fourth novel *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018) got her the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award in 2022. In this novel, Roy maps the labyrinthine paths of human experiences, employing landscapes as a metaphorical canvas to explore the complexities of existence.

Literary Cartography is an art form that involves mapping the intricate landscapes and emotional territories within a novel. To Jurji Lotman,

Literary space represents an author's model of the world, expressed in the language of spatial representation. In a literary work, space models different relations of the world-picture: temporary, social, ethical and others (Lotman & Vroon 218).

He claims that literary space is only a simulation of actual space, not a replica of it and asserts that cultural norms and conventions act as a 'mediator' between them, regulating both space in texts and space in the physical world. Anuradha Roy's literary cartography in *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018) explores the complex lives and unfulfilled desires of her characters during the pre-independent era. Through vivid descriptions of physical and emotional spaces, Roy creates a rich tapestry of interconnected narratives that highlight the profound impact of personal choices and societal constraints on one's sense of self and belonging.

The very title of the novel speaks volume about the contrasting 'lives' that the readers are going to witness: the dichotomy of 'lived' and 'never lived.' Here 'lives' is the

metaphor of real and imagined literary cartography. The title encapsulates the central theme of missed opportunities and unfulfilled potential, serving as a poignant reminder of the paths not taken in life: Gayatri, a free-spirited artist, abandoned her son and husband to pursue her passion for painting; Myshkin, the narrator, left to grapple with the societal norms and expectations of the time, is haunted by the choices his mother made. The title, *All the Lives We Never Lived*, suggests the alternate futures and possibilities that Myshkin, Gayatri, and other characters in the novel could have lived had they made different choices.

One of the novel's most significant historical backdrops is the period of British colonialism and India's struggle for independence and its effects on the town of Muntazir. Against this backdrop, the characters in the novel confront the limitations placed on their lives by the oppressive colonial regime, as well as by their own personal circumstances. The title emphasizes the idea that the characters' lives were shaped not only by external forces but also by the choices they make or failed to make: Gayatri's decision to leave her family in pursuit of artistic freedom and self-expression is emblematic of the sacrifices individuals make in the quest for personal and national liberation.

### **Mapping the Adventure**

The novel is set on a thrilling adventure through the landscapes of India, Bali, partially Europe (because of the crisis and tension due to War), and the human heart. While it may not fit the conventional mold of an adventure novel, it weaves a tale of exploration, self-discovery, and the quest for freedom that is as exhilarating as any traditional adventure story. The novel begins with a startling statement from Myshkin, the narrator, a Horticulturist by profession, while recollecting the memories of his early childhood days:

In my childhood, I was known as the boy whose mother had run off with an Englishman. The man was in fact German, but in small-town India in those days, all white foreigners were largely thought of as British. This unconcern for accuracy annoyed my scholarly father even in circumstances as dire as losing his wife to another man (Roy 9).

The foremost incident of 'run off' is what connected the novel with the theme of 'adventure,' where one of the protagonists, Gayatri, who is also an observer, 'set forth' from one location to 'arrive' at completely unfamiliar locations to register her valuable experiences and observations regarding the historical and geographical knowledge of those locations. The word 'adventure,' according to *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, means 1) "an unusual, exciting or dangerous experience, journey or series of events" and 2) "the quality of being excited and willing to take risks, try new ideas, etc." Despite the etymology, it is usually understood that when someone says he/she is carrying on an adventure, he/she is leaving rather than arriving (Tally 21). While recollecting the past, Myshkin could remember how his mother, just before she left, had asked him "to come back from school on time" so that "she could take [him] on a little trip somewhere" (Roy 136-137). An unnatural incident at school and heavy drops

of rain on his way back home disabled him from reaching the place on time and he missed the opportunity to be with his mother on that, rather ironically, 'a little trip.' The 'little trip' was, of course, the trip to life, an adventure, a chance to witness the 'lives' that one could never witness while staying at Muntazir with the common folk. Throughout the novel, Myshkin grapples with the impact of his mother's decision to abandon him. He wonders about the life he might have lived had she stayed, and this sense of loss pervades his existence. In this way, the dichotomy between 'lived' and 'never lived' encapsulates the collective sense of longing and nostalgia that permeates the characters' lives.

Though Myshkin missed the adventure, its excitements, and risks, but was found visualizing the experiences of his mother through her 'painted' description of the places in her letters to Lisa. In those letters to Lisa and only a few to Myshkin, she described the fear, excitement, and hardships of the adventure from the very first day of the 'little trip' when she boarded a train from Muntazir with the two foreigners, Walter Spies and Beryl De Zoete. In almost all her letters, she reflects on the life she left behind, acknowledging the sacrifices she had to make for her art. She left the security at home for the dark, hidden, and indefinite future. Generally, going for an adventure means to leave one's home and, more specifically, to leave the comforts of home. However, the act of leaving one's home requires much thought and for an Indian woman in the 1930s it seemed almost impossible to do so.

### **Mapping the Descriptive Geography and the Narrative Trajectory**

The fundamental characteristic of literary cartography is always marked by a positive tension between two closely related but occasionally antagonistic entries: the narrative trajectory and the descriptive geography. Peter Turchi, in *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer* (2004), describes two separate but related activities that when combined, allow for the creation of a useful “map” for the reader. These are exploration, “some combination of premeditated searching and undisciplined, perhaps only partly conscious rambling,” and presentation - “a document meant to communicate with, and have an effect on, others” (Turchi 12). Whatever the case, literary cartography is a genre that inevitably combines both narrative and description, frequently in unanticipated or unexpected ways (Tally 28). The interaction between those two entities thus shapes the figurative map that is created as a result. Any literary map must balance the need to move a plot or story forward, adhering to an unyielding temporal register, with the equally pressing need to pause, explain things, “paint a picture” or describe a scene (Tally, 28).

Here the narrative trajectory covers within its purview both the historical and the ahistorical. As a historical novel, *All the Lives We Never Lived* deals with the particular – the life, deeds and unusual death of Walter Spies, the famous German painter in the 1930s – but this becomes the universal on account of human truth – the socio-cultural space of women during the 1930s in India. History is the result of investigation, research, documentation, and statistics. Accordingly, Anuradha Roy informs the reader in the 'Acknowledgement' about the extensive research, investigation,

documentation etc. she had done to establish her argument in this novel. She reveals the secrets of the past by creatively reenacting historical incidents or fictional characters. In this novel there is a good deal of transmutation and recasting of incident and character. The novelist supplies the mould and frequently gives a wrench or twist to adjust the drama of history to the social drama of man. She blends the historical and ahistorical elements by recasting Walter Spies and Bali in the 1930s, more specifically his estate Tjampuhan, on one hand, and Gayatri, an Indian descendent and her socio-cultural space on the other. Both the painters, Walter Spies and Gayatri, one real and the other fictitious, abandoned their familiar land and people in their quest for aesthetic pleasure and, if Walter Spies is the embodiment of the international tension and crisis of the 1930s, then Gayatri is, similarly, the embodiment of socio-cultural tension and crisis at the national level.

The political geographer John Agnew in his *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* makes three key distinctions about 'place': as 'location,' as 'locale,' and the 'sense of place.' The absolute location, or the grid references we affix to parts of the earth's surface using standard latitudinal and longitudinal positioning, is what he meant by 'location' (Withers 639). Agnew defines 'locale' as the physical framework for social interactions, the true morphometry of the homes, workplaces, and other settings where people go about their daily lives. Moreover, the affective connection that individuals must have to a place is understood to be a part of the 'sense of place' (Withers 639). The action of the novel takes place in various settings, including the idyllic town of Muntazir, located in the northern region of India, and the remote Indonesian island of Bali. Each place is meticulously described, allowing readers to visualize and emotionally connect with the characters' surroundings. The vivid depictions of landscapes, such as the lush gardens of Muntazir or the vibrant streets of Bali, serve as a backdrop against which the characters' lives unfold. These settings act as physical markers on the literary map, guiding readers through the characters' experiences and shaping their identities.

The dichotomy of the places is evident through Myshkin's account of Muntazir and from the letters of his mother about Java and Bali. There are references to certain other places as well like Santiniketan, Germany etc. and they too have their own order of significance. However, the foremost incident of 'run-off' takes place at Muntazir, a fictitious small town, some 20 miles away from the Himalayan foothills, that has:

a sense of village about it, a settlement from the Middle Ages that progress had pulled by its ears into the present day, where building poked their way out between orchards of lychee, mango and custard apple, interruptions in a landscape with more trees than houses (Roy 55).

The railway service was there but only a 'few trains stopped' at that station. Socially and culturally, both the elites and masses of Muntazir created a restricted boundary for the women. Discipline, homely, faithfulness, and obedience was the benchmark of that place. It is a town rooted in tradition and conservatism. Here, Roy vividly portrays the conservative values and customs that bound women to their homes and limited their agency. Women are expected to conform to traditional roles as homemakers, while

men are breadwinners and decision-makers. It is a place where societal norms are strictly enforced, and deviation from the established path is met with harsh judgement. The author paints a vivid picture of Muntazir's narrow streets, the oppressive atmosphere, and the watchful eyes of the community, all of which contribute to the suffocating social environment that Gayatri seeks to escape. Therefore, the physical space of Muntazir could not offer women a comfortable space to relish in their artistic endeavors; instead, it oppresses and subjugates them.

On the other hand, Bali represents a more progressive and cosmopolitan space for artists like Gayatri. After she leaves Muntazir, she comes to Bali and settles in a modest bamboo and stone hut. Walter Spies was the owner of this estate, Tjampuhan, at Bali. The historical estate still carries forward the legacy of Walter Spies. The ponds at Bali were filled with pink and blue lotus and in the evenings at the royal palace of Bali there was feasting and music. The inhabitants of Bali lead peaceful lives. The estate was being taken care of by two managers. Among some of the dignified foreigners resided over there were Margaret Mead, a famous American anthropologist, and Colin McPhee, the famous American musician.

The disgusting, unkempt sloppiness Gayatri witnessed at Muntazir was absent at Bali. Edward Relph in his *Place and Placelessness* (1976) suggests that:

“The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not therefore come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from superficial or mundane experiences...The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence.” (Relph 43)

Edward Casey too in “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time” argues, “To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in” (Casey 18). The evenings at Bali were filled with music and dances. Dazzling jewelry and gorgeous costumes with floral hair accessories were used during the dance performances. The males at Bali adorned their heads with flowers or tuck one behind their ears. Whereas the women at Bali were 'exquisitely beautiful' and had the kind of unafraid, direct stare that Gayatri loved the most. Apart from these, the physical and cultural space for women here is not as restricted as found at Muntazir. Rather it is fluid and flexible. At Bali, there were statues and temples lining every road. Gayatri had not come across any beggars at the streets. In the rural settlements of southern Bali, few women covered their chests. They had developed a prudish attitude in the north because of the Dutch and Christian influences. At first, Gayatri was astounded to see how commonplace it was to be bare-breasted there; nevertheless, after some while, “it looked absolutely normal” (Roy 246). It is a town where modern ideas and artistic expressions flourish. The novel captures the spirit of Bali as a place where individuality is celebrated, where people are more open to unconventional ideas, and where the clash of traditional and modern values is palpable. In short, Roy's literary cartography maps Bali as a place known for its vibrant culture, rich art forms, and acceptance of diversity. Thus, the dichotomy of the places lies in the fact that Muntazir represents the constraints of tradition and societal

expectations, while Bali offers the promise of liberation and the pursuit of one's true self. And Gayatri's choice to leave one space for the other underscores the novel's exploration of the choices individuals make to seek self-realization and escape societal expectations.

### **Mapping the Emotional Territories**

Beyond physical spaces, *All the Lives We Never Lived* also delves into the intricate emotional territories of its characters. The protagonist, Myshkin, grapples with his mother Gayatri's decision to abandon him and their family to pursue her artistic aspirations. Through Myshkin's as well as Gayatri's introspection and memories, Roy maps the complex emotions of abandonment, longing, and resentment. These emotional landscapes are as vivid and tangible as the physical settings, allowing readers to navigate the depths of the characters' psyche. Furthermore, the bonds between Myshkin and his mother, his father, and his grandfather are tested and transformed as the narrative unfolds. These connections are as vital to the adventure as the physical journeys undertaken by the characters.

Literary cartography in the novel highlights the tension between personal freedom and societal expectations. Myshkin rebels against societal norms and expectations, seeking liberation from the constraints imposed by his conservative upbringing. Myshkin's mother, Gayatri, challenges the normative role of women in society by pursuing her artistic passions, which ultimately leads to her departure. Roy explores the role of artistic expression as a means of achieving personal freedom. Her decision to abandon her family is a radical act of self-assertion, highlighting the limitations imposed by societal norms. Gayatri's passion for painting becomes an outlet for her desires and frustrations, allowing her to express herself in a way that defies societal expectations. Art becomes a form of rebellion, providing a temporary escape from the confines of conformity and offering a glimpse of the freedom she craves. Through their stories, Roy highlights the importance of individual autonomy and the pursuit of personal fulfillment. Myshkin's journey to uncover his mother's story becomes a quest for self-discovery and a search for truth. By mapping the boundaries of gender roles in Indian society, Roy prompts readers to question the impact of societal expectations on individual lives.

Simultaneously, *All the Lives We Never Lived* explores the sacrifices and burdens that come with fighting for national freedom. The characters find themselves caught up in the fervor of India's independence movement, with their personal desires often taking a backseat to the larger cause. The novel portrays the conflict and dilemmas faced by individuals torn between their responsibilities towards their families and their commitment to the nation's struggle for liberation. Nek Chand's inability to understand Gayatri's need for personal freedom reflects the wider societal attitudes towards women's autonomy. The characters' personal journeys are deeply intertwined with the political and social upheavals of the time. The political turmoil of the era serves as a metaphor for the characters' internal struggles. Their pursuit of personal freedom becomes entangled with their desire for a free and independent nation.



Gayatri's pursuit of personal freedom is juxtaposed with the larger struggle for national freedom. As the country fights for independence, individuals like Gayatri and Brijen find themselves torn between their personal desires and their duty towards the nation. This conflict is highlighted through the character of Mukti Devi, a young woman who joins the freedom movement and sacrifices her personal happiness for the greater cause. The novel raises thought-provoking questions about the sacrifices individuals must make for the greater good and the impact of these choices on their personal lives.

In contrast to the pursuit of freedom, the novel also explores the consequences of conformity. Myshkin's father Nek Chand, represents the embodiment of societal expectations and conformity. He adheres to the established norms, suppressing his own desires and dreams as well as that of Gayatri in favor of societal acceptance. Myshkin, torn between his mother's rebellious spirit and his father's conformist nature, grapples with his own identity and desires. Roy explores the internal conflicts faced by individuals who find themselves caught between the allure of personal freedom and the fear of societal judgement. While Myshkin and Gayatri both seek personal freedom, their journeys reveal the price one must pay for nonconformity. Myshkin's rebellion against his family and society leads to a life of solitude and longing for what could have been. Similarly, Gayatri's defiance of societal expectations results in her being labeled as an outcast. The novel, therefore, highlights the difficult choices individuals face when pursuing personal freedom in a society that values conformity.

## Conclusion

The concept of literary cartography in *All the Lives We Never Lived* extends beyond individual emotions and spaces. One of the remarkable aspects of *All the Lives We Never Lived* is the way Roy presents the story from various perspectives. The narrator, Myshkin, narrates his own experience, while his mother, Gayatri, reveals her side of the story through a series of letters. By presenting multiple perspectives, Roy challenges the notion of a single truth and highlights the subjectivity of personal experiences. These narratives are interconnected, forming a web of relationships and experiences. Through the intricate tapestry of interconnected narratives, Roy invites readers on a transformative journey, where the lines between past and present, reality and imagination, blur, ultimately revealing the profound connections that shape our lives.

Roy employs non-linear storytelling to explore different timelines in the novel. The narrative seamlessly shifts between Myshkin's childhood and his adult life, creating a rich tapestry of interconnected events. This technique not only adds suspense and intrigue but also emphasizes the lasting impact of past events on the present. Through these shifts in time, Roy reveals the consequences of choices made in the past and how they reverberate through generations. In *All the Lives We Never Lived*, Anuradha Roy masterfully employs the concept of literary cartography to map the physical and emotional landscapes within the novel. Through detailed descriptions of physical spaces, exploration of emotional territories, and the interweaving of multiple

narratives, Roy invites readers to navigate the complex lives and unfulfilled desires of her characters. By immersing readers in these intricately mapped landscapes, the novel prompts introspection about personal choices, societal constraints, and the profound impact they have on one's sense of self and belonging.

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## Reflecting the Dynamics of Exclusionary Politics and Cultural Violence in the Northeast: A Reading of Anjum Hasan's *Lunatic in My Head*

Sayan Chatterjee\*

### *Abstract*

Given the complex mosaic of multiple cultures and ethnicities that characterize the Northeast, the political grammar of this region has been informed by diverse aspirations and demands, especially of 'ethnic homelands' and rights. The apprehension regarding the absence of a designated territory and the potential loss of ethnic identity in post-independent India has ignited the 'bigoted' notion of ethnonationalism which, in turn, has propelled the problematic discourse of 'outsiderhood' in the region. The politicization of ethnicity as a means of 'resistance' by the ethnic communities has produced an 'indigenous/outsider' binary, giving birth to a counter-racism in the region characterized by widespread and multifarious violence. In this context, the paper attempts to analyse Anjum Hasan's novel *Lunatic in My Head* which represents the exclusionary politics that underscores the lives of the 'ethnic others' in the state of Meghalaya. Furthermore, the paper will try to show how the indigenous/outsider binary brews a culture of violence of a kind that often escapes critical gaze.

**Keywords:** Northeast India, Ethnicity, Ethnonationalism, Outsiderhood, Violence.

The Northeast region of India has too often been identified by scholars as a site of 'unsettling diversity', especially because of the diverse ideas and aspirations that the ethnic communities of the land subscribe to, which are conflicting and, to some extent, contradictory in nature. The largely unaddressed questions of autonomy, identity, belongingness, ethnic territorial rights, and reservations have characterized the political grammar of Northeast India since independence, giving birth to aggressive agitations, existential anxiety, and sporadic violence. Oinam and Sadokpham, therefore, argue that the diversity of the region is characterized by the "contesting interface of people and their collective claims" more than the ethnic and linguistic plurality (9). Moreover, the angst of losing a protective discrimination regime, implemented by the colonial government to safeguard the interests of the vulnerable aboriginal peoples, and the possibility of the absence of a designated ethnic space of its own in post-independent India made many of the ethnic groups in the Northeast apprehensive about the potential loss of their ethnic identity and language, which was one of the major causes of hostility towards the centre and 'mainland' India, and insurgency in the Northeastern states that are predominantly populated by ethnic groups which acquired more complicated dimensions later on. On the other hand, since the cataclysmic event of the partition of India in 1947, and then the war with Pakistan, which culminated in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, the Northeast has witnessed a massive influx of refugees who were religious and linguistic minorities there. The issues of migration and the eventual creation of a somewhat hybrid space in most of the states of the Northeast, therefore, produced a

fertile ground for the creation of a xenophobic 'outsiders discourse', fueled by "identity insecurity" with more and more ethnic communities "jumping on the 'ethnic homeland' bandwagon, and asking for the protective discrimination regime to be implemented in their ethnic cocoons" (McDuie-Ra 61; Choudhury 216).

The insider-outsider debate prevalent in the Northeast is a very complicated one since the dividing lines between the insider and the outsider are often hazy and confusing. An 'outsider' in the state of Assam, for instance, is mostly determined on the basis of linguistic identity, whereas in the other states - populated mostly by the ethnic populace - anyone outside the ethnic belt is considered an 'outsider' and seen as a potential threat to their property and ethnic identity. The tag of 'outsider' is equally applicable even to those who have been living here for generations, making them the 'ethnic other' in their own land. The status of non-tribals in states like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland, asserts Sanjib Baruah, has been reduced to that of 'denizens', thereby propagating exclusionary politics in the region with a large number of citizens of India excluded from a significant number of constitutional rights like rights to land ownership and exchange, business and trade along with restrictions on acquiring licences and access to the elected office (2). However, given the historical disadvantages that the tribal peoples have suffered, it is also important to note that the obsession with 'territoriality' and rigid 'ethnic identity' has been a strategy of resistance amongst the ethnic groups of the Northeast to protect the 'indigenous' identity in their 'own' land that has witnessed huge immigration, and consequently, anti-state armed struggle and ethnic cleansing, which in turn has propelled the fear of getting minoritized in their land and losing political and economic power (183). Nonetheless, in the past few decades, the Northeast has witnessed a political evolution, characterized by institutionalized ethno- governance, policies, and politics of recognition by India's 'ethnographic state'. It is also pertinent to note that the Indian state's distinct criteria of identification, classification, and recognition of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) along with offering a territorial regime of positive discrimination through the Sixth Schedule and 'ethnic homeland model' have made Northeast India a place of governmental exception, making exclusive territorial titles, rights, and political autonomy "actively *desired* by ethnic tribal communities...and produced a new tribal sensibility" (Wouters 18-19). The surge of ethnopolitics in the Northeast may be considered a result of this 'desire' for an exclusive 'ethnic homeland', bereft of the presence of 'others', propelling xenophobic attitudes towards the non-indigenous population of the region. These ethnic aspirations, when connected with the idea of exclusive administrative boundaries for self- governance, are believed to have given rise to a bigoted and xenophobic insider (indigenous)/ outsider binary, eventually drawing a large chunk of cultural and linguistic minorities, the 'ethnic others' of the region, into the vortex of widespread and multifaceted violence.

Violence, in the context of the Northeast, refers not only to the subjective, visible, and physical forms of violence but also to more subtle and inconspicuous forms of indirect vis-à-vis objective forms of violence which often escape the critical gaze but eventually translate into subjective and physical violence of cataclysmic nature. Given

the ample amount of xenophobia instigated against the 'outsiders' in the Northeast, the methods and manners through which violence manifests in the region become diverse, therefore, weaving a complicated and intriguing web of violence affecting the culture of a place at a given time with its people turning hostile against the ones they consider the 'other'. The bulk of literary output, especially the writings in English, from the Northeast, has been able to capture these intricate nuances of various contestations that characterize the region with its inhabitants negotiating their ways through political unrest and violence perpetrated by the state and the non-state actors. However, the dominant voice of the Northeast has been the voice of the 'indigenous' peoples, represented by “the Mamang Dais, the Temsula Aos, the Esterine Kires, et al” (Choudhury 214). In this regard, it may be argued that though the creative brilliance of these 'indigenous' writers has tapped into the crucial contemporary issues of the Northeast, emphasizing the multifarious aspects of insurgency and terrorism, ecological concerns, the loss of 'tribal' spaces, human rights concerns produced from the use of mindless violence, the writers' stance may be critiqued by pointing out their inability to shed light on the issues concerning the 'ethnic others' of the region, the victims of exclusionary politics. However, as Choudhury argues, it is with “the publication of the 'Shillong novels' (if one might call them so), written by writers who are considered belonging to the 'non-indigenous' communities in the Northeast” that the voices of the migrants and 'ethnic others' have started to emerge, reflecting their precarious condition in the region marked by ethnic conflicts and violence (214). The category of 'Shillong novels' comprises three novels in particular – Siddhartha Deb's *The Point of Return* (2002), Anjum Hasan's *Lunatic in My Head* (2007), and Nilanjan P. Choudhury's *Shillong Times: The Story of Friendship and Fear* (2018). These three novels together illustrate an emerging strain in Northeast Indian English literature with their protagonists – Babu in *The Point of Return*, Firdaus, Aman, and Sophie Das in *Lunatic in My Head*, and Debu in *Shillong Times* – all bound by “one common thread of their 'dkhar-ness' (the khasi term 'dkhar' is an ethnic slur used for the 'outsiders', the non-tribals...the quintessential 'ethnic others')” (214- 215). The novels bring to the fore the nuances and subtleties with which violence operates in the Northeast, and the characters of the novels, in their everyday experiences since birth, bear the burden of that inconspicuous form of coercion that sustains relations of domination and exploitation making the dividing line between the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders' distinctly visible.

The author primarily considered here, Anjum Hasan, was born in the provincial town of Shillong in the state of Meghalaya and has been a significant 'non-ethnic' literary voice from the Northeast who is currently settled in Bangalore. The literary venture of Hasan, which started with the publication of a poetry collection, *Street on the Hill*, by the Sahitya Akademi in the year 2006, soon garnered much attention with the publication of her debut novel, *Lunatic in My Head*, in the following year. Her two subsequent novels, titled *Neti Neti* (2009) and *The Cosmopolitans* (2015), along with the collections of short stories *Difficult Pleasures* (2012) and *A Day in the Life* (2018), have been able to successfully carve a place for her in the anglophone literary realm of

the country. Typically characterized by the presence of an overarching “literary map of Shillong and Bangalore”, Hasan's fictional works seem to reflect the characters' existential angst typified by the multilayered Indian cityscapes (Vaidya). The idea of 'rootlessness' typically runs through most of Hasan's works, with the protagonists grappling to trace a place where they belong. The character of Sophie from *Lunatic in My Head* and also *Neti Neti*, for instance, manifests the same as she finds herself as an outsider in both Shillong and Bangalore, and the dynamics of this angst further complicates in *The Cosmopolitans* as Qayenaat, the protagonist, oscillates between the nostalgia of Bangalore city as it was 15 years back and its unceasing progress in a fast-paced, wealth-driven avatar. Referring to these fictional works as witnesses to the beauty and contradiction of a dark, changing world, Vaidya opines that Hasan's literary oeuvre “tackles the frequently inexplicable world of modern India by sketching the disquiet of those who don't quite belong and who cannot help but wander with eyes wide open” (“Multilayered Maps of Modern India”).

Set in the picturesque town of Shillong in the 1990s, Anjum Hasan's *Lunatic in My Head* magnifies this perpetual thread of 'rootlessness', knitting it with the insider-outsider binary that dominates the politics in the Northeast with fine subtlety and acute sensibility. Though the exclusionary politics of the state is not the only major thematic concern in Hasan's *Lunatic in My Head*, the representation of the existing ethnic division certainly draws the readers' attention since it has been presented as part and parcel of the existence of the novel's three main protagonists – the lecturer Firdaus Ansari, the IAS aspirant Aman Moondy and the eight-year-old Sophie Das. Firdaus, Aman, and Sophie in the novel are the quintessential 'others' in the eyes of the propagators of 'outsiders discourse', bound by, as mentioned above, the “common thread of their 'dkhar-ness'” (Choudhury 214). The perturbation of being the 'outsiders' haunts the characters, and Hasan refers to the same in the very first chapter of the novel while introducing the character of Firdaus Ansari: Firdaus was none of this. She refused to introduce herself as a Bihari because though her parents were from Bihar, she was born in Shillong and never lived anywhere else. What did it make her? In Shillong's eyes if nothing else at least a dkhar, a foreigner, someone who did not have roots here, did not have the ground needed to put roots in. (4) Like Firdaus, Aman, and Sophie are also seen struggling to find their roots in Shillong what with Aman carrying a north Indian surname and Sophie a Bengali one. Though all three of them are born in Shillong, they are puzzled to consider it their 'home' since they are being made aware of their 'dkharness' in myriad ways, though at times the exclusion does take a more precise form. Sophie Das, the teenage protagonist, for instance, is made aware of her 'dkharness', her excluded status in the ethnic society of Shillong in the second chapter of the novel itself when, while attending a reception party with their landlady Elsa, she was not served with snacks by the girls who were serving tea and snacks to the guests:

The girl with the tray put down a paper plate before Elsa, gave Sophie the barest of glances, and then turned right round and started handing out plates to the facing row. Sophie sat frozen for a while...they looked at Sophie, foodless and blushing with

embarrassment... a girl from the facing row had noticed that Sophie had been ignored, that the dkhar had been shown her place. She whispered something to her friend. They began giggling. (98)

The novel is replete with references to similar incidents which highlight the routine practice of showing the 'outsiders' their rightful place in a state which is claimed by the ethnic population as their 'own'. This brings to the fore the deep-rooted hatred against the non-indigenous population, fueled by hegemonic ethnic identity politics in the region, which translates into ethnic mobilization leading to exclusionary politics that prefer to keep the non-tribals out of social, economic, political, and cultural domains. Drawing insight from arguments extended by Arjun Appadurai in *Fear of Small Numbers*, it may be contended that the hegemonic identity politics in the Northeast is an offshoot of the “anxiety of incompleteness” since the existence of the non-ethnic populace serves as a constant reminder to the ethnic majorities about the incomplete 'ethnic purity' of a territory that has been claimed as quintessentially ethnic (8). The presence of 'ethnic others', in the context of the Northeast, severely destabilizes the idea of this ethnic purity characterized by religious, cultural, and linguistic uniformity, creating an apparent social uncertainty, thereby propelling projects of ethnic cleansing that are “both vivisectionist and verificationist in their procedures” (5). The perpetration of violence, in this regard, very often emerges as an instrument and brutal technique of cultural purification that ensures social certainty by ostracizing minorities to safeguard the interests of the majority population. When it comes to the Northeast, it also becomes crucial to highlight that the region has time and again claimed about its being subjected to prolonged economic discrimination from the political dispensation at the centre, and the political aspirations of the masses have been suppressed time and again through the means of brute military power which could have plausibly been avoided by unlocking the avenues of diplomatic solutions through dialogues and discourses. Moreover, because of the geographical segregation and religio- linguistic divisions, it may be argued that India's Northeast remained an uncharted territory to the 'mainland' India for a significant period bearing the burden of multitudinal stereotypes even in the post-independent era, and also hesitant enough to embrace the forms and flavours of typical 'postcolonial modernity' unlike the other parts of the country. Therefore, the uncertainty regarding the presence of the 'others' owes its roots to the aforementioned factors to a significant degree and is closely associated with the fear of getting minoritized in one's land which, furthermore, is allied to other fears about growing inequality, loss of sovereignty, or potential threats to local security and livelihood. Within this framework, the multifarious modes of violence that the non-ethnic/ non-tribal 'others' have been subjected to in the Northeast, might be interpreted as being instrumental in producing a social certainty by mobilizing what Appadurai terms “full attachment” towards the ethnic communities and their interests (7).

However, more than the economic and political exclusion, it is the social exclusion that operates at the heart of the Northeast, depriving the excluded ones of social recognition, self-respect, and social values (Bijukumar 20). Social exclusion, according to Power and Wilson, is about the “inability of our society to keep all groups and individuals within reach of what we expect as a society...or to release their full

potential” (27). Therefore, Sophie's unrelenting sense of shame about her identity or Firdaus's confusion regarding her belongingness stems from an essentially excluded status. In this regard, the presence of an exclusionary society may be interpreted as a phenomenon generated from the existence of a continuum of violence that is 'cultural' in nature. Cultural violence, Johan Galtung argues, refers to “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence - exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) - that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (291). Galtung identifies the casual flow of violence from cultural to structural and then to direct or physical violence since the culture, he opines, “preaches, teaches, admonishes... and dulls us into seeing repression as normal and natural” (295). Therefore, cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right or at least not wrong. The incidence of heckling and physical abuse of the street vendor Sarak Singh by some tribal youths in the novel, draws attention to the same:

“Do you want to see what my boots can do” asked the tallest of the boys. “You bastard. Don't talk to me like that” . . . He punched the man on his shoulder in an experimental way. Sarak Singh winced and took a step back but kept his eyes down. His friends said nothing...The boy punched him again, harder, and he appeared to lose his balance... “Stop it”, said Aman softly...” Shut up dkhar . . . “Shut up and go home. Don't interfere.” (36-37)

The regular attacks on 'outsiders' like Sarak Singh by the goons, the 'insiders' of the state, and the disturbingly nonchalant attitude of the common masses towards these abuses reflect how violence against the non-indigenous population is seen as a common and regular phenomenon and considered instrumental to safeguard the indigenous population, culture, and identity from being jeopardized by the 'ethnic others.' The extortion of money from the non-tribals by the local boys, as referred to in the novel by Dr. Moondy (Aman's father) is another practice of asserting their ethnic hegemony.

Expatriating on the notion of 'cultural violence', Galtung refers to the ideological and linguistic aspects of a culture that contribute to the creation of a violent structure. The repeated use of the slur 'dkhar' to address the non-tribals, as evident in the novel, and the ethnonational ideology of an 'ethnic homeland', essentially characterized by a “xenophobic space-centric ethnic identity consciousness among the 'tribes” has made the insider/outsider binary more intense rendering a dehumanized position to the 'other' (Choudhury 218). In the context of Meghalaya in particular, and Northeast in general, the verbal, and psychological abuses meted out to the 'outsiders' indicate the violent structure being institutionalized and the violent culture internalized from where direct violence becomes repetitive and ritualistic, like a vendetta. The character of Sarak Singh from Hasan's novel bears witness to this as he says to Aman and his friends, “they keep doing this. And they never even pay” (38). Moreover, a continuum of violence, Galtung opines, creates 'needs-deficits' which, when it happens to a group collectively, turns into 'collective trauma' that can sediment into collective consciousness (295). Therefore, a mundane routine of going for a night walk on the streets of Shillong evokes fear in Aman's mind and his father's reluctance



to pay money to the extortionists makes him anxious about his father's safety. The subtle forms of coercion that mark the everyday existence of the 'ethnic others,' furthermore, deprive them of the basic human right, the right to life, as they live in constant fear of violence. Dr. Moondy, therefore, terms Shillong as a place with “no future” as he remarks, “in my time, things were different. One could make a life here... sab khatm ho gaya. That time has gone. Now, people, boys...barge into people's shops, into offices, and demand money” (70).

However, the notion of cultural violence does not always signify a 'violent culture' because, as Galtung opines, an entire culture can hardly be classified as violent, and therefore, the definition of cultural violence only refers to certain aspects contributing to cultural stereotypes which eventually translates into serious subjective violence (291). Firdaus's relationship with the tribal-boy Ibomcha, Aman's friendship with Ibomcha and Ribor, and Sophie's uneven camaraderie with their landlady Elsa Lyngdoh, counterpoint to the 'insider'-'outsider' divide, thus foreground this argument precisely in the novel. Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that in *Lunatic in My Head*, we find instances of cultural differences producing stereotypes that are not confined to not only stereotyping the 'outsiders' but attempts are also made by several 'non-tribal' characters, like Nivedita and Dr. Thakur, to stereotype the indigenous people, which points towards an equally disturbing attitude of disgust and suspicion that further widens the indigenous-outsider division.

Anjum Hasan's *Lunatic in My Head* probes deeper into the socio-cultural fabric of the Northeast, revealing the intricacies and conflicts associated with the identity politics that dominate the discourse about the region. Hasan's novel may be read as an attempt to disclose and discuss the excluded status of the non-indigenous population, living as the perpetual 'others' of the region, which is further linked with a virulent form of extremism and violence. However, more than the violence that “works on the body”, it is the cultural violence, which “works on the soul”, that the novel primarily deals with (Galtung 169). The cultural component of violence, asserts Raphael Lemkin, complements direct violence and 'cripples' a group's existence (xi-xii). So, the sustained attacks on the non-indigenous communities in the Northeast by grouping them as 'dkhars' (foreigners), or abusing the most vulnerable ones physically, can be regarded as a collective cultural practice that negates the very existence of the ethnically others putting a corrosive impact on their social ontology. The characters of Hasan's novel bring to the fore the marginal, 'crippled', and 'excluded' social existence of the 'ethnic others' in the state of Meghalaya, caught in the vortex of multifarious forms of violence. The narrativization of the outsider's predicament in *Lunatic in My Head* may, therefore, be read as a creative endeavor to magnify the hitherto unfamiliar affairs of ethnic hegemony, highlighting the need to incorporate this into the public and literary discourses about the Northeast.

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**Psycho-Sexual Health of Malayali Migrants and their Left-Behinds:  
A Note on Benyamin's *Goat Days* and M. Mukundan's *Pravasam***

**Rince Raju\***  
**Dr. Devendra Rankawat\*\***

*Abstract*

Migration is arguably one of the oldest of human experiences. Yet, the complexity of this multi-faceted and multi-phased phenomenon seems to have largely defied the human attempts at a full understanding. There are still some issues that have remained neglected or under-researched. One such is the sexual health of the migrant in the host society and its psychological effects. More critical attention needs to go into understanding the nuances thereof because when a migrant lands up in a host-land, s/he gets beset with a plethora of adjustment challenges viz. cultural-ethnic differences, linguistic barriers, collective and individual identity, socio-political dynamics. Amid all this, the psycho-sexual health of a migrant becomes an individual concern requiring individual efforts as the issue is largely systemic. This gets further complicated in cases when the spousal migration takes place soon after the marriage.

The Malayali diaspora (named after their language Malayalam) constitutes a significant section of the Indian diaspora. However, some of its challenges are typical – spousal migration during the prime period of sex life, a lop-sided personal and social life of the left-behinds, especially that of 'the Gulf wives'. Since this pattern is characteristically Malayali, the Malayali diasporic literature affords ample depiction of such challenges and of the ways in which individuals try to tackle them. So, the psycho-sexual interaction does become the site of an internal struggle that needs to be understood better than what has hitherto been done. The present paper aims to explore the issue of psycho-sexual health of the Malayali diaspora as portrayed in the novels - *Goat Days* by Benyamin and *Pravasam* by M. Mukundan. The paper has two focal points – the challenges faced and the adjustment strategies devised by the Malayali immigrants to tide over the emotional turmoil.

**Keywords:** Spousal migration, labour migration. Gulf Wives, desexualisation, *Kafala* System.

Psycho-sexual health is generally a neglected aspect of life. For migrants, it is arguably even more so. Though migration is one of the oldest of human experiences, some of its challenges have proved to be too nuanced and intricate for a full human understanding. In fact, there are multi-level challenges. On surface, there are those obvious and outer concerns like cultural and ethnic differences, linguistic barriers and group identity; deep down, there are issues that pertain to the very core of a human being. The mysterious inner world of an individual somehow remains undergirded by the primeval urges – sex being the central one. Therefore, satisfaction of sexual need is of crucial importance and any deprivation thereof might directly impact the overall well-being of a person. As Schnarch, a practising academician at Yale School of Medicine, has pointed out that the intimacy built into a sexual relationship is a source of emotional and social support, which is a key component that defines life context

and in turn shapes health (qtd. in Liu & et al 278).

Scholarly theorisation on the subject has also implied that sexual activity may acquire the meaning of a basic, bedrock sociability- the “essential” element that proves to immigrants their intrinsic human worth (Cvajner, 265). One manifestation of such a crisis is the spousal separation caused by migration. Migration *per se* has a long history. Both humans and animals have migrated for 'greener pastures' since antiquity. In the case of India, both out -of -India and into- India migration have occurred frequently, resulting into a highly multi-cultural, multi- religious society at home and a widely spread Indian diaspora abroad. Malayali diaspora is one of the significant part/segment of Indian diaspora and spousal migration is a typical pattern therein. It occurs for a variety of reasons but economic compulsion is the most common cause. As such, the men migrate to take up jobs in the Gulf and their families stay behind and get money in the form of remittances. But in all this, the spouses suffer in emotional and sexual life.

Due to regrettable lack of proper living facilities in the host land (specially so in the labour camps in the Gulf) and prevalence of uneasy social norms in the host society, most of the Malayali migrants are forced to leave their wives back home. For official purposes, the recent economic studies on the Malayali migration have coined the term 'Gulf wives' to describe such wives. In the Kerala Migration Survey report, 2011, it was estimated that approximately 1.1 million such 'Gulfwives' were living in Kerala. These women did make up nearly 13 % of the married female population in Kerala then. Of course, these left-behind wives were in the prime of their youth (hence at the peak of sexual need) with an average age of 20.5 years, while the average age of their husbands was around 27.5 years. Importantly, this also was presumably the most fertile period of their sex life.

Thus, the separation does impede not only the biological sexual needs of such couples and their breeding patterns but also impacts their psychological wellbeing. Sigmund Freud has pointed out that the libidinal drives can conflict with the conventions of civilised behaviour, represented in the psyche by the superego (Kitcher,106). However, in the context of the Malayali, it is economic reasons that restrict the migrants' ability to experience sexual consummation. Consequently, the unnatural suppression of the libido surely leads to tension and disturbance in the individual, prompting the excessive ego defences which results in neurosis (108).

In Kerala, the issue of unemployment and the lack of a suitable job market to absorb the skills have persisted relentlessly since the 1970s. Incidentally, this synchronised with the beginning of migration to the Middle East in search of employment or greener pastures. The connection between these demographic transitions of migration is evident as the youth in Kerala sought to go out. Even as of 2014, the unemployment rate among emigrants before migration was estimated to have been around 31.1 per cent, while the overall unemployment rate in Kerala was as low as 7.2 per cent of the labour force. Emigration has ever since played a significant role in mitigating the issue of unemployment in Kerala. In 2014 the number of emigrants nearly doubled to 2.4 million and remittances they sent back increased more than five-fold to INR 710

billion, not accounting for migrants who had returned, or who had escaped the Kerala Migration Survey (Zachariah & Rajan, 16). Since 1971, Kerala has been referred to as 'money order' economy only to be replaced later with the label 'remittance-led economy' owing to the fact that even currently remittances alone make up a figure equivalent to 35 per cent of the state income (KMS 2018, 62) and 10.2 per cent of total national remittances is contributed from Kerala even today according to Economic Review 2022 (428). These data show the inevitability of migration in the modern world order, especially in states like Kerala.

On social front, in the early 1980s, when the oil boom was at its peak, young men from Kerala, who were chasing their Arabian dreams, were in great demand everywhere. The wealth they earned from Gulf countries made them the top priority in the institution of marriage. The point is emphasized in Mukundan's novel *Pravasam*: "In childhood days all girls long to have an elder brother in the gulf. Later on, they hanker for a groom there" (Mukundan 195; translation mine). Going to the Gulf also becomes a social symbol of economic viability, and, therefore, also a means of achieving social acceptability of young lovers. As Shankarankutty puts it in *Pravasam*, while referring to Abooty, the young boy who migrates to Gulf so that he may marry the girl of his choice. He says: "There were many youths across the state saying, "Dear I will tie a knot around your neck"" (Mukundan 266; translation mine). However, the young wives of such men, have to face a harsh reality soon after the marriage. Many of these men work as labourers (residing in labour camps in the Gulf). Since there is the minimum income requirement for family sponsorship, the women are usually unable to join their husbands. Moreover, certain jobs in the Middle East are so designed as to be suitable only for men. As a result, they would typically see their husbands only once every two or three years, as depicted in Mukundan's novel *Pravasam*. This was so before the advent of mobile phones and the internet. Even the telecommunication available now makes little difference as the pixel-images can hardly substitute for the real flesh-and-blood people.

As such, these women face a number of challenges. They get inescapably saddled with household responsibilities ranging from rearing children to looking after their in-laws and handling other family matters. This aspect of their lives is poignantly portrayed in Mukundan's novel *Pravasam*. As the authorial voice observes: "Having to live alone (even after marriage) is the greatest sorrow on earth" (Mukundan 169; translation mine). Both the husband and the wife are, in fact, equal victims of their psycho sexual crisis caused by spousal migration. Lives of the couples Kumaran–Kalyani, Moidu–Subaida, Janardhanan–Latha, Pallikkandi Vinod–Sumalatha – Sumalatha and others from both the novels amply illustrate the disturbance caused by such spousal migration. After marriage the in-laws' house is for the 'gulf wife,' what the hostland is for the migrants as they entail loneliness superadded with responsibilities.

The separation caused by migration and the resultant lack of an active sex life can lead to not only loneliness but also a sense of emotional discomfort for them (Haour-Knipe 10). This plight is vividly depicted in the novel *Pravasam* by M Mukundan and

in *Goat Days* by Benyamin. Kottayth Kumaran, who is the first victim of spousal migration in the novel *Pravasam*, migrated to Burma leaving behind his newly-wedded pregnant wife, Kalyani. His purpose of migration was to earn wealth and build his identity through employment in the on-going British railway construction project. Since he knew little about the place he was going to, he couldn't dare to take his wife along. The separation of Kumaran and Kalyani affected both of them in their adjustment to the changed situation. The degree of frustration Kalyani felt is writ large in her letter to Kumaran: “When you come back, I won't be here in the Kottayth house. I will go with someone else. Even after the marriage, it isn't easy to live without a man” (Mukundan 103; translation mine). She can be seen as the symbol of the 'gulf wives.' Her pleadings with Kumaran to return to her are full of emotional helplessness, and poignantly show up the failure of conjugal/marital life.

On the other hand, Kumaran's existence in the host country without the emotional warmth and support of his wife was equally miserable. In fact, men's wellbeing- both physical and mental- is much more dependent on marriage than that of women (William 476). Kumaran could hardly stop thinking about Kalyani and their son. Similarly, Najeeb from *Goat Days* also underwent the harrowing agony, while staying away from his wife, in a different context i.e. in a remote *masaara* in the Middle East.

Both *Kumaran* and *Najeeb*, one in Burma and the other in the Middle East, experienced the pangs of sexual deprivation. Kumaran did find some solace in Beerankutty and his daughter Kadheeja in Burma (who were prior migrants). He compromised with taste, language and even culture, but his need for sexual satisfaction remained unmet. For a while, he considered Kadheeja as an equivalent to his wife Kalyani, as she was the only woman available for him to communicate with in his mother tongue and she also served him homely cuisine in the land of migration. The dream that Kumaran once had of having a physical relationship with her can justifiably be construed as his unconscious desire for the female body. It testifies to the Freudian psychology of Unconscious desires and thoughts, insisting dreams might provide a glimpse into our unconscious desires, conflicts, and thoughts that are repressed or not easily accessible in the waking life. But later when Kumaran had to marry her under compelling circumstances – as Beerankutty was on his death bed imploring him to marry her—he felt unable and emotionally uninclined to consummate the marriage physically. This shows the complexity of this phenomenon.

Kalyani on the other hand, had complete revulsion to sexual needs by the time Kumaran returned home. By then, their son Giri was already an adult. The intervening time had made Kalyani more adamant, autonomous and independent. The couple found it extremely difficult to restore their relationship to its original state. Even their son Giri felt revulsion towards his father for his *absence* during childhood and for his second marriage in Burma. The narrator, M Mukundan suggestively depicts the changed situation as follows: “Kumaran took an umbrella and came out slowly. He did not unfold the umbrella even though it was raining. The helplessness and pity of someone who has been cast out of life can be seen in his every step” (Mukundan 129; translation mine).

A number of researchers (Brockhoff and Biddlecom 833-56; Yang and Xia 241-50) have previously indicated that migrants who experience physical separation from their spouses might partake in risky sexual activities or form new relationships in their destination, contributing to a decline in emotional connections with their partners left behind. Consequently, the diminished intimacy could significantly impact the psychological well-being of the left-behind spouse. But Kumaran's situation tells a different story altogether. He stands branded as a traitor yet remains completely unfulfilled in both the relationships. Neither Kalyani nor Kadheeja could become completely his.

Ramadasan, the gulf migrant in *Pravasam*, in a mood of resignation, expresses his reluctance to get married. His reasoning is a synecdoche of their pain in general. He says: "We Gulf migrants are only destined with marriage, not with a bride. We have to return to the same desert after leaving her with the mother-in-law. That is our destiny" (Mukundan 147; my trans.). Ramadasan's close friend Abooty also expresses his frustration at having to suppress the sexual desire in the labour camp; "How could I live without the glance of even a single woman" (Mukundan 303; translation mine)

The desexualisation resulting from migration, thus, is quite evident in the life of Najeeb in the novel *Goat Days* by Benyamin. The events narrated in the novel are carved out from the real-life experience of Najeeb, a Malayali migrant to the Gulf from Alappuzha. His fate was to lead a life in goat *masara* in the middle of a desert without the presence of any humans around. Like every other Malayali, Najeeb also migrated to settle the debts, to add a room to the house and thereby to secure his family's future. These simple and basic things of life come at such a huge price to these unfortunate Malayali migrants. This unbearable but unavoidable emotional pain of spousal migration is well conveyed by Benyamin through the life of Najeeb and Sainu in *Goat Days*. He says:

Nobody would have embraced his wife like I held Sainu that night. But one sorrow remained. My son? Daughter? I would not be there for the birth. I wouldn't be able to massage Sainu during her big pain. As if to make up for that, I kissed Sainu's growing belly. My Nabeel, my Safia— names I had chosen to call my child; my kunji, my chakki—pet names I had for them. Oh, my son ... my daughter ... Your uppah will not be near to see you come into this earth with wide eyes. But, whenever I return, I will bring enough presents for you, okay? (27)

From here on, he needs to suppress all the desires and dreams of a father and a husband. The journey of hope ended up in a desert *masara* for three years, nine months and four days where he had to survive among goats and sheep as one of them.

We can endure any misery if we have someone to share it with. Being lonely is very depressing. Words twitched like silverfish inside me. Unshared emotions pulsed, bubbled and frothed in my mouth. An ear to pour out my sorrows, two eyes to look at me and a cheek beside me became essential for my survival. In their absence one turns mad, even suicidal. It might be the reason why people condemned to solitary confinement turn insane. (Benyamin 98)

Loneliness does have an impact on the psychological balance of a person. One can

shelter oneself from troubles if there is family around. However, due to the *Kafala* system in the Gulf, the labourers were not allowed to leave their masters whenever they wished. Najeeb's helplessness, inescapable situation and loneliness triggered all the emotions hitherto kept suppressed by him:

I did not think I would have the urge to be sexually active again. But it happened. What had lain dormant for so long suddenly woke up. All my efforts to satiate it only made me crave it even more. Seductive nude female figures began to slither in front of my eyes. I thawed in that emotional surge. I needed a body to lie close to. I needed a cave to run into. I became mad. In the intensity of that madness, I got up and rushed out. When I opened my tired eyes in the morning, I was in the masara. With Pochakkari Ramani lying close to me (Benyamin 98).

Pochakkari Ramani is a goat, named by Najeeb in remembrance of a prostitute in his village back in Kerala. The process of desexualisation through labour commodification and basic human rights violations can be read out with the traumatic experience of Najeeb.

The biological need for sexuality is being curtailed for most of the migrants. Freud regarded libido as analogous to hunger, the will to power, insisting that it is a fundamental instinct. So, suppression of libido for long is like starving the migrants just because they are too poor to forego employment opportunities even under such inhuman working conditions.

So, spousal migration does have considerable psycho-sexual effect. M Mukundan and Benyamin do bring out this pain caused by the relational transnationalism in the psyche of Malayali migrants and their left-behinds through their novels *Pravasam* and *Goat Days*. The intimacy maintenance of Kumaran and his wife Kalyani in *Pravasam* and Najeeb and his wife Sainu in *Goat Days* have been analysed to show how they had to suffer at individual levels. The 'Gulf wives' like Kalyani, Subaida, Sainu, and others, as observed in the novels, are victims of long-distance relationships and suffer for no fault of their own.

The only possible solution to the psycho-sexual disturbances of the Malayali migrant labourers in the Middle East could be a government-initiated family reunification policy. Alternatively, sanctioning leave at regular intervals or making available family quarters instead of the labour camps may also help alleviate this malaise. Psychiatric and psychological counselling may also help ease out the psychological issues of these migrants, who constitute a strong pillar of the economy of the state of Kerala. In a word, the recent Malayali diasporic literature has quite poignantly raised the issue of psycho-sexual health of the Malayali migrants and their left-behinds. This is what stands out as an alarming concern about the lives of the Malayali migrants in the Gulf.

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## Vignettes of Naga Culture: A Study of Easterine Kire's Select Novels

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### *Abstract*

Northeast India is one of the most culturally rich regions of the Indian subcontinent. Like the other states of Northeast India, the literature from Nagaland encompasses “an intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery” as it witnesses the issue of a systematic policy of exclusion from the mainstream national imagination and literary space. Representation of the oral culture of the diverse ethnic groups in Nagaland is one of the recurrent themes in the writings of Easterine Kire. In her novels, *When the River Sleeps* (2014) and *Don't Run My Love* (2017), Kire has tried to revive the traditional cultural practices which have been facing “the xenophobic fear” (Mishra, xiv) due to the constant invasion of the global culture. The nexus between natural and supernatural is observable in both of the novels. Through her fictional craft, Kire unlocks the door of a magical world where spirits and human beings coexist. Besides, she probes into the collective memory of her community and revives the traditional beliefs, oral stories, myths and folktales with her extraordinary talent of storytelling. Situated within this context, this paper is an attempt to bring to the fore how Kire's novels revive and revitalize the folktales and cultural practices to assert the rich oral traditions and identity of the indigenous tribes of Nagaland.

**Keywords:** Northeast India, oral traditions, folktales, identity

Northeast India amalgamates the ancient customs and breath-taking natural landscapes maintaining a perfect harmony. The diverse languages and dialects of its indigenous multi-ethnic people have made this region exceptional in comparison to other parts of India. The vibrant culture and tradition of the land shape its literature. Therefore, the literature and culture of Northeast India are intrinsically entwined. Northeast India bears the legacy of rich oral and written forms of literature, the foundation of which is laid on folktales, folksongs, epics, myths, riddles, fables etc. As Sanjoy Hazarika's book *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast* reveals:

The oral history of many tribes tells of ancestors from the shadowy past, from mountains steeped in mist and romance, from lands far away, of snake gods and princess, epic battles and great warriors. (Hazarika xlvi).

The folk literature sustains age after age, embodying the socio-economic condition, traditional knowledge system, and the collective consciousness of the people of the territory. The literary artists of Northeast India have documented their culture in their literary oeuvre. The conflict-ridden region, the graphical landscape, and the habitation of various ethnic groups facilitate the production of a kind of literature that is peerless in the real sense. One has to acknowledge that the strong political issues and their consequences, atrocities, erosion of identity, and marginality eventually provide a scope for the writers to produce a corpus of literature that recreates vivid oral culture and folktales of the land. As Margaret Ch. Zama writes in the

“Introduction” to *Emerging Literature from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity*:

These writers, ... are individualistic in their approach and narrative style, but collectively represent the ethos of the region in terms of shared history and political destiny, and therefore aspire towards a vision beyond narrow ethnic mappings... (Zama xiii)

Some notable writers from the North East of India, such as Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Mitra Phookan, and Easterine Kire have immensely contributed to foregrounding the literature from this region. Mamang Dai in her novel *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) weaves an intricate web of stories, images and history of the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. In the recently published book *The Inheritance of Words: Writing from Arunachal Pradesh* (2021) Dai brings various voices of Arunachal women writers on subjects as identity, Shamanism, language, folk culture, orality to focus on the predominant issue:

It would be true to say that in the North East region there are many authors today following the oral tradition to delve into the myths and traditions in a process of retrieval and re-interpretation to inform the writing of today. This is inevitable as it is necessary for literature to grow. The past may be gone, but it is a place we can always re-visit. (Dai 7)

Temsula Ao, one of the distinguished women writers from Nagaland, and a member of the Ao community, explores the issue of identity, orality, and folklore of her homeland in her poetry, short stories and novels. Her short stories collections - *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2005), *Laburnum for My Head* (2009) and *The Tombstone in My Garden* (2022) - are notable works which form the unique identity of Naga literature in particular and the literature of Northeast India in general. Easterine Kire, like Temsula Ao, one of the renowned voices, and a representative of the Angami community, is sensible enough to consciously preserve the rich elements of culture which consist of a plethora of folktales. Apart from that, she takes the responsibility to document oral history as well as a shared memory of her community through her writings. In her works, she dexterously investigates the lives of the indigenous Naga people, their pangs and anxieties, their happiness and miseries and their search for identity. Her ethnographic framework stems from her cultural epistemology of story-telling as “the old storytelling tradition, which is common to all oral cultures of indigenous people, has been creatively integrated into modern literary genres to give a distinct identity to the literature of this region” (Mishra xxvi). Her novels, *A Naga Village Remembered*, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *The Sky is My Father*, and her poems predominantly encompass the idiosyncratic history and culture, nature and spiritual world of Nagaland. The representation of folktales, orally passed down from one generation to another, embody the collective and shared memory and shape the intrinsic cultural identity. Therefore, the representation of oral folktales of any indigenous community is truly essential as Kire asserts in her essay “Should Writers Stay in Prison?”:

The telling of a story is not only an artistic action, it is a spiritual exercise that is an integral part of the healing of a people's psychological wounds...Naga society was

and continues to be a highly oral society. Both men and women take pride in oratory skill, which is an expression of the agility of the mind. (Kire 273)

Representation of the oral culture of the diverse ethnic groups in Nagaland is one of the recurrent themes in the writings of Easterine Kire. In her novels like *When the River Sleeps* (2014) and *Don't Run My Love* (2017), Kire has tried to revive the traditional cultural practices which have been facing “the xenophobic fear” (Mishra xiv) due to the constant invasion of the global culture. The novel *When the River Sleeps* displays Villie's quest for the river of his dreams, imbued with the knowledge of the spiritual world. *Don't Run My Love* revolves around Visenuo, her daughter Atuonuo and their encounter with tekhumevimia<sup>1</sup>, the weretiger. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to bring to the fore how Kire's novels revive and revitalize the folktales and cultural practices to assert the rich oral traditions and identity of the indigenous tribes of Nagaland.

*When the River Sleeps* explores various forms of oral traditions, particularly of the Angami society of Nagaland. Kire takes the readers into the enchanting world of the Angami tribes of Nagaland and their colourful lives. The novel depicts an adventurous journey of a lone hunter, Vilie who is on a quest of the mysterious sleeping river to collect heart-stone which can offer him illimitable powers and abundance. Driven by strange dreams Vilie embarks on the epic journey and risks his precious life for the magical stone. As the novel progresses, the readers are introduced to many glimpses of the rural and community life of Angami tribes and how nature plays an important role in the survival of indigenous people. The narrative reflects her concern to restore and preserve the Naga culture. In the course of his journey, Vilie encounters various deities, spirits, weretigers and demons and proves himself a “mythical hero” by overpowering all the malignant evil forces. Villie's beloved, Mechuseno died due to some supernatural causes. It was said that one day, she caught an unknown fever when she went into the forest to collect herbs with her friends, and encountered an ominous spirit, a tall dark man who followed her home like a shadow and surprisingly, no one could see him other than Mechuseno. This incident highlights the superstition that is deeply rooted in the belief system of the community of the Angami tribes. It is located that Seno's sudden death causes fear among the villagers. Thus, Kire's portrayal of supernatural elements showcases how these influence the lives of the tribal communities of Nagaland. However, it is noticed that Vilie treats the forest as his shelter, “the forest is my wife” (*WTRS* 7), and he often mentions that the forest not only remained the source of sustenance for him but also saved him in every crisis.

In his quest for the river of his dreams, Vilie decides to halt in the field occupied by a Zeliang man named Keyireusap. However, during the night stay at camp, Vilie encounters a tiger. It is impossible for a lone hunter to encounter a tiger. Now, Vilie remembers the ritual of the weretiger narrated by the seer. It is a practice performed by the men who transform their spirits into tigers. The persons who are transformed into tigers are called 'tekhumiaivi' or weretigers. It is the strong belief of the Angami society that the hunter can recall the men of tiger spirits to protect himself from the attack of

tigers. However, Villie's quest for the heart stone continues. Villie then takes the readers to the unclean forest of 'Rarhuria'<sup>2</sup> which is generally avoided by the villagers due to the fear of getting sick. Villie also falls sick when he arrives in this unclean forest and becomes very weak. It is the practice of the region that the seer gives the people herbs like the drink of ginseng and the leaves of the nutgall tree to cure them. In another incident, the protagonist, Villie witnesses the spirit of a young girl in a pool of water and next, he meets another evil spirit who attempts to kill him. But the remembrance of the seer's words saves him from the powerful strike of the evil spirit. As he cries out: "Mine is the greater spirit! I will never submit to you!" (WTRS 83). Finally, another wonderful event takes the readers into the surreal bed of the sleeping river. The protagonist, Villie, accompanied by Kani, the fisherman, finally reaches the river. The atmosphere of the surroundings is terrific and creates a sense of suspense in the story. Villie is overwhelmed by the sound of a mighty waterfall. He experiences a grave silence engulfing the entire bank of the mysterious river. This is the place where the duo, Villie and Kani witness the spirit women who protect the river. They observe that the appearance of the spirit women creates a terrific atmosphere through the funeral chanting. It seems very strange to Villie that after the disappearance of the spirit women behind the hills, the river went to deep sleep. And this is when Villie steps into the river and collects the magical stone. However, his return journey to the village was not smooth. It was more difficult than reaching the river. Now, Villie and Kani are haunted by the widow spirits and later on, they come across the village of 'Kirhupfumia'<sup>3</sup>, mainly occupied by women of magical powers who can kill the people by pointing their poisonous fingers. The characters Ate and Zote, two sisters who live in Kirhupfumia, are mainly known for their fearful practice of witchcraft. It is Ate who saves Villie from the attack of Zote who wants to steal heart-stone. Later on, Villie takes Ate to his abode but feeling unsafe Ate moves away from this isolated village. Afterwards, Villie hands the heart stone over to Ate and she starts to live with Villie's family in his village. Finally, Villie is mercilessly killed by a man who wants to possess the heart stone for mundane pleasure. Therefore, Villie's assiduous endeavour to find the sleeping river and collect heart-stone, illuminates his soul as his dynamism leads him beyond the boundary of the mundane world.

Thus, Kire documents the traditional life, belief, faith and rituals of the native Angami tribes of Nagaland and unravels the hidden treasures of the Naga belief system. Besides, the novel also highlights the intricate relationship between nature and human beings. Through the depiction of the practices and beliefs of traditional life, Kire offers glimpses of the spiritual life of the Naga tribes and shows how humans, nature and the spiritual world are closely associated with one another. The novel starts with a physical quest but as it progresses, the novel becomes more of a spiritual journey than a physical one. Throughout the journey, Villie achieves spiritual wisdom and knowledge which help him to defeat the evil spirits and collect the heart-stone. As PBiswas and C. J. Thomas opine in their essay:

...when human beings as agents could see themselves as an extension of nature outside, they further evolved a linguistically meditated rational order and established

a unity between 'nature' and 'culture.' (Biswas and Thomas xix)

Kire's latest novel *Don't Run My Love* opens with the peaceful yet struggling life of the two women – Visenu, the widowed mother, who after her husband's demise single-handedly raises her only daughter Atuonuo and trains her to become an independent farmer. Easterine Kire registers the rich folktales of the Angami community in Nagaland through a series of events revolving around the lives of these two women. Kire transports the readers to a surreal world wherein naturalism blends with supernaturalism. The simple lives of two women suddenly change with the arrival of Kevi- a *tekhumiavi*. Kire designs the plot with utmost care in a traditional village Kija whose dwellers toil hard day and night to grow grains in the fields. The action of the plot chiefly revolves around harvest time when Visenu and Atuonuo ceaselessly hoard the crops. They cautiously refuse help from their neighbours even when unseasonal rain is about to nip “the hard work of several months” (DRML 2). They decline help from others, not because of the rumours but because they are well aware of their potential. They are independent, diligent and sufficient enough to operate their own lives. However, Visenu accepts the help offered by a young man Kevi with whom familiarity grows up gradually. Kevi's ambiguous identity invokes a mystery in the minds of the readers. Kevi is portrayed as “anyone who set eyes on him, man or woman, young or old had to admit that he was a beautiful creature indeed” (DRML 1). Kevi's proximity with the mother-daughter dyad begets multiple queries to the people of Kija, who are inquisitive to know, “Who was the stranger? Was he a relative of Visenu's?... Was this a suitor to Atuonuo? (DRML 41).” In the article “Easterine Kire's *Don't Run My Love*,” Hansda Sowvendu Shekhar remarks:

This brings in the questions of propriety and reputation. In the society – a patriarchal one, certainly- Visenu and Atuonuo live in, it is not considered proper for a young widow or a young unmarried girl to mix so freely with a young man. (Shekhar 2)

However, in the first section, Kire weaves the plot intricately with the traditional socio-cultural setting of the Naga community, incorporating their customs, practices, beliefs and folktales through ample use of vernacular expressions which expounds “the dominance of orality in her culture that she politely and consciously textualizes in the text” (Kumar 7). Visenu and Atuonuo's fear of spirit is surreptitiously embedded in their thought process as “they had heard too many stories of spirit's waylaying field-goers on their way home” (DRML 13). Stories rooted in their culture assuredly structure their identity and, therefore, make a bridge between the hiatus of past and present as Kumar again suggests, “Likewise, storytelling is an essential component of folk culture” (Kumar 9).

The next section of the novel is deeply plunged into the folkloric tradition of the Angami community. Kire draws the legends from folktales and employs them to perform a pivotal role in transmuting the circumstances of the central characters of the novel. She delineates the psychological dilemma of young Atuonuo after her initial rejection of Kevi's proposal to marriage. As an aftereffect revengeful Kevi turns into a were-tiger, directly derived from a Naga legend called “tekhumiavi.” Atuonuo's voice choked with fear as “Kevi had become a were-tiger.” Kire dismantles the mystery of

Kevi who “have a foot each in both the worlds. So long as they are alive, they belong to the world of men, and the men that we call their owners grow more powerful and wealthy from this connection” (*DRML* 92). However, the esoteric stories of were-tigers or tekhumavi are carried away verbally by the people of the Angami community. The embryonic symbol of the were-tiger has been documented by Easterine Kire to reanimate the rich folktale of the Angami community. In an interview with I Watitula Longkumar and Nirmala Menon, Kire remarks:

The oral is key to understanding the culture of the community, and a writer needs that understanding to produce written literature. The amount of cultural information that the oral carries make it impossible to keep it out of any discourse on literature. (Longkumar 5)

The perplexed mother and daughter embark on a journey in search of a remedy to the village of Seers to safeguard themselves from the grudges of Kevi. They undertake an arduous journey to navigate the exact locale of “the most powerful village, the village that held answers for all the problems” (*DRML* 82), the village named Meriezou which “was legendary among the Angamis; it was the seat of culture, the birthplace of many famed seers, and people still sought it out for answers” (*DRML* 81). Mysteriously, a single gigantic apple tree at the gateway can be seen as 'the only landmark for the Village of Seers, a boundary between the natural and the supernatural’ (*DRML* 83). Paranoid Visenu and Atuonuo connect the life of the natural world of Kija and the surreal world of Meriezou. In quest of spiritual healing in the realm of Seers, they discover a parallel existence of a paranormal world that is delusional and it is 'hard to save a human life when a spirit spear finds its target' (*DRML* 94). Kire artfully employs supernaturalism that gleams the Angami's belief in the realm of spirit and here spiritualism somehow becomes a facsimile of supernaturalism.

In the Village of Seer, Kire introduces an old woman, Pfenno who can be described as a storyteller. Although she has her own stories, she sustains the myths, beliefs and sagas of legends. Kire explores the oral tradition of her homeland through the account of Pfenno, an old wise woman in the land of Seers. Pfenno has immense knowledge about 'tekhumevimia' who is physically and spiritually powerful and she also claims, “There is a strong taboo surrounding the culture of tekhumevimia” (*DRML* 92). The Old Seer surprisingly renounces that the killing of the weretiger is against his principle to retain the natural order. He values the harmony of the natural world, and therefore, enforces a few regulable embargoes to preserve this natural balance. Kire's portrayal of Old Seer is profoundly philosophical as he irritably replies, “We give life, not death. We give life to whomsoever and whatsoever desires to come into being. It would go against our principles if we were to take life. But humans, humans only know how to kill” (*DRML* 96). Visenuo's urgency as a mother to protect her daughter from the 'tekhumevimia' in the camouflage of Kevi is realised by the seer, and he suggests that only a woodsman can kill a were-tiger. Visenuo and Atuonuo decide to go back to their homeland Kija, bidding farewell to their safe shelter. They cannot survive in the fathomless realm of spirits where their identity is at stake. They don't

want to lose their autonomy, and on their way home, Keyo, the familiar woodsman retrieves them from Kevi 'with the accuracy of a hunter who knows there is no second chance' (DRML 116). Kevi's appearance initially seems angelic to the women, but his demonic effect comes over them in waves. The primordial energy of were-tiger or tekhumevimia is drawn from the Naga community's belief in lycanthropy. Undoubtedly, the characters of a folktale add a noteworthy dimension to the plot, and at the same time, help to resurrect the forgotten tradition of the Angami culture.

This paper investigates two separate journeys. One highlights Vilie's journey from the material world to the spiritual one, and the other showcases the journey of Visenuo and Atuonuo that begins with fear and ends in fearlessness. The lifestyle, tradition, belief system and wisdom of the characters like Vilie, Visenuo and Atuonuo are entwined with the forces of nature. Nature with its mystery and magic, plays an active role throughout their journey. The novels *When the River Sleeps* and *Don't Run My Love* thus unfold a world of myth and mystery, belief and disbelief, natural and supernatural. However, Kire resorts to oral storytelling practice which is an integral part of the Angami community. She explores the Angami identity that dwells in its oral traditions and folktales. This paper highlights folktales, beliefs and ritual practices of the Angami community as manifest in the selected texts. Easterine Kire demonstrates the rich tradition and oral culture of an ethnic group marginalised from the mainstream culture and, therefore, revitalises the folktales of her homeland.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Tekhumevimia or Tekhumiavi is the folkloric name of weretiger. It is a belief mostly practised among the Tenyimia people in Nagaland. Certain numbers of people transform their spirits into tigers.

<sup>2</sup>Literally Rarhuria means unclean place. It is the name which is given to certain forest areas infested with evil spirits.

<sup>3</sup>Kirhupfumia is named after a tribal village populated by a group of minority women who have the evil power to kill people by pointing their poisonous fingers at them.

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## Thematic Concerns and Performative Techniques in Kusum Kumar's *Listen Shefali*

Dr. Pratima Chaitanya\*

### *Abstract*

Indian Drama in the post-independence period showed a marked shift; not only there was a focus on indigenous theatrical tradition and disregard of Western theatrical tradition, but also the beginning of an era when women playwrights and directors seemed to carve some space for themselves in an otherwise male-dominated genre of drama/ theatre. Kusum Kumar's *Listen Shefali* (1978) has won a lot of critical acclaim, whenever performed. Focus on social issues--caste system, *dalit* consciousness, self-dignity, independence and novel performance techniques, form an important part of Kumar's plays. The present paper is descriptive in nature and is an attempt to explore the variegated themes and techniques deployed by Kumar in the play. The paper makes an attempt to study the theatrical technique in *Listen Shefali* in the light of the Sanskrit theatrical tradition, the *Natyashastra* and Indian social hierarchical structure. An effort has also been made to study the caste and gender dynamics in the light of Ambedkar's ideology.

**Keywords:** post-independence women playwrights, *dalit* consciousness, Ambedkar's ideology, the *Natyashastra*

The new theatre which began in our country in the middle of the nineteenth century was a slavish imitation of the theatre of the colonizers. Its patrons and practitioners were the Indians who were trained in Western education and who heartily accepted subordination. The new theatre got immense patronage and encouragement in cities like Calcutta, Bombay and to some extent in Madras and had no connection with the countryside traditional theatre. In Bengali and Marathi, this theatre became most active. The written text and playwright got central importance in this new theatrical activity.

Post-independence, a new lease of life was given to the Indian theatre with the formation of IPTA in 1943-44. Although IPTA was basically West-oriented and did not relate to the theatrical tradition of the country, it inspired a lot of talented theatre workers in many regions and languages, who later became pioneers of very significant and creative theatre workers. Indian English Drama gained popularity with the drama of regional tongues being translated either by the playwright or by others into English. Indian English drama has registered a remarkable growth and maturity through English translation of Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Kannad plays in 1970s and after. Writers like Dharamvir Bharati and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi and Girish Karnad in Kannada lent creativity to Indian dramatic literature. This was indeed the time when women playwrights and directors seemed to carve some space for themselves in an otherwise male-dominated genre of drama/ theatre. Whether it is the Western world or the Oriental world, women have been isolated and alienated from the world of the plays.

Later they found their representation on stage in the form of choreographers, actors, musicians, dancers etc. but they were conspicuously absent as playwrights and directors. Indian women in the late nineteenth century found themselves writing poems and delving into fiction but theatre was still a far cry for them. As Tutun Mukherjee states in "Prolegomenon to Women's Theatre:"

Women's voices have been heard in the dramatic space only in mimicry--repeating the words written for them by men and performing the roles envisioned by them by the male imagination . . .By remaining 'invisible' in their visibility, they have reinforced the existing relations of production in theatre and have perpetuated its institutionalisation. (5)

The contribution of Indian women as dramatists was established only in post-independence India. Important women dramatists include writers like Mahashweta Devi, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Dina Mehta, Manjula Padmanabhan, Polie Sengupta, Mannu Bhandari, Mrinal Pande, Shanti Mehrotra, Tripurari Sharma, Kusum Kumar and several others.

Kusum Kumar has emerged as a strong voice as a woman playwright in post-independence India. She has written seven-full length plays namely *Dilli Ooncha Sunti Hai*, *Om Kranti Kranti*, *Sanskar ko Namaskar*, *Ravan Lila* and *Pavan Chaturvedi ki Diary*; ten one-act plays and two street plays. Among these *Suno Shefali* (1978) or *Listen Shefali* has won a lot of critical acclaim, whenever performed. Kumar focuses on social issues in all her plays--caste system, *dalit* consciousness, self-dignity, independence and novel performance techniques form an important part of her plays.

### **The Dalit Issue as Presented by a Non-Dalit Woman Playwright**

Kumar, being a non-*dalit* writer herself, has successfully represented the *dalit* issue, challenging the politicising of caste and class in modern day India and re-establishing the boldness and assertiveness of a *dalit* woman, questioning the nexus of the patriarchal and caste set-up in post-independent India. There is a general notion that the works of the *dalit* writers only should be included as part of *dalit* literature. But several non-*dalit* writers have effectively conveyed the caste dynamics and the issues of a low-caste. In Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan* (1996), the tensions of inter-caste marriage between a low caste man and a high caste woman, despite being well-educated is brought to the surface where the former sees the latter as representative of upper caste and ill-treats her and manhandles her to the extent that the idealistic marriage stands broken. Girish Karnad too in *Tale-Danda* (1990) deals at length about the idea of caste-system. The play projects a socio-religious movement, called the *lingayat* headed by the poet seer Basavanna during the time of the Kalachurya dynasty, which was supported by the then ruler. However, the event of marriage between a Brahmin girl and a boy of a low class, leads to violence and bloodshed in Kalyan and becomes the cause of the downfall and complete obliteration of the movement. The play not only deconstructs the system of caste in India but also complicates this issue when we find that those who talk about the abolition of caste

system and are social reformists, end up in fanaticism and sow the seeds of the destruction of their own ideology. As the ruler of Kalyan, Bijjala exclaims in *Tale-Danda*, "One's caste is like the skin on one's body. You can peel it off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again: a barber—a shepherd—a scavenger!" (Karnad 21). Thus, many non-*dalit* writers have been successfully able to represent the *dalit* consciousness.

The protagonist of the Kumar's play, Shefali, seems to be leading an angry woman brigade and ceaselessly seems to remind us of the angry young men in Indian cinema in the 1970s dating back to the angry young men movement of the 1950s in England steered by John Osborne and Kingsley Amis. Like the protagonist in the movie *Albert Pinto ko Gussa Kyu Aata hai* (1980) and Jimmy Porter in the play, *Look Back in Anger* (1956), Shefali, a *dalit* woman, is a non-conformist. She is against the privileging policies of the government, which on one hand appear to empower the under-privileged but, in reality, such welfare policies perpetuate the discrimination against the upper and the lower castes.

### **The Dynamics of Caste Dovetailed into Indian Society and Politics**

*Listen Shefali* is divided into six scenes and navigates between three varied kinds of family units--the traditionally orthodox and virtually fatherless family of Shefali grappling with poverty, compromises and their lower social position in society owing to their *dalit* identity, the upper-caste ambitious socially successful and politically motivated family of Bakul, and the self-identified family of the astrologer-cum-sage-cum-realist, Manan and a ten years old child, Geru with no filial connection. While life in Shefali's family, with day-to-day problems of being a poor outcaste in society, with the mother fending for good matches for her daughters, is difficult and claustrophobic, Bakul's upper-caste family with its emotional and spiritual vacuity and an insatiable lust for power, is dehumanising. It is only the self-identified family of Manan Acharya and Geru, which emerges as unified, pure and unaffected by caste and social ties.

The economically independent, English teacher and graduate, Shefali challenges the patriarchal order and the caste equations by vehemently opposing her marriage with Bakul, the son of the Brahmin social worker Satyamev Dikshit, and her longtime lover, who later is revealed to be interested in her only to fulfil the political plans of his father to win in the upcoming elections. Dikshit wishes to proclaim himself as a Messiah who is liberal enough to transcend the caste system by marrying his only son to a *dalit*. It is interesting to see how in the play Shefali is doubly colonised by virtue of her gender and *dalit* identity. But this double colonisation instead of breaking her down seems to strengthen her, embolden her so much that she refuses a promising marriage with an upper caste Brahmin Hindu boy, retaliates against her mother and her family and listens to what her heart, her soul has to say to her.

While the mother haplessly accepts her social position, Shefali challenges the welfare politics of the state even as a child. As she says:

Right from childhood, in the society, at every stage I found generosity surrounding me. We just had to accept it saying 'yes sir'. . . in school, food, clothing, books were

given generously. . . in fact, given free. . . we just had to declare that we were Harijans. So, we three sisters wanted to remain 'janharis' in school. . . (*Bakul watches Shefali. He seems disturbed.*) In school, they distributed books and sometimes wool and cloth for uniform. We three sisters never accepted such generosity . . . why should we say that we were Harijans? The 'janhari' girls are they better than us? (Kumar 195)

Bakul desperately wishes to marry Shefali, not out of love for her, but to use her *dalit* identity to win seat in election for his father. In his love, Shefali feels an element of condescending when he convinces her with intrinsic pride for the marriage and says "It's not a joke to be the wife of Bakul! To be the daughter-in-law of Sri Sri Satyamev Dikshit is even more remarkable" (195).

The final attempt to convince Shefali was made by Bakul at Miss Sahib's place. The generosity of Miss Sahib was behind Shefali's English education and she sent the latter as a teacher to teach English to Satyamev Dikshit. This was when Shefali met his son Bakul and fell in love. It was only later that the political motives behind the seemingly emotional relationship, were evident and Shefali voices it later in the play:

Shefali: (*With mocking anger*) From there we get on a jeep. . . moving all over the city we announce through loud speakers--'Ladies and gentlemen vote for us'. . . (Disturbed, her voice becomes louder) You are standing above me and saying 'Vote for Dikshit . . . today it is this Harijan girl who is telling you. I just married her (*Louder*). Upliftment of the Harijans is as important as eliminating poverty. (Bakul is agitated) Whatever efforts we made so far are not sufficient (*Bakul covers hi sears and hangs his head*) When I realised that all efforts towards the upliftment of the untouchables have been unsuccessful, in a moment of desperation, I first fell in love with this woman, and then I married her. So, ladies and gentlemen, now all of you should cast your valuable votes in our favour' . . . This was your dream, wasn't it? (224-225)

Having understood that Shefali will not give in to pressure by anyone, Bakul surreptitiously and with the permission of Shefali's mother, marries her younger sister, Kiran who is an epitome of a typical woman who is happy at the prospect of getting married into a well-off family, more so by marrying into a Brahmin family. Shefali who had never visited the Shiva temple on the *ghat* is ushered to the latter by Manan in the final scene of the play, where she is shocked to see Bakul and Kiran getting married. It is as though Shefali is led from ignorance to knowledge, from spiritual vacuity to enlightenment.

The thoughts on caste in the play seem to echo the ideas of Ambedkar on caste while subtly criticising the idea and tactics of Mahatama Gandhi. While Gandhi gave the name *harijans* to untouchables (translated as the children of God) and perpetrated the idea of welfare policies and positive discrimination and upliftment of *dalits*, the latter still stood distinct from the upper castes (Bhaskar, *This Leader Forced*). In the play, Manan, ironically remarks on Gandhi's policies by shouting slogans; to quote "Gandhi baba Gandhi baba aaja" (Kumar 197) in the backdrop of the argument between Shefali and Bakul.

The philosophy and vision of Ambedkar was guided by rethinking Indian modernity from the perspective of a woman. He wanted to create a new space in which women,

particularly of the oppressed and lower class and castes, could be heard and have a voice. Ambedkar argued in his work *The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women* (first published 1951), that the secondary status of Hindu women stems from the *Manusmriti*. In his criticism of *Manusmriti*, lies Ambedkar's spirit to promote education for women. Through the character of Shefali in the play, we get a glimpse of a liberated woman, who has the audacity to challenge patriarchy and unjust societal set up through the power of education. Manan Acharya refers to her being an educated woman: "I also know that you are educated, cultured, gentle and fine girl" (219). While her younger sister Kiran, who has internalised patriarchy and is bound by traditionalism, resigns to her low social position and accepts marriage with a rich Brahmin boy, Shefali fights for her own identity, her own space and does not conform to the idea of being an outcaste in society owing to her *dalit* status.

Ambedkar was suspicious of the worship of Hindu gods and goddesses. On 14th October, 1956, B.R. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism. "Ambedkar had long decided to change his religion to escape what he considered a 'threat to freedom'--the varna or the caste system propagated by Hinduism. . . Ambedkar opined that conversion was the only method for Dalits to denounce the caste system." (Balasubramanian and Gopinath, *Decoding*.) Shefali too is critical of rites of Hindu Brahmanism. Kiran is caught by traditionalism while Shefali, through her English education is freed from the darkness of ignorance which mindless adherence to religion puts one into. In Scene III, Kiran says to Shefali:

Girl: You are insulting our gods and goddesses--chhichhi! All my prayers have been wasted. Can't you differentiate between gods and ordinary folk? You call gods examples! Not only are you a sinner, you're making me one too! Shefali: If I sinned, how did you become a sinner? Deviji, is this some kind of a contagious disease? (Kumar 213)

The play seems to suggest that only annihilation of caste system as a whole can perhaps bring about a change. As Ambedkar says in "The Annihilation of Caste," "I had said that the real method of breaking up the caste system was not to bring about inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages but to destroy the religious notions on which caste was founded" (50). Ambedkar wanted to do away with the *shastras* which justify and sanctify the caste-system.

The character of Manan Acharya, the sage-cum-philosopher-cum-astrologer-cum-feminist, is instrumental in finally setting Shefali free from the cage of patriarchy and caste in order that she may identify her true self. Acharya like Ambedkar seems to emerge as the leader of Dalit consciousness and feminism.

### **Performative Techniques Deployed from the Sanskrit Theatrical Tradition**

In *Listen Shefali*, the stage directions at the very outset of the play seem to resonate the techniques of *kakshavibhaga* and *parikrama* as mentioned in the *Natyashastra*. To quote from the text:

The banks of the river Yamuna. A jetty is marked as a ghat. A platform, stretched across the bank with three or four steps, leads to the river. A narrow wooden platform

divides the platform creating two separate ghats. On the left side pitched on the platform is the astrologer's tent. A mat spread out contains among other things a cage with a parrot. On the right side of the platform on the lowest step a woman sits quietly, resting her chin on her knees and swaying her hand along the waves of river, as though waiting for someone. (Kumar 182)

A Sanskrit dramatic performance often makes use of *kakshavibhaga* which is the “imaginary division of stage into different areas by which various locales can be suggested without any scenic change” (Jain 21). The feature is a product of the lack of dramatic properties in Sanskrit theatre; the latter being acting-oriented. Stage directions that suggest movement like walking around or a journey from one place to another is a direct reference to *parikrama*, a convention from *Natyashastra*, the Bible on dramaturgy.

The fractured spaces in the play also convey the caste-based distinctions in India. The play has been dextrously structured by Kusum Kumar to symbolise the distinctions based on the caste-structure in India. The stage setting also seems to convey the difference between two levels of existence, two level of states--the spiritual plane of Manan Acharya versus the plane of the outside, material world marked by identities of caste, class and gender. One side of the stage represents the dwelling of the astrologer cum spiritual guru Manan Acharya and a child, Geru who lives with him--this side of the stage symbolises a human life and existence beyond caste and familial ties transcending the material world of consumerism in which relationships are based on give and take. The other side of the stage represents the material world---the caste and class ridden society, where Shefali, the *dalit* and the enlightened, the have-not turned rebel, the incongruous soul, waits upon her destiny to be unfolded. The river Yamuna which flows through both the *ghats* seems to symbolise the flow of human life and the permanency of human existence which transcends all caste, class, gender and barrier distinctions. Shefali makes use of the technical device of *parikrama* to suggest movement from one part of the stage to another, which is also symbolic of the blending and the merging of the two planes of existence wherein Shefali later, with the help of Manan Acharya, has her spiritual self awakened.

The use of bamboos to demarcate separate spaces on the stage, also reminds one of the caste-based division in Indian society. Even in the twenty-first century India, we still have the upper caste quarters and the lower caste quarters in villages. In upper caste households too, the people belonging to the lower caste are not allowed to enter the houses but their presence is restricted only to the verandas and outer spaces of the households. The idea of purity and pollution inherited directly from Manusmriti and voiced in the famous statement “ढोल गंवार सूदर पसु नारी।सकल ताड़ना के अधिकारी॥” (Tulsidas 30) (A drum, a rustic, a low caste, an animal and a woman are fit to be thrashed) from the epic poem *Ramcharitmanas* by Goswami Tulsidas, seems to pervade most of Indian thought and culture. The non division of the play into acts accords it a folk-temper.

### **"Listen"--the Inner Voice of Shefali**

Kumar very beautifully introduces the symbol of the caged bird chirping at the

outset of the plays. As the stage directions read, "The bird in the cage chirps.... The chirping of the bird disturbs the quiet. The astrologer enters and sits in his place. He lifts the cage and whispers in an endearing tone. The bird falls silent" (Kumar 182). Apparently, the bird here symbolises Shefali. Like the bird, Shefali too is in cage, the cage of being born in a *dalit* household and being well educated in English with a liberal mindset; like the bird which noisily chirps, she too voices her discontent, her anger against the social order where her identity is inevitably tied down to her caste and like the bird, she too is silenced by Manan Acharya towards the end of the play who seems to tell Shefali that it is impossible to break the deep-rooted barriers of the insidious caste system, and the outside world will not acknowledge her independence and identity, so perhaps it is better to stop banging your head to break away this cage of human society and it is best to turn inwards and find solace within one's own self. The voice from the backstage or *nepathya* which resonates at the end of the play seems to be a final word on the rigid caste structure in India which remains and will continue to remain insidiously unchallenged because generations down the line, people have internalised it and their psyche, willingly or unwillingly, is controlled by caste. To quote from the text, "From behind the curtain--is heard--"Thus written are chronicles of cowards each day. Darkness'"(227).

### Conclusion

The play, *Listen Shefali* deeply explores the themes of female identity dovetailed with Dalit consciousness. Giving voice to Ambedkarite vision of women empowerment and progress of the oppressed class/castes, Kumar deftly portrays the protagonist of the play, Shefali break the shackles of the caste-ridden, patriarchal set up to carve a niche for herself, to find her own space, to discover her own voice and identity. The use of dramatic devices from *Natyashashtra*, like *kakshvibhaga*, with bamboos used to demarcate one part of the stage from another, is emblematic of the existence of caste-distinctions in India. It also conveys the idea of human existence being divided into the spiritual and material planes with greed and lust dwelling on the material plane and the ethereal life symbolised by Manan, on the spiritual plane. With symbol of a bird in cage, the playwright wishes to convey that the *dalit* women in India are still voiceless and oppressed and it is difficult to escape this insidious whirlpool of caste and gender marginalisation, and solace can only be found within one self. Only by strengthening one's own self and finding peace within, one can live in a divided societal order with gender-bias and casteism.

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## A Study of Trauma in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

Bijendra Nath Das\*

### *Abstract*

The paper suggests that women frequently experience 'triple trauma' in a domestic sphere due to 'othering,' 'violence' and 'voicelessness,' as these are connected to one another. By analyzing these connections, it discovers a broad spectrum of ideological connections to trauma sources and experiences, thus contributing to a legitimate trauma discourse. Therefore, the present paper attempts to study how women's psychological trauma is represented in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*. By examining the issue from a feminist standpoint, one can get an insight into the psychological trauma faced by Mira Purohit once she gets married. Hence, the paper explores Mira's threefold traumatization by highlighting how one event cascades into another within the domestic realm.

**Keywords:** Women, 'other,' 'objectification,' violence, voicelessness, trauma.

### **Introduction**

Trauma is a psychological shock that occurs due to an overwhelming natural/unnatural event/experience. This includes natural disaster, terrorism, war, physical violence, loss, acute negligence, sexual abuse, domestic violence, or partner violence, and so on. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (*Unclaimed Experience* 11). Further, to elaborate, Judith Herman defines it as:

Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning. (*Trauma and Recovery* 33)

Nonetheless, trauma is a medical condition that is the result of the experience of a catastrophic event whose effects on the victim are subjective, as it varies from person to person. In addition, trauma has a close relationship with violence. One such kind of violence that wreaks havoc with the physical, emotional as well as psychological well-being of the woman is rape. Susan Brownmiller, defines such violence as:

A sexual invasion of the body by force, an incursion into the private, personal inner space without consent – in short, an internal assault from one of several avenues and by one of several methods – [which] constitutes a deliberate violation of emotional, physical and rational integrity and is a hostile, degrading act of violence that deserves the name of rape. (*Against Our Will* 376)

On the other hand, from her clinical study—regarding women's condition, Herman mentions that, “not until the women's liberation movement of the 1970s was it recognized that the most common post-traumatic disorders are those not of men in war but of women in civilian life . . . The real conditions of women's lives were hidden in

the sphere of the personal, in private life” (*Trauma and Recovery* 28). It is this “domestic trauma,” occurring within the domestic boundaries of a household that deeply impacts Mira, as depicted by Deshpande in *The Binding Vine* (Anderson, *Readings of Trauma* 6).

Shashi Deshpande is one of the leading figures in the field of Indian fiction. She has nurtured the very genuine and sensitive issues of contemporary middle-class women, such as: their search for love, their quest for self-identity beyond the traditional roles, rape within and outside the marriage, their emotional conflict and so on. Primarily, her protagonists are grandmothers, mothers (-in-law), wives, daughters (-in-law), sisters (-in-law) –and so on. Deshpande's work *The Binding Vine* mainly tells the story of three women: Urmila (Urmi), Kalpana, and Mira. Purohit Jr. B. A. who never appears in the story, as she is already dead. Mira's physical absence in the novel is indicative of the fact that often the issues of discontented matrimony are considered non-existent by our society at large. Resultantly, the existence of such grave issues comes to light after the situation goes out of hand. Nonetheless, the exposure of her traumatic story is facilitated through the discovery and perusal of her diary and poetry by the protagonist Urmi, her daughter-in-law. Mira was a college student who aspired to become a poet. While she was attending a marriage ceremony, her ripe body attracted a man's attention who decided to pursue her so as to gain its possession. Soon, through the institution of marriage, he took her under his ownership and exploited her for his own sexual satisfaction, and hence the process of her traumatization began.

Therefore, to examine Mira's traumatic condition, it is necessary to acknowledge the social, political, and ideological factors involved. Despite the varying nature of these impacts and their dependence on ever-changing factors, it is evident that Mira's psychological trauma within the patriarchal structure was primarily caused by three overarching forces; namely, patriarchal formation of the 'other,' violence on the 'other,' and forcing the 'other' to be voiceless. Within this context, we observe that these three overarching forces constitute the primary causes of Mira's triple trauma.

### **Patriarchal formation of the 'other'**

The idea of the 'other' is rooted in the physical disparity of the body. The term disparity signifies the inadequacy of the body and mind, wherein the body must be “male” to be considered adequate. Aristotle, on the anatomical differences, mentions “by virtue of a certain lack of qualities, we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness” (qtd. in Dorothy 53). This statement is one of the foremost examples of overbearing force that leads to female trauma. On this subject, Simone de Beauvoir writes “for him she is sex”, “she is the other” (*The Second Sex* 66). Further, she remarks that “the subject [he] posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object” (*The Second Sex* 66). On the matter of the 'object' Martha Nussbaum states, “[t]reating things as objects is not objectification, because..., objectification entails making into a thing, treating as a thing, something that is really not a thing” (*Sex and Social Justice* 218). As a result, the

most disturbing experience for a woman is being objectified as the 'other.' This objectification ensures that she is deprived of her self, her individuality as well as her emotions. Being reduced to the status of an 'object' is equivalent of being designated to a state of worthlessness, of an existence of disregard and abuse by the owner. Such a life becomes a narrative of unending misery that holds no hope for the woman turned 'object.' Therefore, "for [him] she is" reduced to a "cunt" (235). In this regard, Nussbaum has formulated seven notions in relation to the concept of 'objectification.' All these concepts exemplify the process of objectification of the 'othered' being. The concepts are:

- a) *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his... purposes.
- b) *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
- c) *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
- d) *Fungibility*: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
- e) *Violability*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
- f) *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
- g) *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account. (218)

However, Nussbaum concentrates specifically on the negation of autonomy and instrumentality, arguing that these are the most critical aspects since they frequently involve the majority of the other dimensions of objectification. In continuation, Rae Langton's work *Sexual Solipsism*, by comprehending Nussbaum's ideas of "Objectification," appended three more concepts that are as follows:

- h) "Reduction to body: one treats it as identified with its body, or body parts."
- i) "Reduction to appearance: one treats it primarily in terms of how it looks, or how it appears to the senses."
- j) "Silencing: one treats it as silent, lacking the capacity to speak." (228–30)

Hence, the process of treating someone as an object, known as 'objectification,' may involve one or more of these components, and there are no precise guidelines that determine the necessary and sufficient criteria for a type of treatment to qualify as 'objectification.' The perspective presented by Nussbaum is evidently attractive owing to its phenomenological approach. She is capable of demonstrating the typical ways in which men manipulate women in a manner that is similar to their manipulation of objects. Regarding the concept of 'objectification,' in "Against the Male Flood: Censorship, Pornography, and Equality," Dworkin formulates the occurrence of 'sexual objectification' as:

Objectification occurs when a human being, through social means, is made less than human, turned into a thing or commodity, bought and sold. When objectification occurs, a person is depersonalised, so that no individuality or integrity is available socially or in what is an extremely circumscribed privacy. Objectification is an injury right at the heart of discrimination: those who can be used as if they are not fully human are no longer fully human in social terms; their humanity is hurt by being

diminished. (30–1)

In the case of Mira, the moment she was seen at the wedding ceremony, she was 'objectified'; and as she was the 'other,' her ripe body becomes the hallmark of her identity. Further, her identity was reduced to her "body or body parts" (*Sexual Solipsism* 228). On the other hand, the act of marriage is the only means of owning a woman as an 'object,' according to the patriarchal notion. Deshpande writes, "To me the story... is not so much about Mira's marriage, but about the man's obsession with her" (Deshpande 47). At the wedding, the moment he saw her, he started to lust her body. "After which he became a man in single-minded pursuit of an object: marrying Mira" (47). By marrying Mira, the man not only achieved his desire to 'own' the object (her body) but also installed her (as an object) in his house in order to fulfill his sexual gratification as per his desire. In doing so, he not only made her an "inert" object so that she being the 'other' does not have an "agency" and "activity," but also demoted her to being an 'instrument' so that the objectifier can use her as a tool for his purpose ("Objectification" 218). He believes that marriage is a means of obtaining "ownership" of the "other" (the woman), enabling him to use the 'other' as an 'inactive' object - a tool of sorts - to fulfill his sexual needs. Mira documented the physical, psychological, and emotional agony she suffered after nightfall in one of her diaries. Because of the traumatic events in her marriage, Mira developed a fear of eventide, as she is cognizant of the potential consequences of her own exploitation after the sun sets. The autonomy is not feasible for her as she is considered (to be) the object. Mira, thus, experienced her first trauma after being 'objectified' and 'othered.'

### **Violence on the 'other'**

The second overarching external force that traumatizes women is violence. The prevalence of violence is a manifestation of patriarchal ideology in the construction of woman as the 'other.' Being the 'other,' violence against women is embedded in the society's perception of the 'public' (events that are visible to all) and the 'private'. In the case of private, Laura Brown mentions, "[f]or girls and women, most traumas *do* occur in secret. They happen in bed... behind the closed doors of marital relationships where men beat and sometimes rape their wives... They are private events, sometimes known only to the victim and perpetrator" (*Trauma* 101).

The man in *The Binding Vine* wanted to marry Mira to violate her ripe body. His fixation with her alluring body prompted him to marry her in order to take her ownership as well as to exert authority over her life, ultimately overpowering her. He was "a man who tried to possess another human being against her will," as he considers a woman as the 'other' or the 'object' of pleasure (Deshpande 83). Urmi, the reader of Mira's writings, mentions that her husband's act of marital rape, "runs through all her writing—a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married" (63). Her husband's sexual violation traumatizes her so much that she started, "*fearing the coming/of the dark*" (66). To shield herself from the man who saw her as nothing more than an object, she kept her deepest feelings to herself. She conveyed through her writings that

she had kept her emotions hidden from him and had only given him the facts. Mira writes, "...I have my defenses; I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings" (67). Mira's desire to be alone was never respected. She cringed at the thought of her husband approaching her for intimacy, knowing that it was only for his own carnal gratification. She writes:

...he comes back...he holds me close, he begins to babble. And so it begins. Please he says, please, I love you. And over and over again until he has done, 'I love you.' Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all. What is it he wants from me? I look at myself in the mirror and wonder, what is there in me? Why does it have to be me? Why can't he leave me alone? (67)

As her 'body' or 'body parts' become her identity, she is reduced to the status of an 'object.' Further, an object cannot have feelings and even if she speaks of them, it will not be counted ("denial of subjectivity"). Therefore, being the object of her husband's sexual gratification, she was continuously raped. The events of marital rape left her physically, psychologically, and emotionally traumatized as it was "repetitive" and "continuous" occurrence, "over a long period of time" (*Trauma* 100). Her life exemplified the lifelong consequence of mental and physical rape that a woman goes through to fulfill the marital obligation. In this regard, Shikha Chhibbar mentions:

In 2011, a survey in India revealed that one in five men have forced their wives to have sex. More than two-thirds of Indian married women between 15 and 49 years old claimed to have been beaten or forced into sex by their husbands.... Marital rape is a conscious process of intimidation and assertion of the superiority of men over women. Although a woman may only experience rape once to bear the full impact of it, these statistics indicate that some women are subjected to rape on a regular basis.

Arguably marital rape is no less an offence than murder, culpable homicide or rape per se. It degrades the dignity of a woman and reduces her to a chattel to be used for man's own pleasure and comfort. It reduces a human being to a corpse, living under the constant fear of hurt or injury. Medical evidence proves that marital rape has severe and long-lasting consequences for women. ("Sexual Violence in Private Space" 1-2)

In addition, regarding marital rape, Barb Kiffe notes, "[m]arital rape is seldom given the legitimacy or validity of other forms of sexual violence, but it can be just as devastating. What sets marital rape apart is that the victim has to live with her rapist" (*Marital Rape* 7). It is this horrible reality of a woman's life that renders her a voiceless spectator of her own victimhood.

### **The Voicelessness of the 'other'**

The ability to express oneself verbally is a fundamental aspect of the human experience. The rationale behind having a voice is that it provides individuals the power to resist, articulate their thoughts, and be acknowledged. In other words, it symbolizes their identity and dignity. Most importantly, it is an integral segment

developing our innermost being, “[v]oice is part of the physical world, and its psychological power comes from this fact: that it transposes what has no physical manifestation – the psyche, the soul, ourselves...” (“Wild Voices” x). Voicelessness, in this way, becomes a twofold manifestation of 'othering' and 'violence,' leading to women's traumatization - a psychologically wounding process. It is the foundation of these two overreaching forces that render the victim traumatized and voiceless. Women's voicelessness is the condition of traumatic wounding. It is a symptom that emerges through the process of violent 'othering.' The study of voicelessness within the proposed threefold framework reveals the significance of conveying one's thoughts and emotions. On this matter, Gilligan mentions:

...finding a voice that has been lost, meaning swallowed, buried deep within oneself, held in silence; finding a way to say what could never be said because there were no words or no possibility of being heard, or because speaking was too risky, too dangerous...Both literally and metaphorically, finding a voice brings one into relationship. (“Wild Voices” xi)

In *The Binding Vine* Deshpande portrays voicelessness as a traumatic experience that has a wounding impact. Within the narrative, the impact of lacking a voice is demonstrated by Mira's expression of agony, emphasizing her hopelessness. At her college, after hearing Venu, a renowned poet of her time, she decides her goal in life. Mira mentions, “I know this is what I want- to be able to write like this” (Deshpande 66). However, during a conversation in which she shared her poetry with Venu, he tried to repress her creative faculty by asking Mira in a sharp-tongue, “Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men” (127). Such a response from an educated and learned man traumatizes her. Further, while attending a marriage ceremony, she is objectified by a man who madly desires to own her body like an object by marrying her. She is voicelessly forced to leave her college because of her marriage. Urmi (Mira's daughter-in-law, while discovering the above fact) in self-doubt wonders, “Was she angry that she had to give up her studies? Did she protest, say anything to her parents?” (64). Once Mira is married, her mother warns her not to raise her voice before her husband. This happens during her farewell ceremony, when she was expecting words of warmth and comfort from her mother but instead got instructions of absolute obedience and subjugation. Perhaps, this was the consequence of the gendered 'othering' experienced by her mother throughout her life. Accordingly, her mother advises her, “*obey, never utter a 'no' [to his desire]/submit and your life will be/ a paradise...*” (83). Since her mother made this statement and “blessed [her]” for the new life, there was no one left with whom she could share her fears and concerns. As there was no other way to voice the anguish, she started writing about the overwhelming act that happened to her every night to alleviate her pain as “the will to proclaim them [the traumatic events] aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma” (*Trauma and Recovery* 1).

## Conclusion

*The Binding Vine* powerfully illustrates the harrowing ordeal and the dehumanizing treatment a woman endures after getting married through the character of Mira, who is victimized by a male chauvinist who considers a woman as the 'other,' an 'object' whose only function is to provide sexual gratification to the subject, or the man. Her treatment as an object ensures that her desires are overlooked, voice is suppressed, individuality is crushed and her life is rendered meaningless. Thus, she becomes an unwilling recipient of triple trauma sans freedom, sans joy in her life. The very essence of human existence, contentment, is alien to her. Under such circumstances, she helplessly struggles for her survival. Additionally, the interconnectivity of multiple oppressions perpetrated on her, highlight the agonizing subjugation of the supremacist society on helpless women. By showing the quotidian brutality and the trauma inflicted on Mira, *The Binding Vine* looks to be a case study that can aid in comprehending the interwoven events culminating in an unending cycle of subjugation, misery and trauma of woman within the domestic sphere.

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## Subversion of Myths: Deconstructing Power Structures and Stereotypical Perceptions in Select Works of Kavita Kane

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### *Abstract*

The article intends to analyze the select novels of Kavita Kane in the light of underlying complexities and contradictions in the projection of women characters in myths. Myths in any culture all over the world occupy an essential position in the consciousness of every individual and determine the culture of a society in terms of beliefs, customs and taboos. These myths are constructed in a manner of eulogizing a particular group of populace who is politically strong and famous. Some myths disregard the valour and intellectual power of the subalterns. In the postmodern era, identity, history and myths are rewritten, distorted and subverted as a part of the narrative strategy to deconstruct the established power structure. For instance, writers may flip the roles of characters in myths, giving power to traditionally marginalized figures. This can challenge established social hierarchies, gender norms and cultural expectations. Therefore, the article attempts to unfurl the enshrouded women in Indian epics whose portrayal aligns with the patriarchal structures. It also highlights the powerful image of vulnerable women characters like Uruvi, Urmila, Menaka, Surpanakha and Ahalya who are masked in history and deliberately made obscure in myths.

**Keywords:** myth, power structures, subversion, contradiction, deconstruction, subaltern.

Myths are deeply embedded in the consciousness of the people and it is important to note how both religious and political myths are crafted and constructed to preserve the implanted doctrines of hegemony and resistance. As Barthes says, “nothing can escape from the connotation of a myth and no story escapes from the bounds of literature. Literature can accommodate any tale from any country or origin” (87). In the present age, myths are rewritten, distorted and subverted with the aim to unsettle the power structures and to break the underlying patriarchal propaganda. The subversion of myths in literature refers to the intentional deviation or reinterpretation of traditional myths and cultural narratives. This approach becomes imperative in the contemporary literary discourses as Goya states: “subversion is universal. Indeed, if subversion were not possible, the freedom of the human mind would stand in doubt” (03). Writers often use this technique to challenge or question societal norms, challenge established power structures, or offer alternative perspectives.

Kavita Kane is a powerful writer of the present who pungently delves into the mythological narratives and decodes them from the focus of marginalized women. Her works transplant the well-known stories from Indian mythology into present day critiques, where the plight of the woman at the margin is highlighted. Her emphasis is on the women who have been neglected so far and she also shows how those women become strong and potent. Kane has undertaken a challenging task and built up a credible narrative with available facts from histories and myths. Kane picks up marginalized women like Uruvi, Urmila, Menaka, Surpanakha and Ahalya from

Indian epics and focuses on their challenges and sacrifices that are hitherto unknown to the mainstream.

In an Interview with Dr. Uma Bhushan that is published in the journal *Literary Voice*, Kavita Kane states her intention in writing her works related to mythical women characters. She observes that she attempts to “. . . view our epics through a woman's point of view because women have been marginalised at every level of society, consistently overridden by patriarchal domination and assumptions. These stories are stories of men, written by men, told by men and even heard by men. How about considering the mentality of female characters of those same stories?” (330). Her works decanonize the hitherto envisaged images of a women in selected myths and she concocts them in such a way that the latent woman power is revealed and proved to the readers.

The narratives of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have offered ample scope to bring out the tribulations of women. As Padma Malini Sundararaghavan rightly observes:

. . . literature and history have their roots in myth. When confronted with powerful natural phenomena, humans felt there was an unseen power that controlled these forces. He had to explain it to himself and the community and it was thus that the earliest myth stories were told. Again, when trying to resolve kinship and social conflicts, he had to use analogical tales or myths to evolve stories that encoded rules of behavior . . . it is encoded in language which is an open-ended system, further interpretation ends. . . Once myth becomes encoded in language, it takes on the qualities of a literary text and gains an autonomous status. (17)

As stated above, myths become an integral part of the literary domain and metaphors. Hence, only a proper analysis can express the similarities and differences between the original and the reworked part of the epic stories and characters. Kavita Kane, who indulges herself in reshaping the minor characters in Indian epics, tries to transform her submissive women characters into potent protagonists. This is possible only when she draws her ideas from a blend of history, imagination and shared myths. As Cook states, “myths stubbornly pervade the way we treat one another and organize the space around us, they charge our works of art with urgent meaning” (1). This is exemplified in *Karna's Wife (KW)* which is about the queen of Karna, who is treated as an outcaste and a marginalized charioteer in the epic of *Mahabharata*. Karna is often an object of admiration and is noted for his gratitude and integrity towards Duryodhana. But his queen, Uruvi is a masked minor character, dominated and foreshadowed by other women like Kunti and Gandhari.

The narrative depicts how a traditionally passive woman character becomes a powerful and assertive protagonist. Uruvi is a Kshatriyan princess, who marries Karna, despite knowing that he is a charioteer's son, “a sutraputra” and not a Kshatriya (*KW* 42). She is supposed to be the bride of Arjuna, but she spurns him in order to choose Karna. She justifies her love for him, saying that he is:

. . . a sutraputra, who was born to show valour and to achieve glory. . . For me, that makes you enough of a Kshatriya. You have attained fame and glory as a brave, formidable warrior. You are a good man, a generous, kind person. What more could I ask for? Honour is not in a name or status but what you carry in your heart. (*KW* 42)

It shows not only Uruvi's love for Karna but also indicates her vehement voice against discriminative social structures. Overcoming all these challenges, Uruvi expresses her righteousness when she comes to know of Karna's role in the disrobing of Draupadi. She reveals her anguish and anger for humiliating Draupadi. Kane pens down her wrath:

Her fury rose, her words knife-like, Did it make you feel proud, great warrior, to pull a woman by her hair and haul her through the royal hall? Did it make you feel proud, great warrior to strip her of her pride . . . to disrobe her? To deride her as a prostitute? . . . what sort of man are you? . . . You are so fixated with your negative status and low birth, and yet it prompted you to call Draupadi a harlot; it instigated you to order her to be stripped. You are deceiving yourself if you think you are this kind, good and noble person when you are not! You never were! (KW 116-117)

From the perspective of a woman, the infamous scene of disgracing Draupadi is shot out with rage by Kane. Uruvi never forgives Karna for his transgression and his doomed friendship and loyalty to Duryodhana. Even after Karna's death, she chooses to stay with Radha and Vrishali in the home of Karna. She forgets her royal way of life and prefers an ascetic life. She is a unique woman, who has not been brought to the forefront by others, but Kavita Kane renders justice to her by giving a noble status of a queen to her.

A writer may deconstruct traditional archetypes to expose their complexities rather than conforming to them. Examining the emotional and psychological facets of characters that were previously presented as one-dimensional might help achieve this. It can be evidenced through another less known woman named Urmila, Lakshman's wife in the epic of *Ramayana*. Kane senses her as an intelligent and astute woman and makes her the heroine of her book, *Sita's Sister (SS)*. No one cares for what happens to Urmila when Lakshman leaves for exile along with Rama. Nor does he care for her when he decides to accompany Rama. Lakshman calls his wife as Mila and holds a lot of love and esteem for her. However, when Rama takes Sita with him, Lakshman fails to do it. He explains himself:

For me, my life is being with my brother. He is my all. He is my friend, my teacher, my life, my soul. I cannot do without him – that's how I have grown up, that's how I have been made. . . . the purpose that justifies my existence is serving him, protecting him. Some people consider me his menial, and I don't mind it. He is the reason for my being. (SS 66)

From Urmila's point of view, the above quotation clearly explicates not only Lakshman's love for his brother but also his failure to understand the emotional psyche of his wife. Her feminine feelings are not respected and she is doomed to experience the pain of a deserted wife.

Even though Urmila is left alone, Kane, being a woman writer, senses her feminine feelings and elevates her character in the novel. For example, Urmila the name, means “the enchantress, the meeting of the hearts, waves of passion” (SS 147). But she stands drained of her spirits when Lakshman leaves her. Her altruism is evident, when she deliberately disregards Lakshman as he leaves her for the forest for fourteen years. She pretends to scoff him, as she knows that she cannot go with him to the forest. She

asks haughtily, “I am a princess, born in leisure and luxury. Would you expect me to spurn this to chase you in your misguided, wild adventure with your brother eating berries, walking barefoot and cooking meals for the two of you?” . . . she saw him flinch and she felt a sharp stab of sorrow as she realized she had succeeded in her attempt to hurt him.” (SS 147). She lives her own life of personal exile. While the sacrifice of Lakshman is known to all, the sacrifice of Urmila is masked and foreshadowed by other celebrated mythical characters like Rama and Sita. Kavita Kane, when asked about her selection of characters for her works, states that:

Our mythology is so fascinating! And it's just not Draupadi or Sita who are strong women but almost all of them are. Be it Kunti, Gandhari, Tara or Mandodari. But marginalised characters like Urmila or Menaka or Surpanakha are women of conviction too and have their own story to tell, a story we don't know of. I like to tell their stories. . . these characters are part of the epic narrative but haven't had the space reserved for them as they are minor characters. But the moment the glare falls on them, they are seen as distinct individuals with a story to tell. (2)

In the novel *Menaka's Choice* (MC), Kane also sublimates the character of Menaka as one of the leading women in Indian mythology by breaking the stereotypical image that she is always drawn with. Usually, she is portrayed as a scheming seductress, who aims to mesmerize Vishwamitra, one of the great venerated ascetics in Indian mythology. Having depth of erudition in mythology, Kane meticulously discerns the ignominious myth that describes Menaka as a captivating seductress. Kane efficiently reconstructs it, by magnifying her sensibilities as an ordinary woman with desires and expectations. Hesiod, the eighth century writer brands such a woman as “kalon kakon” – “the beautiful evil thing.” Such derogatory connotations are associated with such women. But Kane presents her in a humanistic plane in her novels.

Menaka is portrayed as an intelligent woman, unlike the other traditional women who have been projected as highly submissive and pious. Menaka is categorized as a dancer and a gorgeous woman with abundant talents, as “she was born to distract, destroy and ravish” (MC 4). Her bewitching beauty captivates the gleaming eyes of Lord Indra, the king of devas, who “expelled a long breath and turned to look at her face” (MC 3). One can sense her intrepid daringness and astute intelligence when he scornfully derides her. Menaka, incensed by him, eloquently retaliates by indicating his weaknesses. Kane intends to cast her version of Menaka as a dynamic woman with immense potentialities.

Changing the perception from which a myth is told, can subvert its stereotypical meaning. Shifting the narrative perspective can offer alternative interpretations, highlight different aspects of the story, or challenge the reliability of the original myth. For instance, myths are constructed to lionize the deeds and valour of men by trivializing women and their contributions to the society, as it has been obviously done in Indian epics. Kane in contrast maximizes her women characters. For example, nevertheless Lord Indra is the king of devas, he seeks assistance from Menaka to save his kingdom from Vishwamitra. Menaka who longs for achieving

something individually and craves to escape from the heaven, accepts to Indra's plot and helps him in stopping Vishwamitra from creating new heaven, by her role of a seductress. As Kane writes, "it was not her revenge plan or a ruse. It was her only chance in a desperate attempt to escape from heaven" (MC 100).

Hoping to get a new life, she makes way into the heart of Vishwamitra and succeeds in the mission assigned to her. Kane puts his enchantment into words, as "his breath stuck in his throat, it had gone strangely dry. His eyes widened in shock and rising wonder as if it could not take in any further the sheer beauty he saw standing in front of him" (MC 112). She apparently proves that a woman can keep a man spellbound and make him dance to her tune. She induces him to hold on to her physically and emotionally and she too builds up and ends up in an emotional bondage with him. But Menaka is different in the sense that she seeks an individual identity for herself, apart from the role of a seductress. Though at the end of novel she reunites with Vasu and leads a satisfactory life in heaven, her longing to obtain individuality and autonomy ends in fiasco and is not able to expunge the memory of Vishwamitra.

The mythological projection of Menaka obviously exemplifies that myths merely skate on the surface level to project women and fail to ponder and reveal the inner feelings of them. Human frailties abound in celestial women too and the confined existence of ambitious women like Menaka is focused by Kane. She reveals how the rebellious spirit in them claims justice for their exploited selves. Menaka, the name means "born of the mind," is born from Lord Brahma's mind and is an interesting combination of beauty and brain. Kavita Kane draws out the real form of Menaka, deviating from the common image of lust and lure. She shapes out the fighting emotions of ego and possessiveness in Menaka, that contour her as an astute and humane Apsara.

Certain writers employ subversion as a satirical or parodic technique, ridiculing the customs of conventional treatment of myths and characters. This method may be entertaining and critical, pointing out the contradictions in mainstream narratives. It is clearly exemplified by Kavita Kane in the novel, *Lanka's Princess (LP)*. Of all Kane's women characters, Surpanakha who was named as Meenakshi, the younger sister of Ravana, is a precocious child and cleverly outwits her foes by bringing their downfall. It is, undoubtedly, attested by her father Vishravas who purportedly comments the following line, when she was born: "This little girl of ours shall wrought what our sons will never be able to do!" (LP 3). As a girl from Asura clan and not having adequate charm and charisma of a royal woman, she has been intensely loathed by her own family members except her father and grandmother. Experiencing a sense of isolation from her siblings, the enmity between her and her brother Ravan since their childhood days, causes a huge destruction. It is apparently proved when Ravan has strangled her pet Maya:

Meenakshi felt her own hand twitch and like a cat sprang on the unsuspecting Ravan, digging her nails into the tender flesh of his neck, her teeth bared in apoplectic frenzy. Ravan gave a cry of surprise, curdling into a scream of pain, one arm protecting his face against her clawing fingers, the other trying to wrench her off. She clung on,

ripping her sharp nails unto any exposed flesh, tearing the skin, sinking deeper to gouge. (LP 8)

As they grow up, the enmity becomes unabated. For instance, Surpanakha cleverly avenges Ravan who is responsible for the death of her lover Vidyujiva. Using her intelligence, she successfully demolishes the kingdom of her brother through Rama whom she uses as a cat's paw to achieve her purpose. In spite of her enterprising traits and noble qualities in the epic *Ramayana*, she has been trivialized in the myth and she is depicted as a woman with an iniquitous nature. Her benign nature is clouded by the dominating behaviour of her brother and Surpanakha is projected as a negative character.

The very name, 'Surpanakha' means a woman, hard as nails. Her original name Meenakshi, which takes the readers to her childhood, shows that she is a charming and humane woman, with 'golden fish-shaped eyes' and is the vivacious daughter of Vishravas and Kaikesi. But, as a woman, she is pathetically scorned since her birth, by her own mother and father, who take pride in the valour and wisdom of their sons, Ravan and Vibhishana. However, Meenakshi is much devoted to her father and mother. She is called as Surpanakha, when she starts reinforcing her identity in her conflict with others. She willingly grabs the identity of Surpanakha, the evil woman to overcome the disgrace that she suffers from her own family. Her love life with Vidyujiva is thwarted and she strives to wreak her vengeance on Ravan through Rama and Lakshman. Kane sympathizes with Surpanakha, and attempts to bring out the positive qualities in her, justifying her motives and aspirations.

Sometimes, writers can include imaginative elements from multiple myths to create a new, hybrid narrative. This intertextuality can result in a rich tapestry of meanings that challenges the simplicity of the original myths. For example, *Ahalya's Awakening* (AA) by Kane brings out the tale of every woman afflicted and scorned in the male dominated world. Ahalya becomes the victim of the desires of Indra and bears the plight of a woman being cursed to become a stone. Her disappointment knows no bounds when she has to wait for years and years until Rama steps on her and she then earns her redemption. Through her fictitious narration, Kane concocts the meeting between Ahalya and Sita which reflects the very divinity, integrity and purity of Rama. Kane points out how Ahalya is able to resume her life again after her period of retribution. She reflects in the novel, "In our pessimism, we wish we could renounce life and live in a dark hole. But as the universal law goes, we have to live and love. It is better to face what is in front of you, not just with dignity, but with some honour. It makes sad, less sad and glad, more glad!" (AA 89). Hence the retelling of the story of Ahalya from a different perspective arms the work to transcend the limits of the mythological frame. In her interview to Dr. Uma Bhushan that is published in the journal *Literary Voice*, Kane explains her motive behind her works:

Take the original stories of Ahalya and Shakuntala and observe how the different versions have morphed and even distorted the original narrative. The epics too became the biggest victim of patriarchy and both *Menaka's Choice* and *Ahalya's Awakening* reveal the patriarchal domination and assumptions. The understanding of

mythological discourse changed, largely revolving around the male characters, with women being ignored as mere catalysts for the culmination of the greater stories. (332)

Kane chooses the tricky genre of mythological fiction, where a brilliant balance between fact and fiction is desirable. The narrative style is highly appreciable and fast paced, and is in modern language which makes the readers feel comfortable and energized. From Kane's narration, it is clear that the less known women or the misjudged characters are often the women, who suffer the most. The most sensitive emotions of women like their muted anguish, the denied love life, the stifled sense of self-respect and the hidden craving for attention and love are all subtly carved by Kane. The essence of strong women and their conflicting emotion is identified in the women whom Kane has selected for her mythical tales. So far, they had their survival at the periphery level and it is Kane, who has brought them to the centre.

Traditional history is recorded from the patriarchal viewpoint and writing myths also follows the same pattern. A few women like Sita, Draupadi are often brought to the centre of discussion, but the altruistic and valiant women deliberated above are ignored and never mentioned in history also. It takes a woman writer like Kavita Kane to explore these avenues and flash their names, in order to give them the worth and respect that they deserve. Myths carry a universal significance that stretches beyond the limits of patriarchy and extends beyond social boundaries.

To sum up, Kane's women characters, though derived from various epics, revamp the stereotypical perceptions thrust upon them, and demonstrate the latent talents of the vivacious women like Uruvi, Urmila, Menaka and Surpanaka. They challenge the existing norms of judging women according to patriarchal yardsticks. These women characters reveal the correlation between the myths and the ethical values embodied in Indian *dharma*. The fact is that myths have been actualized and historicized. The process is so natural that credibility is not questioned. Kane succeeds in breaking the canon that contains the works that degrade the power of women, deconstructs the myths in the selected works, and impels rereading of celebrated myths. By subverting myths, Kane contributes to the ongoing evolution of traditional narratives, offering a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances within traditional stories. This subversion allows for a reevaluation of established norms and provides space for alternative perspectives and voices.

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## **Representation of Disability and Agency: Understanding the Nuances of Disability in Malini Chib's *One Little Finger***

**Abhijit Seal\***

### *Abstract*

Disability Studies is an emerging area in the academic as well as socio-cultural context. Various literary scholars try to make use of literature as a medium to address various shades of the disability and the politics revolving around it. In the present paper, the author has chosen Malini Chib's personal narrative *One Little Finger* (2010) as a primary source to decode the various nuances of disability, challenge/question the notion of normalcy and highlight the politics concerning the disabled women in a sexist and ableist society. The present study accentuates the physical, emotional and psycho-social issues of the protagonist Malini and shows how she overcame and negated such barriers of experiential reality through education and activism. The paper also showcases how Malini, due to her parental support and encouragement attempts to change the course of ableist society's conventional understanding of the disabled through awareness and empowerment by presenting herself as an inspiration for all the disabled.

**Keywords:** Disability, Discrimination, Inclusion, Personal narrative

### **Introduction**

Disability Studies has emerged as a discipline in the last few decades of the twentieth century in the West after the success of the Disability Rights Movement in America. Though initially disability has been regarded as only a medical problem located in a person's body, the proliferation of interdisciplinary approaches has shifted the paradigm to other domains of humanities. Scholars have come up with their notions of disability as a social and political phenomenon and then have shifted the paradigm to cultural domain culminating in the emergence of the cultural disability studies. This has resulted in the newer understanding of disability and hence over the last few decades, disability studies have changed its trajectory. It is no longer seen as a problem located in a person's body, but is seen as a problem with a focus on the barriers faced by people with impairment. In India, the discourses on disability have not reached a state where the multiple realities of disabilities are addressed by it. India has one of the highest numbers of people with disability. But till 1981, this disabled population has not been even included in the National Census. From The Persons with Disability Act 1995, to the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2007, and the passing of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill in 2016, India changed its approach towards the people with disabilities and adopted an all-inclusive stance towards them, ensuring and promoting fundamental rights and human freedom. Despite all these legal measures, persons with disabilities, in most cases, continue to face discrimination and oppression on daily basis. Though there have been some studies on the discourses of disability, it remains invisible due to the unavailability of data. Herein lies the importance of

represent themselves as definitive human beings. *Normate*, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them. (Thomson 8)

Thus, according to Garland-Thomson, if disability is a deviation from a normative subject, then the normative American self is the norm from which it deviates. Anita Ghai, an eminent Disability Studies scholar and activist from India, sharing her disabled experiences, states,

As disabled persons, we are products of an ideology of normality where communication of messages of the able body is a constant in any society. As a result, a disabled person is constantly in a mental state of deferral, awaiting the day the body will not just be mended but cured. Until then, the disabled tend to impersonate the able-bodied. (2)

Thus, Disability Studies scholars have challenged the very notion of normalcy. The scholars like Davis, Garland-Thomson and Ghai have taken the discourses of disability beyond the socio-political and rights-based agenda, and exposed the cultural discursive processes that have categorically sidelined the disabled population.

The 'otherisation' of the disabled population has resulted in their secondary status in the ableist society. In the mainstream literary discourses, disability is conjoined with passivity and victimization which, in turn, reinforces certain stereotypes like dependent, passive, sensitive and miserable subjects. Literary disability studies have foregrounded the various nuances of disability through the literary narratives. Though disability has always been there in literature down the ages, it has remained invisible as proper focus is not given on these representations. This representational erasure is not always due to the oppression and marginalization of the disabled population, rather, it is what Michael Berube calls, 'The politics of disavowal' which is associated with "the psychological distance most people put between themselves and disability" (85). Thus, there is a need to challenge the received notions of disability, and unravel the ways in which the identity of the disabled population is constructed. The author Malini Chib is one of the prominent Disability writers and activists in India. In spite of her physical disability, she has written the personal narrative, *One Little Finger* which has been adapted into an Indian film titled *Margarita with a Straw* in the year 2014. Preeti Monga's *The Other Senses: An Inspiring True Story of a Visually Impaired* (2012), Shivani Gupta's *No Looking Back* (2014), Arunima Sinha's *Born Again on the Mountain: A Story of Losing Everything and Finding It Back* (2014) and Major H.P.S. Ahluwalia's *Higher Than Everest: Memoirs of a Mountaineer* (2016) are some of the notable personal narratives about disability. These personal narratives reflect various nuances/shades of physical, emotional and psycho-social disabilities.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Malini Chib is one of the pioneer and reputed Disability activists of India and an author. She is a woman with cerebral palsy as well as afflicted with multiple disabilities. Her personal narrative *One Little Finger* (2010), which she typed with

exploring various avenues to gather the information of the disabled population and their experiential realities.

Disability studies as a discourse has traversed its trajectory from a mere medical model through the social model and has embarked on a cultural paradigm after the academia and scholars of humanities began to use literature as a key factor for the critical analysis of disability. In Disability Studies, narratives enable us to have a nuanced understanding of the experiential realities of the lives of persons with disabilities. Julie Smart in her work *Disability, Society and the Individual* says,

Historically bodies and minds have been ascribed certain norms and disability studies help us to explore those norms and expose the politics behind the creation of disability as a socially constructed category. (33)

Thus, this paper is an attempt to challenge the construction of 'normalcy' and understand the very formation of the self, and the interpretation of the narrative in creating the agency of the disabled subject.

In the Indian context, people's disability has been relegated to the margins due to a lack of awareness of disability in the mainstream discourses as people with disabilities are systematically excluded, separated and socially dis-empowered. Disability Studies scholars have explored how the able-bodied ideologies have created a culture of ableism that invalidates the experiences of the disabled population. However, with the passage of time, the disabled population has gained some recognition and is regarded as a presence within the socio-political framework. With the emergence of the narratives about the experiences of disability, various nuances of disability as social disadvantage, social exclusion and oppression experienced by these people, have been foregrounded. The cultural turn of the disability studies has stressed on the cultural nuances of disability that have been represented in literary narratives. Disability scholars critique the very notion of normalcy as in mainstream culture because it regards disability as something 'abnormal' and so on. In the Introduction to *The Disability Studies Reader*, Lennard Davis critiques the very construction of the idea of "Normalcy" and opines that the "problem" of disability does not lie in the person with disabilities but rather in the way that normalcy is created. He states,

To understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body. So much of writing about disability has focused on the disabled person as the object of study... I do this because the "problem" is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the "problem" of the disabled person. (Davis 16)

Furthering discourse on disability and normalcy, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (1997) explores the representation of the disabled body in American literature and culture by focusing on the very notion of deviance of the disabled subject from the norms of society. She coins the term "normate" to assign a subject position of the cultural self that is unveiled. Regarding the term "normate," she opines,

The term *normate* usefully designates the social figure through which people can

only one finger over the span of two years, brought her immense fame. *One Little Finger* is a narrative that offers an excellent perspective on disability, identity formation and a disability culture within which Chib lived her life to eventually emerge on a positive note. She sends across a message that through resilient perseverance and activism one can resist the cultural prejudices/injustices and emerge victorious. *One Little Finger* is Chib's journey from her impaired infancy till she finds her employment as an event manager. Her personal narrative portrays her severely crippling disability, her positive attitude, her definition of the future for herself and also for other disabled people. Chib's work is an important contribution towards giving a voice and dignity to persons with disability who have for long been relegated to the margins. It is an engaging, honest and inspirational narrative which portrays serious difficulty and heartening accomplishments. In the words of Gunjan Kumari,

It is not merely an autobiography, but also a critique of the two prevalent models, namely medical and social model, a treatise on feminism and disability, a critique of education system for disabled students, a glimpse of Disability Movement, and most important of all, the representation of disabled person as a human being with flesh and blood. It is a symbolic book, resonating multiple voices altogether, the voice of a disabled for inclusion in the mainstream, the anguished cry of a disabled woman for her right to womanhood, and the voices of all disabled children who are deprived of their rights to proper education, who eventually feel incompetent, less confident and baffled in life. (46-47)

Thus, Malini Chib's work alludes to various barriers she has faced as a disabled woman since her birth and how she has faced them physically and emerged victorious. *One Little Finger* begins with the complicated birth of Malini Chib and the doctors declared that she “was a spastic and had Cerebral Palsy” (Chib 4) The doctors find out that the motor cells of her brain are damaged and she suffers from a lack of coordination and balance, and inform her parents that she will have to live a vegetable life and nothing could be done about it. Here, the author is pointing towards her physical disability. But she has real supportive parents who take utmost care of to take her out of her passive state. As Malini Chib says,

“They were fighters, as were we. Besides being fighters, they were focused and very conscientious about the routines.” (5)

But she suffers a great deal in the public space as she could understand the kind of gaze that people give and the whispers behind her back. It hurts her emotionally, her parents get upset, devastated and eventually decide to move to London for her sake.

Chib's life takes a different turn in London when she is admitted in a special school in Cambridge called Roger Ascham School; from where she moves to a school at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea in London. At Cheyne, she receives the best treatment and education. Chib not only talks about her supportive parents but also her family members who have helped her a lot throughout, to negotiate with her emotional disability. She slams the Indian doctors for their uncouth behavior and attitude towards disability. She makes tremendous progress in London, begins to sit up, begin to crawl, pull herself up on furniture and walk when aided. About the doctors and support staff in London, Malini Chib feelingly writes:

“The approach to me was different. It was a kind, encouraging and understanding team of professionals who dealt with me.” (10)

Her mother too gets herself trained about various aspects of disability, becomes stronger and at the insistence of her father, enrolls herself for a Post Graduate Diploma course at the Institute of Education, University of Leeds, to become one of the finest special educationists. After the birth of her brother Nikhil, Chib's parents return to India.

Life at Bombay becomes terrible for Malini as the situation remains the same after all those years. There is no school for children with disabilities. The doctors seem to be harsh and Malini Chib painfully writes, To them I was a non-thinking person who needed fixing and fitting into the mold of being normal. I hated the whole experience. (16)

Thus, Chib candidly portrays the society's attitude including the professional doctors, towards people with disability. This kind of attitudinal barriers inflict harm both physically as well as psychologically. At this juncture, Malini's mother takes the first step to establish a school for the disabled children following the medical model of curing persons with disabilities. In the early 1970s, the first school called *The Centre for Special Education* was set up in Bombay and is still operative which is frequented by Pam Stretch, a London based physiotherapist. Thus, a kind of Movement has started. A number of Spastic Societies have been launched in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi after that. But in Delarue, London at the age of fifteen was a great learning experience for her. She learnt life skills from her friends who were mostly disabled. There she was provided with an electric wheelchair that gave her the mobility. Chib says,

Delarue taught me to grow up and be responsible for myself. It taught me to be assertive about my needs, organize my time and in a sense, it prepared me for a regular college... (45)

After schooling at Delarue, Malini came back and was admitted at St. Xavier's Junior College, Bombay. Malini along with three more students with multiple disabilities, had created history by making inclusive education in higher education a reality. Thus, these developmental changes helped Chib to conquer her emotional disability.

At St. Xavier's, Malini gradually got accustomed to a college for normal students. Initially, she faced exclusion and went through a lot of suffering. One chief problem was the issue of accessibility. As the infrastructure of her college was not disabled friendly, she faced a lot of problems as far as her mobility was concerned. She wanted to be a part of all the normal activities of the college, though she understood her shortcomings due to disabilities. She introspects:

It is then that I began my journey of deep introspection. What is normal? Who is normal? Why am I abnormal? It seemed obvious that I was different. I began to be painfully aware that I was never going to be easily accepted by the so-called normal society. (Chib 56)

Then Malini narrates the fun part of college life where she makes a couple of friends and starts enjoying her life. She used to go to parties and yearn for boyfriends though she understands that “For the typical boy it was not acceptable to be seen with a disabled girlfriend. They wanted a 'normal girlfriend' in their arms. Yet I loved the

normalcy of life I had at Xavier's" (Chib 59). Though her college life had new challenges on a variety of fronts - social, personal and academic - she had learned to grapple with them and overcome them, specifically her psycho-social disability.

After her Graduation from St. Xavier's, Malini went to the United States of America for a short visit which exposed her to new ideas. She found that the disabled people in Berkeley argued that all the people were interdependent as "nobody is completely independent" (Chib 84). On return to Bombay Malini started her informal recreational club called ADAPT (Able Disabled All People Together) where people could meet socially. With this she introduced the inclusive aspect to the social discourses where both the abled and disabled would meet.

While pursuing a publishing course at Oxford, Malini got fully seized of the societal paradigms that created the whole discourse of disability. She experienced that even the so-called normal people had some disability in their lives which she termed as "invisible disability" (103). She would attend all the sessions where she articulated about the concept of rights and entitlements of the disabled. The second outing in London opened new vistas of awareness to Malini regarding various developments in Disability movements and had started to focus on her individual experiences as a disabled woman. She was introduced to feminist scholars like Jenny Morris who in her book *Pride Against Prejudice: A Personal Politics of Disability*, talks on the central theme of "personal is political" (13). It endowed her with the strength and wherewithal to know how a disabled woman adjusted herself with everyday life, its politics and the relationship of disabled woman with the outside world. She read about the feminist dictum of the double disadvantage of a disabled woman, for being woman in a sexist society and also for being disabled. Malini Chib brings to the light the cultural connotation of this,

I found out that there was a cultural association to disability with dependency, child-likeness and helplessness. A disabled man on the other hand is viewed as a wounded 'male' while a disabled woman is not able to fulfill the cultural expectations. (145)

Chib talked about the body and sexuality paradigm of a disabled woman. A disabled woman had a rejected body and that they were either asexual or hyper-sexual. Thus, women with disabilities were regarded as deviant by society without normal physical, emotional and psycho-social needs.

While in London Malini Chib begins giving talks on disability issues in various parts of London. At this point Richard Reiser, in-charge of *Disability, Equality and Education* offered her the job of a trainer as he believed that "the only way to bring disabled people into the mainstream is through empowerment" (Chib 168). This provides her the first step towards her own empowerment. She did her Second Masters' Program also, got a job at Oxford Bookstore in Mumbai as Senior Events Manager and began her activism through ADAPT with the objective of initiating change in access, attitude and policy for people with disabilities in India. The ADAPTS Rights Group (ARG) was formed which included both non-disabled and disabled people to work together to form an inclusive society where "all are welcome and included" (Chib 187) As she reflects, she finds herself happy as she is. Thus, she

states,

I have learned to love and accept that life is beautiful as it is. It is not always easy, but definitely beautiful. I think that despite the attitudes of rejection, lack of access and loss of freedom, I have accepted India as home... I am comfortable now in the light and the dark, the smiles and the tears. (198)

### Conclusion

Thus, Malini Chib's *One Little Finger* chronicles the journey of a disabled woman. Throughout the narrative, Chib presents the development of the disability studies movement in India and how she along with her mother played a crucial role in bringing awareness and sensitivity into the social discourses on disability. The narrative presents how from a mere disabled woman, Malini Chib attains agency to bring about changes through education and activism. It is revelatory how she negates the politics attached to disability. As a whole, Malini Chib's personal narrative documents the nuances of disability, physical, social and psycho-social, and calls for a serious rethink on 'disability.'

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## Mapping Collective Memory and Trauma: A Study of Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* as a Partition Novel

Dr Namrata Pathania\*

### *Abstract*

Geetanjali Shree's booker prize winning novel *Tomb of Sand*, originally penned in Hindi as *Ret Samadhi* and skilfully translated into English by Daisy Rockwell, emerges as a significant work within the realm of Partition Studies. The Partition of India in 1947 remains one of the most significant and traumatic events in South Asian history. It resulted in the division of the Indian subcontinent into two separate nations, India and Pakistan, and left an indelible mark on the collective memory of the people who lived through it. *Tomb of Sand*, though fictional, serves as a poignant lens through which to examine the multifaceted repercussions of the Partition. This research paper delves into the novel's exploration of the Partition of India and its lasting socio-psychological impact on individuals and communities, especially in its third and last section. By examining themes of displacement, memory, trauma, and identity, the analysis elucidates how this novel contributes to the discourse surrounding the Partition of 1947, shedding light on the enduring consequences of this tumultuous historical event. Beyond the collective trauma, the novel also delves into the personal trauma experienced by its characters. Through the characterisation of Ma alias Chanda, the octogenarian protagonist of the novel, who embarks on a journey to her ancestral home in Pakistan, Shree illustrates the longing and loss of all those who were displaced. She also describes in detail the violence and atrocities meted out to the victims of Partition especially women and the enduring pain of displacement, even decades after the event.

**Keywords:** Displacement, historical, memory, partition, trauma.

The Partition of India in 1947 generated a plethora of sensitive and poignant body of literature known as Partition literature. The first and the second waves of Partition novels continued roughly until the 1980s, but Partition continues to inspire the literary imagination of writers even now. Contemporary novels such as Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1992), Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* (1995), Jyotirmoyee Debi's *The River Churning* (1995), Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999), M.J. Akbar's *Blood Brothers* (2006), Kamleshwar's *Kitne Pakistan* (2006), Sunanda Sikdar's *A Life Long Ago* (2012), Shobha Rao's *An Unrestored Woman* (2016), Balraj Khanna's *Line of Blood* (2017), and Veera Hiranandani's *The Night Diary* (2018), have widely been read and acclaimed as important testaments of Partition. Geetanjali Shree is a notable writer who has carved a niche for herself in the literary landscape for past two decades. Her language of creativity is Hindi with five novels namely, *Mai* (1993), *Hamara Shahar Us Baras* (1998), *Tirohit* (2001), *Khali Jagah* (2006) and *Ret Samadhi* (2018) to her credit. She has also penned several short story collections, *Anugoonj* (1991), *Vairagya* (1999), *March, Ma Aur Sakura* (2008), *Pratinidhi Kahaniyan*, (2010) and *Yahan Hathi Rahte The* (2012). Besides, she is an acclaimed scriptwriter working with a theatre group "Vivadi," and also with the National School of Drama, Delhi. Most of her works have



been translated in multiple Indian as well as European languages such as English, French, and German etc. Her novels, though thematically and structurally very different from each other, celebrate life with all its ups and downs.

*Ret Samadhi*, translated in English as *Tomb of Sand* by Daisy Rockwell, won the prestigious Booker Prize in the year 2022. This novel lends itself to multi-thematic analysis. However, this paper delves into the novel's exploration of the Partition of India and the resultant displacement and trauma. Shree has dedicated one final section of the novel to this particular theme. Anuska Guin points out in her Book Review of the novel, "Geetanjali Shree has embedded Partition literature in this book, so beautifully" (n.pag.). In reply to Reya Divekar's question as to what drove Geetanjali Shree to touch upon Partition as one of the themes in her novel, the author says:

Partition is an important part of history for the three countries on the subcontinent, but I feel it is an experience of many countries.... Partition has specific sub continental implications, but it also spans the larger world. It is a sad reality seen throughout human history.... Even people like me, who have no direct experience of the Partition, are surrounded by its memory.... I am talking of even those who have never been directly, personally affected but collectively carry the trauma of it. (Divekar n. pag.)

The Partition of India in 1947 remains one of the most significant and traumatic events in South Asian history. It resulted in the division of the Indian subcontinent into two separate nations, India and Pakistan, and left an indelible mark on the collective memory of the people who lived through it. As observed by Vinod Kumar Chopra in his book, *Partition Stories: Mapping Community, Communalism and Gender*, "The freedom of India from the British regime in 1947, which was achieved after a long struggle waged against the colonial rule by the Indians... was however, marred by the colossal tragedy of the Partition of the country... This political decision led to unimaginable human suffering and large-scale migration on both sides of the border" (48). Never before or since have so many people lost their homes or country as rampantly as during the Partition. In the words of Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre in their seminal book, *Freedom at Midnight*, "Amidst an unparalleled tide of human misery about twelve million people moved between the new truncated India and the two wings, East and West of the newly created Pakistan, People were crawling like columns of ants across the country" (319). The trauma of displacement, thus, caused was unprecedented and led to its interpretation according to psycho-analytic trauma theory. According to the noted literary trauma theorist, Michelle Balaev, "The move to emphasize trauma's specificity according to a particular personal or historical event indicates the versatility of psychoanalytic trauma theory" (366).

Trauma Studies seek to explore the impact of trauma in literature and society, "Psychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities are the central concerns that define the field of trauma studies" (Balaev 360). Trauma studies first came up in the 1990s and relied

on Freudian theory. This theory developed a model of trauma that indicated that suffering caused due to extreme experience was unrepresentable. This was the traditional trauma model pioneered by Cathy Caruth and popularised by Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman. In this model, trauma is viewed as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation:

Trauma is an unassimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation... Traumatic experience and its inherent dissociation thwart the application of determinate value to that experience because the level of fright destroys the mind's ability to comprehend it and linguistically code it. Although the experience may never be narrated or identified clearly, it acts like a tumour in consciousness that wounds the self. (363)

Freud and Breuer emphasized in *Studies in Hysteria* that the original event was not traumatic in itself but only in its remembrance. According to them:

We may reverse the dictum “*cessante causa cessat effectus*” (when the cause ceases the effect ceases) and conclude from these observations that the determining process (that is, the recollection of it) continues to operate for years—not indirectly, through a chain of intermediate causal links, but as a *directly* releasing cause—just as psychical pain that is remembered in waking consciousness still provokes a lachrymal secretion long after the event. Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences. (7)

Trauma is thus defined in relation to the process of remembering. Freud's later work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) extends and adapts his earlier theories on the defence mechanisms of the ego as well as the origin and effects of trauma upon the psyche. Traumatic neurosis is marked by the “compulsion to repeat the memory of the painful event with the hopes of mastering the unpleasant feelings.... The self does not remember the actual event but only the “reproductions” of the traumatic experience that arise in dreams” (Freud 19). Following the traditional model, came up a more pluralistic model that suggested the assumed inexpressibility of trauma as one among many responses to an extreme event rather than its defining feature. This model emphasizes the determinate values of the traumatic event and memory. Psychiatrist Laurence Kirmayer argues that the recollection of traumatic events is governed by social contexts and cultural models, “Such cultural models influence what is viewed as salient, how it is interpreted and encoded at the time of registration, and, most important for long-term memories that serve autobiographical functions, what is socially possible to speak of and what must remain hidden and unacknowledged” (191).

*Tomb of Sand* serves as a poignant lens through which to examine the trauma caused by the Partition of India and its lasting impact on individuals and communities, especially on its octogenarian protagonist, Ma alias Chanda in the third and last section of this voluminous novel. Named “Back to the Front,” this section describes the journey undertaken by Ma who crosses the border in search of her ancestral home in Pakistan and then goes till Khyber- Pakhtunkhwa in search of her ex-husband, “She travels to Lahore, where she lived as a girl, and then to Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, where she goes looking for her ex-husband, Anwar” (Chakraborty n.pag.). She had kept her

memories locked within herself until she decides to go back to her original home in Pakistan and confront them. To go to Pakistan, crossing the border is a requisite and the author comments, “Here we are at Wagah, where the tale is drama and the story is partition” (Shree 535). Ma fails to understand what the border really depicts - a boundary between nations or people or hearts? A line of control or an instrument of divide? A feature, geographical in nature or political or psycho-sociological? Shree maintains the ambiguity, “Border to what? Do we belong here or there?” (552). Yet, Ma tries to defy it without completely understanding it, “The tiny woman stands at the thing they call the border, on the other side, spinning slowly like the earth, wondering where to go: this way or which way?” (553).

Ma, the “small woman” (549), is not alone in this quest but is escorted by her daughter, Beti, the “growing bigger” (549) woman. Traversing the difficult path of finding and reliving her disturbing past, she is trying to find the essence of her being, “To follow the path of a soul, one must walk at a soulful pace. Ma walked softly, gently.... The woman walks as though traversing an entire century with each step. Her daughter's hand in hers, leaning on her cane” (549-550). On way to Lahore, Ma remembers the bloody riots that had coloured the road red. The road, thus, becomes one of the characters in the novel having witnessed the unprecedented mayhem:

The road observes two women alight upon its surface.... The road has traversed centuries, twisting and twirling like a river, wandering from this country to that. It has known the laughter of humans, understood their haste, seen many fearful sights that flow through its veins like blood. It must have been offended when...the waters of the nearby spring...flowed red, a reflection not of the rising and setting sun but of the bloodshed of days gone by. (557)

This road had seen all. Riots, rioters and their bloody sport, “Once upon a time, a riot had broken out amongst the caravans of refugees that passed along the road” (557). This road had seen Ma alias Chanda as a child running over it out of fear because during the communal frenzy, children and women were the most favoured or sought after preys.

Ma's journey to confront her traumatic memories and rediscover her identity mirrors the experiences of countless individuals who endured the Partition. Paul Connerton opines, “All beginnings contain an element of recollection stressing upon the fact that it is not possible to obliterate the past completely as every new beginning relies on the habits and loyalties of discarded past” (56). Similarly in views of Marc Auge, “Remembering or forgetting is doinggardener's work selecting, pruning memory and forgetting are in constant negotiation in the construction of the past” (75). The intersection of collective memories of Partition of India reveals the trauma experienced by nations as well as individuals. For women:

Traumatic memories were more painful as they were also bodily memories and as such bodies became important sites of memory in analysis of aftermaths of partition.... Though scores of years have passed but still the scars are fresh, wounds unhealed, a generation of women with wet eyes and affrighting memories are still holding up the unheard tales in the recesses of their heart. (Sobti 732)

In her book, *Partition's Post-Amnesias*, Anaya Kabir coins a new terminology - 'Post-

Amnesia' that "endeavors to trace the dialectic of memory and forgetting. It is a narrative that seeks to retrace the fragile webs of kinship and memory in which individuals remain suspended long after the political and personal events have seen them in different directions..." (Sivaramakrishnan n. pag.). The novel offers insight into the profound psychological impact of the Partition on survivors, exploring themes of survivor's guilt, post-traumatic stress, and the enduring legacy of trauma.

Going down the memory lane, "lost in memory" (Shree 567), Ma decided to visit each and every place and monument that had haunted her memory for so long. Having escaped the riots and then settled in India, her heart longed to go back to her roots. She coaxed her daughter and went back to all the places of her adolescence and youth-Lahore Fort, Badshahi Mosque, Vazir Khan Mosque, the Ravi, Montgomery Hall, Mochi Darwaza, Bano Bajar, Surjan Singh Gali and many more. The daughter was dazed to see her mother as a new woman, "When they arrived in Surjan Singh Gali, Beti notices Ma's eyes shut tight. She stands still at Delhi Gate. If you want to look at a map etched in your mind's eye, you must close your eyes" (571). Ma "gazed off into the distance, into the galis and lanes, as though she could see far off. She had a vague look about her, as though she'd become a two-headed river...that can flow both this way and that. (573). Crossing the border, she finally reached the door of her maternal home that was locked quite like her memories and longings, "A stout old door, green in colour, etched with network of cracks, fastened with a heavy iron chain" (574). The door finally opened and so did her traumatic past. The house was in ruins having suffered the ravages of time, "And this was her maternal home, exclaimed Ma, but in a whisper" (575). Yet, it bore the testimony of once being a comfortable abode where people laughed and loved until the hell of Partition broke loose, "Ma walked past, ignoring the person opening the green door, and slipped into the house.... She blinked in slow motion. Her eyes seemed to close for an age, then open for an age" (583). She narrated her traumatic past to her daughter for the very first time, "I was making phulkas. Taya told me to run up and hide on the roof. I'd fired up the hearth, the roti was on the pan. There was a commotion: he said, jump up, get out. The doors fell, the stars wobbled... The house was on fire" (585). The fire of partition set all the houses and the dreams of the inmates on fire, "Fire. Attacks on caravans. Karachi Pindi Lahore. Tandojam Umarnot Munabao. Tharpakar, Khipro, Tando, Alhayar, Khadri (604). Everything was burnt to ashes. Chanda was sixteen years old when she was kidnapped from her maternal home near Lahore by a group of miscreants during the communal riots that followed the ill-fated Partition:

A man appears, his face masked by a strip of fabric. He seizes her, grabs her. Pulls . . . Lifts her, Throws her down. Truck . . . one or two more masked men. In the truck, girls. Like her: sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. Weeping. Snivelling. One on top of another . . . She bites a hand. The masked man slaps her . . . Darkness. A tarp thrown over them. They are buried beneath, Suffocating, suppressed. Dying. Unconscious. Some crying. Some silent. Blind. She too (596).

They were taken away and then stuffed in a cemetery for days without food and water. Then they were reloaded in an open truck and the journey resumed. As to where was

known to none. But it was for sure an irreversible journey. Girls were the double victims of partition by virtue of their gender, “Why only girls? The fate of girls is rotten” (600). Being one of this ill-fated tribe, Chanda was separated from her home and lover forever just like Salma, the protagonist of Kamleshwar’s *Kitne Pakistan*, “Whether a woman belonged to this side of the border or the other, she was never whole” (Kamleshwar 130). Chanda was cautioned by her teacher in the past to safeguard her chastity by wearing double trousers, “Wear two shalwars” (599) but the “. . . Double shalwar left behind. Back home” (599). It wasn’t just chastity that was left behind but belongingness, camaraderie and all that made one human. The girls survived but the soul was numb forever, if not dead, “The worst kind of violence on women was inflicted through abduction. . . . The women were abducted from their homes, refugee trains, refugee caravans and also from refugee camps” (Chopra 123). According to Kirpal Singh, during Partition riots, “It is estimated that about fifty thousand women were abducted in both the Punjab” (154).

After abduction, Chanda contemplated death “If I see a well, I’ll make a break for it. . . . What need to die? I already have” (Shree 66-601). Her only companion in this odyssey of struggle and survival was a little idol of Buddha that she got hold of in one of the places the girls were held captive. Whenever she felt hopeless, it gave her hope, “. . . the Buddha is her saviour. . . . When she missed home, she pressed it to her forehead. If she felt the silence of death she bowed to the Buddha” (604). She was lucky enough to escape from the clutches of the rioters along with a small girl of eleven or twelve. Hand in hand, they ran and crossed the Thar. It was a herculean task to run through the sand amidst a fierce storm. Chanda recollects, “You can never imagine it if you haven’t seen it: a sandstorm billowing towards you from a long way off, towering to the sky, like a tsunami growing in the ocean” (610). This sandstorm became the metaphor of the storm of communal hatred that inundated all humanity in the wake of Partition. The girls were stuck in the mire and could neither proceed forward nor turn backwards, “Should we turn and run? But how? Behind us approached frenzied crowd who had learned that some of their own had searched for girls from all over and hidden them so they wouldn’t fall into their savage hands. . . . Fire behind. Storm ahead” (610-611). It was a catch 22 situation. She gathered all courage and continued swimming in the sea of sand along with the girl and the Buddha. After the storm ceased, they were caught up in a bush. They had nothing to eat or to drink. They survived on grass. Eventually, “no strength remained” (617) and they became unconscious. When Chanda woke up, she found herself in a cantonment hospital but the girl was nowhere. As stated by Aparna Aggarwal in her research paper, the novel describes the Partition through the female perspective. It, “. . . skillfully described the agonising exodus that followed the declaration of partition, the division of lifelong friends and families. . . . It’s an effort to demonstrate how women were reduced to nothing more than bodies. . . .” (1740).

Finally, Chanda was on the other side of border as “a border had been drawn” (618) and rechristened as Chandaprabha Devi who led a full life as a wife and then as a mother and grandmother, “The story doesn’t end. A new story speaks” (619), before

embarking on the back journey crossing the border and the boundaries, "...I didn't come here, I left here" (628) to be whole once again. Once displaced, she is content to be placed back to where she was born and brought up. Ma reclaims her true identity by finding, "the part of herself hewn off by the border's enforcement" (Weber n.pag.). Identifying the border, the wounds it gave, "the unhealed border wound - the longing and the loss" (Weber n.pag.), and then trying to heal them becomes the soul objective of Ma's remaining life. She is hell-bent upon meeting Anwar, her lover and first husband and eventually succeeds in doing so.

Hence, the novel invites readers to confront the collective and individual trauma of the Partition, shedding light on the complexities of identity, memory, and reconciliation and serves as a powerful testament to the lasting impact of historical events and the indomitable human spirit that seeks to make sense of the past while forging a path toward the future. The final reconciliation by Ma is achieved after defying the border - political, emotional and psychological. In the words of Geetanjali Shree in an interview conducted by the Deutsche Welle in *The Telegraph*, "...if there are limits and boundaries, then crossing them is also very important" (n.pag.). *Tomb of Sand* is thus a significant contribution within the realm of Partition Studies and Trauma Studies questioning whether it is possible to reconcile the past with the present, and whether one can truly reclaim an identity that has been fractured by the events of 1947.

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## Subalternity and the Indian Rebellion of 1857: Staging the History of the Marginalized in Utpal Dutt's *The Great Rebellion*

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### *Abstract*

The history of Indian nationalism and nation formation, as argued by Ranajit Guha, has been dominated by colonialist and bourgeois-nationalist historiography. While the former credits foreign elites like British rulers and administrators for the achievement of the nation's freedom, the latter eulogizes indigenous elite personalities and institutions. Subaltern Studies emerged as a response to focus on the gaps in elitist historical discourses, to draw attention to the numerous uprisings by millions of people independent of elite leadership. Utpal Dutt's play, *The Great Rebellion* dramatizes the Indian rebellion of 1857 and throws light on the subalterns, who are exploited by the foreign (British rulers, officials) as well as the native oppressors (princes, merchants, moneylenders). The playwright presents the active participation of subjugated people—weavers, peasants, sepoys, women (including 'fallen' women), and ordinary citizens—in the anti-colonial freedom struggle. The present paper seeks to study the play in the light of the ideas posited by Subaltern Studies.

**Keywords:** 1857 Rebellion, Indian Mutiny, Indian Drama, Subaltern Studies, Utpal Dutt

In his essay “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India,” Ranajit Guha argues that the history of Indian nationalism and nation formation has been dominated by colonialist historiography and bourgeois-nationalist historiography. Both the approaches are elitist in nature, the former crediting British rulers, administrators, institutions, and policies for the formation of the Indian nation and the consciousness of nationalism, and the latter eulogizing Indian elite personalities, activities, and institutions (Guha 1). Anil Seal, for instance, in his book *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* described “*nationalism* as the work of a tiny elite reared in the education institutions that the British set up in India” (Chakrabarty 5; italic original). The field of Subaltern Studies emerged in response to such biased elitist perspectives and sought to focus on the gaps in traditional historical discourses, to draw attention to the numerous uprisings by millions of people independent of elite leadership. Utpal Dutt's play *The Great Rebellion* (1985) dramatizes the 1857 rebellion and throws light on the role of the marginalized sections of society in the anti-colonial freedom struggle. The present study seeks to analyze the play in the light of the ideas posited by Subaltern Studies.

The word 'subaltern' is primarily a military term referring to an officer of lower rank. Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci employed the term in his *Prison Notebooks* to mean the proletariat, thereby using the word in nonmilitary sense and in the context of Marxist class struggle. He later included other subjugated groups under the category of 'subaltern.' “In Notebook 25, Gramsci identifies slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races, and the proletariat as subaltern social groups” (Green 69). Gramsci's idea was taken up by a group of South Asian scholars



known as the Subaltern Studies Collective, including Ranajit Guha, David Arnold, Shahid Amin, Gyan Pandey, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, and others. They broadened the implication of the term:

The Subaltern Studies scholars initially adopted Gramsci's term to examine the history of peasant insurgency in colonial India and its representation in colonialist texts, which, they argued, was as important as those of the dominant classes, thus shifting the focus from the colonial and postcolonial elites to the peasantry and rural gentry. Ranajit Guha has also broadened the term to refer to 'the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or any other way.' (Cuddon 689)

Throughout the publication of the *Subaltern Studies* series (from 1982 to 2005), the term has undergone tremendous changes and become an umbrella term. Thus, subalterns now may refer to any subjugated groups oppressed by dominant classes and include aboriginals, slaves, women, workers, peasants, refugees, transgenders, religious minorities, tribals, Dalits, lower castes, colonized subjects, racially others, etc.

Theatre is an effective platform to present resistance of the subalterns to oppressive forces. Playwrights like Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, Utpal Dutt, Bijon Bhattacharya and others have re-created the lives of subjugated people on the stage. Utpal Dutt (1929-1993) upholds the causes of the marginalized in his plays like *Angar*, *Tiner Talowar*, *Nightmare City*, *Hunting the Sun*, *Rights of Man*, *Ebar Rajar Pala*, etc. He employs theatre as an ideological weapon in raising socio-political awareness among the people and getting connected with them. According to him, "Historical plays about the anti-imperialist struggle were one sure way of not only hitting back at the distortion of history by the ruling class but also of quickly uniting with the masses" (*On Theatre* 8). He opines that the ruling elites "have practically suppressed the epic revolt of 1857" (Ibid. 5). The play *Mahavidroha*, translated as *The Great Rebellion* by Dutt himself, presents the freedom struggle of the exploited and marginalized people like weavers, peasants, sepoys, blacksmiths, women (including 'fallen' women), and ordinary citizens. It throws light on the exploitation of subaltern people on the basis of religion, class, caste, race, and gender by the foreign rulers as well as the native oppressors.

Colonial historical discourses such as *History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-58* by John W. Kaye, *A History of the Indian Mutiny* by T. R. Holmes, *History of the Indian Mutiny* by G. B. Malleson, *The History of the Indian Mutiny* by Charles Ball, etc. disregard the wide-ranging nature of the 1857 rebellion and describe it either as a 'mutiny' by a small number of Indians (namely, the sepoys) or as a political disturbance created by the colonized subjects. These colonial historians try to diminish its importance by simply considering it as a law-and-order problem. Thus, Peter Robb has criticized the manner in which the dominant imperial stereotype presents the great uprising as "primarily a mutiny of the sepoys, later joined by the unruly mob, taking advantage of the general breakdown of law and order" (qtd. in Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar 2). On the other hand, the bourgeois-nationalist historians are also led by elitist biases:

According to nationalist historians like S B Chaudhuri, Tara Chand and R C Mazumdar, the social composition of 1857 consisted of the ruling class and the traditional elite of the society, who were the “natural leaders” of the revolt. The elitist character of the revolt is highlighted by referring to it as a general movement of the Muslims and the Hindus—princes, landholders, soldiers, scholars and theologians. (Gupta 195)

Even the Marxist scholars were not untouched by the elitist bias. Promode Sengupta, in his book *Bharatiya Mahabidroha*, focuses predominantly on “the activities and motives of Nana Saheb, Lakshmi Bai, Bahadur Shah, etc., because these feudal chiefs were, to him, the 'natural leaders'” (Bhadra 230). However, Subaltern Studies as an influential field of study did not emerge by the time of Utpal Dutt's composition of *The Great Rebellion*.<sup>1</sup> But he was certainly influenced by Gramscian thoughts and could look beyond the bourgeois historiography. In his plays like *Kallol*, *Titumeer*, and *Sanyasir Tarobari*, he criticizes distortion of history by the ruling class and focuses on the role of the subalterns in violent freedom struggles. The very title *The Great Rebellion*, instead of naming it the 'Sepoy Mutiny,' indicates Dutt's rejection of the colonial historians' elitist narratives.

The opening scene of the play establishes the subaltern position of Indian weavers. As the English machine-made clothes cannot match the quality of Indian cotton clothes, the foreign merchants try to destroy the native industries. Panjakush reveals their shrewd tactics: “They don't want us to weave cloth. So they've clamped a tariff of 10 per cent on Indian cotton, 20 on silk and 30 on wool. Whereas English textiles pay only three and half per cent” (Dutt, *The Great Rebellion* 138-39; henceforth *TGR*). Moreover, the English officers burn down the weavers' houses and cut their fingers inhumanly, rendering them unable to produce fine clothes any longer. Those subjugated weavers turn to husbandry and later become sepoy, who rebel against the oppressive colonizers. Rudrangshu Mukherjee, who focuses on the popular nature of the rebellion and the participation of common people in it, describes the Indian soldiers as “peasants in uniform” (167). In the present play, the rebellious sepoy confirm their subaltern status when they openly declare themselves as the “sons of peasants, blacksmiths and weavers” (*TGR* 178). The colonizer-colonized binary represents the conflict between the dominant and the subaltern groups in the play. The English officers exploit Indian soldiers in various ways—giving less wages, feeding low quality food, verbal abuse, etc. The Hindu and the Muslim soldiers refuse to use the Enfield Rifle cartridges in fear of losing their religion, as it is rumoured that the cover is greased with fats of cows and pigs. Rumour can act as a powerful tool, as Kaushik Roy observes, in raising subaltern consciousness: “Rumour being the principal subaltern means of communication played an important role in mobilisation of the insurgents. . . . In times of trouble, people tend to believe in rumour” (146). The English officers compel the sepoy to use the cartridges and punish the soldiers, who do not comply with the command. The Britishers attack the religious sentiment of the Indians to weaken the latter's struggle: “The Englishmen wish to break the back of the native, so that we lie happily at their feet and never raise our heads again. Hunger weakens the body—an outraged religion weakens the mind. With the nation prostrate,

they can rob it without hindrance” (*TGR* 164). The religious impetus provoked the Hindus and the Muslims equally to fight against their common enemies – the Christians. “The preservation of religion emerged as the dominant rallying cry of the rebellion. The revolt was seen as a war of religion” (Mukherjee 149).

In a colonized country, there exist some powerful natives who act as the allies of the foreign elites and exploit their own people. Tularam and Vizier Asanullah in the present play are native oppressors who act as the informers of the Britishers and conspire against their own countrymen. Ranajit Guha categorizes such people as the “*dominant indigenous* groups” (7; italics original). Tularam is a moneylender who is loyal not to his country but to money and power. He sells gunpowder to the British army and if they assure him profit, he will support them with all his money. These moneylenders own “tons of gold stacked away in their vaults” (*TGR* 199), while the people suffer greatly. There are yet money-minded businessmen who weaken the soldiers in their freedom struggle. These rich merchants hoard wheat, medicine, cloth, sugar, gunpowder, tents and other essential and warfare things. This leads to the artificial shortage of commodities in the market. As a result of the black marketing, the sepoys do not get proper food and begin to die. As the sepoys witness the foreign and the indigenous elites gathered for a meal, the meeting confirms the allies between the colonizing and the colonized oppressors who rule over the subaltern subjects. Lachman Singh elucidates through the example of chess game how the subalterns are subjected to the hegemony of the capitalist and the ruling classes:

We are merely pawns in the hands of princes and merchants. Pawns can't go backward, but only forward. They made these rules. But the queen, the bishops, the rooks, they can go as far back as they wish. And the king only moves one square this way or that in drugged inertia. I say our real enemy is not the English but our own princes and moneylenders. (*TGR* 191)

Thus, Samik Bandyopadhyay observes that “Dutt has taken care to lay the blame for the defeat of the revolt squarely on the princes and the merchants who collaborated with the British all through” (131).

The playwright further illustrates through a small episode how the ruling class keeps exploiting the weak and subjugated people. Prince Mirza's horse eats sweets from some shops in the market and when the shopkeepers ask for the price, the saddler refuses to pay money and rather misbehaves with them. But the prince supports and justifies his saddler's misconduct: “The shopkeepers dared to ask for money . . . The prince's horse has eaten a few sweets and they have to be paid for?” (*TGR* 170). The statement reveals the audacious nature of the prince in particular and the ruling class in general. The play aptly illustrates how the subalterns are exploited by the indigenous elites. The same prince also betrays his own countrymen. He forges a deceitful letter to prove Deputy Commander Heera Singh to be a traitor, leading to the latter's court martial and death by hanging. Even the fellow sepoys do not believe Heera, although his body bear many wounds – the marks of his bravery and patriotism. The simple-minded soldiers are unable to look through the tactics of the diplomatic rulers and are easily manipulated. Actually, the subalterns' fear of the ruling class keeps them

exploited for a long time. Heera's wife Kasturi agitates the sepoys to renounce their internalized fear:

There were so many of you here. Each had a gun, but no one raised it. Such is the fear of the princes in you, a fear many centuries old. There are two battles raging at the same time—between us and the English, and between us and the princes. If you don't see that, you see nothing. The enemy is before you and behind you. While you fight one for freedom, the other stabs you in the back. (TGR 213)

The sepoys burst out in rage against the oppressors with their war cry 'Long Live Heera Singh!'. What is particularly noticeable is that although Dutt was greatly inspired by Brecht's dramaturgy,<sup>2</sup> he does not adapt Brechtian technique in the play. Because he believes that Brecht's system of 'alienation' cannot work well when it comes to the 'unenlightened' spectators of the nation who love to emote rather than critically analyse. So, he follows the technique of allegory and uses a plot based on history to critique contemporary situations.

The play throws light on the multi-layers subalternity of women in a colonized society. The combined forces of colonialism and patriarchy push women into greater marginality as observed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: “. . . both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (82-83). In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, she brings in the issue of the *sati* tradition “to illustrate her point that the combined workings of colonialism and patriarchy in fact make it extremely difficult for the subaltern (in this case the Indian widow burnt on her husband's pyre) to articulate her point of view” (Loomba 234). The present play reveals that the *sati* tradition stems from the hypocrisy of religious leaders. Lachman Singh expresses how many widows have been burnt alive by greedy religious men to steal their property. Moreover, Spivak “challenges a simple division between colonisers and colonised by inserting the 'brown woman' as a category oppressed by both” (Loomba 234). General Nicholson, whom Lachman reveres much, once rescues a widow girl from the pyre, but is later found to burn men alive in Punjab. Waziran's reply to Lachman acutely unveils the apparent magnanimity of the white colonizers: “. . . why do you think the English want to save Indian widows from burning? You think they really care about black women? Is it possible? My body is nightly mangled by hungry Englishmen. No one knows better than I in what contempt they hold us” (TGR 164). Thus, the play debunks the myth of “White men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 93).

*The Great Rebellion* presents the role of ordinary women in anti-colonial freedom struggle that does not get considerable attention in the elitist historiography of colonialist and nationalist discourses. The observation by Lata Singh is quite pertinent: “The study on “ordinary rebels” of the 1857 rebellion remains focused on the participation of men . . . Barring leaders such as Rani Laxmibai, in most discussions of the rebellion, the participation of ordinary women has received little attention” (331). Eric Stokes' book *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857* and Gautam

Bhadra's essay *Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven* (in *Subaltern Studies IV*) focus on the 'ordinary' people but exclusively on men. Utpal Dutt's play becomes historically important in this context, as the play portrays not only women but also 'fallen' woman as taking part in anti-colonial freedom struggle. The character of Waziran is particularly noticeable. The playwright upholds the subaltern aspect of the rebellion through her character. She is subjugated at various levels—first as a subject in a colonized nation, then as a woman in a patriarchal society, and again as a 'fallen' woman (prostitute). Being a street girl, she is despised by everyone. The cook in the Indian army publicly insults and calls her a 'dirty whore,' while other sepoy rebuke Lachman for bringing her to the battlefield. But the playwright presents her as a 'holy warrior' who takes part in the freedom struggle against colonial forces. Her character reminds us of another marginalized woman in Tripurari Sharma's play *San Sattavan Ka Kissa: Azizun Nisa* that presents “Azizun Nisa, a courtesan, who joined the sepoy in Kanpur when they revolted against the British in 1857. Azizun Nisa used to dress like a man. She was very close to sepoy and during 1857 her place became an important meeting point for rebel sepoy” (Singh 331).

Patriarchal outlook looks upon a woman as weak and frail, incapable of heroic deeds. Sepoy Nawab points towards Waziran and comments: “A woman in the middle of the battle is a load of trouble” (*TGR* 183). Waziran promptly defies his statement:

Peasants, weavers, fishermen, blacksmiths—all have joined the war along with their wives. When the Nawab of Malagarh came out in support of the rebellion, his begums fought alongside. When the chief of the Gujar tribe, Shah Mull, fell in battle, the Gujar housewives took the field. Housewives are fighting in the streets of Lucknow, Kanpur, Gwalior and Agra... (183).

The character of Kasturi draws our attention. Like Brecht's *Mother Courage*, she survives by selling wine and warfare things (swords, belts, boots, uniforms) collected from the battlefield. Through her, the playwright exposes the nature of exploitative capitalists, who make business out of war. When the sepoy arrest her for her alleged crime, Kasturi rebukes them: “Your death is also business capital for the biggest merchants in the city. You wouldn't have the guts to lay hands on any of them, would you?” (*Ibid.* 196). Theatre critic Samik Bandyopadhyay observes that Dutt's portrayals of the figures of Kasturi and Waziran have been drawn from the “contemporary accounts that describe the 'old withered Mussalman women from Rampur' who brought supplies of cartridges to the men in the batteries” (131).

Besides weavers, peasants, sepoy, and women, the play refers to the struggle of other subaltern groups as well. The Englishmen inhumanly curb the revolt of the Santhals, who fought bravely with their primitive bows and arrows. Many English soldiers commit the heinous act of raping Santhal women after the tribals' defeat. Lachman Singh witnesses “a woman's naked corpse before our captain Merrivale's tent. There was a bayonet stuck into her stomach” (*TGR* 148). The play also mentions exploitation of the lower castes who are doubly subalterns in a caste-ridden colonial society. Lachman, a weaver's son, hides his lower-caste origin from the fellow sepoy in fear of getting humiliated and excommunicated. Through him, the playwright

reveals caste oppression embedded in Indian society: “In the village, if our shadow falls on them, they lynch us” (*TGR* 153). Moreover, millions of people have been reduced to endless poverty in the name of caste.

For the colonialists and the nationalists composing the history of the 1857 rebellion, as noted by Darshan Perusek, the primary materials comprise corpus of writings like memoirs, diaries, letters, records, reminiscences, etc. by British soldiers, administrators, and civilians (290). Except Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan's booklet, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, no other significant account by any contemporary Indian exists. Here the roles of literary historians like Tripurari Sharma and Utpal Dutt become significant in presenting alternative perspectives to the dominant discourses. By focusing on the subalterns like weavers, peasants, sepoys, and women in his play, Dutt brings to light the unheard voices of the marginalized groups. He believes in the role of revolutionary theatre to uphold the causes of the subalterns, “to re-affirm the violent history of India, to re-affirm the martial traditions of its people, to recount again and again the heroic tales of armed rebels and martyrs” (*Towards* 67).

“The subaltern historians' rewriting of history had two objectives: 1) the dismantling of elitist historiography by decoding biases and value judgments in records, testimonies, and narratives of the ruling-classes; 2) the restoration to subaltern groups of their “agency,” their role in history as “subjects,” with an ideology and a political agenda of their own” (Perusek 295). Keeping in view the latter objective, the present study firmly establishes Utpal Dutt as a literary historian of the subalterns. His play *The Great Rebellion* disregards elitist historical discourses in presenting a crucial episode of Indian freedom struggle on the stage and upholds the roles played by subaltern people such as weavers, peasants, sepoys, women, prostitutes, and ordinary rebels. Since Dutt believes theatre can bring about social change, he uses materials from history but only as an occasion to alert us where we are going wrong and how we can bring about meaningful changes to make life better.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The play is actually the revised version of an earlier play named *Tota* (*The Greased Cartridge*), which was composed in 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Besides translating some Brechtian plays into Bengali, Utpal Dutt formed the Brecht Society of India in 1964 and edited a theatre magazine named *Epic Theatre*.

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## Performativity and Undoing Gender Roles in *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* (2022)

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### *Abstract*

The dynamics of power and politics in the Malayalam film industry remain patriarchal and continue to reproduce heteronormativity. The films of the new generation broadened the discourse of gender and women's representation and questioned existing conventional ideologies and the hierarchical structure of compulsory heterosexuality. The present article critically analyses the Malayalam film *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* (2022) within the framework of Judith Butler's Gender Performativity. The general trend to portray women as mute spectators and victims of domestic abuse is deconstructed subtly in *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey*. The study focuses on the transformation of Jaya from a traditional gender role and its performance to attain her performative identity. Further, the paper explores the sociocultural construction of gender, the heteronormative conditioning of women, and the enforcement of gender hierarchy and hegemony with reference to the film.

**Keywords:** Gender, Performativity, Patriarchy, Malayalam Cinema, *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey*

### **Introduction**

Malayalam cinema has evolved over time and trying to break the shackles of hegemonic masculinity and superstardom that gripped the industry from the 1990s to 2010 (Ray and Mochish 39). The emergence of the new wave of post-2010 cinema engineered a radical shift in the industry, resulting in the New Generation Malayalam cinema. The new wave helped change the stereotypical representation of gender and sexual minorities in cinema. The new generation films are significant in shattering the stereotypes and portraying unconventional women protagonists (Gopinath and Raj 65). Film commentator C. S Venkiteswaran remarks that the new generation cinema “bore a new look and feel that was different from the jaded patterns that the superstar narratives followed” (2013). The space and position of women and other gender minorities broadened with the new generation shift in Malayalam cinema. The problem with the new wave is that “it refuses to question patriarchy, these films perpetuate and reinforce a double standard, women as independent, but continuing to be victims of patriarchy” (Gopinath and Raj 71). New-generation cinema often paints the feminine body as sexually liberated and deviates to objectification rather than building feminine identities as their lens pans from rural to urban. Their focus shifts from female characters who are professional working women rather than the women confined to four walls of the home in the previous era. However, it is undeniable that the new wave's independent and progressive female characters were vital in creating a more extensive discourse around gender roles and performances in Malayalam cinema.

Meena T. Pillai traces the history of women's representation in Malayalam cinema in



her essay *Becoming Women* and essentially identifies Malayalam cinema as misogynistic in its roots. According to her, “Malayalam cinema inscribes and reinscribes the dominant ideologies and presents women as a sight, spectacle and stereotype. It operates on the language of patriarchy and capitalism” (17). In another essay titled *Matriline to Masculinity*, Pillai identifies that “the 1990s Malayalam cinema mostly stereotyped gender roles, which validated patriarchal domination and women's subjugation” (110). The dominant narratives portrayed women as weak and silent and always at the mercy of men. This is not only the case in Malayalam cinema, as patriarchal institutions use it to legitimise traditional gender roles, gender identities and heteronormative binaries.

*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* (2022), written and directed by Vipin Das, is a Malayalam language film trying to dismantle the hierarchy and social order set by masculine hegemony. The post-pandemic movie put forth a subtle and different stand on feminine representation and gender roles. It deviates from what Pillai observes as the general trend and deconstructs the dominant ideologies. Compared with new-generation films, JJJH chooses a different method to deconstruct gender roles and performances.

In general, the woman subject in cinema lacks agency, identity, and authority, “women on screen in Malayalam cinema continue to surrender independence and identity, willingly enfolded and symbolically subjugated by the eager hands of men” (Pillai 36). In JJJH, the lead character, Jaya, questions patriarchy, fights against oppression, and embraces her independence and identity; she takes it by force. The violence and aggression used by Jaya are uncommon for women characters in Malayalam cinema, as it is generally attributed and portrayed as a masculine characteristic. Malayalam cinema has rarely associated women with violence and aggression, and the few representations that showcase the violent and aggressive female characters are problematic, as it paints them as morally corrupt, engaged in unethical professions, and outcasts.

JJJH paints the silent, oppressed woman in the first half and a transformed Jaya who resorts to violence and aggression against her husband, transcending the stereotypical notions of femininity in the second half. The paper primarily focuses on the transformation of Jaya from a traditional gender role and its performance and the construction of her performative identity. The socio-cultural construction of gender, the heteronormative conditioning of women, and the enforcement of gender hierarchy and hegemony using patriarchal institutions are further discussed in the paper.

### **Gender Roles and Performativity: Subverting the Heteronormative Matrix**

Patriarchal institutions have overpowered the identity and agency of women throughout history and civilisations. The state and its institutions, emphasising hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, have subjugated women and fixed roles and identities for them. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, states, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (272). The becoming and categorisation of being women and being feminine is a social, political and cultural construction.

Second-wave feminism put forward the idea that gender categories are constructed. Beauvoir argues that “while sex differences are linked to biological differences between male and female, gender differences are imposed socially or even politically, by constructing contrasting stereotypes of masculinity and femininity” (258). Patriarchy, thus, produces and reproduces the stereotypes using compulsory heterosexuality to naturalise the gender binary. Judith Butler draws from Adrienne Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality and Monique Wittig's heterosexual contract to build the matrix of heterosexuality, which enforces the patriarchal gender norms and identities through structural and hierarchical spaces (Butler 194).

Judith Butler endorses Beauvoir's idea of becoming a woman, “If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification” (33). Judith Butler extensively theorises the constructedness of gender identity and its performative aspects. Butler draws upon Beauvoir and Foucault to establish that gender is unnatural and created by society to conform individuals within binaries and heteronormativity. In “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*”, Butler asserts that “all gender is, by definition, unnatural” (35). Butler states it is “impossible to separate out gender from political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (5). According to Butler, gender identities outside the realm of “compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality” unearth how gender norms are socially instituted and maintained (22).

Butler remarks that “Gender proves to be performative— that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (33). She further clarifies her idea of performativity in an interview as “to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start” (Big Think, 00:01:26-00:01:33). The idea of gender identity, roles and performance is imbibed into the individual through the heterosexual matrix. Judith Butler defines the heterosexual matrix as the “grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised” (194). The matrix naturalises the gender binary, and Butler points out that “sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along” (8), and there is no connection between the human body and gender; the body only determines sex as it is biological, and patriarchy, deceived generations by showing sex as gender and legitimised it through the heterosexual matrix. *JJJH* problematises the heterosexual matrix and exposes the imposition of gender identity and roles on women.

### **Constructing 'Jaya'**

The film revolves around the life of Jayabharathi, who comes from a traditional Hindu household in Kerala. The director employs the institutions of family and marriage to portray the domination of patriarchy over Jaya. Jaya is conditioned and controlled by patriarchal forces from the beginning. Jaya has no agency or authority over her

identity and life. Her life can be divided into three different stages; the first one is her life at her own house, the next stage is her life with Rajesh at his place, and the final stage is her own independent life.

In the first phase, her life is controlled by Vijayan (Jaya's father) and Mani Uncle. John Berger observes, "To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men" (43). Jaya's life can be equated with Berger's observation. Vijayan and Mani are the keepers of Jaya from birth to marriage. After marriage, they transfer the keeper's position to Rajesh, her husband. The women have no space and voice in decision-making; men enforce their decisions on women, "the development of a civil society where every social contract was a patriarchal contract, made by fathers or men in power and was thus binding to the rest of the family or association or union" (Pillai 107).

The construction of Jaya's socio-cultural identity begins with the title song, which portrays Jaya as "Hey you calm, polite, demure and delicate woman, Well-being of this home rests in you, How gracefully you guard the dignity of a man!" (00:05:32-00:05:47). Society expects women to portray these qualities and place them as a protector of man's dignity. The song conveys how masculine hegemony underscores women's individuality, identity, and self-esteem. Next up is the montage sequence, which narrates the gendered upbringing of Jaya, which is interesting. The montage frames the identity construction of Jaya from birth till adulthood. The background music, quick cuts, minimal dialogues, and repeated camera movements build a gestalt that conveys the pattern of misogyny Jaya endured during her upbringing. The speeding up of time and in which each frame depicts different gender norms and stereotypes projects the montage's success in placing Jaya in the background of heteropatriarchal forces.

The gender overtones and construction of Jaya's feminine identity subtly unfold in the first half. The predetermined identity and gender work systematically as they haunt a child from birth. The structural enforcement of gender roles begins with naming. Jaya has been named after her brother Jayan. The naming process lacks identity as she is named after her elder brother. The sense of identity, choice and freedom has been denied to Jaya from childhood. In another scene, Jaya's father says, he wants to bring up Jaya like Indira Gandhi. In response, her uncle says, "Good for you; let Kollam get its own Indira Gandhi. But she needs to grow her hair. Else, she won't get a groom" (00:08:37-00:08:44). In the next scene, Jaya's ears are pierced, and her mother comments that without piercing her ears, Jaya seemed like a boy. She had to wear the clothes of her brother and use his toys, and she owned nothing.

The family, parents, relatives, traditions, rituals and society as a whole work together to conform to the gender role and identity of Jaya. As Beauvoir and Butler suggest, becoming a woman is happening to Jaya. "Right from infancy, boys and girls are taught gender-specific behaviour. Girls are taught to be obedient, submissive, tolerant and generous" (Singh 28). "Gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations" (Stoller 1457). As Singh and Stoller point out, gender-specific behaviours and attributes are predetermined and constructed by

heteronormative society to control and condition women. It creates an inferiority complex in women and compels them to accept that men are above women and are in power. The masculine hegemony and hierarchy deeply rooted in the power structures determine the roles of Jaya and order her to follow suit like other women and embrace hegemonic femininity. The roles are produced and reproduced over time to fit into the heterosexual matrix.

JJJH touches upon the construction of feminine identity in the childhood of Jaya and questions patriarchal discrimination against women during her next stage of development. Jaya asks her father to get a teddy bear for her to play with, and Vijayan gives her Jayan's old car as a toy. Jayan is given special treatment as he has been sent to tuition; when Jaya asks for the same, she is denied this by her parents. The same happens when she asks permission to go for a tour; she is denied, and her brother is allowed to go. Jaya is treated as a second-class citizen and forced into obedience and silence.

In the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak*, Spivak states, "If the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow and cannot speak at all" (83). As Spivak suggests, Jaya is forced to be silent and cannot speak at all in JJJH. Jaya wanted to pursue higher education at Ivanios College in Trivandrum, but her parents and uncle sent her to a nearby college. Jaya tries to be adamant about joining Ivanios, but her father replies that, "Did we ask for your opinion? Men make decisions here" (00:15:01-00:15:05). Jaya cannot speak at all. Elaine Showalter writes in her essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" that women constitute a muted group in society while men form a dominant group. Jaya is muted by patriarchy, as Showalter points out, by the dominant group of males consisting of her father and uncle.

JJJH problematises relationship toxicity through the character of Deepu Sir, a pseudo-liberal feminist. Jaya encounters him and is attracted to the progressive stands of Deepu during college. She is pushed into the trap of a toxic relationship. The decision to say yes to the relationship is not wholly Jaya's. She is advised by her friends to say yes. She has been denied love, choice and freedom in her family, and the thought of somebody loving her further pushes Jaya into the relationship. Deepu gains credibility by faking as a progressive feminist but is an abuser who wants to wield complete control over his girlfriend. Jaya is denied agency and identity from childhood to adulthood by her parents, relatives and boyfriend. Her parents and uncle decide to marry her off after finding out about her relationship. Jaya is barely 20, has to bury her ambitions and dreams about life and is forced into a marriage by her parents and uncle. Jaya disagrees with the marriage proposal and says she wants to study; her father's response indicates how men are powerful and they dictate women in the patriarchy. "I don't want to get married now. Who decides that? You? As a man, why am I here then?" (00:21:23-00:21:29). Jaya is silenced again, forced into a state of fear, and forced into a marriage with Rajesh (Basil Joseph).

Susan Brownmiller talks of a "state of fear" (15) which arises from the violence and anger unleashed by men on women. Jaya is forced into that state of fear in her family

and marriage. In the first half, her father and uncle created a state of fear. In college, it was Deepu, and after marriage, it was Rajesh. Men become tools of patriarchy to enforce the state of anxiety in women and push them into silence and subjugation.

The foundation of the institution of marriage in India is the transfer of a woman from one family to another, controlled by agreements based on caste, class, and religious limits. Marriage is a crucial political and public act that establishes and maintains social order, hierarchies, and alliances. Reproducing the social order is marriage's primary goal. "Marriage was posed as woman's destiny and to get her married the holy mission of the men of the household, failing which they fell short of the patriarchal ideal of manhood" (Sreedharan 103). Marriage and family are the pillars of a patriarchal society and are crucial to masculine hegemony and power structures. In *JJJH*, the wedding of Jaya to Rajesh is the turning point. Jaya's parents and uncle, see her wedding as their holy mission.

The space and surroundings of the performance expected of Jaya now shift to Rajesh's home. Rajesh wants a perfect wife in Jaya who will be an obedient servant, as Pillai points out, "who loves to cook and clean, wash and scrub and polish for her man" (8). Rajesh wants the complete submission of Jaya to heteropatriarchal norms and his toxic masculinity. The shot in which Jaya enters Rajesh's home is tricky as the camera pans over the broken objects around the room. The high-angle shot focuses on the cracked glass lid of the teapoy while Jaya places the Nilavilakku (lamp) on it. The broken glass reflects Jaya's face, and the high angle of the shot of her reflection within the glass signals her vulnerability, hopelessness and dilemma. "The high-angle shot from above is taken to diminish the power of its subject" (Dix 28). The visceral high angle employed in the shot tries to connect the viewer with the emotion of Jaya, her apathy and hopelessness as the background score suggests; she is lost.

The tension starts to build slowly, and a few days after marriage, the macho man in Rajesh shows up as a surprise to Jaya. In the first shot in which Rajesh is introduced, he can be seen twirling his moustache (Meeshapiri) which traditionally symbolises manhood and masculinity in Kerala. Rajesh has been developed as an alpha male by the director, and his behaviour patterns are strange. He will only have Idiyappam and Chickpeas for breakfast and will not tolerate anything. He is too aggressive and short-tempered. The passive aggression and violence Jaya faced at her home paves the way for active violence and aggression at the hands of Rajesh.

The first time Rajesh uses violence on Jaya, he apologises and takes her out for a movie and dinner date. He chooses the movie, the restaurant and the food; the same idiyappam. Rajesh hits Jaya again - apologising, going out, movie and dinner follow; thus, it becomes a ritual, and Jaya has to remain silent and endure the pain. When she complains about this to her parents, they seem disinterested and tell her that this is quite natural and normal; "We women should adjust all this. That is how life is, dear" (00:45:35-00:47:47). The heteronormative society believes that men have the right to punish women. Jaya is subjected to domestic violence, and people around her normalise the violence as natural. The heterosexual matrix has created a social belief that women can tolerate some beatings and abuses for the stability of family and

marriage. Patriarchy projected that “women protect and nurture the interests of the family rather than equality and social justice” (Fazal 50). “Within the structures of family and community, the construction of rigid notions of a woman's identity as daughter and wife are enforced through the threat of familial instability” (Menon 285). The threat to the institution of family and marriage compels women like Jaya to tolerate domestic violence. The enforced status quo of masculine hegemony normalises domestic abuse and constructs the identity that women can perform the role of a wife and daughter according to the norms and regulations set by patriarchy. JJJH unearths how patriarchy legitimises and encourages misogyny, internalises violence against women, and forces other women to accept and justify it as the norm.

### **Transformation of Roles for the Subject**

The powerplay of gender dynamics turns upside down in the second half with the transformation of Jaya. Jaya reached a threshold after twenty-one beatings in six months. She breaks her silence and decides to come out of that state of fear every woman endures in a patriarchal system. Jaya retaliates and fights against the tyranny of masculine hegemony unveiled by Rajesh. She claims her identity and freedom and chooses not to conform to patriarchal forces and norms. Jaya disowns her given identity, gender roles and norms. Jaya is coming out of the false consciousness in which women are trapped by patriarchy to enforce gender norms and hierarchy. Jaya can transgress the boundaries of silence and submission created by the heterosexual matrix when she fights back.

The most scintillating shot in the film is the one in which Jaya kicks out Rajesh underneath an aquarium. Jaya chooses violence to fight against the domestic violence she faced. It is the first independent choice Jaya made in her life. Till then, she was forced to follow the will of others, the choice of patriarchy. The moment she kicks Rajesh, her independent choice, her assertion of her own identity, and her own performative act unfold at that moment. By choosing violence, she is also attacking Rajesh's pride and manhood. Getting beaten by women is considered a shame in a patriarchal society and hurts the sentiment and dignity of Rajesh's masculinity.

“Patriarchy compels women to be emotional punching bags and suppress their desires with a fear of rejection and going too far” (Gilbert and Webster 41–44). In JJJH, Jaya does not want to be the punching bag for Rajesh, and she subverts that idea and readies herself to counter it. The alpha male in Rajesh has been hurt and wants to retaliate against the shame he endured, and he provokes Jaya and questions her ability to beat him in a fight. He intimidates Jaya into another fight with him. He does not expect her to be robust and dares her to beat him back. Rajesh thinks that he controls the situation as Marilyn French observed, “aggressive qualities are associated with manliness. To be a man in a patriarchal society means to appear to be in control” (56). The macho man in Rajesh feels embarrassed when the story is leaked to the family. He could not bear the shame and felt drowned.

The transformation of Jaya is a performative choice, and she deconstructs the socio-cultural construction of gender roles. Patriarchal gender roles create a false

consciousness that women have to endure violence and should remain in a state of fear and silence. Fear and silence are constructed on the emotional blackmailing of familial instability. Jaya flouts the fear and silence and deconstructs the false consciousness propagated by the heterosexual matrix.

Judith Butler remarks, “Gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a doing rather than a being” (25). Jaya was being a woman, performing and repeating the traditional roles until she decided to fight back. Butler problematises the category of women; according to her, “the category 'women' is produced and restrained by power structures, rather than looking to those power structures for emancipation” (5). The categorisation of identities is exclusionary normative and propagates binaries. Butler argues for deconstructing the categorisation of women to flout the construction of being a woman, “only through releasing the category of women from a fixed referent that something like 'agency' becomes possible” (16). In *JJJH*, when Jaya starts to fight back, she redefines the category of women and asserts her agency.

The fightback against Rajesh and patriarchy is a conscious act from Jaya which communicates and asserts the individuality and performative identity of Jaya. Gender is a patriarchal production, conformed through stereotypical roles and performances and according to Butler, “impossible to separate out gender from political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (5). Jaya questions this production of gender, which places masculine hegemony above natural justice; thus, she transgresses the boundaries of gender construction and enactments.

Jaya endorses her newfound performative identity when she disowns the feminine gender identity imposed by patriarchy. Jaya's realisation can be equated with Butler's explanation “to say gender is performative is to say that nobody is really a gender from the start”. Jaya transgresses the given gender boundaries, fixities and hierarchies while embarking upon the new performative identity; meanwhile, Rajesh is puzzled and left in a problem of his failing macho masculinity. During the peace talks to reconcile, Jaya asks a question to everyone: “Why didn't you feel this way when I was getting beaten up?” (01:20:14-01:20:17). The question is significant as patriarchy stands up for men and forgets to do so for women. This results from “subverting female identity to a construct created by laws, customs, taboos, and conventions upheld by a patriarchal order designed to keep women in subjugation and maintained via socialisation processes” (Gopinath and Raj 68). Jaya subverts the socialisation process of becoming feminine and walks out of the marriage and family, and she becomes independent as she finds her performative identity. Mary Eagleton observes, “Men were the idealised rational, full participants as workers in the public arena of the economy and politics; women were dependents, to be protected and kept close” (Eagleton 12). The closed circuit of patriarchy reserved the public sphere and space for men, making women dependent on masculine hegemony. Eagleton further states, “For most women, the home is a site of social relations that are structured by power and inequality” (Eagleton 15); Jaya transcends that space of the home and deconstructs the social relations structured by power and inequality and embraces

independence, choice, free will and freedom.

### Conclusion

JJJH is an experiment delicately juxtaposing domestic abuse with humour. The satirical take on the patriarchy and its institutions like family and marriage opens up the space for a larger discourse in Malayalam cinema. The film subverts traditional notions of women's representation and portrays a rebellious Jaya as the protagonist, who reverses and undoes the gender roles and performances assigned to feminine identity. "In Malayalam cinema, female prototypes have been created with the utmost care taken in reinforcing the hegemonic patriarchal stereotypes" (Gopinath and Raj 69). Jaya's assertion of agency and choice opens the public sphere and space for women and other marginalised gender identities.

The choice of performative spaces in gender roles is limited, and the film makes its protagonist Jaya choose the performative space aligned with the other gender rather than creating a new performative space of her own. In this sense, the film feels slightly over-the-top, unobvious and slightly unrealistic. Jaya had to replicate the performative space of Rajesh and his aggression to subvert the gender norms. "Many women choose to continue to remain within the (heteronormative) family fold, using various strategies to pursue their desires without resorting to overt resistance" (Varghese and Ranganathan 355). Jaya displaces the fear of overt resistance in JJJH, and the resistance subjects Rajesh to silence and fear.

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## “Take Life or Let Live”: A Biopolitical Comprehension of Partition through Srijit Mukherji's Movie *Begum Jaan*

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### *Abstract*

Biopolitics is a process of regulating populations as subjects, and biopower is the way through which biopolitics is exerted upon the bodies within the political arena of a particular sovereign power. A sovereign power, therefore, is privileged with the right to take life or let it live. In this context, the paper aims to witness how Srijit Mukherji's 2017 movie *Begum Jaan* unfolds the intersection of class, gender and power dynamics amidst the tension of partition in Punjab. The paper investigates how the movie conceptualises the plight of prostitutes trapped in the conflict of land and showcases how the states exercise its biopolitical power over these women, restricting their agency, subjecting them to gendered violence and ultimately reducing them to what Giorgio Agamben terms as bare life. Thus, the paper aims to examine how, in the movie *Begum Jaan*, biopolitics and biopower intimidate an abjected gender population in the socio-political context of partition.

**Keywords:** Partition, Foucauldian biopolitics, biopower, bare-life, abjection

### **Introduction: Comprehending the Perils of Partition**

“Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission, Having never set eyes on this  
land he was called to partition Between two peoples fanatically at odds,  
With their different diets and incompatible gods”  
W.H. Auden. “Partition”

Sir Cyril Radcliffe came to India on the 8th of July 1947 with only five weeks in hand to divide a soul into two halves—India and Pakistan. This immense responsibility that determined the fate of millions was put upon the shoulders of someone who had never set foot in this land before. He neither had any idea about the country's diverse nature nor its culture. This reckless division of the country into two halves based on a line drawn by Radcliffe underscores the profound indifference of the British colonial administration towards the well-being of the lives of the Indian populace. People were overthrown from ancestral land, raped, robbed, bankrupted and killed owing to this Radcliffe line which W.H. Auden satirically captured in his poem, "Partition." The “last-minute mechanism” (Ansari) by the British Raj not only made cartographical blunders but also left socio-political scars on both the newly born countries.

India is a multicultural and multilingual country and has always preached the notions of compassion, unity and fraternity, which were harshly butchered during the bloody event of Partition. Depicting the wounds lingering around partition in his article “The Great Divide” William Dalrymple writes:

By 1948, as the great migration drew to a close, more than fifteen million people had

been uprooted, and between one and two million were dead. The comparison with the death camps is not so far-fetched as it may seem. Partition is central to modern identity in the Indian subcontinent, as the Holocaust is to identity among Jews, branded painfully onto the regional consciousness by memories of almost unimaginable violence (Dalrymple).

The perils that partition wrought on peoples' lives were beyond imagination, which even today shakes our "collective unconscious" (Jung 42) with terror. The narrative of *Begum Jaan* (2017), which the paper deals with, is based on such a shaky history. The film not only delineates the horror of partition but also presents before us the trauma it laid in the minds of people living during that time, particularly in the minds of the marginalised section of society. Since 1947, partition has become a *leitmotif* for many Indian film directors. Srijit Mukherji's *Begum Jaan* is one such example that not only handles the issue of homelessness and no man's land but also deals with the intricate power politics orchestrated by the States (Britain, India and Pakistan), where individuals are reduced to mere biological entities. This depersonalisation within the framework of biopolitics is portrayed vividly in the film as we witness the states inflicting gendered violence upon the prostitutes, whose *kotha* (brothel) lies in the no-man's land, and the paper aims to unwrap it.

### **Foucauldian Biopolitics in Srijit Mukherji's Movie *Begum Jaan***

Michel Foucault observes that the notion of liberalism brought about a radical transformation in the whole governmental mechanism during the 17th century. The power of a State, which was previously measured by its geospatial extension, was shifted to the new mechanism of governance that focused on regulating and managing the lives of the individuals for the sake of liberal growth and prosperity. This biopolitical approach consequently marked a departure from a machinery of power that relies on visible repression to administering the subjects with consent. The sovereign state-power, or the monarchical repressive apparatus that always went on exercising its right to take life, was altered into a new state power that sought to extend its control over every aspect of human existence from birth to death. This biopolitical shift though apparently seems generous, conceals a darker truth behind it. The intervention of the state power is not an act of altruism but a means to optimise the population and regulate the very fabric of life for the benefit of the state. As Foucault, in his Lecture on 17 March 1976, asserts,

one of the greatest transformations political rights underwent in the nineteenth century was precisely that, I wouldn't say exactly sovereignty's old right- to take life or let live- was replaced, but it came to be complemented by a new right which does not erase the old right but which does penetrate it, permeate it. This is the right, or rather precisely the opposite right. It is the power to 'make' live and 'let' die. The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die (Foucault 241).

According to Foucault, this shift that is, from "take life or let live" to "make live and let die" (Foucault 241), is what marks the 'birth of biopolitics' through which people are divided into those who must live and those who must die. It is a politics exercised

upon the biological aspects of a population in order to control them so that they function according to the norms. Therefore, biopolitics is played anatomically by consolidating norms about bodies. Thus, people would be judged not only through their anatomy but in terms of their deviation from the norm. Acknowledgement of a certain form of a body as proper (proper size, weight, height, propensity to give birth, life expectancy) leads to the ostracisation of anyone who deviates from it. In the movie, too, we see a similar "repugnance, disgust, abjection" (Kristeva 11) that the prostitutes face as they deviate from the norms. *Begum Jaan* showcases the impact of partition on a group of prostitutes who are marginalised and isolated from society. Their *kotha*, which is situated on the border of newly formed India and Pakistan, is seen merely as a barrier in the process of border-making. These prostitutes come from different states, speak different languages, belong to different religions and castes and are yet connected together through their collective trauma of violence, alienation and marginalisation. They are othered by society based on this normalisation of certain medical conditions. At the very beginning of the film, we see a few villagers complaining to the police to remove the brothel somewhere else as they are vectors of various diseases.

Looking at someone only on their medical condition and thereby ostracising them is what the biopolitical eye does. The movie *Begum Jaan* deals with the eponymous central character who runs prostitution between Shakargarh and Dorangla. From the Middle Ages, prostitutes were seen as the embodiments of filth and pollution, the ones who create a pit within a smooth societal structure. They were gazed at as lustful creatures who should never be included within the spheres of normal habituation. John Scott argues that prostitution took the form of a biopolitical problem in the nineteenth century. It is viewed as a problem not for violating religious norms but for its association with various diseases that have othered them from the societal sphere. They have been stamped as the biological others who contaminate the virility within a healthy society (54-55). In the movie, we see how the bodies of those prostitutes are seen from a medical gaze. The state only cared for the health of the prostitute for the betterment of society. When the two government officials arrived to give them the notice of eviction from their *kotha*, they thought it to be the notice for health check-ups because, previously, health check-ups were the only purpose behind governmental visits. Srijit Mukherji captures the aspect of alienation of the brothel and its members through a wide shot from an elevated angle. The *mise-en-scène* of the shot (32:40) helps us better understand the intricate politics involved in othering those prostitutes. The brothel is seen to be situated in a place where no human inhabits, giving us the impression that it is cut off from mainstream society.

### **Cognising Gorgio Agamben's Notion of 'Bare Life'**

In his book *Homo Sacer* (1995), Agamben carried forward the Foucauldian theory of biopolitics. For him, sovereign authority is already exerting biopower through various state apparatuses because it is based on the notion of "bare life" (Agamben 13). Bare life points out the subjection of the biological self or life to the dictates of the

legislation, which results in the right of the state or sovereign power to the life and death of its subjects. Giorgio Agamben avers that those subjects who live under the rule of a biopolitical regime are prospectively forsaken by law and potentially laid bare to violence. The most suitable example of bare life can be best witnessed at the concentration camps set by Nazi Germany during the World War II. The Jewish prisoners were reduced from human to inhuman, who were incapable of thinking. Therefore, Agamben argues that

sovereignty has the power to decide which life may be killed without the commission of homicide, in the age of bio-politics this power becomes emancipated from the state of exception and transformed into the power to decide the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant... In modern bio-politics, sovereign is he who decides on the value or the non-value of life as such (83).

In this context, it will be worth discussing how women have always been the worst victims of violence during turbulent times. In such times, women are often laid bare to violence, becoming "the final biopolitical substance to be isolated in the biological continuum" (Agamben 85). To quote Zygmunt Bauman, they are diminished by the state to the position of "human waste:"

The production of 'human waste', or more correctly wasted humans (the 'excessive' and 'redundant', that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay) ...It is an inescapable side-effect of *order-building* (each order casts some parts of the extant population as 'out of place,' 'unfit' or 'undesirable') and of *economic progress* (4).

The same can be witnessed in *Begum Jaan* as well. When the two government officials from two different nations (newly formed India and Pakistan) were assigned to the process of evicting the prostitutes from their *kotha*, which incidentally falls under the no man's land, one officer seemed to be concerned regarding their safety and security. However, the other officer opined that their lives were of little or no value at all:

It won't make a difference. Do you think that a century later when the children would read about the partition it would have stories about you, me or Begum Jaan?... In order to destroy Begum Jaan's brothel, we won't have to give speech or cause a riot. At least, in these two areas. In order to save countless lives, we'll have to sacrifice some lives (*Begum Jaan* 1:21:55— 1:23:08).

This shows the bareness of their life. They are turned into a *homo sacer*, who can be stripped of their rights and protections, making them vulnerable to being excluded from society and subjected to violence without legal consequences. Being abandoned by family, society and the state, their lives are nothing but waste, similar to the status of the 'Muselmann' (Agamben 85) of Nazi Germany.

### **The Contours of Gendered Violence During Partition Riots**

Every form of violence inflicts its lethality mainly against those deemed weaker by the hetero-patriarchal society. Whenever there was violence, the intensity of the *nakba* was grave, mainly upon the second sex. Women have always been gazed at as objects, and all forms of violence set the platform for the annihilation of women. They

become an easy target for exploitation. Urvashi Butalia, in *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), and Kamla Bhasin, in *Borders and Boundaries* (1998), wrote from the women's perspective about violence. Their works are full of unsung anecdotes of women whose lives were jeopardised by a partition that was devised by men. Many of the women chose death instead of being robbed of their chastity. These incidents again show the bareness of the lives of women in the time of crisis. This impact of sovereign violence had its adverse effects on the women on both sides. History has given much importance to male-centric viewpoints and ideologies, particularly in the context of nationalist movements. The masculine gender is always hailed to be the defender of the mother nation, and women are always thought to have needed protection.

*Begum Jaan* opens with an incident from Delhi 2016, where we can see a couple travelling in a bus, and some random ruffians start molesting them. The male friend is beaten in an attempt to rape the girl evoking the fear and pangs of the Nirbhaya rape case. Immediately after, the camera travels back to the time of the Indian partition in 1947 through visuals of the *kotha* of Begum Jaan, where we can see a *kotha* member, Gulabo, being devoured by an old pervert man in exchange for money. Gulabo, being sexually exploited by that older man, recalls how she was raped during the riots of partition and ended up being here. The story of another victim, Shabnam, comes immediately after Gulabo. Salim, Begum Jaan's right hand, describes how she was raped in riots and how her family and society have forsaken her: "Begum Jaan, she was raped in the past riots. Some boys dumped her at the camp in a pitiful state. Her father refused to take her in and left her here" (*Begum Jaan* 00:7:27-38). These pictures from India's pre-partition turmoil to present-day India show how women for ages have been raped, murdered and molested in situations created by men. The partition that gave birth to two nations symbolically also led to the separation of women's souls and bodies. This is not the story of Begum Jaan and her *kotha* members but of womanhood in general during the time of partition. Delineating the horrors of partition, Nisid Hajari, in *Midnight's Furies*, writes:

Gangs of killers set whole villages aflame, hacking to death men and children and the aged while carrying off young women to be raped. Some British soldiers and journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed Partition's brutalities were worse: pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits (Hazari 134).

Men have always seen themselves as saviour and protector, but it is interesting to witness how no one comes to rescue these prostitutes when their *kotha* is set on fire. When the *kotha* member Jamilla flees with Sabnam and Laadli, the police officer tries to rape them, but Laadli, just 13 or 14 years old, comes to the front and starts taking off her own clothes in front of the police. This makes the police uncomfortable as he has a daughter of that age. The opening of her clothes is symbolic of making patriarchy naked, reminding one of Mahasweta Devi's short story *Draupadi*, where Dopdi Mejhen, too, revolted against the "repressive state apparatus" (Althusser 141) by standing naked in front of the army officer as a gesture of revolt against assault she

was subjected to in custody. This nakedness shames the patriarchy as a whole.

### ***Kotha*, a Symbolic Microcosm of Nationhood**

The prostitute of the *kotha* were all denied, ignored and shunned by their own family, society and the state. They appeared to live with their own definition of peace, harmony, and liberty in their self-created home - *kotha*. The *kotha* was formed by Begum Jaan after being denied entry from various spheres of society. The *kotha* members were from different social, religious, and racial strata, and have entered the brothel at different times being victims of varied modes of violence. The only parallelity they share with each other is that they are all children of violence and now make both ends meet by selling their bodies under the safe premises of their *kotha*. In their way of living in the *kotha*, they made their own feminine values and set of rules far from the patriarchal values of the rest of the country. This is the reason that these ordinary sex workers were converted into blood-soaked revolutionaries when their *kotha*, their only nation, came under threat. Despite repeated warnings to evacuate their place, they remain intact as a protest against patriarchy, "repressive state apparatus" (Althusser 141), and society. They, like Rani Padmavati, decided to commit Jauhar (self-immolation) after a fire-breathing fight with the oppressors. Their self-sacrifice is of no less glory than that of Rani Padmavati, who immolated herself to save her honour. *Kotha* members sacrificed themselves in the fire to save their home, motherland, and nation. Their sacrifice for their motherland reasserts the fact that the concept of home, nation, and belongingness is imaginary. It is a collective identity that emerges from the depth of imagination. "The nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7) and is an intangible construct that transcends geographical or physical borders. It is a realm where shared narratives intertwine and where the echoes of histories resonate. Their commitment for the *kotha* as a patriot is reflected in the voice of the members. Amba says, "Jamila, this isn't a brothel. It's our home" (*Begum Jaan* 1:36:47-53). Rani replies: "We never got so much freedom in our own home" (*Begum Jaan* 1:36:55-1:37:00). Rani's concept of freedom is retorted immediately by Begum Jaan as the latter says in utter despair:

Freedom! Nonsense! These two countries are playing the game of independence and so we must move out of our home. our home our land . . . I even marked a place for my burial. For years I sold my flesh. I never imagined my brothel will be broken into two. Our bodies will be partitioned (*Begum Jaan* 1:37:00-1:38:1).

The eviction notice brought by the two government officials reminds Begum Jaan of her forceful eviction from her house as a child widow when her husband died, and the narrative helps us connect with such women of the past who were biopolitically shunned by society.

### **Conclusion**

Srijit Mukherji is a master storyteller concerned more about humans than the nation. The death of Begum Jaan and the *kotha* members was the only way not to be uprooted from their only home. The death of the members was the only way to oppose the verdict of partition. Their death in *Begum Jaan* works as a metaphor for their tribute

to their virgin soil. The paper tried to present how Srijit Mukherji's *Begum Jaan* fosters Foucault's concept of biopolitics. The play of politics centring around the lives of the prostitutes and the very ways of labelling them as the social-other in the movie crucially exhibit the working principle of biopolitics. Throughout the movie, the prostitutes are the victim of objectification and abjection. They have always been bound to be reserved in silence. Their voices are never unmuted, and their opinions, desires, and needs, in short, their lives are mere pieces of candles that burn sharply but are ephemeral.

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# Deconstructing Patriarchy and Notion of Woman: A Critical Study of *Jhanjh Labongo Phool*, a Bengali T.V Serial

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## *Abstract*

Like cinema, television serial is an important media that attracts and addresses a large section of audience. In recent time, the popularity of T.V serials are noticeable, as a result, the portrayal of women in these T.V serials needs to analyse critically. The article focuses on *Jhanjh Labongo Phool* (2016-17), a popular Bengali television series that portrays the transformation of a naive rural girl named Labongo Lata into a renowned chef in the city of Kolkata. Throughout her journey, she encounters various social, cultural issues and challenges that are important to analyse. The article investigates how patriarchy shapes the notion of women and how it is historically, politically, and culturally constructed, affirmed, and articulated. Additionally, it examines how this Bengali television series constructs the concept of women and reinforces patriarchal values. It also addresses the function of women in positions of power and how they manifest masculine attributes. This study follows a qualitative methodology and employs an analytical methodology.

**Keywords:** patriarchy, women, gender, Bengali TV serial, family, feminism

## Introduction

“... “female” no longer appears to be a stable notion, its meaning  
is as trouble and unfixed as woman”  
--Butler in “Preface” of *Gender Trouble*, ix.

French intellectual and feminist Simone de Beauvoir's most quoted line regarding notion of woman is that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.” It implies a woman is not biologically and anatomically born rather, social, political, cultural power politics and other mechanisms produce a woman. The politics of body is exclusively visible, negotiated and structured. Sex and gender were inextricable interlinked notions. Before Butler's appearance in the arena of critical thinking, 'sex' was defined purely as biological and anatomical identification. Based on those biological and anatomical configurations certain roles are imposed. Those roles are called gender roles. Gender is constructed, articulated, enacted and performed through repeated social 'citations' and traditional ascribed impositions. Social citation means people articulate repeatedly what roles are traditionally configured as male roles and female roles. In contemporary feminist theoretical manifestations especially after Foucault and Butler, sex and gender are regarded as different things. As a result, there is no explicit link between sex and gender. Both are equally constructed. It must be understood that “the relationship between biological and cultural processes was far more complex-and reflexive- than we previously had supposed (West and Zimmerman 126). Foucault's notion of power structure and Butler's concept of sex and gender provide a fresh understanding of sex, gender and gender politics. To understand, this discourse of power, sex and gender, we need to

understand the historical development of that discourses. This article aims to explore how patriarchy constructs the notions of women and how it historically, politically and culturally is constructed, validated and articulated. It also traces how Bengali T.V serials configure the notion of women and promote patriarchy.

### **Notion of Woman: A Feminist Perspective**

Feminist perspective questions, critiques and challenges normative notion of gendered order in society, unequal power distribution and notion of patriarchy. It advocates equal gender rights and empowerment. Nivedita Menon (2012) states, “A feminist perspective recognizes that the hierarchical organizing of the world around gender is key to maintaining social order; that to live lives marked 'male' and 'female' is to live different realities. But simultaneously, to be a feminist is to imagine occupying the marginal, relatively powerless position with reference to every dominant framework that swallows up the space at the centre” (viii). Feminism is a social, cultural and political movement that claims equal gender rights. It is not a unitary or singular concept, rather it is complex, contradictory multi-faced process. Lisa S. Price (2009) argues that feminism is also a method of analysis, a point of view, and a means of seeing the world through the eyes of women. It raises concerns about government policies, popular culture, and ways of doing and being, as well as how these ideological and institutional practises affect women's lives. Menon (2012) states, “Feminism is thus not about individual men and women, but about understanding the ways in which 'men' and 'women' are produced and inserted into patriarchies that differ according to time and place” (viii). Through the social and cultural movement, feminism provides a fresh perspective to understand the hierarchal power structure in a society and advocates to unlearn the normative patriarchal discourses and ideologies. Therefore, it can be argued that “To be a feminist is to understand that different identities— located hierarchically as *dominant* or *subordinate*— are produced at different times and in different spaces, but also to be aware particularly of the processes of gendering” (Menon ix). Before going into further details, we should understand what patriarchy is and how it functions within a socio-cultural and political framework.

The notion of patriarchy is not static rather it evolves over the time through centuries. There are multiple perspectives to understand the concept of patriarchy such as perspectives of Marxist feminist, liberal feminist, radical feminist, racial and caste. The concept of patriarchy has a long history and it can be viewed as a system of government that is ruled by men and they sustain their leading position in social and political life. Sylvia Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (20). Further, she categorically establishes six structures of patriarchy:

At a less abstract level patriarchy is composed of six structures: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. More concretely, in relation to each of the structures, it is possible to identify sets of patriarchal practices which are less deeply sedimented. Structures are

emergent properties of practices. Any specific empirical instance will embody the effects, not only of patriarchal structures, but also of capitalism and racism. (Walby 20)

These six structures are interrelated with each other. They mutually generate a system of reinforcement of patriarchy. The structure of state is a capitalist and patriarchal. She also argues “Patriarchal relations in sexuality constitute a fifth structure. Compulsory heterosexuality and the sexual double standard are two of the key forms of this structure” (Walby 21). Adrienne Rich defines the concept of “compulsory heterosexuality” which strengthens formation of patriarchy:

The institutions by which women have traditionally been controlled—patriarchal motherhood, economic exploitation, the nuclear family, compulsory heterosexuality—are being strengthened by legislation, religious fiat, media imagery, and efforts at censorship. (Rich 11)

It considers that sexual relationships between men and women are normal and natural. It promotes, sanctions and legitimises heterosexuality and banishes all type of sexual orientation other than heterosexuality. Therefore, binary gender and sexual divisions are consolidated by patriarchy. Patriarchy creates culture and social norms. Freud's “Oedipal” moment signifies beginning of a culture where a man enters into. As a result, the 'Oedipus complex' symbolises the process by which women are subjected to the inter-subjective control of men through the acquisition of sexed subjectivity. Firestone (1972) identifies biological reproduction as the fundamental factor of women's subordination and attacks on the heterosexual family structure. She coined the term “the biological family” which means “the basic reproductive unit of male/female/infant,” a social institution. She categorically recognises four facts in which women are subordinated:

1. That women throughout history before the advent of birth control were at the mercy of their biology—menstruation, menopause, and 'female ills', constant painful childbirth, wetnursing and care of infants, all of which made them dependent on males (whether brother, father, husband, lover, or clan, government, community-at-large) for physical survival.
2. That human infants take an even longer time to grow up than animals, and thus are helpless and, for some short period at least, dependent on adults for physical survival.
3. That a basic mother/child interdependency has existed in some form in every society, past or present, and thus has shaped the psychology of every mature female and every infant.
4. That the natural reproductive difference between the sexes led directly to the first division of labour at the origins of class, as well as furnishing the paradigm of caste (discrimination based on biological characteristics). (Firestone 8-9)

For Firestone (1972), the patriarchal family structure is the root cause of women's subordination. The 'marriage contract' is fundamentally a labour contract. This contract generates two classes, a class of oppressor and a class of oppressed. Women are identified as a unique oppressed class and men are the oppressors. Patriarchy creates multiple cultural institutions and those institutions create certain structures for

men and women. In others words,

Patriarchal cultural institutions complete the array of structures...This structure is composed of a set of institutions which create the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze in a variety of arenas, such as religions, education and the media (Walby 21).

Judith Butler (1990) critiques the notion of “women” and “representation.” She sees “representation” as a controversial term which, on the one hand, “serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (Butler 1). Butler states conventional notion of “women” is problematic. She notes, “The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms” in recent feminist discourse (Butler 1). Juridical linguistic structure constructs “women” as a subject, therefore, the uniform homogenous subject is configured and popularised by patriarchy. The first wave feminism theorises “gender” is social construction and “sex” is biological. Butler critiques this cultural/biological dichotomy. She observes “sex” is also a social and cultural construction like “gender”. In the preface of *Gender Trouble*, She notes, “...“female” no longer appears to be a stable notion, its meaning is as troubled and unfixed as “woman and because both terms gain their troubled significations only as relational terms” (Butler ix). Butler (1988) argues gender is acted, expressed, produced and performed:

Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed... gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed. (“Performative Acts” 527-528)

Patriarchal framework produces and legitimates gender in binary dichotomy such as masculinity and femininity. Heteronormative social structure attributes these exclusive gender orientation to specific anatomical figure of human bodies. The anatomical human bodies are forced to perform and thereby, these bodies become “compulsory heterosexual.” This compulsory heterosexuality is the backbone of patriarchy. Creating binary gender division and prioritising unequal hierarchal gender pattern, patriarchy sustains its authoritarian power in different forms and shapes.

### **Construction of Women in Bengali TV Serial**

The impact of television serials on several aspects of society, including fashion trends, styles, behavioural expressions, and the promotion of political, religious, and patriarchal ideologies, is significant and cannot be disregarded. The concept of gender is constructed and redefined through widely accepted mediums due to the prevailing patriarchal storyline and its visual representation. Bengali television serials serve the dual function of teaching and entertainment, commonly known as 'edutainment.' These shows explore a diverse range of topics including women's productivity, love, marriage, conjugal life, extramarital affairs, domestic concerns, healthcare, birth control, gender roles, and domestic politics. Television serials and films exert

significant effect on viewers in general. These visual narratives have shaped, guided and manufactured our consciousness. This is the power of both Television and cinema. Deshpande (2009) acknowledges the immense potential of television and film:

This power incorporates attributes of being omnipresent, of being influential and finally of exerting psychological and commercial control over mass audiences. In the case of many popular programmes, this power is the power of manufacturing opinion and thereby imprisoning the audience in a cage of discourse. But there can be positive energy in these narratives. (Deshpande 6)

In patriarchal social framework, the notion of women, the gendered process, and its cultural rituals are reproduced and reinforced in virtual narratives with a touch of glamour. Bengali T.V serials, in majority of cases, present the story of Hindu, upper-caste, middle class and patriarchal family. In some instances, it seems that the normative gender hierarchy is subverted but in other sense, new gender hierarchy is formed based on same hierarchal pattern. This is also a patriarchal framework and its multi-formed manifestations. How gender and power- relation are produced and manufactured through the select T.V serial, would be discussed elaborately.

### ***Jhanjh Labongo Phool (2016-17)***

The setting of *Jhanjh Labongo Phool* is in Sorshefuli village. The serial starts on the day of 'Jamai Shasthi,' a Hindu Bengali festival dedicated to the sons-in-law. In the early morning of the day, an old woman is seen singing loudly in front of an idol, wearing a white saree. Other members of the house are either sleeping on the floor or in other rooms, and they are being disrupted by the noise. It is shown that the mother-in-law or elder women supervise and conduct the puja and rituals. Another gender hierarchy is observed in the first episode where women are shown sleeping on the floor and men are sleeping on the bed. Based on gender and sexual identity, the space is divided separately.

In traditional family space, gender is constructed and celebrated through series of performances. In the first episode, it is noticed that women in the village form a queue with cooking materials. They wait for Lobongo, the central character of the serial, to be shown as an exceptional culinary expert. The serial takes place in two locations: Sorshefuli village and Kolkata. The portrayal of women is different in each location. However, how does this T.V serial construct the notion woman? To get the answer, we need a comprehensive analysis of the serial with feminist theories.

### **Lobongo Lata**

Ishaa Saha, an actress, has played the role of Lobongo Lata, the principal character in this television series. In the television series, Lobongo Lata's journey from an ordinary, unsophisticated, and naive rural girl of Sorshefuli village to a renowned chef at the prestigious Victoria Palace, a famous restaurant in Kolkata is portrayed. This dramatic transformation takes place throughout the course of the serial. She is an obedient, submissive and innocent girl who is always concerned about the well-being of others. Marriage is depicted as a central focus in this serial, and Lobongo's

extraordinary culinary skills is shown to be a significant quality for the marriage. Sorshefuli and Kolkata both places play a role in her character's growth and development. Since her childhood, she spent most of her time in Sorshefuli, where she learned that her future husband would be Neel, whose family had formerly resided in Sorshefuli but later relocated to Kolkata. The huge disparity in social stratification and quality of life between the Lobongo family and Neel's family is clearly visible. Neel belongs to upper class, educated and prosperous society; on the other hand, Lobongo belongs to lower middle class.

Family and society both play a crucial role in the construction of gender. Acting, producing, and performing one's gender are all acts. In her family, Lobongo, engages in activities that are traditionally performed by women. Her skill as a cook is acknowledged, complimented, and brought into the public eye countless times during the serial. Being a woman is not a pre-determined state rather "it is a becoming, a condition actively under construction" (Connell, *Gender* 5). Beauvoir argues, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (qtd. in Connell 5). Kimmel, writes the role of the family for gender construction:

Families are gendered institutions; they reproduce gender differences and gender inequalities among adults and children alike. Families raise children as gendered actors and remind parents to perform appropriate gender behaviours [...] each specific aspect of family life-marriage, child rearing, housework, divorce-expresses the differences and inequalities of gender. (Kimmel 138)

The gender is performed bodily and culturally. The series shows the process in which Lobongo becomes a woman performing gender-appropriate activities. Connell notes, "Ideas about gender-appropriate behaviour are constantly being circulated, not only by legislators but also by priests, parents, teachers, advertisers, retail mall owners, talk-show hosts and disco jockeys" (*Gender* 5). Gender is inherently relational to culture and social pattern. The gender of Lobongo could be determined by her actions, the clothes she wears, and the way she interacts with both men and women. Connell notes the structural pattern of gender:

Gender, like other social structures, is multi-dimensional; it is not just about identity, or just about work, or just about power, or just about sexuality, but all of these things at once. Gender patterns may differ strikingly from one cultural context to another, but are still 'gender'. Gender arrangements are reproduced socially (not biologically) by the power of structures to shape individual action, so they often appear unchanging. (*Gender* 11)

The patriarchy maintains its power structure by perpetuating a marriage-centered consciousness in which women are expected to marry men and the other way around, and this is essential for the patriarchy to continue existing.

In the first episode, Lobongo is depicted as a grown woman who has reached marriageable age. All of Lobongo's playmates are married. Her entire family is concerned about her marriage. When her mother noticed her cooking for other people's houses on the day of "Jamai Shasthi," she was overwhelmed with sorrow and asked her husband how many more days Lobongo would have to cook for other people's houses. Here, Nayantara, Lobongo's mother, says that a woman's 'real' house

is the house of her husband. As a result, Lobongo ought to get married soon, then go to her 'real' house, where she ought to cook for her own husband. Everyone in her family, as well as women in her neighborhood and her other acquaintances, had certain assumptions and rumours about her marriage. When it comes to Neel and Lobongo's marriage, there is always a degree of uncertainty. Annada Sen Sharma who is Lobongo's grandmother's friend from a wealthy family had promised to bring Lobongo as a bride, and women in that village used to mock Lobongo for not getting married at this age. In the first few episodes, the emotional upheaval that Lobongo experiences as a result of not being married and the rumours that surround it are shown quite accurately in this serial. Lobongo's ambition and desire to be Neel's bride are instilled in her by her family and serve as a driving force behind her activities. Patriarchy has its foundation "on the idea of the superiority of all men to women," and it is perpetuated through rituals, tradition, and religion (Srivastava 33). The institution of marriage facilitates patriarchy by reinforcing the idea that a woman's 'real' home is her husband's house, which results in unequal power dynamics between genders. The serial overemphasises the Bengali ritual "Jamai Shasthi," which is mostly patriarchal expression. Almost all rituals place a disproportionate burden on women. In this context, Priyanka Chatterjee states:

While women must bear all the implications of these rituals in their lives following marriage, a mother is not supposed to cook any meal for her pregnant daughter during her baby shower. Women are made to dwell between being a *grihalaksmi*, the home-maker and the bearer of ill-fate, according to these self-contradicting ritualistic norms. ("Sexism and Casteism")

Through the character of Lobongo and other women in her house, the serial promotes patriarchal traditions and rituals. Men can also be victims of patriarchy, but "their repression and oppression remain largely invisible" (Chatterjee and Dhabak ix). In this serial, the male characters are primarily shown as being silent and passive viewers, and they are occasionally subjected to dominance.

### **Indrani Sen Sharma**

Swagata Mukherjee has played the role of Indrani Sen Sharma, the mother of Neel Sen Sharma. She is a well-educated modern lady who is self-sufficient, confident, and determined to achieve success. She is the founder of the prestigious restaurant Victoria Palace, which is located in Kolkata. Everyone in her family is frightened of her, with the exception of her mother-in-law, because she performs a dominant role in the family. Through her actions, she is able to accumulate power and undergo a transformation that aligns her with traits typically associated with masculine.

Traditionally, the characteristics of physical strength, aggressiveness, violence, revenge, control and domination are associated to masculinity. Femininity is the gender expressions such as passive, weak, dependent, controlled and oppressed. However, the fact is that masculinity and femininity are not always interlinked with the male and female bodies. Jack Halberstam (1998) states, "Masculinity in this society inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege; it often symbolically refers to the power of the state and to uneven distributions of wealth" (2).

Indrani possesses significant financial resources, a prominent social position, and authoritative influence in the serial. She exerts control over every member of her family and performs the role of breadwinner. The performance of masculinity is deeply rooted in the space. In the family space, Indrani exhibits her masculinity through domination, controlling, overpowering and silencing other member of the family. Her gender performance is a lived reality of her female body. Her female masculinity is not like a hegemonic masculinity, rather, it is a distinct kind of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is “the configuration of gender practice” in which men dominate and control women (Connell, *Masculinities* 77). Women in a patriarchal framework can also act as agents of patriarchy, and being an agent of patriarchy, Indrani uses her power and authority to impose restrictions and controls on other members of her family.

Indrani vehemently opposes Neel and Lobongo's marriage since Lobongo belongs to the lower class. In Sorshefuli, she discovers Lobongo's culinary skills, which would help her restaurant. Indrani, a savvy businesswoman, approves their marriage but forbids Neel from seeing Lobongo's face, even on their wedding day. On that day, Lobongo is taken to the Victoria Palace, while Neel returns to his house. The next day of her marriage, Lobongo is forced to work as a chef at the Victoria Palace. She is not given the proper social recognition for being a wife and daughter-in-law. She is only used by Indrani as a labourer and a servant. Indrani and Lobongo play contrasting roles as oppressor and victim and belong to different levels of the power hierarchy. At the end of the serial, Lobongo ultimately attains social validation within the family after a prolonged period of struggle.

### Conclusion

The concepts of 'masculine' and 'feminine' are purely arbitrary relationship with the concept of 'sex'. Gender is constructed and reconstructed through performative acts. It intersects and interacts with sexuality, caste, class, race, ethnicity, religion, politics and ability. Patriarchy always marks certain bodies as “man” and “woman” and attempts to fit in them in certain roles. The TV serial addresses the question of gender and demonstrates further complicated tools and mechanisms which produce “women.” Again, “women is not a natural and self-evident identity” (Menon 171). Rather, their identity is created, produced and promoted through various patriarchal mechanisms. Bengali TV serials manifest and portray the Bengali cultural tradition, family structure, social values and patriarchal rules and norms. Burden of honour and respect of a family is always on women and they remain in the centre of attention of the serial. Patriarchy very subtly rules and dominate women by women. The serial addresses the ways gender is performed and constructed within the power structure and poses questions about the conventional notions of 'masculine' and 'feminine.'

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# Entering the Symbiocene Era: Negotiating Solastalgia and Contested Cultural Landscape in *Aavasavyooham*

Remya R\*

*Abstract*

The recently emerged 'Kochi film' genre in Malayalam film industry has in its short oeuvre, depictions of various regions of Kochi city in Kerala, which is renowned for its multi-ethnic populace. The film *Aavasavyooham: The Arbit Documentation of an Amphibian Hunt* (2022) produces a cultural map of Puthuvypin in Kochi, in a way that conjoins historic myths and legends, with modern topographies and built environments, while problematizing and subverting the notion of the 'Other.' The film presents a fantastic tale in the form of a mockumentary that prophesies the (d)evolution of human race. This article examines the ways in which *Aavasavyooham* depicts the development of Solastalgia among the subaltern residents of Puthuvypin, and establishes the argument that the cultural landscape of Puthuvypin is a contested one. The article then situates the 'other;' the character Joy, to show how the film negotiates a contested cultural landscape and solastalgia to act as a clarion call that marks the advent of a new era and species that defy conventional identity markers. The larger aim of this analysis is to prove that the film ushers in a new post-anthropocene era; the Symbiocene, which is embodied in Joy.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene, symbiocene, solastalgia, contested cultural landscape, Kochi film

## Introduction

*Aavasavyooham: The Arbit Documentation of an Amphibian Hunt* (2022) is a film that conflates the past in the form of mythologies and legends, the present in the form of modern developmental strife, and the future in the form of a cataclysmic (d)evolution of the human race. The film is set in Puthuvypin, a region that forms part of the Vypin islands of Kochi in Kerala, and tells the tale of human actions and interventions that turned Kochi's natural landscape to a modern cultural landscape that threatens to destroy the ecosystem and biome of that region, leading to unprecedented changes that challenge human agency and comprehension. Presented in the form of a mockumentary that juxtaposes the developmental activities happening in Puthuvypin with a parallel tale of a group of scientists searching for a particular type of frog species in the Western Ghats, the film takes us through the life of Joy, an enigmatic character whose origins are unknown. He is the 'other' whom the fellow characters behold with anxious curiosity, as he metamorphosizes in to a human-amphibian creature that leave the scientific world dumbfound, unleashing a cornucopia of mythical and scientific speculations. The film seamlessly dovetails myths with modern realities to problematize and subvert the notion of the 'Other', thereby paving way to interrogate the attempts to blur the divide between myth and reality. The film portrays the development-induced problems that threaten the lives of the underprivileged residents and the natural ecosystem of Puthuvypin. The most prominent issue is the construction of the LPG terminal by the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), which puts the lives of the people at risk. Consequently, the residents experience what is known as 'solastalgia'; a term coined as a neology from the words

'solace' and 'nostalgia', to indicate “a form of distress or grief for the lived experience of the desolation of one's home environment (Albrecht, “Solastalgia” 300). By adopting an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that borrows ideas from cultural geography and evolutionary biology, this article argues that *Aavasavyooham* subverts the notion of the 'other' and acts as a clarion call that signifies the advent of the 'Symbiocene'; the new post-anthropocene era. The term 'Symbiocene' refers to “that period in the earth's history where humans symbiotically reintegrate themselves, psychologically and technologically, into nature and natural systems” (Albrecht, “Ecopsychology” 58). This paper adopts a 'Russian doll' model of analysis which involves three levels of critical inquiry. At the outset, the first level looks in to the public sphere presented in the film, to prove that the cultural landscape presented in *Aavasavyooham* is a contested one where the subaltern people experience Solastalgia. This contested nature of the cultural landscape reveals a power struggle between the powerful elites and the powerless subaltern, wherein conventional identity markers like ethnicity, religion, caste etc. become means of difference and discrimination. Consequently, the second level of analysis investigates the social sphere shown in the film, to show how the film portrays othering, through societal attitude towards the character Joy, who is an enigmatic outsider. The concept of this peculiar 'other' calls for further analysis of Joy, who holds deeper ontological significance concerning human future in a post-anthropocene world. The third section thus narrows in on the private sphere of the individual Joy, whose character analysis reveals that he is an embodiment of the new Symbiocene era.

### **Puthuvypin and Solastalgia**

Kochi's growth into a metropolitan city has resulted in radical changes in its landscape and these changes have been portrayed in many films that fall in to the recently nomenclated genre in Malayalam film industry; the 'Kochi films' (Radhakrishnan 174). Films like *Big B* (2007), *Chotta Mumbai* (2007), *Chappa Kurishu* (2011), *City of God* (2011), *Anayam Rasoolum* (2013), *Kammattipadam* (2016), *Parava* (2017), *Valiyaperunnal* (2019) as well as *Aavasavyooham* (2022) fall under this category, as they present spatio-cultural maps of Kochi. All these films, in varying degrees, touch upon issues like gang violence, real estate mafia, land use patterns, development-induced displacement, differential access to resources, burgeoning migrant labourers etc. (P, 80-89; Radhakrishnan 175-189). These films have the commonality of portraying the 'lived experience' of the subaltern masses in conjunction with the elite populace who reap the benefits of development. It has been established that “generic conventions can be a significant reason for patterned similarities in a set of films” (Vyas and Shekhawat 1938), but even when clubbed together with other films, a film can stand apart with its unique treatment of the common subject matter. What sets *Aavasavyooham* apart from the rest of the Kochi films is the novelty of its treatment of what constitutes the subaltern. This film deftly captures the plights of not only humans, but also the animals, and Nature in general.

The film shows how human-induced changes to the environment adversely affect the subaltern, and the animals are shown to belong to this group, as the latter too, grieve

the destruction of their living space. The human-induced changes are what creates a cultural landscape, as Carl O. Sauer puts it: “The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result” (103). *Aavasavyooham* touches upon the larger issues of unplanned development, causing displacement, loss of traditional jobs etc. The developmental activity overtly foregrounded in the film and shown to endanger the lives of the residents in Puthuvypin is the construction of the IOC's LPG terminal. *Aavasavyooham* realistically captures the lived realities of Puthuvypin, complete with real-life accounts of police brutality and people's protests against the construction of the terminal. The residents are shown to stage protest meetings to spread awareness amongst the public as to how grave a danger they have been put in due to IOC's project (*Aavasavyooham* 01:51:22-58). Shots showing people wearing T-shirts that say 'Save Kochi' are poignantly shown (*Aavasavyooham* 55:12). The slogans in the protests are called out by students in uniforms (*Aavasavyooham* 01:52:02-07), and there are footages of children playing police 'lathi charge' (the act of policemen controlling a crowd with their batons) (*Aavasavyooham* 01:51:15-18). The sense of doom percolates people's daily life to an extent that fear for life takes precedence over education, and protests become a quotidian act as they fight for their survival. Here, one can observe how there is a power struggle between the global conglomerate, IOC and the subaltern residents of Puthuvypin. While the former wants to alter the cultural landscape of Puthuvypin through the construction of the LPG terminal, the residents want to retain the landscape as it is. This power struggle is what makes the cultural landscape a contested one. In order to comprehend the contestations in and of landscapes, one must look in to the dominant groups that hold power to silence the subordinate groups with the help of various institutions that will benefit from the dominant ideology (Kong and Law 1504). The Government and the police force are such institutions that aid the IOC by keeping the protests at bay by imposing Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to ensure the unhindered construction of the IOC's project. The police arrest Joy and Kochuraman for the violation of Section 144. Kochuraman, an environmental activist is a character whom everyone except Joy, considers a Maoist, and Kochuraman vehemently asks: “What crime did I do? Planting mangroves? Does planting trees make one a Maoist?” (*Aavasavyooham* 01:14:05-13). The authority's attitude towards environmental activists as anti-institutional becomes more evident when the policeman Anthony Philips, threatens Biju Kannanganad, an environmental activist, by saying that Biju is under the Police's radar for protesting against IOC. Here, the film conveys the idea that anyone who voices their protest against development are considered criminals. From the film, it becomes evident that it is the subaltern who are bearing the brunt of development-induced changes in the living space, and it is interesting that the film includes the animal world in this category of victims of solastalgia. The film portrays the loss of animal life due to reckless developmental activities through instances of depletion of fishes in the sea, illegal fishing of juvenile fishes, disruption of ecosystem etc. Vava talks about how landfills bought in from other parts of Kerala to fill mangroves and construct new buildings introduced new animals like venomous

snakes into Puthuvypin area. The film shows how increased water traffic due to the construction of Vallarpadam terminal and Vypin LNG terminal caused Dolphins to disappear from the inland waters surrounding Puthuvypin. It also discusses how migratory birds, dragonflies, turtles, and other life forms are adversely affected along with the mangroves due to mindless developmental activities. Joy reiterates protest slogans to the fishes in the lake: “We should strongly protest, but it should be non-violent” (*Aavasavyooham* 55:43-48), thereby integrating the animals as protestors. These drastic and negative changes to the ecosystem and biome of Puthuvypin directly affect the underprivileged. Fisherman are forced to forsake their traditional jobs and seek work as construction workers or as security men in construction sites. This is made apparent through Raghavan, who says that there is no future in the job of a fisherman. Meanwhile, the rich boat owner Murali shows no remorse in catching juvenile fishes as he escapes incarceration through amercement. Vava becomes unconscionable and takes advantage of Joy's ability to lure fishes out of the sea. The film shows how the rich remain unaffected by ecological concerns while the underprivileged are adversely affected by it. The film, thus, shows that the ecosystem, along with the subaltern human populace in Puthuvypin exhibit “lived experience of negative environmental change” (Albrecht, “Negating Solastalgia” 9), which is symptomatic of Solastalgia.

These observations about the populace who are afflicted by reckless development relay the fact that the cultural landscape of Puthuvypin is essentially contested, and this living condition forms the reason for solastalgia amongst its subaltern residents. Every contested cultural landscape entails the politics of inclusion and exclusion (Gailing and Leibenath 338). From the larger discourse of the public sphere of contested cultural landscape, the paper will now delve in to the social sphere where interactions between people will reveal the socio-cultural markers that become the basis for discrimination. The next section will delve deeper into the matrix of social relations shown in the film, to analyse people's attitude towards Joy, the character that is most subject to othering.

### **The Enigmatic 'Other' in a Contested Cultural Landscape**

This section takes the notion of contested cultural landscape further by investigating the socio-cultural markers shown in the film, informing the notion of identity, namely ethnicity, religion and caste. The character Joy in *Aavasavyooham* presents a subversive image of identity in such a landscape. Joy, being devoid of identity markers, becomes an enigmatic 'other' to the characters around him. Raghavan observes that Joy has no Aadhar card, ration card, license or passport, and speculates that Joy is perhaps a migrant from Nepal, Sri Lanka or Bengal. Ethnicity, understood as a “descent-based” (Chandra 398) notion becomes problematic here, as no one knows Joy's origins, and hence, his ethnicity. The question of ethnicity becomes relevant here because Kochi is renowned for its highly multiethnic society, owing to its long history of colonisation and migrant residents. Kochi has a motley of communities including Gowda Saraswat Brahmins, Latin Catholics, Jains, and Jews

among others. Migrant settlers get assimilated through a shared common language; Malayalam (Nandy 297), but belonging to the dominant ethno-linguistic group does not guarantee an ideal state of inclusion. This is because “inclusion can also mean subordination” (Anthias 839) as notions like caste, class etc. can make it a disempowering form of inclusion.

Joy was forced to flee from Azhikode after Murali, Sajeevan and Binil try to murder him. To them, Joy was a “migrant beggar” (*Aavasavyooham* 24:52-55) from whom Lissy, who was in love with Joy, should be protected. Binil exhibits xenophobia, as he deems it their duty to protect the chastity of a girl from their hometown from a migrant outcast. He questions Joy's act of stake-net fishing: “Are you a member of the Vaalan community? Don't you know only members of the community can do stake net fishing? We don't even include Christians in this business” (*Aavasavyooham* 26:26-34). His words reveal the issue of caste and its relation to the nature of work that people do, which reveals the casteist sentiments that people harbor and the hostility they feel towards 'outsiders'. Through these instances, the film also touches upon the issue of the boom of migrants from northern parts of India to Kochi and the treatment meted out to such labourers in the name of ethnicity, religion, caste etc. They are othered and are often at the receiving end of hostility from the host society. When Joy is arrested for breaking the curfew imposed so as to facilitate the construction of the IOC terminal, the policeman Anthony Philips takes bribe from Murali, and aids Murali's plan to murder Joy. Anthony claimed that Joy ran away from the police jeep, and that he is a “shrewd criminal and an anti-national terrorist” (*Aavasavyooham* 01:17:22-28). All these instances show that Joy's enigmatic identity without any identity markers earn him the status of an alien other. It is this lack of specific identity markers that later paves way for attempts to 'identify' him using transcultural myths, when he mysteriously metamorphosizes in to a half-human, half-frog creature.

It can be concluded that it is precisely the enigmatic nature of Joy that makes him a transcultural being; an embodiment of 'life' itself. He is not a 'human' with a traditional set of identity markers, he is not a recognizable animal belonging to a particular species, as he transcends the boundaries of any and all such identifications in his final stage of metamorphosis into an unidentified creature. The larger implications of such a being need to be delineated through careful scrutiny. By narrowing in on Joy in the next section, this paper attempts to demystify the enigma associated with Joy.

### **Joy: Embodied Symbiocene**

Joy can be understood as a post-anthropocene being; a representation, albeit an incredible one, of the new symbiocene era, which is “characterized by human intelligence and praxis that replicate the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing life-reproducing forms and processes found in living systems” (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 102). Joy, transforms in to a creature, speculated to be an amphibian. This event catches international attention and several attempts to explain this precarious event unfolds through discussions among historians, theologians, scientists etc. throughout

the world. A pastor in Puthuvypin claims that Joy is the reincarnation of God, to fight Satan. A temple priest calls him the reincarnation of Varuna (the God of seas according to Hindu mythology). A Professor of Psychology equates Joy to a mermaid. A government official sent to investigate the matter claims that Joy is a sea animal that has taken refuge in land. A scientist explains that Joy could be a 'hangover species' or a 'transitional species' much like 'Frogmanders' (combination of a frog and a salamander), a species that existed 290 million years ago. An eminent entrepreneur opined that Joy is the result of a mutation that happened to a frog that jumped into a pile of e-waste.

These transcultural and transdisciplinary speculations about Joy shows that he is beyond the boundaries of all normative divides that exist amongst humans and between humans and other life forms in the Anthropocene era. Joy, who becomes a form of symbiotic creature, appears to be what Symbiocene stands for; realizing the “vital interconnectedness of life” and all aspects of human existence which “will be seamlessly reintegrated back into life cycles and processes” (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 104). This is illustrated in the film quite viscerally through Joy. After Joy gets admitted to a hospital, his X-ray reveals that he is rotting from the inside, and the doctor finds worms inside Joy's leg. Further medical investigations reveals that the worm belongs to the Cecilian family, and is usually found only in the soil. This explains why earlier in the film, Lissy and others described that Joy had a peculiar odour that resembled the smell of rotten fish. Later on in the film, the worms taken out from Joy's body mutates into some other life form, and plants grow out of it. These extraordinary changes that transform a human to a new life-producing creature could be Nature's (represented as a subaltern, and a victim of reckless development) way of coping with the disastrous changes happening to it. This observation is furthered in one of the final shots of the film, where Joy's skeleton, after being taken to the National Museum of Natural History in France, shows new plants emerging from it and frogs magically coming to inhabit it. Thus, Joy becomes an embodiment of the Symbiocene, wherein 'life' itself is redefined, and human beings' position in the evolutionary ladder is reduced to a vantage point rather than a pedestal, and symbiotic living with all forms of life that share Earth becomes the lynchpin of survival.

The instances shown in the film regarding Joy and his possible (d)evolution is indicative of the possibility of human race entering into a symbiotic relation with other forms of organisms, as a direct result of anthropogenic/human-induced changes on Earth that threaten the survival of life itself. Researches in evolutionary biology has shown that anthropogenic changes that have disastrous effects like climate change, changes in land use patterns, habitat fragmentation, biodiversity loss etc. will induce new patterns of Symbioses (Hom and Penn 140-42). Through Joy, the film urges us to re-examine and displace ourselves from the pedestal of assuming the highest position in *scala naturae*. Joy's transformation is testament to the fact that “we exist in a dynamic, multi-scale landscape in which multiple symbioses with biological, human, and cultural components are interacting, declining, forming and evolving simultaneously” (Hom and Penn 158).

## Conclusion

This study can be understood as a symbiosis of film studies, cultural geography and evolutionary biology; a multi-disciplinary approach suited to explicate a complex phenomenon, albeit filmic and imaginary, that sidesteps easy comprehension. Glenn Albrecht, who coined the terms 'Symbiocene' and 'Solastalgia' refers to the power of media to reflect ecological crises and act as mouthpieces for the impending downfall of human race if the Anthropocene era continues: “Popular literature and film—often sensitive barometers of a society's deep anxieties—already portray such an apocalyptic turn in human-nature relationships” (Albrecht). True to this notion, *Aavasavyooham* poignantly portrays a possible evolutionary turn in human - nature relationship and shows how a person devoid of conventional identity markers becomes a herald of a new generation, namely the Symbiocene. Joy is a transcultural being that transgresses compartmentalized identities and blurs the divide between myths, facts and fiction. He also transcends the divide between species, thereby subverting human beings' superiority in the evolutionary ladder. Through Joy, *Aavasavyooham* seems to be conveying the message that the way ahead for human race is to eschew divisive identity markers and evolve into beings that are one with Nature. His change can either be called an evolution of human beings into a form that is suitable to cope with the changes happening in the contemporary scenario, or a devolution, wherein humans are being pulled back along the evolutionary ladder, to become more symbiotic with Nature. In the context of anthropological changes, Joy represents an apocalyptic future for the human race, which, conversely, could be a salvation for Earth, which is suffering due to the anthropogenic changes that are leaving catastrophes in their wake. Joy represents 'Gaia' the Earth itself, with all its life forms, finding ways to cope with the disastrous changes happening to it. He embodies the Symbiocene; paving new ways for a future marked by “complete reintegration of the human body, psyche, and culture with the rest of life” (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 102). The film therefore weaves an intricate web that connects identity, myths, the Anthropocene and the Symbiocene, in a way forming a parallel to the web of life itself.

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# Unleashing the Power of Visual Narratives: Enhancing ELT through Engaging and Impactful Teaching

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## *Abstract*

Visual narratives play a crucial role in today's classrooms. English Language Teaching (ELT) classes embrace innovative approaches by leveraging visual aids, such as images, videos, and graphical representations, to effectively convey information, concepts, and stories in relevant contexts. Modern technology has made it possible to utilize high-quality images and videos that captivate students' attention and significantly enhance the learning experience. This paper presents an analysis of students' learning experiences when exposed to skillfully employed visual narratives by their English language teacher. The teacher's utilization of visual narratives to teach literature texts and grammar, plays a pivotal role and takes center stage in this study. The results demonstrate a remarkable improvement in students' performance, including enhanced critical thinking abilities, improved proficiency in language skills, facilitated learning, and increased confidence. Besides examining the theoretical foundations of visual narratives and their connection to cognitive processes, storytelling, and information processing, this paper also explores how visual narratives can stimulate active learning, promote critical thinking, and improve knowledge retention. Furthermore, this study investigates the impact of visual narratives on student motivation, engagement, and creativity, considering the diverse learning styles and preferences of individual learners. The findings emphasize the potential of visual narratives as a valuable tool for educators to create engaging and impactful learning experiences.

**Keywords:** Visual narratives; English Language Teaching (ELT), Innovative Approaches, Student Engagement, Critical Thinking

## **Introduction**

In the realm of modern education, integration of visual narratives has emerged as a transformative force in English Language Teaching (ELT). Traditional approaches, often centered around textbooks and lectures, can fall short in engaging students in their language acquisition journey. However, a paradigm shift is occurring as educators increasingly embrace innovative teaching methodologies that utilize visual narratives to create compelling learning experiences (Dunlap & Lowenthal 53). The use of visual learning not only enhances the comprehension of information but also significantly contributes to knowledge acquisition, fostering creativity and active engagement in the learning process (Berbets, Babii, Chyrva, & Malykhin 319). Visual narratives incorporate images, videos, and graphical representations to convey information, concepts, and stories in meaningful contexts. By infusing ELT with visual narratives, educators can establish a dynamic learning environment tailored to the diverse needs of contemporary learners. Loschky et al. (342) in their research describe how the comprehensive cognitive framework for visual narrative

processing encompasses various stages, ranging from momentary attentional selection and information extraction from visual images to the creation and maintenance of event models in Working Memory (WM) and Long-Term Memory (LTM). This paper will showcase specific instances of a teacher successfully incorporating visual narratives into a pre-university classroom.

## Literature Review

### *Significance of Visual Narratives in ELT*

Visuals influence learners as they can stimulate imagination, evoke emotions, and promote deeper comprehension. Visual narratives bridge language and meaning, enabling students to make meaningful connections and develop a more profound understanding of the target language. In the first place, visual narratives bring concepts down to earth, allowing weak readers and below-average students to grasp the content or story for motivation and learning. According to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, proficiency alone is not the sole factor, but creativity and innovation need to be nurtured (Pillai 5-6). Pillai (2) has demonstrated in his paper how visual mnemonics help enhance students' memory and creativity in ELT classrooms. Research has demonstrated that implementing effective pedagogical strategies, which create meaningful experiences, positively influence the well-being of new students, and facilitates their transition to university (Everett, 626).

Visuals also facilitate the development of the four language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - by providing authentic and contextualized language input (Sadiku, 29, 31). Visual narratives come handy for teachers who can design their lessons based on available visuals. With the advent of technology, teachers can produce audiovisuals well suited for their classrooms.

Narrative frames skillfully designed scaffold the target story or prompt participants with specific wordings that can engage the learners' attention are currently popular (Greenier & Moodie 102590). Studies have shown that visual narratives enhance students' understanding and appreciation of literature texts, aiding in interpreting complex concepts and facilitating discussions on themes and symbolism (Wu, 340; Gresham, 47). In terms of grammar teaching, visual narratives improve students' understanding and application of grammar rules and structures (Fachraini 2). Visual narratives help acquiring language skills, such as improving listening comprehension, speaking and communication skills, and reading and writing skills (Pariwat 1-3). They also stimulate active learning, promote critical thinking and problem-solving, and enhance knowledge retention (Wu, 340, 341).

Integration of visual narratives in ELT positively impacts student motivation, engagement, and creativity, catering to diverse learning styles and preferences (Wu, 344). Selecting and creating efficient visual narratives involves considering their alignment with learning objectives, authenticity, storytelling techniques, and visual and audio elements (Gresham, 47, 48). Incorporating visual narratives into the curriculum and providing teacher training are crucial for successful implementation (Gresham, 51). However, challenges such as technological considerations and

addressing cultural and linguistic diversity have to be met (Osipova & Lao 8). Visual narratives in ELT improve students' comprehension, critical thinking, language skills, motivation, engagement, and creativity. They enhance the teaching of literature texts and grammar, facilitate active learning and knowledge retention, and cater to diverse learning styles.

## **Theoretical Foundations of Visual Narratives**

### *Cognitive Processes and Visual Perception*

Cognitive processes, such as attention, perception, and interpretation, contribute to the comprehension and meaning making of visual narratives. An experimental study conducted by Gutiérrez, Puello, & Galvis (50) utilized the picture series technique, the experimental group demonstrated notable improvement in their overall writing skills, especially in areas such as transitional flow, logical sequencing, and idea development, in comparison with control group.

Cohn, Paczynski, Jackendoff, Holcomb, & Kuperberg (3, 4) investigated the cognitive processes that suggested that comprehension of visual narratives involves an interaction between structure and meaning (Cohn, Paczynski, Jackendoff, Holcomb, & Kuperberg 3, 4). Visual narratives, such as images and videos, aid in abstract thinking, multisensory learning, and cognitive development help learners connect visual content with words, fostering linguistic knowledge and thinking skills (Lavinia, 216).

### *Attention and Memory in Processing Visual Narratives*

The Scene Perception & Event Comprehension Theory (SPECT) as a comprehensive framework helps us understand how people comprehend visual narratives, such as picture stories, comics and films. The interplay between front-end and back-end processes, medium-specific differences, and the research questions derived from SPECT helps us gain insight into the coordination of attention, information extraction and event model processes in perceiving and understanding visual narratives (Loschky L. C., Larson, Smith, & Magliano, 313, 314).

### *Narrative Structure and Information Processing*

Kalaja, Dufva, Alanen, & Barkhuizen (3, 4) discuss the usage of visual narratives, specifically drawings or self-portraits, in applied linguistics research gaining deeper insights into the learning and teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and other languages in the context of Finland. The research explores the possibilities and limitations of collecting and analyzing visual data, comparing it with written narratives or autobiographies and highlights the role of narratives in language learning and teaching, emphasizing the construction of identities through storytelling.

### *Story Telling and Mind Mapping*

Storytelling techniques, such as foreshadowing, suspense and symbolism, can be employed in visual narratives to enhance information processing and engagement.

These techniques capture viewers' attention, evoke emotional responses, and convey messages effectively. Digital storytelling can be used as instructional design framework to explain complex concepts using narrative and metaphor. Taylor et al. (553) examines the visual elements of storytelling and metaphors that enhance student engagement.

The narrative structure, including plot, characters, and story arc, influences the processing and assimilation of information in visual narratives. Viewers organize and make sense of the narrative content based on its structural elements. Textbooks often pose difficulties for students due to their level of complexity. Research shows that mind maps make content more accessible and memorable, generating excitement and enthusiasm for learning (Dahbi 416). It is advisable to teachers to use 'Mind Maps' before, during, and after instruction in various learning environments.

### *Cognitive Processing of Story Elements in Visual Narratives*

Visual methods, such as visual diaries, found images, researcher-constructed images, photo elicitation, documentaries, and visual storytelling, can provide valuable insights and depth to understanding stories and storytellers. Lisahunter (93) draws on the work of scholars in visual traditions and their visual work to demonstrate how to utilize visuals in three research spaces: field text creation, interim research texts or analysis, and research texts for dissemination.

### *Visual Narratives and Learning*

Visual narratives, such as images, videos, and graphical representations, enhance language learning and student engagement. Visual narratives can promote critical thinking skills, such as analysis, evaluation, interpretation, make connections and develop their cognitive abilities among learners.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

The research design for this study was structured to investigate the impact of visual narratives in English Language Teaching (ELT) on students' academic performance. The qualitative investigation involved a carefully planned approach to assess the effectiveness of visual narratives in comparison to traditional teaching methods. The research design incorporated teaching methods that utilized visual narratives displayed on a screen, specifically employing a series of 20 slides to convey the story of 'Too Dear' by Leo Tolstoy and introducing the concept of 'Reported Speech' in grammar.

### *Participants*

The participants in this study comprised 30 second-year pre-university college students from the arts section, aged between 17 and 18. The study was conducted at Indian Academy Pre-University College in Bangalore, providing a diverse group of

students for the investigation. In their first year of study, these students were not introduced to visual narrative techniques.

### *Research Instruments*

The study employed a variety of research instruments to collect comprehensive data on students' experiences, attitudes, and preferences related to visual narratives in teaching a story and Reported Speech in grammar. These instruments included questionnaires and a 30-minute test. The use of visual narratives was a consistent element across delivering the lessons, involving a series of 20 slides to convey the story of 'Too Dear' by Leo Tolstoy and introducing the concept of 'Reported Speech' in grammar. Data analysis focused on the positive reception and understanding of students, indicating the effectiveness of visual narratives in enhancing engagement and academic performance.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **30-Minute Test Results**

The 30-minute test aimed to assess the impact of visual narratives on students' understanding and retention of content. The results, as summarized in Table 1 below, provide an overview of students' performance and the components of the questions.

30-min Test Components (20 marks) Students who scored the effective score (all correct) out of 30 students  
 10 challenging one-mark questions 30 students  
 One 6-mark paragraph question 11 students  
 Four 1 mark Reported Speech questions 18 students

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**Table 1: Students score in the 30-min Test**

The test included questions related to 'Too Dear' by Leo Tolstoy and a 'Reported Speech' grammar exercise. The test consisted of 10 challenging one-mark questions derived from "Too Dear" by Leo Tolstoy. All these questions were correctly answered by all the 30 students. A 6-mark question is designed to assess students' writing skills. Notably, three students scored below average, with the lowest score being 12 out of 20. However, 11 students achieved a perfect score of 20 out of 20, showcasing a strong grasp of the lesson content. The remaining 16 students fell within the range of 14 and 20. However, a few students faced challenges in the writing exercise, indicating the need for further training in this aspect.

In the grammar section, which focused on the 'Reported Speech' exercise, 18 students received a full score of 4 out of 4, demonstrating a commendable understanding of the topic. The exercise also highlighted that more practice and accuracy are necessary for complete mastery, as not all students performed equally well. However, the overall performance in the grammar exercise indicates a positive learning trend. The positive reception of visual narratives, as indicated by the 30-minute test scores and questionnaire responses emphasize the benefits of multimedia in education. The engaging nature of visual narratives contributed to enhanced student performance, particularly in understanding complex concepts like 'Reported Speech'. While the majority of students performed well, the challenges faced by a few in the writing exercise highlight the importance of addressing diverse learning needs.

### Questionnaire Results

A questionnaire consisting of 10 questions was administered to gather insights into students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of visual narratives in the experiment. The following is the questionnaire with the findings that revealed overwhelmingly positive feedback.

### QuestionsResults

The questionnaire responses provide qualitative insights into students' perceptions, offering valuable suggestions for future improvements. The positive impact on critical thinking, creativity, and motivation supports the integration of visual narratives as a dynamic tool in English Language Teaching (ELT). The holistic

	Questions	Results
1	On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your overall improvement in learning through the use of visual narratives compared to the previous year?	The majority of students (25 out of 30) rated their overall improvement in learning through visual narratives between 8 and 10, indicating a significant positive impact compared to the previous year.
2	Did you find the visual narratives engaging? Please share your thoughts on how they affected your interest and enthusiasm for the subjects.	28 out of 30 students found the visual narratives highly engaging. Many students expressed that the visual narratives significantly increased their interest and enthusiasm for the subjects, making the learning experience more enjoyable.
3	In the 30-minute test, how confident were you in answering questions related to 'Too Dear' by Leo Tolstoy and the 'Reported Speech' grammar exercise?	The majority of students (27 out of 30) reported feeling confident in answering questions related to both 'Too Dear' and the 'Reported Speech' grammar exercise, indicating a positive impact on their confidence levels.
4	What score did you achieve in the 30-minute test? How did you feel about your performance?	The students' scores in the 30-minute test varied, with 11 students achieving a perfect score of 20 out of 20, and the remaining 19 students scoring between 14

		and 20. Overall, students expressed positive feelings about their performance.
5	How did the visual narratives contribute to your understanding of the content, especially in the 'Reported Speech' grammar exercise?	28 out of 30 students reported that visual narratives significantly contributed to their understanding of the content, particularly in the 'Reported Speech' grammar exercise, making complex concepts more accessible.
6	Were there any challenges or difficulties you encountered during visual narrative classes? If yes, please describe them.	No student reported any kind of challenge faced during visual narrative classes, indicating the students are comfortable with the new aspect of learning in the classroom.
7	How did the visual narratives influence your ability to comprehend and remember the content compared to traditional teaching methods?	29 out of 30 students reported that visual narratives positively influenced their ability to comprehend quickly and remember the content compared to traditional teaching methods, emphasizing the effectiveness of visual narratives.
8	Do you think the visual narratives positively impacted your critical thinking abilities and creativity? Please explain.	26 students believed that visual narratives positively impacted their critical thinking abilities and creativity.
9	Did you feel more engaged and motivated to learn when visual narratives were incorporated into the lessons? Why or why not?	28 students felt more engaged and motivated to learn when visual narratives were incorporated into the lessons.
10	How would you suggest improving the use of visual narratives in future lessons, and do you have any additional comments or feedback on the experiment?	Various suggestions were provided by students, including the incorporation of more interactive elements, diverse visual narrative styles, and additional training for specific challenges encountered. Additional comments and feedback were generally positive, emphasizing the overall success of the experiment.

evaluation, combining quantitative and qualitative data, positions visual narratives as a promising pedagogical approach. Future research could delve into refining teaching strategies and exploring varied narrative styles to continually enhance the effectiveness of visual narratives in ELT.

## Overcoming Challenges and Limitations

### *Technological Considerations*

Challenges such as limited technical support and teachers' struggles with effective integration may hinder the use of visual narratives. To overcome these challenges, teachers are encouraged to develop tailored lesson plans and undergo training, ensuring a seamless incorporation of digital tools into the learning environment.



### *Addressing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity*

Effective visual narrative implementation necessitates addressing cultural and linguistic diversity. Educators should select culturally relevant visual narratives, provide translations or subtitles when necessary, and foster inclusive classroom environments. Osipova & Lao's (12) exploration of culturally and linguistically responsive literacy instruction aligns with the need to prepare teachers for diverse exceptional learners, emphasizing the importance of teacher education programs.

### **Conclusion**

Integration of visual narratives into English Language Teaching (ELT) has demonstrated substantial benefits, positively impacting student learning outcomes, critical thinking abilities, language proficiency, and motivation. While this study sheds light on the advantages observed, there remains ample room for future research to explore diverse narrative styles, genres, and the long-term effects of incorporating visual narratives into ELT. As educators move forward, it is crucial to recognize the potential of visual narratives and actively integrate them into instructional practices. This involves thoughtful selection of materials, the design of engaging activities, and a commitment to accommodating diverse learning styles. The literature survey and theoretical foundations provided in this study offer valuable insights into the world of visual narratives, laying a foundation for future exploration and understanding. Moreover, the teacher's efforts in implementing visual narratives within lesson plans yielded promising results, underscoring the potential for their continued utilization. To reap the benefits, ongoing professional development and collaborative efforts among educators are imperative. By fostering a collective commitment to embracing visual narratives, educators can create dynamic and enriching learning environments that not only advance language proficiency but also inspire and motivate students throughout their English language learning journey.

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# Existential Intelligence in Postgraduate ESP Classroom for Business Studies: A Pedagogical Analysis

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## *Abstract*

This research explores the rationale behind selecting texts and designing Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) activities centered on Existential Intelligence within the Inspirational literature genre. The study elucidates researchers' techniques and strategies to integrate pedagogical approaches infused with business elements and a sense of purpose—integral to existential intelligence—while focusing on developing speaking skills using select Literature. The chosen texts are grounded in their capacity to provoke profound contemplation on life's meaning and authenticity and align seamlessly with the foundational principles of existential intelligence. TBLT activities are crafted to promote select speaking variables by encouraging learners to engage in critical discussions and apply philosophical concepts to real-world business scenarios. This research contributes to the pedagogical landscape by highlighting TBLT, enriched with existential intelligence principles, harnessed to enhance learners' speaking abilities. Educators can employ these insights to empower students for both linguistic proficiency and a deeper understanding of the human experience in the business context.

**Keywords:** Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Existential Intelligence, ESP Literature Selection Rationale, Effective Pedagogical Approaches for Business Students, Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), Verbal Communication, Conversational skills

## **Introduction**

ESP education is a crucial element within various academic domains and is essential in English language instruction for students of different fields. Nevertheless, the process of teaching English to students from diverse backgrounds presents a multitude of challenges, impacting both educators and learners. Therefore, it becomes vital to explore how these challenges can be effectively addressed through pedagogical approaches that align with the specific needs of students in their respective fields. Numerous research studies emphasize the necessity of introducing models and strategies to enhance English language comprehension. In the work by Bhatia et al., emphasis is placed on the paramount role of need analysis, instructional methodologies, and material development when designing ESP courses (Bhatia et al. 144). The present study aims to create a learning tool that encompasses essential aspects of language acquisition, addressing the current gap in creating teaching materials that resonate with the preferences of MBA students, particularly in the realm of Inspirational Literature, which can specifically focus on enhancing their conversational speaking skills.

## **Review of Literature**

Belcher's article presents a valuable perspective on integrating authentic materials

and practical tasks in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. The emphasis on authenticity in materials and tasks resonates with contemporary pedagogical principles prioritizing real-world relevance in language learning (Belcher 14). As ESP continues to adapt to the changing needs of learners across diverse sectors, this discussion serves as a pertinent guide for educators and researchers seeking to stay current and innovative in their ESP practices. Clement and Murugavel's research on language training for engineering students in India presents a compelling case for the importance of custom-made language education to enhance graduates' employability. Their systematic approach, employing a Training Need Analysis, is a valuable model for similar studies in diverse academic fields. Moreover, their study highlights the critical role of English proficiency in bridging the gap between educational qualifications and industry demands, a topic of universal relevance (Clement & Murugavel 122). This resonates with the objectives of the present study, which focuses on developing a learning tool to improve language skills for Business graduates. By acknowledging the specific language needs of students within the business realm, both studies contribute to the broader conversation on enhancing graduates' readiness for the workforce. Their findings offer insights applicable to engineering and other academic domains, emphasizing the significance of preparing students with the requisite language skills for their chosen fields.

Khatib et al. promote the inclusion of literature in EFL/ESL classrooms, emphasizing its numerous advantages while recognizing the complexities associated with its effective implementation. The authors delve into the reasons behind the decline and resurgence of literature in language instruction, shedding light on significant factors such as cultural relevance and student engagement. One of the methods, specifically the fifth model referred to as the Reader Response Model (RRM), places its central emphasis on incorporating elements of Existentialism into task design and execution (Khatib et al. 205). This approach aligns seamlessly with the objectives of the current study. Živkovic showcases the importance for critical thinking in ESP classrooms, which entails sharing and exchanging ideas, analyzing, justifying, and defending concepts, making informed decisions, and resolving real-world challenges. To enhance students' proficiency in critical thinking, educators can craft purposeful instructional pedagogies with learning activities designed to nurture these cognitive abilities. Students must receive explicit instruction on critical thinking skills, with teachers frequently modeling such skills (Živkovic 106). Consequently, selecting appropriate content for teaching and training purposes becomes pivotal.

Motivation has always held a significant role in shaping student behavior, with motivated students often demonstrating superior academic performance. However, despite the growing acknowledgment of the economic significance of entrepreneurs, research investigating the motivating factors behind their endeavors remains insufficient and inconclusive (Seemiller 95). A compelling need exists to comprehend the motivating elements influencing business students, necessitating further scholarly inquiry in this domain. Notably, inspiration's role in the entrepreneurial process often remains underrepresented within the literature on entrepreneurship (Wartiovaara 4).

Examining motivational/Inspirational literature, Kim & Lanzl have established that reading motivational books can significantly shape students' attitudes toward academic achievement, personal growth, and social responsibility. These books provide a valuable sense of guidance and inspiration, resulting in fresh perspectives on life and fostering the development of an internal locus of control (Kim & Lanzl 4). Moreover, incorporating literary works, including short stories, into educational contexts has been recognized as a strategy to enhance learning capabilities (Vural 21). Contemporary concern within the business community increasingly revolves around ethics and moral conduct, as highlighted by (Jalil et al. 8). This concern extends to students, particularly those in business education, who may find value in incorporating inspirational literature into their curriculum to explore the intricate relationship between ethics and existentialism. Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy posits that every individual possesses an inherent essence that precedes their existence and defines their identity. (Agarwal & Malloy 152) modified existing decision-making models, incorporating existentialism, including Sartre's ideas, as a fundamental ethical factor, as also recognized by West in 2008. Existentialism aids students in recognizing the significance of their choices, empowering them to assert control over their career paths.

These activities have improved University students' academic engagement by instilling a sense of direction and purpose in their lives. The study's emphasis on rigorous reflective exercises and their positive impact on mindset, purpose, and study engagement suggests that interventions involving inspirational literature or other motivational tools may effectively assist academically unmotivated students in developing a sense of purpose (Hudig 13). This highlights the need to cultivate a sense of purpose for academic advancement and student motivation and a sense of purpose, which is the sole purpose of the study.

### **Contextualizing the Choice of Literary Works**

Existential literature frequently delves into intricate philosophical themes such as the essence of life and one's purpose. Encouraging business students to explore this genre can lead to examining their assumptions, a deeper analysis of their beliefs, and considering the broader implications of their decisions and actions within the corporate sphere. This exposure nurtures critical thinking, a skillset that is often overshadowed by the technical expertise emphasized in specialized business training. The study of existential literature introduces students to the complexity of human existence, a spectrum of philosophical concepts, and various cultural contexts, expanding their worldviews. This broader perspective equips business students to become more well-rounded professionals who appreciate the intricacies of the human experience and the diverse demands of global participants, thus contributing to developing managerial attributes.

### **Strategies for the use of this Technique**

- Trainers must grasp the study's rationale and objectives to align lesson plans

and expectations.

- Assign unique serial numbers to each student for identification purposes.
- Record video sessions with minimal background noise and use platforms like Google Classroom or Moodle for data organization.
- Give equal importance to classwork and homework, adhering to specified timeframes.
- Utilize appropriate scaling mechanisms during the assessment process.
- Educators should maintain Teacher Reflective Journals to record session challenges and observations.
- Provide constructive feedback after each task to enhance the learning process.
- Perform data analysis using statistical inference techniques, encompassing various methods like achievement test questionnaires, group discussions, task analysis, and interviews.
- Choose literature that aligns with Existential intelligence, focusing on critical thinking, sense of purpose, relevance to business, and adherence to existential principles.
- Design tasks that reflect real-world scenarios, making learning meaningful and applicable.
- Ensure tasks are engaging, motivating, and promote active participation.
- Consider the availability of resources, materials, and technology when designing tasks.
- Choose task topics from selected texts and ensure students can access the necessary tools and information for effective completion.

The table below shows literary excerpts, explaining their selection for the intervention:

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Select Literature</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Pedagogical Approach</b>
1	Plato's Cave Allegory	"Allegory of the Cave" is a powerful existential narrative that encourages contemplation of the human condition. The cave represents the world as	-Visual representations serve as a focal point for discussion. Different interpretations can be drawn from specific visual elements, encouraging critical thinking

		<p>perceived through the senses. Prisoners chained inside the cave can only see shadows cast on the wall by objects outside the cave. This symbolizes the limited and distorted perception that people may have about reality based solely on sensory experiences.</p> <p>It invites readers to question their own perspectives, beliefs, and the limitations of their understanding, by emphasizing the journey of self-discovery, reality &amp; illusion, and liberation &amp; freedom.</p>	<p>and analysis among learners. It can be adapted to modern contexts, using contemporary imagery or scenarios that resonate with today's audience. This adaptation makes the allegory more relevant and relatable.</p>
2	The Worm by Nissim Ezekiel	<p>"The Worm" by Nissim Ezekiel is a satirical poem that humorously explores the existential and philosophical ponderings of a worm, highlighting the absurdity of human concerns from the perspective of a seemingly insignificant creature. It encompasses existential themes that reflect on the ephemeral nature of life, the quest for meaning, and the interconnectedness of all living beings. It encourages contemplation of the human experience and our place in the vast universe, evoking a sense of introspection and existential wonder.</p>	<p>-Reading and Analysis to encourage them to identify existential elements in the poem, such as themes of transience, human insignificance, and the quest for meaning. Guided discussions on how these themes relate to the human condition and business interactions.</p> <p>-Socratic questioning techniques and collaborative discussions to stimulate critical thinking about its existential implications in business settings.</p>
3	Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) - The Gettysburg Address of 19 November 1863	<p>The concise speech is affirming the principles of equality and democracy, emphasizing national unity, and honouring the sacrifice</p>	<p>-Video clips of Lincoln's speeches, including the Gettysburg Address to visually demonstrate his speech.</p>

		of those who fought in the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address encapsulates existential elements that prompt contemplation on human equality and dignity, human mortality and transience, individual sacrifice and purpose, existential struggle, and resilience. It reflects on the existential idea of human responsibility for the course of history and the need for collective decisions to uphold the values of the nation.	<p>-Encourage students to observe and analyze these cues, discussing their impact on emotional resonance and audience connection.</p> <p>-Facilitate group discussions, integrate reflective activities, and introduce various case studies of business leaders.</p>
4	Essay: The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus	<p>It explores the philosophical concept of absurdity, suggesting that the search for meaning in an inherently meaningless world is the central human struggle.</p> <p>This existential anguish arises from the tension between the human need for meaning and the inherent meaninglessness of the universe. Camus rejects seeking definitive, dogmatic answers to life's existential questions. Instead, he advocates for embracing the uncertainty and the ambiguity of existence.</p>	<p>-Conduct a pre-reading activity to activate students' prior knowledge and foster interest in the topic. Discuss existential questions related to the human experience and the quest for meaning, encouraging students to reflect on their own perspectives; Read and analyse the essay through existential lens; Incorporate reflective writing assignments to consider how verbal communication can complement their written reflections.</p>
5	Endless Time by Rabindranath Tagore	<p>Tagore blurs the boundaries between time and space, suggesting a unity between the past, present, and future, as well as the interconnectedness of all moments. The poem contemplates the nature of</p>	<p>-Identify key vocabulary words and phrases from the poem that may be relevant to business communication. Discuss their meanings and usage in both poetic and business contexts. Role-plays on existential dilemmas,</p>



		individual identity in the context of an ever-changing world. It raises questions about the continuity of the self amid the flow of time and is a poetic reflection on the cyclical nature of time, expressing the eternal interconnectedness of life and the universe.	aiming for reflective discussions on the human experience, followed by a panel discussion to encourage participants to share their interpretations of existential concepts used in the poem. -Discuss the cultural context of Tagore's poem and how it may impact business interactions in different cultures. Encourage students to develop cross-cultural communication skills.
6	Short Story: A Gentle Creature (A Meek One) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky	The story delves into the isolation and despair of a humble woman as she grapples with the harsh realities of life and the indifference of society. The protagonist's emotional turmoil and despair serve as manifestations of existential anguish. Dostoyevsky's exploration of the protagonist's inner world and her interactions with society offers a compelling examination of existential themes that continue to resonate with readers to this day.	-Introduce the story's historical and literary context to provide learners with background information about Fyodor Dostoyevsky and the time in which the story was written. -Organize group discussions and debates around the existential themes present in the story, relating them to the learners' professional lives. This will help them make connections between literature and their field of expertise.

### A Task-based Teaching Approach with Existential Intelligence Features

S. No.	Task Name	Task Description
1	Only 60 Seconds	Create groups of 5-6 students where one records, another speaks, and the rest listen, rotating roles. Each group tackles recording tasks similarly in solo activities. The teacher picks existential topics; each student speaks for a minute. While one speaks, others contemplate the shared existential perspectives.

2	Discussion Forum	Select existential debate topics, and assign teams to represent various perspectives. This preliminary intervention initiative is designed to assess speech impediments, and comprehend the issues encountered by students within a conversational setting.
3	Simulation	Set the scene for a business context entwined with existential themes, initiating a simulation. Students immerse themselves in exploring these themes through character interactions. Post activity, facilitate a debrief to unpack emotions, ethics, and insights, encouraging reflection from both character and personal standpoints.
4	Philosophical Cap	Present a 2-minute philosophical monologue on an existential business quote. Students have 10 minutes for preparation to creatively articulate and share their unique interpretation within the allotted 2-minute speaking time.
5	Narrative Construction	Students will be given a one-liner to form a story upholding existential values and their essence. Each student is expected to think creatively and use the necessary dimensions from the Dialogic Inquiry model like Imagination and Reflection and create a story. Students will be allotted a period of 10 mins, wherein, each student will be evaluated based on conversational variables.
6	Discussion Forum (Post Test)	Both sides initiate by stating their stance, outlining key discussion points. They present arguments backed by evidence and logic, followed by rebuttals. Closing statements summarize positions and key arguments. This conclusive task aims to spotlight the experiment's outcomes.

### **Observations and Challenges during the Actual Implementation**

The following intervention took place in two Pune colleges in Maharashtra, India. Specifically, it involved a carefully selected group of 35 Postgraduate Business Studies students in each college, totaling 70 students. The two experimental groups have allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact. By comparing the results between the two groups, the researcher was able to assess the effectiveness of the intervention in different settings and conditions. This method helped in identifying variations or nuances in outcomes that were attributed to specific factors unique to each group. The sample population was from a diverse representation of students from various backgrounds, language proficiency levels, and learning styles. This diversity enhanced the applicability of the findings to a broader range of ELT contexts. The study has employed purposive sampling

technique.

Presented below are the qualitative challenges and observations encountered by the researcher:

### **1. Pre-test of Only 60 Seconds Activity (Solo):**

Observations: Nearly all students displayed enthusiasm and energy to participate, yet there were pauses, content repetition, and disorganization in their speech. Additionally, some students appeared camera-shy (recording the task for future reference and assessment purposes), resulting in a lack of confidence.

Challenges: Students had limited preparation time, and file size issues hindered file uploads. While most students showed interest in the topics, a few seemed disinterested or unengaged.

### **2. Pre-test Discussion Forum (Group):**

Observations: Students faced difficulties in taking turns, analyzing topics, and listening to others, which led to inappropriate arguments, emotional outbursts, and interruptions within the group.

Challenges: Difficulties arose during the evaluation with unclear scale parameters. Despite trainer's encouragement for English, students used Marathi/Hindi. Infrastructure problems caused delays, and more than 5 participants came in at the last minute which led to changes to attendance and questionnaires.

### **3. Philosophical Cap:**

Observations: Some students engaged deeply with the topics, contemplating, and connecting concepts with various examples. However, a significant portion (around 70-80%) struggled with frequent pauses and fumbling during recording.

Challenges: Students were conscious of the camera and punctuality policies, leading to delays. Extended breaks disrupted the lesson plan, requiring extra time and effort for assessment.

### **4. Simulation:**

Observations: Some groups lacked clarity and creativity, extending their duration unduly. Several participants introduced misleading plot elements, leading to unsuitable story conclusions. Upon introducing the DIM model, students improved after understanding its principles and examples.

Challenges: Misplaced serial numbers causing delays, continued use of non-English languages despite reminders, disruptions from humorous comments, and post-lunch restlessness impacting the activity.

### **5. Narrative Construction:**

Observations: Students demonstrated enthusiasm and confidence when tackling relatable business topics, logical dilemmas, and societal issues.

Challenges: Not all students had equal speaking opportunities. Visibility issues with serial numbers due to poor positioning made recording difficult. Managing the class during role plays posed some challenges.

### **6. Discussion Forum (Post Test):**

Observations: Improved fluency in speech and adherence to time limits were noted. Students gave opportunities to quieter peers, displayed respect, improved listening skills, and exhibited patience toward opponents. Speech fluency also improved.

Challenges: The test had to be repeated over 2-3 consecutive days due to low- class attendance.

### **Benefits of this Intervention:**

- Improved Self-Awareness and Critical Thinking:
- Encouraging students to reflect on their values, beliefs, and purpose in a business context.
- Outcome: ESP students develop self-awareness, enabling them to critically evaluate business decisions through their value-based perspectives.
- Enhanced Verbal Communication Skills:
- Providing opportunities for students to apply persuasive communication in practical business scenarios.
- Outcome: Students were able to articulate better in conversational settings.
- Cultivation of a Global Perspective:
- Exploring existentialism in a global context, considering cultural diversity and global challenges.
- Outcome: ESP students acquire a global outlook, an asset in today's interconnected business environment.

### **Limitations**

The intervention exclusively involved the experimental group without including the controlled group in the study. The experimental group exhibited a positive response to the intervention. Consequently, its broader applicability has not been adequately demonstrated.

The author's intent and the intended user may not necessarily align. To bridge this gap, the creation of a teacher's manual is imperative. Such a manual would simplify the intervention, rendering it more meaningful and accessible for educators.

Implementing this pedagogical approach with a small group of students may be feasible due to its time-intensive nature and the need for classroom discipline

monitoring. However, to comprehensively assess its validity and suitability for a larger sample, this intervention must be conducted on a larger scale. Additionally, technological and infrastructural factors play a crucial role in this context.

Given that this approach revolves around literature, not everyone may readily relate to or embrace it with the same enthusiasm. It falls upon the teachers to adapt and make it practical and student-oriented, considering the specific field-centric aspects of their learners.

## Conclusion

The research study explored the integration of existential intelligence principles into Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) activities centered around Inspirational literature. It revealed that carefully selected texts, grounded in their capacity to provoke deep contemplation on life's meaning and authenticity, served as a powerful foundation for enhancing speaking skills among learners. The study's findings highlighted the significance of infusing pedagogical approaches with business elements and a sense of purpose, both vital components of existential intelligence.

By crafting TBLT activities that encouraged critical discussions and the application of philosophical concepts to real-world business scenarios, the research demonstrated a practical approach to fostering speaking proficiency. Importantly, this approach transcended linguistic development and aimed to instill a deeper understanding of the human experience in the context of business.

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## Understanding Postcolonialism: A Brief Introduction to Key Debates within Postcolonial Studies

Ann Treessa Benny\*

### *Abstract*

Postcolonialism as a discourse has received much attention in academia. Postcolonial studies primarily included historical explorations, but later, it began to unravel the politics of knowledge dissemination and critique the self/other binary. Although postcolonial studies act as a framework of analysis for a broad range of cultural forms, many debates exist within the field. This paper titled “Understanding Postcolonialism: A Brief Introduction to Key Debates within Postcolonial Studies” attempts to offer an introduction to postcolonial studies through an exploration of the critical debates that exist within the field regarding its definition, theoretical framework and use of language and throws light on the necessity of reconsidering the practice of postcolonialism. The paper also points out how little change has occurred within the field, although several researchers have pinpointed the same. Thus, as postcolonial studies are setting paradigm shifts in cultural and socio-political contexts, looking into some grey areas within the field can open up new horizons of critical understanding.

**Keywords:** colonial, postcolonial, definition, theoretical framework, inclusion, language

Postcolonial studies mainly include the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature and other discourses associated with colonisation, decolonisation and neocolonialism. It examines global power relations and their ideologies and reveals the concerns about cultural identity, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, subjectivity, and language. Shao-Po Hsieh, a Chinese-Canadian researcher, in his article “Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism” (1947), defines postcolonialism as a “counter-discourse of the formerly colonised Others against the cultural hegemony of the modern West with all its imperial structures of feeling and knowledge” (9).

Primarily, the term postcolonial was used by historians to represent the period after colonialism, and it began to gain momentum in the 1970s. Some date its rise to the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, in which he critiques the Western constructions of the Orient. Later, postcolonial studies evolved and began to examine the consequences of colonisation. In the last two decades, postcolonial studies have emerged as one of the fast-growing and most influential fields in international academia because postcolonial theory acts as a framework of analysis for a wide range of cultural forms and political and historical underpinnings. As written by Paul Brians, postcolonial studies today “analyze unjust power relationships as manifested in cultural products like literature (and film, art, etc.)” Postcolonial studies also focus on the rejection and replacement of the metanarratives of the West, which not only subordinated and marginalised the colonial “other” but also denied them cultural agency. It acts as a platform that showcases the counternarratives produced by the oppressed. Most postcolonial scholars like McLeod, as quoted by Mambrool, acknowledge that the “material realities and modes of representation common to

colonialism are still very much with us today, even if the political map of the world has changed through decolonisation.” However, though explicitly well-established, postcolonial studies have been problematic, debated and contested since its beginning. Problems and debates regarding its definition, inclusion and exclusion policies, language implications and theoretical framework persist within the field.

The primary problem with the definition of postcolonialism comes from using the prefix 'post'. Since 'post' means 'after,' postcolonial studies is often defined as dealing with the period after colonisation. It leaves people with a false assumption that either colonialism has ended or is an issue of the past. Nevertheless, there is no clear demarcation for the end of colonisation. This phenomenon is well explained by Quintero, an academician from Japan, when he states in his essay “Residual Colonialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (2012) that “The wave of decolonisation that swept around the world in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was once heralded as one of the great liberating movements in history. Yet, few seem to realise that colonialism is still with us”. Colonisation has just transformed into what Abdul Jan Mohamed called a “hegemonic phase of colonialism” (61), where people get colonised mentally. The imperial superpowers still reign over most countries, and this process is called neocolonialism. Some even argue that most former colonies are far from free of colonial influence or domination and cannot be postcolonial in any genuine sense. Scholars often put forth the counter-argument that postcolonialism does not refer to the situation occurring in a newly independent country that has already gained its freedom from the coloniser, but it refers to the time it started conceiving and constructing its various sets of discursive practices to resist colonisation- its ways, its ideologies and legacies. However, this definition assumes that the anti-colonial struggles, both physical and ideological, the process of decolonisation and the postcolonial experience are the same around the globe. However, the people from underdeveloped countries or minorities within developed and developing countries had suffered and continue to suffer multiple and diverse kinds of oppression than other colonial subjects. Here, the definition becomes either negligent or indifferent to the issues and struggles of underdeveloped countries and the minorities within developed and developing countries.

Another problem in terms of the definition of postcolonialism surfaces because of reading it along with nationalism and postmodernism. The semantic basis of the word 'postcolonial' might seem to suggest an issue only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power. Also, postcolonialism uses certain features of nationalism, such as resistance, counternarratives, freedom struggles, etc. However, postcolonialism does not aim at generating nationalistic feelings or patriotism; as Ania Loomba asserts, “anti-colonial nationalism is itself made possible and shaped by European political and intellectual history” (158). Though both postcolonialism and nationalism are intertwined in some countries, reading them as equals not only limits postcolonialism but also makes it more political. Similarly, reading postcolonialism as the progeny of postmodernism gives postcolonialism a Eurocentric outlook, which, as stated by Hsieh, “is to cancel the difference between



postcolonialism and postmodernism, to universalise the problematics of postmodernism, and ultimately to ignore the uneven development of history” (10).

Defining postcolonial studies becomes further intricate when one begins to list what is included under the umbrella term postcolonialism. Postcolonial studies have enthusiastically imbibed concepts from various streams of knowledge such as history, literature, geography, political science, etc., creating paradigm shifts within them. Though postcolonial studies exhibit an all-welcoming attitude, there have been gaps within it. First, postcolonial studies have not yet been successful in defining what it means to be a postcolonial nation. Firstly, as suggested by Brains, “most of the nations involved are still culturally and economically subordinated to the rich industrial states through various forms of neo-colonialism even though they are technically independent”. Also, the question concerned with the inclusion of settler countries and the difference between the experiences of the natives within these settler countries remains unresolved. Some settler countries, such as the US and Australia, have become neo-imperial forces and have been further imposing their power over other nations. Secondly, postcolonial studies at times also stay away from analysing the colonial causes of present-day thought and experiences, “especially those regarding territorial boundaries, the treatment of indigenous populations, the privileging of some groups over others, the uneven distribution of wealth, local governmental infrastructures, and the formation of non-democratic or non-participatory governmental systems.” (Marker). For example, the divide and rule strategy, tactics used by the British to maintain their supremacy, is the main reason behind divides among races, religions, and communities in former colonies. Though racial issues are analysed as a product of colonialism, little enquiry is made regarding the colonial implications behind conflicts in the name of religion and community. Even binary oppositions gained prominence in a very diverse country like India as a consequence of colonial interaction.

Thirdly, a glance at the postcolonial canon depicts that it focuses on the colonial period and only provides meagre attention to precolonial history. The uncontaminated and indigenous past of the natives remains the least explored in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial studies often circumscribe narratives and critiques of colonialism. Ironically, numerous postcolonial texts were written by Westerners, and books such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) were written when Nigeria was still a colony (Brains). Also, postcolonial writers like Ngugi wa Thiongo and Gabriel Okara have stated the prominence of oral narratives in understanding the experiences of the colonised. J. A. Adedeji, a Nigerian scholar, describes oral tradition as the “complex corpus of verbal or spoken art created as a means of recalling the past” (7). Still, postcolonial studies have given little attention to the oral narratives used by the colonised to express both their grief and resistance. Also, postcolonial studies rarely included the process of colonisation and oppression before European colonisation and sparsely focussed or tried to compare the process and experience of colonisation before and after the Europeans. Critics like Brains state that “this way of defining a whole era is Eurocentric, that it singles out the colonial experience as the most

important fact about the countries involved.... say–India, have a long history of precolonial literature.”

Apart from the basic definitions, the theoretical frameworks within postcolonial studies are complicated as well. The postcolonial discourse is still oriented on the ideas provided by Western theoreticians such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Antonio Gramsci, etc. The discussion and analysis of the postcolonial experience are still founded on Eurocentric knowledge. The colonial experience and struggle are examined through a lens provided by the coloniser. Postcolonial critics such as Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Linda Hutcheon thus criticise the notion that postcolonialism is “uncontaminated” or “indigenous” (Hsieh 1). Is what they think the colonised have experienced and what they underwent the same? For instance, the Western and Eastern notions of mind and body have always been conflicting. However, most postcolonial scholars still refer to Foucault when they talk about power and madness. Even in India, a country known for its Vedic knowledge, scholars prefer to speak about Freud's or Lacan's ideas when they refer to psychoanalysis. Most scholars are ignorant of the fact that the Upanishads describe a four level division of the mind, that is, Jagrath (waking state), Swapna (dreaming state), Sushupthi (deep sleep) and Turiya (pure consciousness). The negligence of one's glorious past makes the natives more dependent on the West. Hence, the purpose of postcolonialism, as well as postcolonial studies, gets further delayed. Also, even though changes are happening within the discourse, practising postcolonialism has not bloomed. Studies have been centred on theorising and diversifying the field rather than including postcolonial principles into practice.

Another prominent issue debated within postcolonialism is connected with the language used for writing back. Language has always been a powerful tool. The Europeans cleverly imposed their language upon the natives to ease their transactions. Today it has grown into a global language due to the colonial project. The most ironic feature of postcolonial studies is that it primarily uses the coloniser's language, English, to describe and analyse the atrocities done by the colonisers. This raises the question of whether opposing someone by being entirely dependent on the language imposed by the colonisers is fruitful. The history of postcolonial studies has witnessed several debates on the use of the English language, beginning with Ngugi. Having witnessed the brutal side of colonialism and the loss of cultural and hereditary values, Ngugi was the critical proponent who wanted to ban English education. He wrote elaborately on how the intervention of the English education system affected individual minds. Language, according to him, makes the natives willingly accept colonisation. Though he made genuine efforts to express his protest in Gikuyu, at last, he too had to translate his works into English to gain recognition. Similarly, many writers are still being sidelined or not recognised as the medium they use to write is not English. This is similar to the phenomenon where you will only be valued, as Macaulay stated if you are “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste”.

When the argument regarding the use of English in postcolonialism is raised, many argue that English is not solely the coloniser's language; there are Englishes now.

Burgess, in his “Introduction” (1948) to the work *All About H. Hatter*, wrote about Indian English; it is “A whole language, complete with the colloquialisms of Calcutta and London, Shakespearian archaisms, bazaar winnings, references to the Hindu pantheon, the jargon of Indian litigation and shrill babu irritability all together” (1). Even if this is the case, how far will the process of writing back be complete? As Spivak asks in her work, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), will this provide a voice to the oppressed people? In her poem, Sujatha Bhatt, an Indian poet, asks, “Which language has not been the oppressor’s tongue?” (19). Spivak, as a further discussion on her work, stressed this aspect of language and emphasised the need to create a new form of communication and knowledge dissemination to provide a voice for the oppressed. Many scholars elaborate on employing English as a means to overcome the oppressive side of one’s language. For instance, Dalitising English is proposed as a strategy to overcome the oppressive structure within the native language. But, this language, too, will get tamed according to the power plays, and its effectiveness in overcoming oppression is questionable. Due to the English education prevailing in many countries, most students are familiar with the works of Shakespeare. Still, they often fail to list the books written by contemporary native writers. English influences them more and often contaminates their native tongue and culture rather than being a tool to resist.

Other than the problems mentioned above, the term postcolonial is not evenly used by its practitioners. Some key opponents of colonialism often do not recognise themselves as proponents of postcolonialism. It also lacks acceptance among the colonised as it had little impact on their living. How much ever the postcolonial critics throw light upon the colonial ideologies, which worked out in the past and continue even today, the postcolonial subjects never imbibe them. These colonial ideologies either move deep into the subject’s mind or influence the subject differently. The hegemonic phase of colonialism lets people be ruled ideologically with their unconscious consent. As a consequence, decolonisation, which is a significant project of postcolonialism, is never complete. It only gets postponed whenever an attempt is made to be decolonised. Postcolonial writers often begin their writing careers by bringing out the colonial implications within history and culture, but, at some point, some of them also start favouring global powers. Hence, the ideas propagated by them, too, get unconsciously manipulated. Things get rather complicated when postcolonialism, in practice, tries to solve the issues of the past caused by colonialism and define the growing neo-colonial situation.

It is high time that the practitioners of postcolonialism think about the issues within it. It is not wise to keep pondering upon the past to solve today’s problems. A continuous effort must be initiated to make people aware of the latest versions of colonisation like the “Coca-colonization”. Many theorists and postcolonial practitioners have been strenuously attempting to address the issue of defining postcolonialism. Nevertheless, the time spent resolving the definitions of postcolonialism has only resulted in the stagnation of the practice. Though the gaps within the definition must be filled, taking care of developing the field of study into more demanding areas is an

absolute necessity. Also, moving away from the Eurocentric dissemination of knowledge, searching the precolonial archives for indigenous knowledge and developing a competitive theoretical framework from the point of view of the oppressed can open up new horizons of knowledge. Rather than taking up a global method of theorising, developing theories based on the needs and experiences of the natives would also be productive.

Thus, although postcolonial studies as a critical discourse posits paradigm shifts in our understanding of the world even after four decades of its origin, various open-ended debates persist within the field. As one begins to study the area in-depth, questions related to the definition, strategies, theory and use of language pop up. Transforming postcolonial studies into a counter-hegemonic tool and concentrating more on precolonial indigenous history and literature can help revive postcolonialism. The practice of postcolonialism and postcolonial studies must continue questioning all forms of hegemonic power play and dismantle it from its roots. So, let the change begin by eliminating the problems within postcolonialism, letting postcolonialism serve its true cause.

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## The Conundrum of Computing Creativity: Can AI Replace the Author?

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### *Abstract*

Artificial Intelligence (AI), a major milestone in computer technology, is understood as the ability of machines to do the things we think of as being done by humans, like seeing, thinking, understanding, interacting with things, figuring out how to solve problems, and even being creative. It is used in diverse fields such as Healthcare, Education, Business, Finance and Agriculture. In combination with certain techniques like machine learning, that instructs computers to process information in a manner analogous to that of the human brain, Artificial Intelligence has turned out to be one of the most important technological developments of the contemporary times. Since Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a technology that enables the processing of large amounts of data through rapid, repetitive data analysis and intelligent algorithms, it is generally thought that literature, which is about handling of language and idioms together with emotions, feelings and experiences is the only area which is beyond the grasp AI. However, recent developments in computer technology suggest that AI is also capable of producing works of art. This study aims to assess whether AI which is, in a sense the culmination of scientific and rational thought has the potential to replace the author. It also seeks to examine the intricate relationship between literature and Artificial Intelligence in an age where the machine seems to be holding a position of immense importance.

**Keywords:** AI, Creativity, Authorship, Singularity, Computation

The phenomenon of Artificial Intelligence was almost unknown when New Criticism emerged as a response to the conventional extraneous approaches to literary criticism, which saw a text as morally or philosophically oriented, or the result of socio-economic, political, historic, or biographical facts and occurrences. It argued that a text is to be judged independently of its context or it may lead to the affective fallacy, the error of “trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem” which minimises the importance of the text “as an object of specifically critical judgment” (Wimsatt and Bredsley 31), or the intentional fallacy which is the assumption that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (Wimsatt and Bredsley 468), and may impede the proper interpretation of the work. New Criticism treats a text as a separate entity that can be read using the tools and methods of close reading asserting that every text has its own unique character and structure. It also asserts that what is said in a text and how it is said are inextricably linked. It seeks to demonstrate how a reader can assimilate the dissonant and seemingly contradictory elements of a work and allow them to coalesce into a unified, thematic unity. In other words, the goal is to unite the text, or rather to acknowledge the inherent but hidden unity of the text. The reader's awareness of and focus on elements of the work means that a text will eventually succumb to the analytical and interpretive stress that close reading puts on it. The ideas propounded by the New Critics were somewhat reductive as far as the

importance of the author was concerned. Now that Artificial intelligence is trying to replace the author, would it be possible for the reader to find any kind of unity and structure in text? The idea of whether AI is capable of taking over from the author and producing texts which can be studied and interpreted in conclusive terms stimulates further thought.

### **AI and Literature**

Of late, feats achieved by AI have fascinated some exceptional writers. However the advent, development and progress of AI had been anticipated long back. When it comes to AI-related narratives, the first book that comes to mind is Isaac Asimov's book *I, Robot* (1950), a collection of short stories that gave us the idea of the 'Three Laws of Robotics', which Asimov put forth in his 1942 story *Runaround*. Asimov saw that the extant state of the society in his day was characterized by a constant and inescapable shift and that it was impossible to make rational decisions without considering not only the current state of the world but also the future state of the world. He believed that leaders, entrepreneurs, and citizens must adopt a futuristic outlook (Asimov 120). Since he wrote the aforementioned book there have been many interesting additions to this fictional sub-genre. Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* follows Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter in a dystopian world, as he extirpates a bunch of AI creatures that have been genetically altered to look just like humans. *How Alike Are We* (first published in Korean in 2017) is a novella by Kim Bo-young set on a spaceship. It follows a crisis management AI named HUN as he struggles with memory loss and the growing tension among his crew. The story begins with HUN waking up in an AI body, but it turns out that the transfer of data wasn't as smooth as it should have been. Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) is the story of Klara, an "Artificial Friend" with super-observation skills. From her spot in the store, Klara keeps an eye out for people who come in to shop and people who walk by outside hoping that someone will pick her up soon.

Works like the ones mentioned above suggest that AI has changed the way we think about being human and is restructuring our ideas about identity, creativity, and consciousness. AI is the culmination of mankind's belief in science and rationalism yet the probable peril, as often perceived in fiction, seems to be a situation wherein machines developed by humans would start getting the better of mankind and would eventually control the world. Marvin Minsky, remark that AI is "the science of making machines do things that would require intelligence if done by men" (qtd. in Bolter 1) suggests that the AI technology was perceived as a phenomenon that has the potential to replicate the process of human intellection.

Throughout history, humans have been captivated by the concept of artificial creations that possess characteristics resembling those of living beings. From ancient mythological stories of creatures brought to life by divine intervention, to the cultural significance of "self-acting, self-willed, self-moving" (Jubaer et al. 3) entities in different civilizations, the notion of artificial creations has always held a special place in human imagination and culture. Archytas' description of artificial doves, as well as

the mechanical servants created by the Greek deity Hephaistus, were the first indications of automated machines that bore a resemblance to living creatures centuries ago (Ayala-Yáñez et al. 15). Leonardo da Vinci's design of a humanoid robot in the 15th century reflects the popular interest in the creation of artificial life forms at the time.

The development of artificial intelligence and its ability to copy human behavior has only heightened this fascination. Contemporary public perceptions and attitudes towards attribution of human characteristics to AI have become a topic of discussion in various fields (Tao et al. 202). The increasing interactions between humans and robots have led to a shift in people's conceptions of these machines, with individuals imputing more human-like qualities and traits to AI systems. These anthropomorphic features of machines have been found to impact human-machine communication considerably. With more groundbreaking developments taking place in the field of Artificial intelligence, more and more people are beginning to understand that the creative behaviour of AI systems is different from that of humans. Some argue that AI cannot replicate the true essence of human creativity, and is simply a “machine and technology activity” in artistic creation. Others are of the opinion that AI has the potential to cater to a variety of requirements in different civil domains. (Hou and Xu 117).

### **AI and Literary Authorship**

While AI models have shown remarkable ability to create text that emulates human writing, there are a few vital things to consider when looking at the possibility of AI replacing authors. First, there is the uniqueness that authors bring to their work. Every writer has their own unique experiences, perspectives and emotions that shape their style. These unique features of literary and artistic expression lend substance and significance to their works. There is no way that AI can replicate these elements as they stem from human intelligence and creativity. Secondly, writers have the ability to convey complex ideas and emotions in their writing. They use language skills and their storytelling prowess to engage readers intellectually as well as emotionally. AI-assisted writing today is mainly used in more formal, structured content, like news scripts. (Hou et al. 247). When it comes to works of literature that necessitate originality, creativity, and a comprehensive understanding of human experience, artificial intelligence does not meet the necessary standard. Furthermore, literature is not solely concerned with the production of content, but also with the process of writing. Many authors draw inspiration from their personal experiences, social interactions and cultural influences, which contribute to the authenticity and originality of their works. Artificial intelligence uses existing information and algorithms to create text, but it cannot create from a personal point of view. AI can create text that looks like human writing, but it does not have the depth, subtlety, and uniqueness that writers bring to their text.

Literature is often based on personal tastes, feelings, or opinions and can be interpreted in many different ways by different people. Readers may take different



meanings and feelings from the same piece of text. AI generated texts are usually based on formulas and data. They may not have as much depth of meaning or possibilities of interpretation as literature produced by humans. While AI can create text, it relies heavily on existing information and patterns. Therefore, it may struggle to create truly original, innovative, and groundbreaking literary works. If you don't give the AI a large set of preferred behaviours, or a powerful way for it to learn what behaviour you like, you'll just end up with whatever it finds. And because it's such a complex system, it's likely that you'll never understand it perfectly (Barrat 277). In the world of literature, there is often a connection between the writer and the reader. The reader relates to the writer's voice, experience, and ideas. AI-generated content may not have the same authenticity and personal touch as a human writer.

### **Is the human urge to rely on AI unjustifiable?**

Artificial intelligence can be considered the culmination of rational scientific reasoning, as it is able to use data, algorithmic techniques and computer resources to imitate and enhance human intelligence. Throughout history, scientists and philosophers have sought to understand and replicate human cognitive abilities, and AI represents a significant milestone in achieving that goal. Spitz argues that it is essential for humans to improve their abilities in order to keep up with the rapid development of machines, as they are increasingly able to learn and acquire higher levels of human capabilities (Spitz 303).

By relying on logical reasoning, pattern recognition, and statistical analysis, AI systems can process and interpret vast amounts of data much faster than humans. This capability enables AI to make predictions, solve complex problems, and automate various tasks across different domains. The rational scientific thought behind AI involves formulating hypotheses, collecting data, testing and refining models, and repetitively improving performance. Through this process, AI algorithms can learn from experience and adapt to changing situations, which is one of the hallmarks of intelligence. Nonetheless, an algorithm can figure out the best way to do something, but only an artist, thinker, mathematician, entrepreneur, or politician can really make sense of it. Only someone with a different way of looking at things can really understand what's going on. That's why masters spend their whole lives trying to figure it out. That's how they understand the world (Madsbjerg 147).

The aim of Artificial Intelligence in Literary Creativity is to create artificial authors capable of generating readable narratives. In their book *Artificial Intelligence and Literary Creativity: Inside the Mind of Brutus, A Storytelling Machine*, Selmer Bringsjord, David Ferrucci describe the endeavour of creating a storytelling machine called BRUTUS. It is an architecture intended to construct a machine capable of storytelling thereby evading assumptions that human creativity is incalculable. The first implementation of a part of this architecture is BRUTUS1, an artificial storyteller that appears to be creative (Bringsjord and Ferrucci 191). By attempting to construct such systems, researchers attempt to resolve the question of whether literary creativity is exclusive to humans. To gain insight into the reasons for supposing that human

creativity is out of computational reach, they seek to build systems that would seem to be creative (Bringsjord and Ferrucci 210). In trying to build an AI that can tell stories, one of the most difficult things to do is figure out what kind of creativity do the humans actually possess. Scientists think that human creativity might be the hardest thing to crack when it comes to creating an AI that can pass the Turing Test (an assessment of a computer's capacity to demonstrate intelligent behaviour comparable to or indistinguishable from that of a human being). Then there's the challenge of conveying human knowledge and thinking power to the machine. (177)

AI creativity is systematic and, unlike human creativity, it does not rely on wishes and urges which lead to spontaneous feelings. AI processes information in specific ways to produce expected results. In the article 'Ai-Novel: *Ai no seikatsu* and Its Challenge to the Japanese Literary Establishment' Hannah Osborne argues that AI-written novels may not as yet be able to completely replace human ingenuity and intuition, but they can challenge and broaden our idea of what makes a “good” novel and suggest new ways for people and machines to work together creatively (Osborne 101). The author believes that using AI in writing could completely change our perception of writing, authorship and the part technology can play in the world of creativity. It could also have a big impact on the publishing world, since AI can create content faster and in a more cost-effective manner. However there are limits to what AI can do when it comes to creative writing, and it's not quite ready to take over from human writers yet. (98)

The field of artificial creativity is concerned with the computational investigation of the mechanisms of creativity, a “field that tries to determine in computational detail how creativity works” (Elton 207). Research in the field seeks to correct an inaccurate understanding of the capabilities of computer systems. AI can be of immense help in the creative process but whether or not the former can replace the latter is a very complex question. The new technology has the potential to facilitate creativity through the introduction of new types of tools. Specifically, in the context of artificial intelligence, computational models can be employed to create devices which can generate novel and captivating propositions, including concepts, theories, and musical compositions. Furthermore, new technologies can also benefit creative practitioners in more traditional areas like art and music by equipping them with improved tools and media for expression (210). However artificial creativity is not intended to imitate the complexity of the human brain, but rather to generate machines that are independently creative. There is a long way to go before AI can really compete with humans in the realm of creativity. Computational models of creativity may enable us to construct devices that generate novel and captivating entities, however, these entities are still inferior to those generated by humans (213).

## Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence indeed has an important role to play in the domains of art and literature. It can help writers and artists express themselves with more precision and

conviction by presenting novel ideas to them and also assisting them in working with the ideas with more clarity and ease. With AI getting better and better it can work collaboratively with human creativity to create artistic works which would be appreciable both in terms of form and content. The potentially self-improving and self-modifying algorithms have proven themselves capable of accomplishing challenging artistic tasks and creating consistent and appealing specimens of art. The question of whether AI engineered models of art can actually be perceived as having the capacity to compare with human representations of art is intriguing indeed. This would primarily depend on how the connoisseurs of art or, for that matter, the commoners would react to machine created art and also on the potential of such art to engage people emotionally and intellectually.

In conclusion, while AI has made advancements in generating text that mimics human writing, it cannot fully replace authors in the domain of literary works. The unique perspectives, emotions, and creativity that authors possess are crucial components of literary creation that cannot be replicated by AI. Literary works and, in particular, artistic works have a mysterious quality about them and often evoke powerful feelings in the reader owing to the subject-matter which the authors choose to deal with. Hence, AI technology needs a lot of improvement before it can replace the complex human literary creation which is characterized by subtlety of meaning and creation. To sum up, AI can certainly help writers and create text, but it won't replace literary writers anytime soon. Literature is a profoundly human activity that involves creativity, emotions, subjectivity and the study of complex subject matters. AI can certainly be a useful tool in the process of creativity, but it's unlikely that it will be able to replicate the breadth of human literary expression or the deep connections that literature creates between writers and readers. In fact, it's more likely that AI and human writers will work together and complement one another in the literary realm.

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## A Dialogue with Swarnjit Singh Savi, Sahitya Akademy Awardee

**Prof. Yog Raj Singh**



*Swarnjit Savi is an eminent Punjabi poet, painter, sculptor, photographer, and publisher, passionately committed to Muse. Savi's oeuvre comprises thirteen books of poems - Dairyan Di Kabar Chon 1985, Awaggya 1987, Dard Piadey Hon Da 1990, Dehi Naad 1994, Kameshwari 1998, Kala Hashia te Sooha Gulaab 1999, Ashram 2005, Maa 2008, Te Main Aya Bas 2013, Oori 2018, Mann Di Chip 2021, Khushian Da Password 2021, Udasi da Libas 2022 - which are informed by intellect, introspection, new paradigms and myth making steeped in new idiom, and carves new benchmarks in the poetic craft. Widely travelled and highly feted for poetry and paintings, he has been recently awarded Sahitya Akademy Award for his book Mann di Chip. It is an anthology of refreshingly experimental poems which reflect universal concerns anchored in contemporary times, and spiritual and existential dilemmas that mark human life. Mann di Chip skillfully navigates through a poetic landscape hallowed by centuries old history, tradition and mythology, and redefines body, soul and death. His poetic odyssey is punctuated with questions. Savi's creative process preceded by "periods of profound silence," manifests itself in shifting paradigms and myth making, and paves the way for budding writers.*

Prof. Yograj Singh, Chairman: School of Punjabi Studies and Dean, Faculty of Languages, Panjab University, Chandigarh interacted with Swarnjit Savi about his path-breaking forays in Punjabi poetry. We gratefully share excerpts of this Tete-a-Tete, with our readers. It is mine of information about Savi's odyssey as a poet, his experimentations with taboo subjects, his takes on Punjabi poetry in general, the initial reservations about his poetic craft and how he meanders through all these to take the road that allowed sublimation of the seethings of his mind.

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*As a poet, what are your thoughts on 'Jashan di Kavita' (poetry of celebration) also known as Dehvadi Kavita in the new Punjabi poetry?*

'Dehi' (body) is not only a woman's body. Body can be anything. When 'Dehi' is made into a theory, a lot is left out, and it is reduced to the 'body.' Poetry of Celebration is the celebration of life in all its manifestations, not only the concept of body. A woman's body is not only for childbearing/erotic gratification, it is much more. Her sexuality has many dimensions not only for men but also for herself. As far as my poem is concerned, the word 'Dehi' in *Dehinaad* was erroneously looked 'upon only as a woman's body. Besides, the anthology comprises poems as 'Kitab,' 'Saaragi,' 'Khandar,' 'Bansuri' which were either not read or blissfully ignored. Poetry about love was first written under the veil of soul/spirit/desire. It was understood that love is not about bodies. Probably, due to the fear of social backlash, it was not explored. My poetry opened up the landscape of love, broke taboos and later paved the way for other poets to explore the nuances of love. 'Jashan di Kavita' was pilloried and regarded as paradoxical. Perhaps there was a silence earlier which was broken with this book and slowly other poets also came out of the 'straitjacket' and wrote poetry.

*Has Punjabi poetry been influenced by Postmodernism? If so, which poets do you think it influenced?*

Change is inevitably built into human systems and thought processes with the passage of time. It has to happen. The poet articulates his feelings within the framework of his vision which embraces the gone by time, the current scenario and the distant future. Such a change is evident among the poets of my generation and other contemporary poets, among whom Deed, Ambrish, Amarjit Ghuman, Ajmer Rode, Chandan, Manjitpal Kaur, Gurpreet, Devneet, Neetu, Simrat Gagan, Bhupidarpreet etc. are quite notable.

*What are the achievements of Punjabi Progressive poetry from 1960 to 1990?*

The range of Punjabi poetry during the three decades ranged from radicalism to Progressive to Naxalism, focusing on the rebellious and turbulent social/intellectual undercurrents in Punjab. The poetry during these three decades is marked by intellectually vibrant poets who have enriched Punjabi poetry. In spite of tirades against Shiv Kumar Batalvi during that phase, he is still treasured as a soulful poet by the contemporary generations. Surjit Patar, Misha, Pash, Haribhajan Singh, Navtej Bharti, Manjit Tiwana, Lal Singh Dil, have added riches to the tradition of Punjabi poetry in unmistakable terms.

*What are the shortcomings of Progressive poetry?*

In fact, when the poem defines the passion of 'vaad' and becomes a slogan, instead of a

dialogue, it loses its beauty and truth which is the benchmark for the poetry to last. The space of sensation decreases. Something similar happened to Progressive poetry and that became its bane.

*Viewing your poetry from Dehi Naad, Kameshwari to Ashram, Maa and Te Mein Aya Bus and now Oori, I consider another paradigmatic shift. Especially in the poems of Te Mein Aya Bus, the poetic sense of the woman's body and soul is redefined? What do you think about it? Did it happen by accident or was it done by a deliberate project?*

The structure of my mind or the way of working, is connected with painting, poetry, photography. For a long time, I get attached to a single thought. For example, the period of 'Awwagya,' 'Dard Piadey Hon Da' was associated with the turbulent times in Punjab. During those days, together with these two books - *Awaggya* and *Dard Piadey Hon Da* - I made poster poems (on art sheet-piece of poetry and image), in which I selected poems of contemporary poets from Baba Farid who were a voice against oppression and coercion. Poems and paintings in the mind expressed a time of shared sorrow. During the 7-8 years between *Dehi Naad* and *Kameshwari*, I simultaneously did oil painting series 'Desire,' 'The Quest' and held exhibitions. This time I was wrestling with these questions that in religion, 'body' is only a garment of 'soul.' In fact, everything is soul. I looked upon 'dehi' as more important than soul. These Books and Paintings emerged out of this predicament. 'Ashram' and 'Maa' between 1999-2009 I was introspecting over the questions related to death. In paintings and photography, I did the Series of Paintings 'Leela' and and series of photographs 'The Speaking Tree,' in which the Pyramids, Mummy as the shades of death and life. In 'The Speaking Tree,' I was looking for the answers to these questions in Nature through the camera. During those days my mother breathed her last. In the book *Ashram*, I was preoccupied with questions, even in my dreams. At the time of *Te Main Aya Bas*, a long poem 'Tera Chehra' was written about the relationship between a woman and a man, in which there is a tendency to see the woman anew from the beginning till now. The complexity of contemporary times, the rapid transformation of decades constantly impinged upon my consciousness, and each morning I was amazed at the new vistas of awareness that were unfolding. My constant engagement with these revelations triggered the process of creation of these books. During these years, I also painted a series of paintings called 'Nee Dhartiye.' I cannot rationally explain away this phenomenon but it just happened that way.

*What is your opinion about the language of poetry?*

I understand that the language of poetry is a 'language of images, suggestive and metaphoric' though gets altered in tone and tenor. Perhaps in the first two books, it was the language of usual address, like me and you, we and they. In *Dehi Naad* and *Kameshwari*, the poetic language became different – natural and brief. I think the

poetic language evolves like the poet's mind, it varies with time, place and context. Every poem has its own unique personality and diction. Therefore, I believe that poetry has no special language. Along with poetry, language comes and keeps changing. Poetic language is not something that can be determined.

*The major poets of the new wave poetry are highly progressive and Punjabi folklorists leaving the poetic patterns of the subconscious creating contemplative and discursive motifs. That is why its readership, if not shrinking, is certainly becoming special - what is your take?*

Perhaps the reason for the contemplative poetry lies in the complexity of our lives as reflected in relationships getting complicated, increasing uncertainty, human life being pushed to the margins, widening gaps, deepening mental anguish, economy, unemployment etc. Unfortunately, such an issue is becoming more complicated. In the face of the complexities that confront the creatives, I think the form of the poetry assumes new avatars.

*Women are a special subject of your poetry. Some of the formidable Punjabi Women poets writers - Amrita Pritam, Manjit Tiwana, Manjitpal Kaur, Paul Kaur, Surjit Kalsi, Neeru Asim, Nirupma Dutt, Simrat Gagan, Sukhwinder Amrit and Neetu Arora have significantly enriched Punjabi poetry over the decades. How do you see their phenomenal contribution?*

The number of Punjabi women poets is decreasing. After Amrita Pritam, a galaxy of women poets contributed immensely through good durable poetry and offered wonderful vignettes of women's sensibility. They have created new milestones by rupturing taboos and scaled peaks of creativity. This is the beauty and richness of Punjabi poetry and I partake of the rich intellectual feast enshrined in the poetry of Punjabi women.

*What is the relationship between creation and construction in poetry? Doesn't the editing the first draft makes it dull and loose natural flow of the poem?*

Whatever minor/special changes are made by the poet after the first draft of the poem is also an important part. Like the cutting of extra words, some back and forth or adding new ones, this is construction 'Gharhat' and part of the poem. In the natural flow, sometimes some things the poet does not want, he wants to use certain words. If there is some decrease in fluency with this change, then it is the poet's choice how he finally wants to present his poem.

*In poetry or in any class of literature this noise of the Me 'individual' and the We 'community' has been very simply understood by Punjabi literary criticism. I consider this division superficial and frivolous. We need critics who understand the spiritual*



*essence of poetry. What do you say about this?*

Writers/critics often discuss this issue in literary events. If you write with 'me' in the poem, it will start to look personal and with 'we' it is about group or community! Very funny thing one should understand the rhymes of the poem, look deep into it. As for its relevance, this is the main task of the critic. Undoubtedly, there are a few names in criticism who serve to understand the soul of the poem. My dear friend, through me too, the talk is of the group. Me and myself are one unit of this society. It is more important to listen and understand the inner voice in that poem.

*Do you compose/construct or create poetry?*

As I have said earlier that any change in the original form of the poem, is gradual but necessary. I do not deny it. Other times, your subject is the only one that you feel the need to carve and chisel. Poetry is neither pure arrival nor pure composing. Now Poetry Workshops are also organized to deliberate how to write poetry in English and other languages.

*Axial criticism abounds about the new poetry. Or a poet is exaggeratingly praised or the page is cleared. More than once at various conclaves/private get-togethers I have heard Amarjit Grewal expatiate on the poetry of Savi, whereas I find his observation a balanced and disciplined while understanding your verses. Likewise, I found the Dr. Gurubhagat's critique about your text far away from the signifiers of your poetry. What are your thoughts on the new poetic criticism?*

You are right that the axe-oriented criticism is enough around. I share my writings with Amarjit Grewal before publication. His understanding of my writings is reflected in his studied responses and critical appraisals of the thought processes gone into the creation of poetic works. I think, as poets and critics, if we constantly meet, read, understand, justice will be done to the cause of good poetry.

The new poetry is also identified by Amarjit Grewal and Dr. Sutinder Singh Noor who started 'Nav-Kavita Utsav' from 1993 which laid the foundation for a just evaluation and unique identity of the new poetry. What we are witnessing today is the offshoot of these collective endeavours, and it augurs well for the new poetry and its triumphant forward march. Otherwise, how the new poetry after Mohan Singh-Amrita, Patar-Misha-Pash would have gained lime light? rather would only have become a hangover of the first period. So this is an auspicious omen for new poetry.

*It is generally said that creation should not be bound by covenants. Major Marxist thinkers also hold this view. But still I understand that the poet is often influenced by ideologies. What would you say in the context of your poetry?*

How is the poet writing in what circumstances? Why is he writing? It determines his

party. But the poet should not sit on the bed of promises and write. A poet keeps evolving and has to as the momentous changes are sweeping the globe and he/she cannot be immune to it. Let me say about myself that I write only when the impressions formed in my mind, beggar articulation on the paper with a foresight of the far away pavilions and the vast possibilities that beckon us. In the process, the poetic vision takes in its ambit the contraries of life which are manifest in varied degrees in my poetry, and paintings to an extent.

*I understand that no external support or critic can establish a poet as the poet draws sustenance from the roots of his creativity. Your reaction?*

Poetry has to find its way to the heart and mind of the reader/audience. In fact, my poetry received initially quite hostile reaction for reasons other than merit. However, after *Awaggya* and *Dard Piade Hoin Da*, when *Dehi Naad* 1994 was published, a group of writers issued a fatwa, 'Now you are our poet.' But with the passage of time the poem was read, appreciated and many poets/critics started hailing it. At this point in time, I can say that my poetry has made its way to the heart and mind of the readers.

*The work of poetry is to go beyond this by using imagery, to silence. Thus, painting is a stage of poetry which the poet, with his mediums, goes beyond. This statement about the relationship between poetry and painting. It belongs to Dr. Jagjit Singh. Do you approach poetry's moderation (ochonome) through painting, through new other mediums of poetry? Or it can also be said that when you create a poem, where does the painting stand?*

Poetry and painting are two different mediums. Both can go beyond themselves. But painting cannot transcend poetry or vice versa, because both have different mediums, different tools. Poetry creates images through words. This image is not a painting. A painting is also a visible landscape and beyond that, but not a poem. We feel poetry in painting because of the rhythm of the strokes. But that rhythm of the strokes is not poetry. This is what I can say about myself that the 'meaning' whatever form it takes, remains constant in spite of the genre. What is apparent is not beyond or beyond other appearances. The process of your inner is an abstract flux, there is a silence, what shape does it take, indeed it forms part of the same genre.

*The debate about Posthumanism and Transhumanism has already commenced among the critics of Punjabi literature. Your credentials as a trend setter poet are impeccable. The publication of books *From Dard Piade Hon Da to Mann di Chip* bears testimony to this. The importance of *Mann di Chip* will doubtlessly be paramount in the creative world. *Mann di Chip* negotiates the dilemmas about robot, AI Surveillance systems, and signifies the primacy of human creation vis-à-vis the aids offered through machine algorithms. Super computer may offer a structural lay out for a poem but it cannot replace the overriding importance of the word that*

*articulates human emotions through the poetic craft. How do you view this phenomenon?*

I strongly feel that human dimension of creativity is unique because it is born out of human emotions, imagination and experiences. The range and depth of personal experience is its uniqueness. Machine intelligence also has a memory of the total data of the history of man on earth which can create many works in the form of poetry, paintings, music. But let us not forget that it does not have its own lived experience because whatever AI does, its only source is the data. Articulating the silence of human mind, its vision and dreams is yet beyond the reach of AI. Many of the poems in *Mann Di Chip* spring from this internal dialogue.

Now the speed of AI captures Centuries in moments. But there is no substitute for man's thoughtful creativity. It is also in the hands of man to create the path of ethics for AI, what we want to make of it. Should AI be an ally of the humanity or a barbarian like The Terminator. Should we create surveillance AI systems for war and use them to destroy every human being of the rival country or should we also teach them moral and ethics. This child (AI, Chat GTP) and its growth is in the hands of human, hence his responsibility too. It must ensure the supremacy of man and welfare and betterment of humanity. This is the biggest question of current times.

Baba Nanak's philosophy is 'Shabd Guru Surt Dhun Chela.' Human consciousness 'Surt' and human ability to create 'poetic image' in words will remain superior to machine intelligence. Now we think about post-humanism, i.e. man-machine and nature's cooperative phenomenon, where cooperation will be prominent and the matter of nature's exploitation will be a history of the past. The question is still the same. The book *Mann di Chip* poet joining this whole debate with its questions and doubts is like understanding the patterns of time. The challenge is to have a poetic dialogue with what is becoming more complex at the moment. After receiving the Sahitya Akademi award for *Mann Di Chip*, my responsibility and the attention towards the readership has significantly sharpened.

A poet's multifaceted task is to responsibly understand the dynamics of the society and to penetrate the inner layers of the mind. It is his religion to be aware of the pulse of the time, and worried about the future. In fact, it is in the cultural DNA of a poet to envision the primacy of man in a society, sans ugliness and prejudices.

*Thanks, Swarnjit Savi, for sharing your views about your poetic craft, its odyssey through four decades, and your no holds barred opinion about Mann Di Chip which has legitimately earned you the Sahitya Akademy Award.*

*Book Review*

**Symphony of Words: Discovering the Brilliance of  
*As I Cross the Bridge* by Prof. Molly Joseph**

**Preeth Padmanabhan Nambiar\***

*“Poetry is an echo, asking a shadow to dance.”*

-- Carl Sandburg

In *As I Cross the Bridge*, Prof. Molly Joseph presents readers with a sublime collection of poetry that is nothing short of an aesthetic delight. Each poem within this anthology flows like a cascading waterfall, immersing the reader in a whirlwind of sheer poetic beauty and intoxication. Prof. Molly's words not only captivate the mind but also stir a desire to journey deeper into the realms of metaphysical, spiritual, and ethereal bliss. As the anthology progresses, the simplicity of her poetic diction reaches mesmerizing levels, leaving the reader ensnared within the web of her artistry, much like the mythical Penelope of the postmodern era.

The poetess ingeniously portrays her thoughts and emotions as a flower pot, where every poem blossoms like vibrant flowers, each word germinating with an allegorical essence. One such masterpiece, “As I Cross the Bridge,” contemplates the unpredictability and uncertainty of human existence, likening life's tumultuous journey to a boat floating over waves, navigating the broken bridges of circumstance. With each verse, the human experience is unveiled, evoking contemplation upon the existential terrains we traverse. Prof. Molly's subsequent poems bear an almost apocryphal essence, as their arresting simplicity reverberates like cascading waterfalls, refreshing and invigorating the reader's soul. Works like “Sediments,” “Life Within Death,” “We are One,” and “Dance” are akin to goblets of invigorating wine, drawing the reader nearer to the revelatory world of postmodern literature envisioned by the eminent critic Ihab Hassan.

In *As I Cross the Bridge*, the poetess masterfully weaves words and flesh into an intricate matrix of human emotions and experiences. Each fiber of our being, every nerve, and feeling encountered during the boat-ride across the River of Life is brought to life by her arresting and charming poetic cadence. Joseph assures us that amidst the broken bridges of life, there is always a boat to carry us through. With “Valentine's Day,” the poetess kindles the Lamp of Love in human hearts, yet beneath its radiance, the poem delves into the sweet sorrow and tenderness that inundates the human mind, turning the day of love into a revelatory, almost comic experience of existence.

As we journey through this poetic tapestry, pieces like “Covid,” “Ethics,” and “Mother India” resonate deeply within the reader's psyche, eliciting profound emotions and introspection. The more simple and arresting the diction, the more entranced the reader becomes. “We are one,” “Nature,” “November 1st,” “Dance,” “Moments,” “Mothering Woes,” and “Be Like the Sun,” among others, showcase

Joseph's ability to evoke a kaleidoscope of emotions, tugging at the very strings of the reader's mind and soul. Each poem becomes a multicolored pulse, painting vivid portraits of the is

The entirety of *As I Cross the Bridge* can be aptly labeled as Prof. Molly's Creative Sacrament of her Heart and Soul. Within these verses, she bares her innermost thoughts and emotions, offering readers an intimate connection to her poetic legacy. Her ability to merge the ephemeral with the eternal, the metaphysical with the tangible, is a testament to her poetic prowess and depth of expression.

In conclusion, *As I Cross the Bridge* is a literary masterpiece that will undoubtedly leave a lasting impact on anyone who delves into its enchanting pages. Prof. Molly Joseph's poetic brilliance shines brightly in this anthology, and her words will continue to resonate in the hearts of readers for generations to come.

*\*Preeth Padmanabhan Nambiar, Author Educationalist, President, Writers Capital Foundation, Mysore (Karnataka), India*

*As I Cross the Bridge is published by Authors Press, New Delhi: 2023, pp. 116, Rs. 295*

*Book Review*

**Somadev Chatterjee. *Why Stories Work: The Evolutionary and Cognitive Roots of the Power of Narrative*. Notion Press 2023, pp. 111, Rs. 299**

**Dr. Tamali Neogi\***

Aristotle in *Poetics* has established the “primacy of plot or muthos as the organizing principle that configures the stuff of story into narrative discourse.” In other words, he has developed “a broadly rhetorical model of narrative, concerned principally with the communication and cognition processes associated with storytelling” (Liveley 2019). Among the three dominant methodological paradigms of contemporary (post classical) narratology - Contextualist Narratology, Cognitive Narratology and Transgeneric Approaches to Narratology, “Cognitive narratology focuses on the human intellectual and emotional processing of narratives: 'natural' every day and oral narratives are considered to represent an underlying anthropological competence in its original form” (Meister, 2011). Somadev Chatterjee's *Why Stories Work: The Evolutionary and Cognitive Roots of the Power of Narrative*, published by Notion Press, 2023, stands out as a significant contribution to the field of narratology with special focus on 'Diegesis' (the narration or the act of telling a story by a narrator) in place of 'Mimesis' (an imitative representation that involves portrayal rather than narration). The precise objective of the author is to teach the importance of stories and story structure to the students of his film school, “to answer questions like what makes a story, why it captures our attention, and how is the experience of consuming a story related to other experiences of life . . . to explain why certain features recur in stories throughout history and in all cultures” (8). Thus, Chatterjee enriches the domain of cognitive narratology and evolutionary narratology with exceptional expertise as he analyzes the nexus of narrative and mind/human emotions.

The incisive 'Introduction' to *Why Stories Work: The Evolutionary and Cognitive Roots of the Power of Narrative* precisely outlines (a) the rationale of the current book, (b) objectives of the author (c) the arguments for the following chapters, and (d) the theoretical premise of the book. The relaxed mode with which the author begins the Introduction is in direct contrast with the extremely analytical mode of discussion that follows. It is as if the author himself tries to understand analytically, the evolutionary and cognitive aspects of storytelling. In the first chapter, *Tell It Like Your Life Depends on It*, what necessitates the propagation of the theory of cognitive 'trade-off hypothesis' is the author's attempt to understand “what evolutionary pressures led humans to create and inhabit imaginary worlds? Does storytelling, as opposed to mere language use, serve any useful purpose?” (17). Tracing the roots of storytelling back to our evolutionary process helps the author to analytically prove his point how stories have kept us alive throughout the history of human evolution. In order to stress the necessity and usefulness of good storytelling, the author takes recourse to theories of evolutionary and cognitive narratology. However, the book is not only about critical

theories. Two redeeming features of the book stand out quite prominently: firstly, the author never reaches conclusions on the basis of assumptions but through critical theories arrives logically to the conclusion, secondly, to elaborate through examples the critical notions to the readers as the stories tend to be “intersubjective realities.” The same is true in case of 'epistemic vigilance.' The author defines and elaborates it so that the readers can easily understand how stories “fly under the radar of epistemic vigilance” (36). Through a structured manner the process of theoretical discussion, analysis and elaboration the purpose is to enhance the readers' understanding of how the stories embodying “meta realities exist in the “twilight zone” (26) between fully articulated, codified knowledge and embodied knowledge/inherited knowledge. The author always compares to and contrasts human beings with other species so that the readers can easily grasp the evolutionary aspects of narratology so far as storytelling is concerned.

Through the logical interpretation of the discourse developed in Chapter II, *Learning to Inhabit Unreal Worlds*, the readers come to see the point why stories might be rightly called simulations of social interaction and how “being able to inhabit and manipulate fictional worlds enhances fitness, increases the chances of our survival and reproductive success.” One may accept that “. . . responding emotionally to fiction confers evolutionary advantages” but one wonders at the author's point of view “Why do we derive pleasure from seeing or reading about situations we would never want to encounter in real life? What explains this disconnect between the emotions experienced by the protagonist of a story, and those experienced by us?” One admits that from an evolutionary perspective “we should develop the capacity to feel pleasure in participating in any kind of make-believe situation as long as we know that there is no real threat.” However, one finds it problematic to accept the logic of the author when he says: “Stories are analogues of rough and tumble play or roller coaster rides in the social world, where there is no chance of the safety harness ever going off . . . In situations involving real danger, we focus on survival, not enjoyment, but when we experience the same arousal without the element of danger, we can switch to enjoying the natural high, in short, *fear is fun*.” Bios and real life picture tags that sometimes come towards the end of the films, may be cathartic in case of scary movies but such documentation doesn't establish the fact that fear is fun for one experiencing horror on screen. It goes against Aristotle's theory of Pity and Fear as enunciated in *Poetics*, and militates against the author's assertion that stories are simulations of social interaction and the functioning of “mirror neurons” as mentioned in Chapter IV. Besides, the spurious assumption of the author that “scary movies have become the equivalent of tribal initiation rites that bestowed the role of a 'protector' on males,” smacks of the unintended 'sexist' bias in the absence of the statistics about women enjoying horrors movies in isolation.

While exploring “cognitive trade off hypothesis” the writer's observations “what we observe of the world is another partial model, and we notice anomalies that are relevant to our current pursuit” brings one close to the theory of impressionism. Likewise, the Hoffman's theorem is elaborated to enlighten the readers about bridging

the gap between the “scientific reality of value-neutral things . . . and the psychological reality of a world of value-laden objects in the field of goal-directed action.” One of the most remarkable features of the book is the sub-headings assigned for analysis in each chapter which focus directly/appropriately on the themes.

Towards the end of third chapter, *Maps of Experienced Reality*, the readers entirely agree with the author's argument as to why archetypes work. His observation that the protagonist “should have a flaw or weakness that makes it almost impossible for them to solve the specific problem they are facing” simply echoes Aristotle's theory of 'hubris.'

In the fourth chapter, *How Stories Work*, the methodology of analysis and elaboration persists as the author succeeds in conveying how stories should have a well-defined causal link between events and an end that rewards the reader/audience with a deeper understanding of the story-world, reminiscent of Aristotle's concept of Three Unities and Plot, thus enriching the domain of cognitive narratology by depicting how and why a pattern with right degree of predictability becomes fascinating to readers.

Throughout the book the theories are introduced and discussed to make relevant points but the dearth of instances of good story telling from the films of maestros worldwide, is also disconcerting. Quite importantly Chatterjee's *Why Stories Work* warrants a response about the ideal time duration that fits a film. The crucial aspects as story versus its different variables - script, screenplay, direction, cinematography, sound designing, editing etc. – should have further enriched the discussion. The issues as nonlinear narratives and proper 'pacing' in the art of storytelling in film, structures of short films and art films if discussed, should have added new dimensions to the well-crafted book. The Afterword demands the readers' appreciation for the precision with which the author brilliantly establishes why stories are the controlling agents of our life that on the other hand obviously indicates towards the necessity and usefulness of such studies. Finally, it must be mentioned that drawing insights from classical and post-classical narratology, enables the author unquestionably to achieve the objectives set out in the Introduction. In short, Somadev Chatterjee skilfully and successfully arouses the interest of the reader in comprehending what constitutes the art of good story telling.

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*Book Review*

**Prof. Kulbushan Razdan's *Blossoming Buds*  
A Mix of Ancient Mythology and Modern Sensibilities**

**O.P. Sharma\***

*Blossoming Buds* is Dr. K.B. Razdan's third poetic anthology, the earlier two being *Halcyonic Bubbles* and *Calliope's Leaves*. As in these earlier anthologies, Dr Razdan's poetic role-playing matrix is an "Archetypal curiosity-driven creativity and an island claiming the rich variety of a continent." As quipped by Dr Lalit Mohan Sharma, "Contemporary conflicts and questions as mirrored in myths, morph into the sequence of mosaics, a fiesta for the erudite, and yet an enchanting pageant for common readers of poetry." The anthology also reflects the poet's range of imagination and his poetic plasma, well expressed in poems like "A Rendezvous with Khalil Gibran," to "The Truth of the Forbidden Fruit." In "An Ode to Mind," and other poems catering to an identical kind of direction which simply arrest and encapsulate the reader's mind and psyche.

Razdan's poetic diction in *Blooming Buds* brings about a kaleidoscopic fusion of modernity and antiquity, a fact clearly envisioned and reflected in the poetic drama "Hero and Leader," though in other poems also, the myth-making technology of the poet plays a pivotal role in laying bare to the reader, the essential deconstructing and disturbing realities of current times. In the 'Foreword' Dr Lalit Mohan Sharma, himself a poet, academician and translator, these words say it all: "Juliet's Balconies," "Jernail: A Poet," "Soliloquy of a Rose," "Soliloquy of a Honey Bee," Razdan's anthology has the imposing fascination of a mural riveting a mind with its details. How scathing, bitter and satiric like Jonathan Swift, can Razdan be, is amply proved by such terms as "Leeches" and "Squids" among humans, found in abundance these days! All the same, Dr Razdan's prismatic poetic proclivity can be clearly witnessed in the poem "Love Quakes:" "When the Heart decides, The Mind out of etiquette does not object. A high intensity love quake reduces to shambles, all reason, every logic, history furnishing examples." Dr. Lalit Mohan Sharma concludes his 'Foreword' thus: "a word on the time the reader could travel, buds have been blossoming since times immemorial, you will read of Adam's Failures and Quixotic Redemptions, Krishna the Butter Thief and of Trojan Horses as many tiered metaphor, Turkish Earthquake and Ukraine War." In these lines the writer of the Foreword simply defines, analyses and expresses what Ihab Hassan calls as "detotalizing-totalization," in other words, "blending word and flesh into the dance of existence."

Dr. V. Selvin, a reputed academician from Tamil Nadu, calls, defines and analyses *Blossoming Buds* as "unique in mixing ancient mythology and current happenings in the world" to the extent of blurring the ancient and the postmodern sensibilities of man

who has never changed his desire to fulfill the phantasies of his/her own self in a selfish way. The sprinkling of the mythic elements is so intense that it calls for close reading because of its mythological fabric, literary allusions and current happenings of the world. Dr. Selvin's words reaffirm the dexterity, the felicitous ease with which Dr. Razdan's poetic prism adds "a bit of spice" to make the "Brew" more palatable for readers from across the "Meadows," "Plateaus" and "Mounts" of life and living. These words are quoted from Dr Razdan's very brief Preface to *Blossoming Buds*. Doubtlessly, *Blossoming Buds* can be defined, analysed and critically categorized as a Creative Mirror reflecting myriad colours of poesy emanating across the welkin of the poet's mind. The sixty-five poems together comprise a creative compendium which akin to the rising sun, scatters multicoloured prismatic 'rays' to illumine, inundate and bemuse the reader's mind, in ways overwhelming as well as illuminating.

*\*Mr O.P. Sharma is a veteran Journalist of eminence, based in Jammu (J&K), India.*

*Blossoming of Buds: An Anthology of Poems* is published by Global Fraternity of Poets, Gurugram (Haryana) 2024. Rs. 300.

## POETRY

Vineeta Gupta\*

### *Chromosome Mapping*

Once an ape, always an ape!  
Aping aimlessly with mouth agape  
Covered in all black, an ugly landscape!

“True! we are black, but ancient and green.  
True! we are the harmless *Hippocrene*.

we are as ancient as the Seven Seas;  
we are mother nature's first progeny;  
we need only fruits and leaves;  
we need only the shelter of the trees -- our  
green playgrounds -- we enjoy jumping

around. You! in the white garb  
keep the mother in the dark. You milked her --  
camouflaging your dark designs -- you are a blot  
on our common ancestry. Ashamed, we  
remain sequestered; our aping is the mirror

upturned -- in our blackness is reflected  
your black inside. Your charade of white --  
an absurd pantomime -- holds a mirror  
to our spotless soul, the harmless *Hippocrene*,  
a benevolent spirit even to the predators.

We are the apes, we celebrate our aping  
We are ashamed ancestors,  
We hate chromosome mapping.”

### *Mother's Mindscape*

The raging cyclones  
rising and roaring  
in the East  
and the West  
to swallow the earth  
to shake violently

the heavens above  
discontented  
disgruntled  
unruly  
intolerant  
dying  
to spread  
like the Empire.

The Ganges  
curvaceous  
sublime  
quite  
descends  
from heavens  
to feed  
to contain  
to soothe  
the sea  
in its arms  
spread--

The Mother  
disciplines  
smiles  
in her bounds  
holds  
to her bosom  
and gives  
Eternal Rest!

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**Shilpa Nataraj\***

*Complex-simplicity*

Year-end vibes  
Relishing on a jar of Nutella  
After much scrolling,  
In an attempt to understand the celebration spirit  
Of endings and beginnings, I write  
Beginnings are great because they make a convenient start,  
Fueled with mob excitement and craze  
Beginnings do not excite me,  
For they are full of juvenile hope  
The endings come with poignant hope  
Devoid of mob excitement  
Endnotes steer us through life  
Take note of it (or) it slips to perpetual beginnings

*Etches of Life*

Ever wondered and ever wondering  
Forms the sketches of life  
Maybe life happens here  
Perhaps we are stuck here to oscillate  
  
Growing up thumps over honest wonderment  
Dangling life. Oscillating  
Yet uncommon is not to wonder  
Life, in its myriad ways, makes us endure it  
  
Ever wondered and ever wondering stretches...  
Only as much as we wish to wonder about the undulation

*Cluttered Thoughts*

While some of it, the waves pull away  
Some come crashing on you  
Signal after signal, the traffic rushes  
What's thrown at you might be a mishap  
When you think what's gone is precious  
  
As long as you seek shelter on the shore  
Clutter of thoughts comes in waves

But a city signal is never without a vehicle  
A dive into the lanes of your mind leads you to the main road  
But first wave after wave, the thoughts clutter

Ride with it. Flow with it.  
Resolves the clutter of thoughts.

*Disembed*

Somedays, I contemplate choosing the perfect spot  
With an abundance of shade to park my car  
Sooner or later, I'm posed with the question of whether it's the car or I  
Who needs the shade?  
Well, how much shade does one need?  
Simpler would it have been if the thoughts  
Got lost in seriality, or at best, lost in the assessable work I do,  
But it led to more delectable questions  
Which of the hundred spots available besides offering shade  
Isn't too far for me to walk up to?  
Oh, the dry leaves; I do not want them adorning my windshield  
I hurry up to log in  
Disembedded now, whether to elevate or stair up!

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**Dr. C. Shahin Banu\***

***The Humming Bird***

Majestic Sun glows with a smile to start a new day!  
Spreads radiant beams, warm morning to say!  
I wake up in delight, to spot the day light,  
A sign of triumph in mind to ignite!

I elongate my legs and wings a long,  
Start my day singing a blissful song!  
Lay out the colourful wings to fly over the sky,  
Tear the wind by silky feathers while gliding so high!

My sun berry eyes track the Lake, for shower  
Landing on a tree, wraps cherry red flowers,  
Snowy crane with a red crown stands on a leg to catch up fish,  
I found a silver stream, wet my wings and head as I wish,

Dirt-free myself, untie my hair with pointed beak,  
Twittering merrily for grains and fruits - It's time to seek.  
Blossoming flowers spray fragrant odour,  
I can sip sweet honey in flourished flower,

Tree Loaded Guava invites me,  
aroma of mellow mango diverts me.  
Tasty fruits and nuts are nature's treat,  
Flapping here and there, to find a resting seat.

Gentle breeze shakes branches of the tree,  
I swing to and fro with thrill and glee.  
Drizzling drops adorn my quill,  
which reflects the rainbow over the hill.

Wiping all the beads with a slight shudder,  
Flying across the river by widen flutter.  
Return to place on the evening chariot,  
Alight on the nest before the sunset!

***A Dark Forest***

An unfathomable dim woodland,  
leads a stirring pathway, which

covers timberland and foliage,  
 with tiny *Bellis perennis* white and *Lantana*!  
 Hypnotic black *Drongo* and *Koel*'s melody  
 makes my throbbing heart light!  
 Croaking toad unlocks its golden eyes,  
 Doubting the traveler to this wildlife!  
 Widen my eyes to catch the nature's treat,  
 Spotted a snail in its safety shell.  
 Giant trees hide the blue sky with its dark green leaves  
 But powerful sunrays enter through tiny holes,  
 to remove the smog shelters everywhere.  
 Dropping dews fall on the tiny buds  
 which flourish with heavenly smile!  
 A gentle stream burbles on the rocky stones,  
 touching softly all the plants and bushes!  
 Diving fish makes a big ripple on the silver stream,  
 which shakes the *Cyperus rotundus* to dance with its crown  
 Clustered *Brown* mushroom domes, on the trodden leaves  
*Pink Lotus* relaxes in a serene pond,  
 where angelic swans swim and flap!  
 A flock of green parrot flies over the sky,  
 to find paddy field for grains!  
 I cross all the way astonishing myself with nature's marvel  
 Capture the delicacy in the month of December!

### *Moon*

Adorable charming smile fills,  
 not only your sparkling eyes,  
 But also, my tender heart!  
 Whenever you hide behind the clouds,  
 My eyes hunt for your presence!  
 I gaze your celestial light by  
 Peeping through the coconut leaf!  
 Our silent language rejoices,  
 Not only my heart, but also yours!  
 The stars around you, shine,  
 The blazing flame from you!  
 Your absence makes me upset  
 and also, the stunning universe!  
 I wish to get on your chariot and  
 Travel with you to celebrate my life!

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**Prof. Badri Narayan\***  
**(Tr. Dr. Shubha Dwivedi) \*\***

*Life's Only Four Days*

On the first day, there was an urge  
On the second day, there was hope  
On the third, an overwhelming desire to possess surged within me  
Well, on the fourth day, yes, on the fourth day, as I reached  
For the crimson silk cotton blossom,  
It vanished into the ether  
How fleeting is life, my dearest!

*The Remembrance of a Mystic*

To whom should I entrust my innermost feelings?  
I have everything  
Except, for my inner bard  
Somewhere between the tempestuous clouds of gluttony  
And the dark dungeon of avarice  
has dissipated  
Mine own innermost wandering mystic  
He always accompanied me when I was young,  
My wandering mystic,  
Together we studied, wrote, and played,  
but I don't know where he vanished  
I searched for him high and low,  
In the dazzling shops of the Mall and P.V. R.  
but he eludes me still, is nowhere to be found  
In the sweltering heat of  
desire, lust, ambition,  
and hunger  
He could have been burned to ashes,  
And enshrined within those embers,  
my very consciousness may yet reside  
within my mortal frame  
If he had to part,  
He could have left completely  
But he's still lingering inside me  
in the form of  
Ashes, mist  
and smoke

Whenever I'm enraptured in the melody, the hues, and the pleasures  
I can't fathom the source, but can certainly feel his presence inside me  
As he begins to tease me  
He mocks me-  
With such a wide range of shares and debentures,  
Pray, consider saving a bird, if it be possible!  
Despite so much money, dollars, and insurance  
Only if you could learn to rescue your emotions,  
Then I would know,  
But you could only rescue  
Diamonds, pearls and bills  
If you were to mould yourself into an aluminum vessel  
And treasure a few raindrops in it, I would trust you.  
He yells out:  
Hail the formless and pure one!

### *The Longings*

While the corn cobs were being roasted,  
gleaming in the gusts  
from the handheld cane wood fan,  
I addressed my fervent yearnings,  
It's fine to have the same red colour as azalea blooms,  
That you can soar  
Like a bird reaching  
To the depths of space  
That you are the flow of the mind,  
that you are the very essence of the soul  
Still, perfection need not be your goal  
As often in slumber, fair dreams get shattered  
As often, babies perish in the womb  
As children's balloons sometimes burst while inflating,  
Just like that...

*\* Prof. Badri Narayan is a distinguished poet, bilingual author, Social scientist and recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (2022) in Hindi for his highly acclaimed anthology, "Tumdi Ke Shabd," comprising ostensibly simple, elegant, pithy yet socially pertinent verses. He is presently Director at the G.B. Pant Institute of Social Sciences, Jhunsi, Allahabad (India). Badrinarayan.gbpsi@gmail.com*

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**Dr. Jyoti Pathak\***

***People Have a Mask Within***

In the city, people  
have a mask within.

Some own superior manners  
covering face, attracting,  
embodied in imagery,  
show the cosmopolitan  
standing nearby  
like the mended tapestry.

Some others  
embellished with elegance,  
composure of the heart,  
it seems  
save you through death,  
but fix  
with dubious intent.

In the city, people  
have a mask within.  
Their heart  
flashes in their eyes  
near and far  
with their unseeing faces.

***Where the World will be Heading***

Where the world will be heading  
whether we will live or die  
It has to learn.

Here we reached in a chaos  
where the outbreak is everywhere  
not only the city, also the mountains are scared  
under the scorching summer sun  
It came to understand  
whether we will live or die  
It has to learn.

Till the rain comes, things will be under control  
in the experience, the elder says  
although in these months, no doubt  
It gave lot of experience  
the true life can be found with parents,  
It came to understand  
whether we will live or die  
It has to learn.

Where the world will be heading  
It has to learn.

### *The Nature's Version*

In the midst of the virus ascent  
living beings, all imperilled,  
life is uncertain in the chaotic world  
as destiny is woven and fates curled.

How to live and survive  
is prelude to a line of seamless questions.  
Is this the anguished travail of Mother Earth  
Or her response to this world?

In nature's fury, storms unfurl,  
her angers echoes, chaos takes its hurl  
Nature nurtured all,  
Now, peril pervades and fall.

The world trembles in trepidation  
at advancing abominations  
unmindful of Nature's  
assertions and active versions!

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*LV:A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies Number 17 Vol.1, Mar 2022.*  
*LV:A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies Number 18 Vol.1, Sep 2022.*  
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