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From the Editor's Desk

Literary Voice: A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies, Number 21, Volume 1, September 2023 comprises research articles on various genres of British, American, Canadian, Yugoslavian, Brazilian, Argentinian, Nigerian, South Asian, South East Asian, and Indian literatures in English and films. The investigations of literary texts/films have been anchored in conventional and current theoretical frameworks to reflect the momentous impact of path breaking classics of modern literature on the literary and cultural landscape of the world, the erosion of the conventional values and structures caused by the Great War, and the engagement of the British Literature with the two states of human consciousness – prelapsrian and postlapsarian. The write ups question the literary representations of the white women in contemporary colonial narratives, probe the geographies of humanitarian crisis through the lens of precarity, represent the 'otherness' and 'displacement' in the context of postcolonial studies, and dilate upon how migration process provided possibilities of redefinition and reconfiguration of immigrants' identities, interrogate the binaries in relation to extremist-nationalist dichotomies in media and cultural discourses, challenge the dominant Eurocentric narratives and stereotypical representations of the Third World, trace the spiritual dimensions in the context of *The Bhagavad Gita*, and explore the potential ambivalent productivity of a multilingual and multiethnic Britain by delving into the concept of culturally hybridized and ambivalent Britishness, shaped within the 'contact zones' of various ethnocultural encounters.

The American literary texts have been scrutinized through the prism of betrayal trauma theory, knowledge discourses on power relations on the women, Jungian psychoanalytic theory of individuation, and the variable facets of male gaze through which men conceptualize women in a patriarchal society. The research articles focus on the phenomenon of ageing as individual and collective experience, the possibilities of using ecohorror as a medium to instil environmental awareness, the disturbing impact of armed conflicts on the ecology and biodiversity, the ABCDE technique proposed by the American psychologist Martin Seligman to come out of the bipolar disorder, and Rosalia Baena's concept of gastro-graphy to transmute the experience of cooking into an alternative perception of transculturality.

Three Literary Discourses propose the arrival of possible post-fiction genres, explore how language can be manipulated and used as a tool of censorship, propaganda, and control, and attempt to locate the visual grammar of digital spaces. The Indian English literary texts/films have been evaluated against the backdrop of colonial activities mischievously ignoring the indigenous people's lived experiences and function as an instrument of cultural erasure of the indigenous communities, Judith Butler's notion of 'performativity,' a new culture of feminist nationalism, theories of J.W. Berry, R.W. Connell and Sara Ruddick, G.W.F. Hegel's notion of *Aufhebung*, or sublation, views of cultural anthropologist Jon D. Holtzman, anthropological theorist David Sutton, impact of identity of doctor-patient-author on illness, *Advaita Vedānta*, patriarchy, transgenerational trauma, historical injustices

normalized as traditional myths in the contemporary Indian scenario, historical consciousness, the alterations in the human body triggering social, cultural, and political transformations in society, shifting landscapes in relation to the changing human-nature relations of the land, female sexuality and the celebration of female body. The ELT papers explore the rationale and unique benefits of simulations in evaluation processes with the help of a language assessment model designed to test communicative English, and demonstrate the efficacy of metaverse-based English language learning environments in enhancing the readiness of prospective engineers to operate in a technologically advanced and interconnected global landscape. The current edition of the journal embodies a review essay, two book reviews, poems by a Greek poet and three fresh voices in Indian English poetry.

We in the *LV* look forward, as ever, to your valuable inputs

T.S. Anand

"The Arid Plain Behind": Reflections of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in Select Great War Novels by British Women[1]

Anwesha Mondal*

Abstract

T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* had a momentous impact on the literary and cultural landscape of twentieth century Europe. This impact is evident in the novels of British women writers who captured their experiences of the Great War in a wide range of narratives. Novels like Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* (1930) and Irene Rathbone's *We That Were Young* (1932), reflect Eliot's themes of disintegration, disenchantment and isolation, which resonated with these writers, and influenced their descriptions of a world in which conventional values and structures had been eroded by the War.

Keywords: Great War, women, Eliot, waste land, war workers, invert.

When the speaker in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* says, "I think we are in rats' alley" (34) he might be referring to one of the morbid trenches of World War I; in fact, "rats' alley" is "typical of the nicknames given by soldiers to the trenches of the Western Front"[2] which goes on to explain why it would be a place where "the dead men lost their bones" (Eliot 34). This and other oblique references indicate that Eliot's poem is darkened by the shadow of the Great War. The title of the poem alludes to the wreckage of the War, the poem itself being a metaphor for the devastated landscape of post-war Europe (Lynch). British women novelists mapping this landscape have depicted a range of challenges confronting women in the War and inter-war years. Novels like Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* (1930) and Irene Rathbone's *We That Were Young* (1932), delineate the trauma, disgust and disillusionment of women war workers, and their sense of fragmentation and alienation in a bleak and desolate waste land of war.

The Great War was hailed as the war to end all wars. Nations across Europe in the summer of 1914 "erupted with jubilation following a series of declarations of war;" "thousands of men gathered their childhood friends and proudly, happily, marched to the recruiting station" (Bennett 2). What they expected from the War, however, was totally different from what they experienced; and this gulf between anticipation and reality led to a sense of bitterness and disillusionment similar to that found in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The poem mirrors the rubble of post-war England in a "heap of broken images" (Eliot 31). When read in connection with other literary texts of the era, one can discern its impact on the cultural and literary sensibilities of a war-torn generation that recalled its experiences in both fiction and non-fiction. Women writers writing widely in both genres shed much light on their "different historical experience of war" (Buck 87) and on their association with militarism. They offered

insight into the social dimension of war by going beyond the precincts of combat literature, and taking into account stories of civilians, refugees, munitionettes, pacifists, pro-war propagandists, and bereaved parents.

Women formed an extensive workforce in Britain and other Western nations as substitution for men who were sent to the War. They played a vital role by taking up jobs vacated by men due to conscription, by working in war industries, and by enrolling themselves in armed services in an ancillary capacity. Serving as munitionettes, auxiliary nurses, ambulance drivers, and cooks, in the units of both the home front and the Western front, women penned their experiences in autobiographies and fictionalized war memoirs in an urge to present "the bleak horror of the Great War" (Buck 105). They were keen on "inserting the woman's story into an increasingly uniform story of war experience as combatant experience;" hence, their narratives concentrated "almost exclusively on the female war worker, whether VAD,[3] nurse, munitions worker, or WAAC"[4] (Buck 105). *Not So Quiet* and *We That Were Young* are instances of such pseudo-autobiographical fiction based on real wartime experiences of the authors or their informants. They not only provide us with a feminine perspective to the grim realities of the War, but also depict bitter-sweet relationships between women war workers as they unitedly contribute to the war efforts.

Writing under the pseudonym Helen Zenna Smith, Evadne Price, in her novel *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War*, sketches her life as an ambulance driver at the French front lines during World War I. Her fictionalised memoir is a potent expression of her indignation at the futility of war, at her country's complacent patriotism, and her own daily contact with the suffering and the wounded, coupled with her survival of shell fire, cold, and a chastising commandant, whom she nicknames "Mrs Bitch." Smith finds no glamour in war work – "in the task of cleaning out the cook's room, which is full of rubbish, and reeks of sweat" (Trotter 44). She goes on to explain how being "gently-bred, educated women" they found menial jobs like "the morning clean-out of the insides of [their] cars" intolerable.[5] This attests the fact that women war workers were "confronted with work that was markedly different from peacetime activities;" this necessitated "adaptation to unfamiliar work patterns . . . within new and alien environments" (Simmonds 137). Distanced from the habitual comforts of home, women coming from privileged classes found it difficult to cope with situations like dearth of privacy, fatigue, health hazards and rigorous protocols, all of which were part of their hostel life. Women war workers faced a reality entirely different from their expectations – the kind that had been shaped by "the wholeness of pre-war society . . . infatuated with moral purity, beauty, and the stability of the status quo" (Bennett 5). This wholeness brings to mind the image of children sledding downhill in the opening stanza of *The Waste Land*, an image that nostalgically recreates the innocence of pre-War England. In the wake of post-war devastation and disillusionment, the lines "Marie, hold on tight. And down we went" (Eliot 31) become a tragic metaphor for millions of young people who

perished in the War.[6]

The war workers included women from diverse social backgrounds who joined the war industry, driven either by monetary concerns, patriotic zeal, or the desire to experience social and sexual emancipation. Novelists like Price and Rathbone illustrate in extraordinary detail the arduous working conditions these women were subjected to. Critics have observed that women volunteering for war work, especially the ones who had been "raised with all the restrictions of a Victorian education for ladies suddenly found themselves in strange intimacy with each other – putting up with cold rooms, nasty food and low hygiene standards – and also in shocking familiarity with shattered male bodies" (Martin). For them, the workplace experience was a ragbag, and therefore, disgust at "the pile of excrement in the centre of a courtyard, [or] the rotting corpse on the parapet" (Trotter 47) accompanied by a sneering complaint against co-workers from humble backgrounds, made their altruistic encounter problematic. *Not So Quiet* reveals what the war workplace actually felt like "to those who [could not] altogether forget the bourgeois drawing-room they chose honorably to abandon" (Trotter 47).

In terms of style, *The Waste Land* was quite innovative for its time; Eliot discarded the conventional paradigms of form and rhyme, in favour of unequal lines, short stanzas, and snippets of quotations. This disjointed form (no doubt reflective of post-war chaos and disillusionment) is mirrored in the heap of mutilated female bodies that lie scattered around the protagonist in an apocalyptic ending of Price's novel. In a sense, "femininity does not survive the War. . . . [Though the] heroine survives, [the novelist] marks this survival by shifting from first- to third-person narration, leaving her protagonist without emotion or 'soul,' no longer human or feminine" (Buck 106-107). In this context, we are reminded of a much-quoted passage from the American writer Mary Borden who talks about the desexualisation of men and women in army hospitals: "It is impossible to be a woman here. One must be dead . . . There are no men here, so why should I be a woman? There are heads and knees and mangled testicles. . . . but no men."[7]

The novelist Irene Rathbone worked in the YMCA[8] camps in France and as a VAD worker in London. Her semi-autobiographical novel, *We That Were Young*, also illustrates the variety of women's war work, at the same time underscoring the inescapability of their participation. Initially, the protagonist Joan Seddon is living a happy life with her aunt and younger brother in London; her contribution to the war effort so far involves a mere rolling of bandages along with other local women. Not feeling content with this role, Joan joins her friend Barbara at the YMCA huts in France, to serve the soldiers – supply them with food and drink – as they return from or depart to the front. Though this work is hectic, Joan still feels that her service is not as adequate as she wishes it to be; hence, she returns to London to take up nursing. In the course of tending the wounded, Joan witnesses the horror of war injuries – missing limbs, infections, blindness and despair. Her experiences paint a morbid picture of wartime London similar to the decadent images of the "Unreal City" in *The Waste*

Land. Eliot's depiction of a multitude of people crossing London bridge, as "each man fixed his eyes before his feet" (32) is suggestive of the obliteration of the individual in a mechanised, post-war world; this loss of individuality is also evocative of the mass of injured soldiers in army hospitals, or mounds of unidentified corpses in the trenches of the First World War.

Joan's co-worker and friend, Pamela, falls in love with a New Zealand officer on her ward, but her happiness is cut short by the untimely death of her beloved. War claims it victims – friends, lovers, brothers – and incited by revengeful despair, Pamela decides to join the munitions. Unfortunately, she is unable to continue service on account of her delicate health; she is compelled to quit her job, feeling bitter and disgusted with everything she has witnessed. The War drags on, and the protagonist relocates to the YMCA huts in France, totally exhausted by her prolonged service in the hospitals of London. Post war, thoroughly sickened with everything she has seen and experienced, Joan becomes a pacifist enraged with aged war-mongers and politicians who are responsible for sending young recruits to their deaths. The concluding chapter of the novel is set in 1928; those women who devoted the best years of their lives to the Great War, are shown to be moulded by experiences in a way the next generation cannot fully appreciate.

In an interesting contrast to the above discussed novels that portray the ordeals of women war workers, thus presenting the War years as a kind of sensory and spiritual "waste land," Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* delineates the years before and after this catastrophic event as times of distress, revulsion and disappointment. The novel appeals to the cause of the homosexuals, and is particularly interesting because, homoerotic love is rarely addressed in women's literature of the Great War. The story revolves around the life of Stephen Gordon, an Englishwoman, born in an aristocratic family in the late Victorian period. The "narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby" (Hall) manifests typically unfeminine behaviour since her childhood – in her distaste for women's attire, her desire to cut her hair short, and her intense longing to be considered as a boy. At seven, she develops an infatuation on a housemaid named Collins, and is shattered to discover the latter in intimacy with a footman. She is equally horrified when, at eighteen, her close friend Martin Hallam declares his passionate love for her, subsequently revealing his intention to marry Stephen.

The protagonist's father, Sir Phillip, tries to understand his daughter's personality through the writings of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs – a pioneer of sexology and the modern gay rights movement. Sir Philip, however, does not share his findings with either Stephen or her mother, as a result of which, the latter grows increasingly distant from her daughter, perceiving her as "a blemished, unworthy, maimed reproduction" (Hall) of her husband. Sir Philip is fatally injured in an accident, and passes away before he can tell his wife that their daughter is an "invert." Thus, unaware of her nature, Stephen's mother nurses an inexplicable aversion towards her child, hating "the way Stephen moved or stood still . . . a certain largeness about her, a crude lack of

grace in her movements, a certain unconscious defiance" (Hall). As the heroine grows up, she begins to dress in masculine clothes designed by a tailor instead of a dressmaker, and at twenty-one, falls in love with Angela Crossby, the American wife of a recently arrived neighbour. Angela exploits Stephen as an "anodyne against boredom," (Hall) eventually exposing her homosexuality to her husband. The latter reveals this information to Stephen's mother, who condemns her in words that manifest the contemporary society's attitude towards homosexuals:

> It is you who are unnatural . . . this thing that you are is a sin against creation . . . a sin against the father who bred you . . . I would rather see you dead at my feet than standing before me with this thing upon you . . . you say things that may only be said between man and woman, and coming from you they are vile and filthy words of corruption – against nature, against God who created nature.
>
> . . . you have presumed to use the word love in connection with . . . these unnatural cravings of your unbalanced mind and undisciplined body . . . I have loved your father, and your father loved me. That was love. (Hall)

Appalled at her mother's reproach, Stephen replies,

> As my father loved you, I loved. As a man loves a woman, that was how I loved . . . I wanted to give all I had in me to give. It was good, good, good – I'd have lain down my life a thousand times over for Angela Crossby. If I could have I'd have married her and brought her home . . . If I loved her the way a man loves a woman, it's because I can't feel that I am a woman. All my life I've never felt like a woman, and you know it . . . I don't know what I am; no one's ever told me that I'm different and yet I know that I'm different. (Hall)

After this dispute, Stephen goes to her father's study, wherein she finds a book by Krafft-Ebing; reading this, she learns that she is an invert.

Stephen relocates to London where she emerges as a moderately successful writer, and finds herself in the company of other inverts. Later, she moves to Paris on the request of her friend Jonathan Brockett (also an invert), and is introduced to the urban invert culture, leading to her meeting with the lesbian salon hostess Valérie Seymour. During the War years, Stephen joins an ambulance unit serving at the Front, and falls in love with a fellow driver, Mary Llewellyn, who comes to live with her at the end of the War. Their initial days are spent in happiness, but Mary gradually feels isolated as Stephen is engrossed in her literary pursuits. To add to this, they are continually treated as social outcasts, which the novelist projects as something typically suffered by the homosexuals. Martin Hallam, now residing in Paris, renews his former friendship with Stephen, but eventually falls in love with Mary who is now lonely and embittered. Stephen feels powerless to provide Mary with "a more normal and complete existence" (Hall); she is convinced that she cannot make her happy, hence, pretends to have an affair with Seymour, in order to drive Mary into Martin's arms. The novel concludes with Stephen's plea to the Almighty – "Give us also the right to our existence!" (Hall).

The ending takes us back to the protagonist's passionate outburst made at the moment of her discovery of her sexual orientation: "there are so many of us –

thousands of miserable, unwanted people, who have no right to love, no right to compassion because [we]'re maimed . . . and ugly – God's cruel; He let us get flawed in the making" (Hall). Her lament projects the fact that same-sex love, in early twentieth century, was controlled by the canons of morality, and heterosexuality was the only accepted mode of sexual orientation. Heterosexuality was the norm, while homosexuality was unethical, considered to be a deviation or perversion. The homosexuals were marginalised, victimised, subjected to guilt and self-torture, as a result of which, they suffered from a sense of loss of identity. They either justified or sported their "deviant" sexuality, or stifled it for fear of social ostracization. Hall's novel delineates this socio-psychological identity crisis of the lesbians who are torn between social taboos and personal desires, between their conscience and the consciousness of an implicit social stigma. The narrative shows how the "inverts" react to societal pressures and negotiate with their marginalised existence in a heteronormative society. On the one hand, this negotiation is directed outwards – facing the prejudices and rejection of the society; on the other, it is directed inwards – where the confrontation is with the divided self.

This calls for an alternative space in which suppressed identities can find articulation and acknowledgement. The Great War proved to be such a "space" wherein war workers like Stephen and Mary were able to find a meaning to their existence. War work provided the inverts with a publicly acceptable role, and Stephen earnestly believed that "the service she and other 'inverts' [had] given during the war [would] be the means of their subsequent integration into society" (Trotter 45). The novelist was also hopeful that during post-war rehabilitation, the inverts would no longer be compelled to return to a state of "hiding" – "a battalion was formed in those terrible years that would never again be completely disbanded" (Hall). Unfortunately, the military metaphor continues in the novel in an opposite sense, as inverts in post-war Paris are repeatedly referred to as a "miserable army" (Hall). The narrator invokes the image of a shell-shocked soldier to portray the homosexuals as psychologically traumatised by their status – "for bombs do not trouble the nerves of the invert, but rather that terrible silent bombardment from the batteries of God's good people" (Hall).

Viewed in this context, both pre- and post-War years can be seen as "waste lands" – as sites of trauma, disgust and disillusionment. Hall attempts to speak on behalf of her fallen comrades and survivors in a post-war waste land; and Eliot, in his poem, depicts this post-war spiritual sterility that is profoundly haunted by the rhetoric of the War. The three novels discussed above capture and analyse the memory of the Great War in its various nuances; *The Waste Land* serves as a map to reread these texts in a way we can better understand the impact of the Great War, and possibly prevent such all-consuming devastation from affecting the world again.

Notes

[1]The quoted section in the first part of the title has been taken from the closing stanza of Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*: "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me".
[2]Refer to the following: http://eliotwasteland.blogspot.com/2018/09/rats-alley.html.

[3] The Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) was a voluntary unit of civilians providing nursing care for military personnel in the United Kingdom and various other countries in the British Empire. The most important periods of operation for these units were during the two World Wars (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voluntary_Aid_Detachment).

[4] The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was the women's corps of the British Army during and immediately after WWI. It was established in February 1917 and disbanded in September 1921 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Mary%27s_Army_Auxiliary_Corps).

[5] Quoted in Trotter (44) from Price's novel *Not So Quite: Stepdaughters of War*.

[6] According to Matthew Bennett (5), the youth of 1914–18, "willingly and joyfully slid down into the unknown reaching infinite depths of unspeakable violence."

[7] Quoted in Buck (106) from Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone*.

[8] YMCA, founded on June 6, 1844, by Sir George Williams in London, originally as the Young Men's Christian Association, is a worldwide youth organisation based in Geneva, Switzerland, with more than 64 million beneficiaries in 120 countries. It aims to put Christian values into practice by developing a healthy "body, mind, and spirit." Within ten days of the declaration of WWI, YMCA had established around 250 recreation centres, known as huts, in UK, and across Europe to support both soldiers and civilians alike. Within a month of this, the YMCA Women's Auxiliary was also formed (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YMCA).

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Embedded Poetics: The Presence of Apocalyptic Imagination in a few major British Poets

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Dr Ann Thomas**

Abstract

Apocalyptic Eschatology aligned with the 'Book of Revelation' concerns itself with the end of things. John Collins says "All apocalypses… involve a transcendent eschatology that looks for retribution beyond the bounds of history" (*Apocalyptic Imagination*, 11). Focusing on prelapsarian and postlapsarian consciousness of humans, it raises doubts about man's innate goodness and is hopeful that humankind will retrace itself to prelapsarian consciousness. British Literature has covertly and overtly concerned itself with these two states of consciousness. The poets from Geoffrey Chaucer to the twentieth century have showcased this. In this regard, this paper will study the Reverdie passage (the first 18 lines) in Chaucer's 'General Prologue' to *The Canterbury Tales*, extracts from Milton's *Paradise Lost,* Blake's *London*, Gerard Manley Hopkins' *God's Grandeur* and the 'The Burial of the Dead' in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, to locate the presence of apocalyptic imagination sometimes aligned to environmental writing.

Keywords: eschatology, apocalyptic imagination, reverdie, prelapsarian and postlapsarian, environmental writing.

English Literature right from the time of Geoffrey Chaucer evidences the presence of apocalyptic imagination in which the ideal and practical are contrasted to suggest that human beings must put in spiritual efforts to make the ideal practicable. Poets belonging to different literary ages have responded to their socio-political-cultural conditions predicting the ominous, if attempts are not made to stem the spiritual rot. Commenting on apocalyptic literature Thompson says "It was mapped out in a new literary genre called apocalypse, from the Greek *Apo-calyptein*, meaning 'to unveil'. Apocalyptic literature takes the form of a revelation of the end of history. Violent and grotesque images are juxtaposed with glimpses of a world transformed; the underlying theme is usually a titanic struggle between good and evil…"(as quoted in Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism*, 94). So, one can say, that literary texts that foreground vital revelations in *The Bible* that have overt or covert allusions to religious/spiritual texts that deal with vacuous spirituality can be deemed apocalyptic literature. John J. Collins argues "The form of apocalypses involves a narrative framework that describes the manner of revelation. The main means of revelation are visions and otherworldly journeys, supplemented by discourse or dialogue and occasionally by a heavenly book" (*The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,* 6).

The Poets who have been considered prophets in the humanist tradition, have always appraised the living conditions of people and of the flora and fauna, in order to foreground certain ethical, moral and spiritual downside. In their creative visions, the

poets see the adverse consequences of certain amoral and immoral attitudes and articulate them in vehement language. Such poems may be called apocalyptic predictions which will come true, if the status quo is not altered. In this regard, one can see the presence of apocalyptic imagination in poetry as a unifying principle that can bring diverse poems with distinct aesthetics together. Apocalyptic Imagination becomes an aesthetic credo which will provide any literature with significant literary signposts. Seen in this context some of the major literary figures in British poetry from the fourteenth to the twentieth century can be discussed together because their poems deal with flouting of moral laws that lead to decay and destruction. This paper will briefly study Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, particularly the first section, Milton's poignant description of the fall of Eve and Adam in *Paradise Lost* Book IX, Blake's city poem, *London,* Hopkins' *God's Grandeur* which effectively foregrounds the moral collapse of late Victorian society and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* which is a terrible indictment of a crass materialistic society which had thrown caution to the winds to live the most unspiritual life. Seeing the presence of Apocalyptic Imagination in these poems creates an amazing group of poems in which hope and hopelessness sometimes coexist.

Geoffrey Chaucer, in no stretch of imagination can be called an Apocalyptic Poet. But he is discussed in the context of this paper to showcase the juxtaposition of an ideal life and a terrible fall from it. Chaucer's 'General Prologue' to *The Canterbury Tales,* particularly the first eighteen lines called Reverdie Passage, showcases the presence of apocalyptic imagination and that it serves as an important literary precedent for apocalypticism in English Literature. Greg Garrard says "Eschatological themes and language in fact escaped the discipline of theology long before the twentieth century. The Romantic poetry of William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley and William Blake appropriated apocalyptic rhetoric for secular, often politically revolutionary aims, as did the modernists of early twentieth century such as T.S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis" (*Ecocriticism*, 97).

In the reverdie passage Chaucer perceives this world in terms of a seamless unity where the divine, natural and the human worlds are seen as a wonderful continuum. It effectively foregrounds Chaucer's vision of this unity, though with its inherent issues and problems. He declares that the divine/spiritual world is the essential substratum of both the natural and the human worlds, though with qualification. Commenting on the significance of reverdie passage, Michael Delahoyde says

> This reverdie passage presents a unified and ideal organic hierarchy -- a great chain of awakenings from the rain to the roots of the plants to the flowers, the sun to the fields and the birds growing musical and insomniacal, to humans who maybe sublimate the same impulses into pilgrimages to holy shrines of martyrs. So we progress from the natural to the divine, or from the natural/divine to the anthropomorphic/sacred" ('The Canterbury Tales:The General Prologue'
> https://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/chaucer/GP.html)

Chaucer suggests that a meaningful interaction with the natural world that is divinely

charged is a true source of inspiration and impetus. The reverdie passage can definitely be called a passage of hope as it foregrounds a definite possibility of the postlapsarian (post-fall) consciousness having a glimpse of a prelapsarian (pre-fall) and with that glimpse, which in itself is a moment of spiritual illumination,humans can transform the fragmented consciousness into a wholesome one. This enables human consciousness to retrace its steps to the prelapsarian condition, where the human and the natural enjoyed the most meaningful bond with the divine and spiritual world.

In keeping with the definition of apocalyptic literature, Chaucer brilliantly juxtaposes, in the 'General Prologue',the ideal world of unified hierarchy with a world of fallible human beings, who have erroneous perceptions that have lead to a spiritual crisis. He does not create an impression that human beings have completely severed their connections with the divine; on the contrary, Chaucer argues that the unchanging worlds of the divine and the natural serve as effective reminders of the limitless and timeless world of spirituality to humanity. With a sensitive appraisal of nature, he hopes that humans can establish an unbroken relationship with the divine. Chaucer's world is not governed by a gloomy apocalyptic vision in which human beings have irrevocably strayed away from their ultimate source, God; on the contrary, he argues that the natural world comprising both the flora and the fauna provides humanity with not only inspiration but also an effective means to move away from the postlapsarian state to the prelapsarian one.

The reverdie passage can be divided into three sections: the world of flora, the world of fauna and the world of humans. Chaucer portrays a world of wonderful fertility when the vernal showers put an end to the infertility and barrenness of the winter season.

> *When April with its sweet-smelling showers*
> *Has pierced the drought of March to the root,*
> *And bathed every vein (of the plants) in such liquid*
> *By which power the flower is created;*
> *('Prologue to The Canterbury Tales 1-4)*

He indicates that the engendering power of spring-showers brings about a magic transformation in the natural world as Nature regreens herself and presents a breathtaking world of vitality and vivaciousness. Chaucer claims that every vein in the leaves of the plant gets energized with the onset of spring making April a crucial month. This is because its sweet showers provide the natural world with abundant life. After having described the impact of the vernal showers on plants, flowers, woods and fields, Chaucer happily ushers in the world of fauna, when he says "And small fowls make melody," ('Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* 9). Foregrounding the mellifluousness of the bird's song, he implies a vital harmony that runs through nature. The season incites the birds to sing songs of joy and freedom as ". . . Nature incites them in their hearts" ('Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales'* 11). After painting word pictures of the impact of spring on flora as well as fauna, Chaucer moves to the human world which is of utmost consequence to his whole enterprise in *The Canterbury*

Tales. The last lines of the reverdie passage shed light on the influence of spring season on the human world:

> *Then folk long to go on pilgrimages,*
> *And professional pilgrims to seek foreign shores,*
> *To distant shrines, known in various lands;*
> *And specially from every shire's end*
> *Of England to Canterbury they travel,*
> *To seek the holy blessed martyr,*
> *Who helped them when they were sick.*
> *('Prologue' to The Canterbury Tales'12-18)*

The line "Then folk long to go on pilgrimages" (12) is a clear indication of the humans'communion with the natural world and through it with the divine world. The temporal marker 'then' is important as it suggests the naturalness with which human beings think about pilgrimages, spirituality and God. This instinctive response to the world of nature must be seen as a saving grace in Chaucer's vision of humanity. Shorn of any negativity, Chaucer categorically asserts that going on a pilgrimage is more intuitive-instinctive rather than a rational enterprise. Different kinds of people go on a pilgrimage to different sites of spiritually energized spaces, but all of them have one goal that is to give up the ignorance of the divine world, seen in terms of sickness: "To seek the holy blessed martyr,/ Who helped them when they were sick" ('Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*'17-18). Visiting the sepulchre of "the holy blessed martyr" Thomas Becket is a means by which one can encounter, master and transcend the adverse effects of postlapsarian consciousness, consisting of wrong perceptions and consequently wrong actions. The reverdie passage concludes on a very positive note that if human beings are in tune with the world of nature they can experience the grandeur of God which is always there as a latent power only to become manifest by the spiritual efforts of humans.

Following Chaucer's reverdie passage, which is not threateningly apocalyptic, Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book IX presents a gloomy picture of humanity but with the great hope that Lord Jesus Christ will help humanity redeem itself through repentance. Milton vividly portrays the postlapsarian condition of humans thus:

> *So saying, her rash hand in evil hour*
> *Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat:*
> *Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat*
> *Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,*
> `   *That all was lost. (780-784)*

The fall of Eve is seen in terms of a skewed perception of Nature in which the binaries that exists in the world of nature have become both worrying and problematic. When Milton says "Earth felt the wound" he sees the fall of humans, in the modern ecological context, as a crisis of perception, which leads to a conflictual relationship between nature and humans. When he says Nature sighed through all her works giving signs of woe he brings out the stark contrast to the harmonious relationship that

existed between nature and humans in the prelapsarian state. The consequences of our rash actions tamper with the moral cosmic order, creating chaotic conditions and situations. Commenting on the interface between secular literature and ecoliterature, Swarnalatha Rangarajan says "The trope of the apocalypse extensively figures in secular literature as well as environmental writing. Eminent ecocritic, Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), famously declared apocalypse to be the most powerful master metaphor for the contemporary environmental imagination" (*Ecocriticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies,* 173).

But one significant feature of Milton's apocalyptic perception is his boundless hope that God through His Son will make humans regain the blissful seat they have lost:

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat, (Paradise Lost Book I, 1-5)

Since Literature showcases the difference between the ideal and the practical and the need for their synthesis, the role of apocalyptic imagination in literature serves the purpose of extolling the virtues of the ideal world and to satirize the pedestrian modes of living in the real life situations, owing to nescience. So in Milton's case hope is enshrined in the discourses of apparent hopelessness. Commenting on the importance of an adequate understanding of God which is found in all things great and small, Arne Naess says, "If God is the creative power completely distributed among living things, and humans know, or conscious of this creativity, one may say that their knowledge of God is adequate. Since the only things to be known as actual existing beings are the finite, particular things, "the more we understand (intelligimus) individual things, the more we can understand God" (*Ecology of Wisdom*, 239).

After John Milton, William Blake, during the Romantic Period, is most noteworthy for his apocalyptic imagination. His poems on urban spaces such as *London* and *Jerusalem* effectively condemn the anti-spiritual modes of feeling, thinking and acting. The first lines of *London*

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe (1-4)

sets the tone and tenor of the poem. A. Bulmer says in his paper 'William Blake and the Urban Landscape of Apocalypse:'

> The city is thus figured in terms of the people who inhabit it – people who, increasingly, were of the working class, victims of economic forces beyond their control. This is further indicated in the illustration of the plate, which depicts a child leading and old man by the hand. The old man, who represents London, is bent and careworn; he is moving from left to right across the plate towards a closed door. The aesthetic of the whole is that of entrapment, entombment (similar to "Death's Door) –

of the woe possible in the modern city.
(https://18thcenturyculture.wordpress.com/conference-papers/william-blake-and-
the-urban-landscape-of-apocalypse/).

The Victorian period, a continuation and contestation of the Romantic period, was a
period of both material prosperity and spiritual vacuity. So the poets of the Victorian
Age were thoroughly dissatisfied with the immoral and amoral attitudes of Victorian
Society. Needless to say, religious poets or poets with a penchant for religion naturally
took recourse to apocalyptic mode of perceiving the world. One of the significant
literary markers of the Victorian Period is Hopkins'*God's Grandeur*. The poem begins
with a brilliant statement of Faith:

> *The world is charged with the grandeur of God.*
> *It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;*
> *It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil*
> *Crushed." (1-4)*

These lines stress the importance of human effort in making the grandeur of God a
visible as well as a visionary experience as it lies deep down things. Hopkins follows
this with the significant monosyllabic question "Why do men then now not reck his
rod?" (4) with an intention to make Victorians wake up from their spiritual snooze and
live spiritually. But instead of considering the power, love and the glory of God,
Victorians were complacent with their materialistic progress. Their quest for
materialism fell into a rutless routine creating a terrible monotony:

> *Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;*
> *And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;*
> *And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil*
> *Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod. (5-8)*

Humans have wrongly chosen a dishonorable path, oblivious of spiritual
consequences. Commercial activities rendered spiritual living utterly ineffective and
withered. Besides this, it beclouds our vision so that we do not have a clarified vision
of the spiritual realities which are latent and behind the façade of material life. The
world "bleared" clearly states that we do not know how to see, which is earlier
mentioned as crisis of perception. Hopkins also adds that we have dirtied ourselves
with material progress making the vital spiritual soil barren. As an expression of
apocalyptic imagination these lines appear to be most pessimistic. But in the sestet
part of the sonnet, Hopkins counters all the negative impacts by suggesting that the
spiritual essence in this world actually remains intact:

> *And for all this, nature is never spent;*
> *There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;*
> *And though the last lights off the black West went*
> *Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —*
> *Because the Holy Ghost over the bent*
> *World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings (9-14)*

The well-rooted God's grandeur can never make Nature a spent force, as the dearest
freshness of spiritual realities lie deep down things. Hopkins speaks about the night

giving way to day, dispelling all forms of darkness. The Holy Spirit broods over this crooked world with a warm breast, showcasing the boundless love of God for humanity that will effect a wonderful transformation from hopelessness to abiding hope. This shows that things have not gone out of hand and that a consciousness filled with spirituality is a realisable eternal reality.

One can easily argue that all the pessimism of the Victorian Age crystallizes in the modern poem *The Waste Land,* published in the year 1922, four years after the First World War. The first lines of the first section titled 'The Burial of the Dead' in *The Waste Land* is a conscious echo of what is seen in the reverdie passage of Chaucer, only that the echo is pathetically divorced from the happy state of Chaucer's reverdie:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain (1-4)

Eliot begins his poem by categorically stating that April is the cruellest month in order to take on the wonderful hope and faith in the reverdie passage. In the modern wasteland, the memory of the month of April and its real and symbolic resonances are completely lost. So mixing memory and desire becomes a problematic experience as the memory of spring season, like a distorted mirror, reflects the harsh realities of the Modern Period. Nothing seems to grow in the spiritual realm. It is significant to note that the apocalyptic imagination of Eliot is hugely negative in its import as he portrays the bleakness in every human situation. Suggesting the fractured nature of human existence, while quoting the biblical expression, "a heap of broken images", Eliot suggests that the unspiritual condition in modern wasteland is irrevocable: "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,/And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,/And the dry stone no sound of water" (22-24).

Eliot does show a way out by suggesting religion and spirituality are the panacea for all spiritual ills, but only to conclude that humans have become apathetic to moral concerns. The shade of the red rock is the shade of the Christian Church, which provides spiritual succor to earnest seekers. But the wastelanders are not keen to pursue this path:

Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;(24-29)

The title 'Burial of the Dead' takes its name from a fertility cult rite; fertility is apparently dead during winter, and so it is buried deep to create an impression that fertility can never come back. But every spring season the dead fertility god is resurrected to usher in the onset of spring. But in Eliot's *The Waste Land* these rays of hope do not augur well for the wastelanders.

Eliot considers all the cities of the world as unreal by which he means artificial

and superficial. People meaninglessly participate in the hectic pace of material life only to realize that they are deeply unhappy.

> *Unreal City,*
> *Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,*
> *A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,*
> *I had not thought death had undone so many.*
> *Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,*
> *And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.*
> *Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,*
> *To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours*
> *With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine(60-68)*

The bells that ring in Saint Mary Woolnoth, a Church, have become a mere indicator of the passage of time, instead of being a clarion call to humanity to spiritualize their lives. Alluding to Dante, Eliot sees the presence of numerous dead souls, though existing, having no interest in spiritual matters. The last section of 'The Burial of the Dead' universalizes the wastelandish nature of Europe through the character of Stetson. He is Everyman and a stasis in stagnation. In a world full of hypocrisies, half measures, indistinct aims and goals, what one can expect is only a mirage of hope and vitality seems to be the apocalyptic vision in *The Waste Land*.

It is possible, then, to see apocalyptic imagination in English Literature as a thread that connects each age. In the broad spectrum of English Literature, Chaucer and Eliot are literary milestones and one can see the degeneration of English Culture through an analysis of poems belonging to distinct historical periods by poets who do not share a common aesthetic. So by a focused reading of British Literature one can distinctly see the operation of apocalyptic appraisals of human society, creating both positive and negative images and one can say with some confidence that the hope that one sees in the beginnings of English Literature seems to fade away as Western civilization marches towards an apparent spiritual destruction. Though this paper traces the existence of apocalyptic imagination in a few major English poets, one can definitely see the presence and operation of apocalyptic imagination in other poets, essayists and novelists belonging to British Literature. W.H. Auden and his compatriot war poets have most movingly dealt with the ugly consequences of war to forewarn humanity about the spiritual emptiness that wars among nations and amongst themselves create. Among the British novels, George Orwell's *1984* is one of the most powerful articulations of apocalyptic perception. Through a reading of British Literature that enshrines Apocalyptic Imagination, one can get a wonderful corpus of writings seeing creative commonalities among unique and distinct creative writers.

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Mapping the Post-War Immigration and Hybrid Britishness in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*

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Abstract

The landscape of Britain has been significantly reshaped by the waves of immigration from its former colonies following World War II. This immigration has had profound implications on Britain's geographical, cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions. Immigrants, in their quest for belonging, find their cultural heritage adapted to the new land, yet a sense of nostalgia for the homeland lingers as fragmented memory. From a postcolonial theoretical perspective, the aesthetics of immigration are characterized by cross-cultural, transnational interactions, and the experience of 'double-time.'

The discourse of post-war migrancy challenges the dominant Eurocentric narratives and stereotypical representations of the Third World, presenting a counter-discourse that fosters hybrid and transnational identities. The present paper focuses on the impact of post-war immigration, specifically from Trinidad, on British culture, and explores the potential ambivalent productivity of a multilingual and multiethnic Britain. It delves into the concept of culturally hybridized and ambivalent Britishness, shaped within the 'contact zone' of various ethnocultural encounters, as portrayed in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*.

Keywords: post-war immigration, Britishness, cultural hybridity, cultural identity, transnational

Introduction

> There is the emergence at the centre of the previously peripheral and
> marginal. For the modern metropolitan figure is the migrant: she and
> he are the active formulators of metropolitan aesthetics and life styles,
> reinventing the languages and appropriating the streets of the master.
> This presence disturbs the previous order. -- Chambers, 23.

> . . . empire gave England power and prestige but left its national
> character untouched; . . . now with postimperial migration, the
> blacks have come to contaminate the realm. -- Gikandi, 86.

Immigration, as a broad term, encompasses various aspects such as displacement, remembering, assimilation, acculturation, adoption, and self-representation. It has evolved into both a conflicting and interactive phenomenon, as migrant communities in host countries encounter cultural exclusivity, clashes, discrimination, and cross-cultural interactions. The immigrants define and redefine themselves through diverse ethnocultural experiences, even though they share a common cultural consciousness. The Postwar immigration has facilitated global mobility and interconnection, where non-political and de-historicized cultural

expressions emerge, allowing immigrants to shape their fluid identities within a new society. The immigration process across vast geographical areas results in cultural hybridity and transnational consciousness, characterized by conflicting, changeable, negotiatory, heterogeneous and discontinuous cultural expressions. The immigrants' cultural identities are constantly influenced by a range of fluid processes, and their integration into the host society involves reconstructing and renegotiating their belonging through various discursive means (Jones and Krzyzanowski 43).

While post-war migration is not directly a consequence of British colonialism, its historical legacy continues to impact immigration even in the postcolonial era. After the breakup of the British Empire, immigrants from its former colonies gravitate towards Britain. Despite facing racism and xenophobia, they manage to navigate an 'in-between' cultural space, giving rise to hybrid forms of English and Englishness starting from the 1950s. Their dualistic experiences encompass displacement, alienation, estrangement, and readjustment. These individuals create 'imaginary homelands' by drawing upon imagination and memory, constructing fictional narratives about their past and cultural roots while being caught between two or more cultural settings, leading to feelings of neither belonging here nor there—everywhere and nowhere. Additionally, their aspirations and sense of belonging are based on a complex interplay of dreams and illusions, existing only in their fragmented memories. This dualistic function paradoxically contextualizes dislocated individuals' fragmented experiences within Britain.

The British Nationality Act of 1948 played a significant role in shaping the trend of immigrants making Britain their natural destination, especially from developing countries. This act allowed immigrants to become citizens of Britain, providing them with an opportunity to explore their hidden histories within the mainstream host culture and traditions. However, this process has positive and negative implications for the immigrants' personal growth, development, and relationship with the host country. This trend of increased immigrant presence in adopted societies has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, it brings with it assumptions of acceptance and recognition, acknowledging the contributions immigrants make to their new society. This can lead to an improved lifestyle, foster hybrid creativity, and even open up the possibility of dual citizenship. On the contrary, there are negative consequences to consider. One of these is the potential breakdown of an authentic and homogeneous national identity, as the blending of cultures occurs. The shift from a monologic to a dialogic cultural construction can also present challenges. As various cultures and communities intersect, a cultural mixity arises, which can further complicate matters. Unfortunately, immigrants might face discrimination based on class, race, gender, and color when engaging with prevailing literary canons and dominant ideologies. These existing power dynamics uphold and perpetuate pre-existing disparities, making it difficult for newcomers to integrate fully. Moreover, immigrants may experience different forms of violence and traumatic experiences, thus making their journey in the adopted society even more challenging.

Despite these challenges, immigrant writers and their fictional characters establish mutual and reciprocal relationships with the host culture, effectively bridging the gap between their homeland and the host land. Moreover, they embrace immense possibilities of cultural hybridity that transcend "place, time, history, and

culture." Their migratory cultural expressions and forms find expression within transnational networks, rooted in multiple attachments, encompassing practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, the norms of the host countries. (Hall 225, Clifford 307). As a result, immigrant consciousness is complexly mapped with a sense of cultural difference and disjunction, encompassing both positive and negative dimensions.

Discussion

Sam Selvon, an Indian Trinidadian author who migrated to Britain, witnessed the rapid influx of immigrants in post-war London and its consequent evolution as a multicultural city. His novel, *The Lonely Londoners* showcases how the fragmented, heterogeneous, and hybrid cultural practices in London were impacted by the black Trinidadian immigrant population and its attempts to assimilate in the city. The factors such as the British Nationality Act, the dissolution of the British Empires, the blending of standard English and Trinidadian Creole languages, the radicalization of Britishness, and the subversion of traditional tropes, all these contribute to the construction and evolution of a multicultural British society, influencing the immigrants' hybridized and ambivalent cultural identities. (Hansen, Randall, and Desmond King 398). Moreover, Selvon's work raises questions about the authenticity of British colonial history and challenges the notion of a homogeneous and monolithic national culture, tradition, identity and belonging.

The protagonist, Moses Aloetta, a veteran Trinidadian immigrant and black Londoner, takes on the role of guiding his friend Sir Galahad and other boys on how to survive and find work in the racially charged environment of "the mother country," Britain. Moses imparts the harsh reality that black immigrants like themselves are unwelcome and viewed as "coloured fellars" by white Londoners. Moses's immigration to the colonial metropolis was fueled by illusions of a better life, freedom, independence, prosperity, equality, and opportunities in this new dreamland. However, upon arrival, he is confronted with a starkly different reality, where his dreams are shattered by hostile, indifferent, and racist circumstances. Over time, Moses comes to realize that London, touted as a utopia, has proven to be "a lonely, miserable city" for immigrants who are mostly unwelcome and excluded from society (Selvon 126). Selvon's depiction of post-war London echoes the modernist narrative techniques seen in Charles Dickens' somber portrayal of life in the city in *Bleak House* and T. S. Eliot's depiction of the "unreal city" in *The Waste Land*, with its bleak weather, dire poverty, squalid living conditions, alienation, segregation, racism, and fear.

The massive influx of immigrants from Trinidad becomes a significant issue in a racially charged Britain, sparking discussions in Parliament about the situation: "when the English people starting to make rab about how much too West Indians coming to the country. . . a big discussion going on in Parliament about the situation" (Selvon 2). Coming from a shared West Indian heritage, Moses feels a responsibility to assist his fellow West Indian immigrants. Gradually, he forms connections with other immigrants, particularly those newly arrived, helping them find jobs and navigate their new lives. Waterloo becomes a gathering place for immigrants to discuss and address their challenges, fostering a sense of collective consciousness in

the face of a hostile environment. As one of the earliest immigrants, Moses, like the newcomers, realizes they are denied a sense of belonging and are excluded from mainstream society, arriving with little more than one suitcase and uncertain about where to sleep or go. He recounts their desperate conditions to a journalist, highlighting their unemployment, homelessness, cramped living conditions, and experiences of ignorance, racism, indifference, and discrimination. Despite his plea on behalf of the immigrants, it goes unnoticed by the reporter. Nevertheless, Moses finds the strength and resilience to integrate himself into the host society.

In stark contrast to Moses, Galahad exudes pretentiousness and self-deception, in believing that he knows everything about living and finding a job in London. However, his enthusiasm to adopt a British way of life is quickly shattered by the reality of dislocation, unbelonging, lack of sympathy, exploitation, unhomeliness, and cultural shock during his initial stay in the city. Galahad arrives in London from Trinidad and is immediately struck by the stark difference in weather. Despite facing discriminatory and racialized circumstances, he strives to assimilate into the mainstream host culture. However, the gloomy and foggy winter weather dampens his enthusiasm, leaving him feeling lost and desolate: "when he look up, the colour of the sky so desolate it make him frighten. . . . A feeling come over him as if he lost everything he have" (Selvon 23).

Most of the characters in *The Lonely Londoners* find themselves living in dilapidated houses rented from English landlords and are seen as outsiders by the members of the host society: "you will have to sleep on them two chairs. But tomorrow, if landlord don't agree for you to have this room, you will have to find a place" (Selvon 17). Despite their efforts to assimilate and be accepted, they find themselves grappling with a paradoxical feeling of home within the condition of unhomeliness, living in an 'in-between' liminal space – neither fully belonging here nor there – experiencing a profound sense of duality. The novel's migratory narrative highlights the duality faced by both the characters and British society at large. The characters find themselves as both Londoners and outsiders, united by their black ethnicity yet differentiated by their experiences, lacking a strong bond between migrant minorities and host majorities.

In the concluding part of the novel, the immigrants develop an ambivalent attitude towards London, oscillating between preferences for living in and leaving the metropole, longing for and despising it. For instance, Moses, amidst bouts of loneliness, isolation, alienation from city life, displacement, racism, and homelessness, contemplates returning to Trinidad and leading a simpler life, free from the complexities of city living: "I would get a old house and have some cattle and goat, and all day long sit down in the grass in the sun, . . . I don't want no ballet and opera and symphony" (Selvon 125). His migratory ethnic consciousness fails to find a sense of belonging in London, as his idealized home is restricted and constrained by a fixed sense of Britishness that denies him true identity and belonging. He observes the double standards of the Britishers, feeling that they tolerate but do not fully accept him: "Nobody in London does really accept you. They tolerate you, yes, but you can't go in their house and eat or sit down and talk" (Selvon 126).

Over time, Moses and other Trinidadian boys become committed to claiming their space within the glory and greatness of the city by re-appropriating its culture, language, and society: ". . . in the postwar decades, the primary location of open-

ended models of Britishness has been the city [London]" and it contains transcultural artefacts beyond the "conventional models of Englishness" (John McLeod, 17). Through their long presence, immigrants have blurred the boundaries between themselves and Londoners, providing a means to escape the burden of racism, isolation, and alienation. They challenge their racialized 'Otherness' and discursively imposed status while celebrating a multicultural British society that has evolved from an 'imagined community' to a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual reality.

 V.S. Naipaul, like Sam Selvon, is a Trinidad-born author of Indian descent, relocated to Britain for shaping his hyphenated British-Caribbean cultural identity. His autobiographical novel, *The Mimic Men* delves into the experiences of West Indian immigrants in post-war London, and on the concept of 'mimic men' who imitate their colonial masters, experience feelings of displacement, alienation, hybridity, and transnationalism. These individuals hold an ambivalent attitude towards their native cultures, simultaneously yearn to embrace the colonial one, yet feeling a sense of homelessness and insecurity in the new cultural space, Britain. *The Mimic Men* unveils the profound transformation that Britain, particularly London, undergoes with the arrival of immigrants from the West Indies, and sheds light on the colonial fantasy harbored by immigrants desiring to escape the burden and disorder of their homeland and fulfill their dreams in the 'mother country.' Ralph Singh, a displaced and fluid protagonist, yearns for an imaginary dreamland, only to discover that this place is an illusion, thus revealing the legacy of past colonial corruption and emptiness.

 Ralph Singh, born of Indian descent on the British-ruled Caribbean Island of Isabella and educated in London, eventually settles in the city with his English wife. Later, he returns to his native country, seeking to immerse himself in its political environment after it gains independence. However, he is eventually exiled and migrates back to London, where, at the age of forty, he reflects on his experiences of disillusionment, anxiety, and cultural displacement, and writes his memoirs.

 The opening of the narrative reveals Ralph Singh's discontentment upon arriving in London as a student. As he observes the imperial metropole, his initial excitement is dampened by the discomfort and bleakness he encounters. Instead of finding the greatness and sense of comfortable belonging he had anticipated, he is faced with a different reality:

> Below the livid grey sky roofs were white and shinning black in patches. . . .And looking out from that room to the thin lines of brown smoke rising from ugly chimneypots, the plastered wall of the house next to the bombsite tremendously braced and buttressed, looking out from that empty room with the mattress on the floor, I felt all the magic of the city go away and had an intimation of the forlornness of the city and of the people who lived in it. (Naipaul 7)

The passage reflects his loneliness and melancholic view of West Indian immigrants' lives in London. Ralph Singh resides in a room within a suburban boarding house owned by Mr. Shylock, a character who serves as both landlord and a model for Ralph's imitation. Ralph's desire for colonial identity and fulfillment of colonial fantasies become ambivalent as he experiences a reversal of roles, taking on colonial privileges and aspirations while still feeling displaced in the host society. To him, the island of Isabella is a place of disorder and despair: "to be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure new world plantation, second-hand and barbarous was to be born

to disorder" (Naipaul 118).

Ralph Singh's journey is marked by conflicting desires: a desire to escape disorder and despair in the home country, only to encounter that again in London. His aspiration to lead a British way of life becomes ironic as he becomes a victim of colonial desire and cultural displacement. Additionally, the impact of the colonial education system is evident in his experiences and political aspirations as he seeks power and order while also realizing the extent of colonial corruption: "I was attracted less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied" (Naipaul 32).

As an Indian in the Caribbean, Ralph Singh attempts to revive past Hindu culture and traditions but finds it impossible to accomplish. He eventually takes advantage of politics to satisfy his alter ego and bring order to the Caribbean. However, this new role as a colonial politician further alienates him from his people. When he goes to London to address his country's economic and social issues with the British government, he faces rejection and dismissal from the ministers. One of the ministers insults Ralph Singh: "his manner indicated clearly that our game had gone on long enough and he had other things to do than to assist the public relations of colonial politicians" (Naipaul 224). His past colonial status is disregarded, emphasizing the obstacles he encounters as an immigrant attempting to navigate the intricacies of colonial politics.

Despite being a victim of the colonial system, Ralph Singh succumbs to imitating the colonial masters and becomes a 'mimic man.' The colonial education system instills in him the belief that his mother country, England, is the sole source of power, order, and comfort. This colonial legacy leaves him with an inferiority complex and a sense of homelessness, trapped in self-delusion. Ralph's 'colonial mimicry' is a product of specific historical and socio-economic events that he cannot easily disengage from. The process of becoming a postcolonial hybridized mimic man is ambivalent, representing a partial and incomplete inclination towards authenticity, as reflected in Ralph Singh's self-conscious and self-deceptive words: "We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new" (Naipaul 146).

The Postcolonial criticism targets the legacy of corruption and superficial imperial cultures associated with the process of colonial mimicry. Despite his efforts to establish an authentic sense of Britishness, Ralph Singh's illusions are shattered as the metropolitan city only fosters feelings of alienation, loneliness, and displacement. He becomes doubly estranged from society but eventually finds a semblance of resolution through the realization of his fragmented self and solitary existence which he documents in a memoir. Homi Bhabha's argument about the postcolonial mimic man, desiring "a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite", aptly applies to Ralph Singh (86, original emphasis).

Naipaul's portrayal of London is gloomier compared to Selvon's depiction in *The Lonely Londoners*, presenting the city as a place of both hope and despair, affection and alienation. The characters in the novel feel nostalgia for the imperial metropole and leave a cross-cultural impact on British national culture, tradition, language, literature, and identity, leading to significant moments of transformation and re-articulation. Despite facing hostility and exclusivity in the host country, Ralph Singh is eager to become a British citizen, embrace its culture, tradition, and

language. He finds it impossible to return home and gets reconciled to the new environment, thus underlining his cultural assimilation and acculturation in British society: "I know that return to my island and to my political life is impossible," (Naipaul 8).

However, despite migrants' assimilation and adoption of new cultures and traditions, they encounter social boundaries that mark them as outsiders, preventing them from fully integrating into their new land. Their longing for home and a sense of belonging exists somewhere else, perhaps in fragmented memories, performances, and ambivalent aspirations across different geographical locales, distant both in time and space. As Avtar Brah points out that the concept of home is "a mythic place of desire" and "a place of no-return" in the diasporic artifacts, even though it is possible to visit the place as one's homeland of origin (192). The immigrants may create in their memories what Salman Rushdie calls "imaginary homelands" (10).

In brief, Ralph Singh's journey as a mimic man highlights the complexities of postcolonial identity, assimilation, and belonging. London, as portrayed by Naipaul, becomes a city of contradictions, evoking both longing and estrangement for the immigrants. Their displaced condition prompts a search for a mythical home, ultimately residing in fragmented memories and elusive aspirations.

Conclusion

To sum up, The *Mimic Men* and *The Lonely Londoners* delve into the concept of 'contrapuntal' within a postcolonial framework and explore the intricate, interdependent, overlapping, and affirmative dimensions of the past imperial experience. This approach unravels the hidden histories, voices, and social realities that mark the relationships between colonies and the empire, the colonized and the colonizer, during and after the colonial periods. The immigrant characters in the select literary texts strive to destabilize the imperial metropolitan culture and its fixed concept of Britishness, resist the imperial culture, and deconstruct the notion of pure and authentic discourse. They exist in multiple locations, belonging to diverse traditions and experiences, embodying a transnational space that links them globally across borders through their discourses of multiple material and emotional belongings. Furthermore, their migratory state resembles Gloria Anzaldua's concept of 'mestiza' consciousness, which fosters cultural inclusivity, a diverse and adaptable blend of traits, and serves as a response to racial and gender disparities. This consciousness brings about a profound transformation in their daily lives, breaking down all barriers, and cultivating a multicultural and transnational awareness among the migrants (77, 80).

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Revisiting Colonial History: Investigating portrayal of the 'white women' in Rumer Godden's *Two Under the Indian Sun* and *Kingfishers Catch Fire*

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Abstract

Literature has the power to subvert an established narrative and reconceptualize/ recontextualize it. The author Susanne Baake in her text *Literature and Communities: Literature Reflects Communities* (2009) claims how writers take a stand for a cause that pertains to a specific community by producing literature that reflect their personal beliefs for the same. While colonial literature converses about the burden taken up by the white men, very few deal with the white women who left their homes behind for the empire's cause. These women can be categorised into a community who selflessly participated in the empire building, yet they remained clouded in the literature of the time. After doing an extensive literature review in the area, it was found that limited research has been done on the white women's community in India. The limited literature produced on them presented a very distorted image. The paper problematizes this negative depiction and attempts at questioning this literary representation of the white women in contemporary colonial narratives of the time. For the purpose, the paper will analysis the select texts – *Two Under the Indian Sun* (1966) and *Kingfishers Catch Fire* (1953) - of the British author Margaret Rumer Godden who was once a colonial woman and penned down her experiences in India.

Keywords: colonial narratives, literary depiction, false narratives, white women's community, Rumer Godden

In the text *Literature and Communities: Literature Reflects Communities* (2009), the author Susanne Baake claims how writers take a stand for a cause that pertains to a specific community by producing literature that reflect their personal beliefs for the same. Literature as such plays a pivotal role because it has the power to subvert certain narratives based on that community and reconceptualize/ recontextualize it. The author Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal text *The Second Sex* (1949) questions the representation of the world that is under male domain since ages and how this representation has been considered as the absolute truth. These representations/narratives ceaselessly demeaned the narratives produced by women writers and questioned their authenticity regarding the same. History, for instance, has been under male domain and as such any literature produced is mostly androcentric. For instance, history of colonialism talks about the wreckages and havocs done by the colonisers on the colonised land. Again, colonial literature converses about the burden taken up by the white men for the nation's cause. The poem 'The White Man's Burden' (1899) by Rudyard Kipling reckons the institution of colonialism as a magnanimous institution and celebrates the white man who according to them took a burden for the empire's cause. This is evident in the lines-

Take up the White Man's burden—

Send forth the best ye breed—
Go send your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild (Kipling 1-6)

It is observed that though numerous literatures have been produced on the white men, very few deal with the white women who left their homes behind for the empire's cause. These women can be categorised into a community who selflessly participated in the empire building, yet they remained clouded in the literature of the time. The androcentric literature projected them as encumbrance who did nothing for the growth of the empire. Rudyard Kipling in his short story collection *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888) gave a very biased image of them. In *Discourse of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism,* the author Sara Mills states-

> Writers have handed down to us a fictional image of the typical 'memsahib' as a frivolous, snobbish and selfish creature who flitted from bridge to tennis parties 'in the hills' while her poor husband slaved "on the plains. (Mills 1991)

The literature produced on the white women's community hence gave a very distorted and biased definition of them and they were relegated to a position where their actions were restricted only to the colonial homes and not the society. Hence, this community attempted at creating narratives that were free from gender and racial biases. The author Margaret Strobel in her text *European Women and the Second British Empire* (1991) debates on a myth created by the colonisers that claimed the European (white) women to be one of the reasons for the collapse of the British empire. The myth that circulated during that time was the 'myth of the destructive female'. European women were held responsible for creating a rift between the natives and the white men and also distracting the latter from their goals. Strobel questioned the legitimacy of this myth and also mentioned about the narratives produced by numerous colonial women who tried to deconstruct it and present an alternative narrative to bring justice to the numerous white women who resided in the colony. The literature produced by them not only presented an alternative image of the white women's community but it also presented a new image of the colonised land. It was observed that the wives, daughters and sisters of the English civil or military officers started writing letters, autobiographies, memoirs etc to their relatives at home (Britain). Their writings were confessional and it unveiled the insecurities and injustice faced by them in India that resulted in depression, anxiety, loneliness, etc. These writings eventually became a part of literature that included fiction, non-fiction and autofictions. After doing an extensive literature review in the area, it was found that limited research has been done on the white women's community in India.

The present paper problematizes their negative depiction and aims at studying the narrative of a white woman writer who unmasks and throws light into events of the past from a new stance. It aims at presenting a gendered understanding of the institution of colonialism. For the purpose, the paper will present an analysis of the select texts of the British author Margaret Rumer Godden (1907-1998) who was once

a colonial woman in India and wrote her first hand experiences on the land and its people. The author Margaret Rumer Godden (1907-1998) was born in Sussex, England but she travelled to India along with her family at a very young age because her father Arthur Leigh Godden worked in a shipping company there and was posted in parts of Assam and Bengal for a considerable amount of time. Rumer developed a sense of belongingness to the land when her father was posted in Narayanganj, Bengal (now Dhaka). Godden in her later years also settled in Kashmir along with her children and the experiences she penned down later took the form of autofictions and fiction. The present study will analyse her autobiographical text *Two Under the Indian Sun* (1966) and *Kingfishers Catch Fire* (1953) that presented the struggles of the white women's community in India.

The white women developed a complex view of the colonised land, the one which was completely different from how it was portrayed before. Since they were directly related to the natives, they could present a more nuanced view of the land and its people. They soon realised that their position was no different from the natives who were a victim of colonial exploitation. These women were fed with scandalous information about the land and were prohibited from maintaining close proximity with the natives. Kept under surveillance, their sexuality was seen as a threat. Therefore, on reaching the colony, they found themselves at a difficult position. The authorities did not provide them the necessary amenities which were promised before and they were left alone in alien places while their husbands/father got posted elsewhere. The author Margaret Macmillan addresses these issues in her text *Women of the Raj* (1988)-

> It was worse for the women than for the men. The men at least had their jobs and the sense that they were doing something worthwhile in India. The women were there to keep house and raise little empire-builders of the future. They were not expected to take too close an interest in India; that would have been unseemly. They did not carry out charitable works among the Indians because that was the sort of thing missionaries- generally regarded with some disdain did. And the Indians themselves might get upset, which was the last thing the Raj wanted. (27)

In the text *Two Under the Indian Sun* Godden busted the myth that the white women engaged in lascivious acts in club houses and visited hill stations during summer while their husbands toiled hard in the plains. Godden here talks about their summer in India when they could not afford to visit any hill stations and how their mothers and aunts were expected to wear clothes that meet the European standard in the scorching heat.

> … Mam and Aunt Mary were pink in the face, almost swollen with their discomfort. It was partly the clothes they wore which made almost no concessions to the weather; there were stays and stockings, petticoats, starched lawn or muslin, dresses with high necks and sleeves. (121)

Again, Godden epitomised India as 'home' which was infallibly shown as a land of uncivilised people in the mainstream colonial narratives produced by the white. Rumer and her sister considered India as their home and wrote "we never felt that we

were foreigners, not India's own; we felt at home, safely held in her large warm embrace, content as we never were to be content in our own country." (14) Rumer stated how the close affinity of the white children with the Indian servants lies in sharp contrast with their English aunts at home. She states" Children in India are greatly loved and indulged and we never felt that we were foreigners, not India's own; we felt at home, safely held in her large warm embrace, content as we never were to be content in our own country." (12) The white women being close with the natives could give an honest narrative gleaned from their personal experiences with them. This ultimately dismantles the androcentric narratives and hence it questions the authenticity of such narratives.

Since Godden herself represented the community of white women in India and therefore she decided to speak against the injustice faced by her through her texts. A study of her texts shows her strong indictment for the institution of colonialism. In her text *Kingfishers Catch Fire* (1953) Godden presented an antithetical image of the colonial experience of the white women. Through the character Sophie, Godden highlighted the challenges faced by a white woman in setting up a colonial home in India. Since the colonial home was seen as the microcosm of the British empire, it was expected that the white women maintain a set standard of behaviour and dignity among the natives in the domestic space. While the colonial narratives showcase these women as the ones living a lavish life in India with retinues of servants to attend to their needs, this was not the actual scenario in most cases. The protagonist Sophie in the text *Kingfishers Catch Fire* starts living in Kashmir along with her two children while her husband is posted elsewhere. The text tried to highlight the life of a European woman in India without a male support (which was promised by the authorities before). Sophie's approach towards the native was very positive as she stated that "the people will be innocent and unspoilt... I shall not be a visitor. I shall be one of them." (6) While the 'myth of the destructive woman' claimed that the European women had an aversion for the natives and hence they created rift between the white men and the natives, this text presents a different picture altogether. Once Sophie's children were attacked by the herd children and yet in another incident one of the servants mixed glass powder in their food. While the white community living in Kashmir wanted to punish the servant when the incident came to light, Sophie believed that it might be just an accident and asked the people not to misjudge the natives based on one event. Sophie soon realised the threat that cultural barriers might bring and how this would disrupt the balance in the colonial home. For instance, once Sophie declared a day off for the servants as a sign of good will but it was misinterpreted by the servants who believed that only God has the authority to do that. Again, the colonial women were expected to maintain a standard of living that did not match the income of their husbands. Though she did not have enough money to pay the servants, yet she was bound to keep them as a part of the colonial dignity. Sophie too faced financial insecurities while living in Kashmir and took up various odd jobs to maintain the lifestyle that was expected of a white woman. These circumstances often left the women in agony and trauma that never got highlighted in the mainstream colonial narratives of the time. The writer Indrani Sen in her article "Colonial

Domestics, Contentious Interactions: Ayahs, Wet-Nurses and Memsahibs in Colonial India" stated that the colonial home became a site of imperial anxieties for the memsahibs (white women). It shows how the colonial policies lured these women to the colonies and later exploited them resulting in a threat to their physical and mental health. Godden through her texts unveiled the hypocrisies of the colonial society which has been concealed in the androcentric narratives.

The paper critiques the literary representation of the white women in contemporary colonial narratives of the time. It delves into the literature produced by the white women who penned down their first-hand experiences with the natives in the colony. A gendered understanding of the history of colonialism was attempted in this paper and it was observed that their narratives tried to establish the conviction that colonialism cannot be simply defined as a masculine endeavour. The community of white women who always remained shrouded in colonial narratives acted as a catalyst in building the empire. The literature produced by them (here Godden's texts) nullifies the alleged image of the white women as 'burden'. It shows how these women became a victim of the repressive colonial policies. A careful study of their texts reveals that the literature produced by them was free from the racial biasness. Literature produced by them successfully problematises the false narratives on the white women's community thereby questioning the androcentric narratives which were considered as absolute truth.

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Iris Murdoch's *The Green Knight* through the Prism of *The Bhagavad Gita*

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Abstract

This paper highlights the influence of the Indian scripture, *The Bhagavad Gita*, on Iris Murdoch's penultimate novel, *The Green Knight*. Peter Mir, a primary character in the novel, is studied against the background of the insights of *The Gita* explained by Vinoba Bhave in his commentary (a book which Iris Murdoch read and annotated). At the beginning of the novel, Peter Mir, sunk in egoism, is caught up in a moral conflict and seeks only retribution from the brothers, especially Lucas. At the end of the novel, after undergoing a deep introspection, he slowly reforms. He begins to recollect the dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna in *the Bhagavad Gita*. Mir wonders if Arjuna, sunk in egoism, had decided to fight with a pure mind. This reference to *The Gita* echoes Mir's moral dilemma about his duty (*swadharma*) towards the brothers (Lucas and Clements). This paper aims to make an interesting contribution to Murdoch studies, drawing on some fascinating sources (including the original commentary that contains highlights by Murdoch herself, obtained from the Iris Murdoch Archives in Kingston, London).
Keywords: egoism, revenge, self-realisation, transformation and *The Bhagavad Gita*

Iris Murdoch was one of the most critically acclaimed British novelists and philosophers who published twenty-six novels and five books of philosophy. Though Murdoch frequently argued that she is not a philosophical novelist, moral philosophy somehow seems to find its way in most of her novels. She was influenced by many Western as well as Eastern philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Schopenhauer and Jiddu Krishnamurti. Murdoch believed that literature plays an important role in making us comprehend "how to picture and understand human situations" (Murdoch, *SG* 33).

Iris Murdoch's letters and interviews shed light on the fascinating interplay between her past involvement with communism and her later embrace of spirituality. In 1946, in a letter to the French author Raymond Queneau, Murdoch wrote, "I started life as a political animal thinking my soul didn't matter – now I am almost a religious animal, thinking it matters vitally. In the swing between those two attitudes lie all the philosophical problems that interest me" (Rowe and Horner, 53). Through these conversations, she offers an honest exploration of her evolving beliefs and the intricate path of her intellectual journey. In one of her interviews, Murdoch notes "We had passionate feelings about social justice. We believed that socialism could, and fairly rapidly, produce just and good societies, without poverty and without strife. I lost those optimistic illusions fairly soon" (Meyers 89). While her earlier engagement with communism reveals a commitment to societal equity and shared prosperity, her subsequent pronouncements indicate a profound gravitation towards spirituality. This shift suggests a deepening recognition of individual morality and the complexities of

human consciousness. Murdoch's transformation underscores the multidimensionality of her worldview, as she navigated from the realm of external political structures to an inner realm of ethical introspection. Rather than seeing these aspects as contradictory, her interviews illuminate a harmonious fusion, portraying how her philosophical perspectives converged to create a comprehensive understanding of both the collective and individual dimensions of human experience.

Apart from being a communist, certain prominent Murdochian critics such as Peter J Conradi and Anne Rowe believed that Iris Murdoch was very much carried away by "the existentialist notion of *mauvaise foi* or 'bad faith' – i.e., acting inauthentically due to the pressures of society and conformism – promulgated by both de Beauvoir and Sartre" (Horner and Rowe 693). However, over the years, Murdoch began to refute their existentialist philosophies after spending a considerable amount of time reading the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Heidegger, and Kierkegaard. Murdoch also ". . . questioned his portrayal of modern man as inevitably alienated and solipsistic. She also rejected Sartre's embrace of the absurd, characterised by the doomed effort to find inherent meaning in a world so full of information" (Horner and Rowe 140).

Murdoch's anti-existentialism is evident in her novel *The Green Knight*, in which a wide variety of characters embrace the infinite variety of human beings and their complex pursuit of meaning. Murdoch's philosophy ". . . argued along Platonic lines that the idea of the Good is central to morality and moral philosophy, and sovereign over all others (as distinct from, say, existentialism where the sovereign concept is 'freedom' or 'the will')" (Rowe and Horner 325). The characters in *The Green Knight* navigate a labyrinth of inner conflicts and external expectations, mirroring the inspirited hope of finding meaning within a chaotic world. While Sarte's existential view gave utmost importance to free choice and considered human beings as independent, powerful, and free, Murdoch, in her essay "Against Dryness" argued that "we are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy" (Murdoch, *AD*, 45). In the novel, Murdoch skilfully portrays the interplay between the self and others as both a reflection and a catalyst for self-discovery.

Iris Murdoch's stance on religion was constantly dynamic until the end of her life. Grimshaw, a primary critic of Murdoch's novels, in her chapter on "Buddhism in *The Green Knight*" says that in 1972 Murdoch claimed to be an ex-Christian and a decade later, in 1983, she exclaimed her love for Buddhism by proclaiming to be a 'Christian Buddhist,' but (Murdoch) never lost her faith in Christ (168). Murdoch believed that traditional religions like Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism have given us contexts to think about love and compassion, overcoming self, and the difference between illusion and reality. Murdoch may not directly deal with or portray religion in her novels, but one will still find a subtle sense of the spiritual, reconciliation, forgiveness, duty, and compassion. Her novels contain characters that always have something dramatic to reveal and, at the same time, subtly imply something spiritually significant.

Murdoch did not believe in any one personal God. Her liking was slightly inclined towards the Eastern religions. In her philosophical work, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, she says "The omnipresence of the spiritual, and the union of all things in their hope of salvation are ideas that Christianity shares with Buddhism and Hinduism" (Murdoch, *MGM* 258). Murdoch's subtle yet deep fascination with religion and theology was because she believed in the universality of all religions. She was mainly interested in Buddhism (discussed extensively in many of her works), which has its roots in Hinduism. Interestingly, as Suguna Ramanathan rightly notes: "What Western theology finds most puzzling is that neither Hinduism nor Buddhism requires belief in God, or in a god, any god" (39). The absence of a personal God in these religions paved the way for a universal way of morality. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch affirms her religious belief by saying, "Perhaps the deep nature of religion is (after all, and as it may seem now) better understood in the east" (248). In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, she says, "I think that if we have religion, we shall have to have religion without God . . . I know that I don't believe in one" (168). According to Murdoch, this absence of a form of God facilitated profound self-realisation, an antidote for the prevailing fear of religious groundlessness.

Peter Mir is introduced into the story as an unknown person who takes the blow to save another stranger. The novel revolves around two brothers, Lucas and Clement. One day, Lucas takes Clement to a park at midnight to see the glow worms. When Clement is busy observing the glow worms, Lucas secretly takes the baseball bat and tries to strike Clements's head. Peter Mir, who is passing by, immediately tries to stop Lucas from committing a murder. Lucas, in a fit of rage, turns around and strikes the stranger on his head. They all assume that Peter Mir is dead (as the trial court declares the stranger dead). The story takes a new turn when the brothers discover that Peter Mir is alive.

Moral Problems and Dilemma in *The Green Knight*

How do we solve a moral problem? How do we act morally? How do we decide between right and wrong in a moral situation? This paper attempts to solve these questions by exploring Peter Mir's predicament in the novel. It also aims to establish the importance of moral action and responsibility. The third chapter of *The Bhagavad Gita (Karma Yoga)* accords action, a pivotal place amidst all human endeavours. In life, generally, problems are many, but solutions are not easy to find. D. C. Mathur, another famous critic of Eastern philosophical thought, argues that the solution to a problem lies in "A rational appraisal and evaluation of the problem is called for in the light of the conditions under which one is to act and in the light of the consequences which are likely to ensue, and which one thinks desirable or undesirable" (36).

"Murdoch's novels invoke imaginative worlds, decked with evocative descriptions and absorbing conversations between interlocutors, who demand our attention because of their credible individuality" (Browning 9). Peter Mir in *The*

Green Knight is one such character. Initially, Peter Mir is unable to decide what he wants. Later in the novel, the readers understand that he wants Lucas to understand him as the 'other' and yields to the desire for revenge. Murdoch portrays Mir as a man torn between two extremes. He demands revenge. On the other hand, he wants to provide justice to the brothers. The readers find him ambivalent when he says, "May I be perfectly frank? I want something from you – and I propose to obtain it. . . . Restitution . . . Sometimes called justice" (Murdoch, *TGK* 105).

Peter Mir considers it his moral duty (*swadharma*) to render justice to the brothers. This justice takes the form of his desire for revenge. Later in the novel, this desire becomes more intense than his compassion. In a heightened tone of anger, Mir tells them: "I could haunt you to the end of the world, I could very easily make your entire life a misery and drive you to suicide" (126). The brothers try to make peace with him but in vain. He does not heed to their words and insists on justice and revenge. He wants an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. "Peace? Are you begging me to forgive you, give you absolution, kneeling at my feet perhaps . . . The punishment must fit the crime" (123).

Opposing to what D. C. Mathur, an Indian philosophic critic, refers to *The Gita* in his article: "While we should be firmly committed to achieve the goal after a rational assessment of the situation, we should not be so egoistically involved in the issue as to calculate what, in terms of pleasure or pain, prosperity or otherwise, will be its likely effect on our personal fortunes" (138), Mir calculates his profit in terms of his fortunes. He says, "All right, I will state it simply, I have come to like these people, they interest me very much, I want you to introduce me to them, I want to get to know you all, I want to become part of your family. . . Clement, utterly astonished, instinctively horrified (Clement says) . . . So this favour is to be a substitute for severed hands" (Murdoch, *TGK* 127).

This request makes the readers believe Mir's desire for revenge is coupled with his kindness to the brothers. He meets Bellamy, a close friend of Lucas, and discusses this fiasco. Bellamy tries to convince Mir to give up revenge and embrace the idea of peace. During their conversation, Mir asks Bellamy, "'You know the circumstances of his childhood?' Bellamy replies, 'Being adopted and – yes, of course.'" Mir, intrigued by the reply, says, 'Do you not think it possible that such circumstances might lead a man to build up a murderous hatred for his brother'" (164). This probable intention of compassion disintegrates into a threat and revenge when Mir tries to reveal the truth during a family gathering: "Clement said, 'No, for God's sake, try to understand me!' 'You mean "spare me" – why should I – I despise what you want me to "understand." I am asking you now to tell these people what happened! If you won't, I will" (158).

Vinoba Bhave, in his commentary on *The Gita*, talks about the two types of attitudes. In the *Karma yoga* chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, He says,

> Behind a man's action, there are generally two types of attitudes. One is: 'If I do something, I shall enjoy the fruit of my actions; I am entitled to it.' The second attitude is: 'I shall not act at all if I am not going to enjoy the fruit of my actions." *The Gita* prescribes an altogether different attitude. It says:

"You must, of course, act; but do not have any claim over the fruit of your
actions (Bhave 41).

Unfortunately, Peter Mir mistakenly follows the first type of attitude wherein he seeks Lucas's death. He has selfish intentions for the actions that he performs. Murdoch has grafted the character of Peter Mir in a way that, throughout the novel, there is ambiguity and suspicion regarding his intentions, thoughts, and actions. Almost every character in the novel has an imaginary picture of him. Lousie and Sefton consider him to be Mr Pickwick and Prospero, respectively. Interestingly, Aleph considers him the Green Knight, while Moy considers him the Minotaur.

Mir fails to discern the moral lapse of being selfish. His selfish concern for revenge conceals his 'moral consciousness' (286). *The Gita* highlights the evils of egoism: "A man having an eye on securing the fruit looks at the work from a selfish point of view. In his view, the action and its fruit are exclusively his own'" (Bhave 32). Bellamy tries to coax Peter to forgive Lucas and move on. Instead, Peter says, "For me, nothing can ever be well again. If he were kneeling in front of me, I'd kick his eyes out . . . Justice must be done" (Murdoch, *TGK* 213). Mir is selfishly bent on achieving what he wants.

In the chapter *Karma yoga* Lord Krishna states that, "One could be steeped in violence within, while being non-violent in outward appearance. For, violence is an attribute of the mind" (Bhave 62). As in Peter Mir's case, he cannot adhere to his moral duty because of his obdurate want for revenge and vengeance. Mir, upset by consecutive failures to restore justice, tries a last alternative plan. He decides to re-enact the scene to cripple and maim the brothers. Through the re-enactment scene, Mir expects a purgation or purification. He believes that the brothers will receive the appropriate punishment and justice will be delivered. Mir believes it could be ". . . a sort of rite of purification – a sort of mystery play – a gamble, a gesture – the intervention of a god – well, why do I not say God" – (Murdoch, *TGK* 235).

Through characters like Bellamy and Clement, Murdoch shows Mir the moral path. Clement reminds Mir that this profound desire for revenge is because of his frustrated failures. Bellamy also tries to remind Mir of his moral duties by gently reminding him of virtues like forgiveness and compassion. He also tells Mir, "You are a good angel. This is what you have to be. And something in your soul knows it" (213). Mir does not give in to these words. Instead, he becomes more adamant about punishing the brothers. He scowls at Lucas, saying, "You are a wicked man and you have performed an evil act. Somebody has to pay" (237). He warns Clement that his threats are not jokes and bloodshed is typical of him. His ego prevents him from performing the right actions. Peter Mir cannot attain calmness of mind because of his ego and unfulfilled desire for retribution. In order to fulfil his desire of misplaced justice, he insists on the re-enactment scene.

The re-enactment scene takes place as insisted by Mir. Clement delivers his speech in which he voices his intentions of goodwill and forgiveness. He also acknowledges that Peter Mir was wronged. He further discusses his opinion of peace, not war, amongst themselves. He urges everyone to think and ruminate on matters of

forbearance and reason. Clement calls for the re-enactment scene by saying:

> I suggest that at this moment he should concentrate extremely hard upon the hidden thing or things which he wishes to recall and that we should sincerely attempt to assist him by a similar silence and intense concentration. Here was another silence. The silence continued" (259).

Such tranquillity and silence are emphasized even in *The Gita*. In the *karma yoga* chapter, Lord Krishna says that the mind of a man is a powerful thing. It is wayward, too; it gets distracted by the slightest disturbance. However, on the other hand, this same mind can also help achieve equanimity and endow one with the power of discrimination. Thus, the 'silence' in the re-enactment scene is significant. Mir tells Bellamy that, during the silence, he 'remembered God' (279). He does not mean God personally but in the sense of the 'self.' He had remembered to seek God within. This 'self' helps him regain evenness; an outlook infused with goodwill. It endows him with a disposition to look at the positive side of the men and matters. This transformation leads him onto the path of self-realization.

Thus, after the re-enactment scene, Peter Mir is an enlightened individual. A messenger in the form of his unconsciousness reminds him of his true self. Mir says: "I am now simply trying to explain what it was that I had forgotten" (279). There seems to be some genuine metamorphosis that takes place. Mir's sense of self-realization and his plea for reconciliation are replicated in his letter to Lucas. He accepts that his heightened sense of unwanted egoism led to an intense obsession with the passionate desire for revenge:

> I had lost my moral consciousness – and have now regained it. I was filled with hatred and desire for revenge. Now I have no hatred and no desire for revenge . . . I am very sorry for my aggressive behavior, and I ask you to forgive me. I now see that vindictive rages and vengeful intentions are but fantasies, the superficial frothing of the ego. (286)

Murdoch highlights the importance of moral duty (*swadhrama*) by discussing Arjuna's dilemma, as mentioned in *The Gita*. Arjuna, overcome by egoism (*Ahamkara),* could not perform his moral duties. Therefore, Krishna had to dispel this ego and, through the teachings of *The Gita*, explain to Arjuna the difference between delusion and reality. In the novel, Murdoch refers to this dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna:

> There are moments for war and there are moments for peace. You are no doubt familiar, on this topic, with the discussion between Krishna and Arjuna. Why did Krishna tell Arjuna to fight . . . Arjuna, sunk in egoism, could not have made the decision not to fight with a pure mind his motives would have been self-righteous, his action valueless. (286).

Peter Mir can be compared to Arjuna in *The Gita*. Mir, with a heightened sense of superficial ego, cannot act morally in this context. Mir, in a godless world, resorts to self-help. However, the inner light of consciousness puts him back on the moral path. *The Gita* states that individuals must be free to decide and act morally. To do that, one should judge any human existence's social and natural conditions and employ one's

tendencies, habits, and capacities to achieve the desired results or goals.

Mir succeeds in rationally making use of his moral consciousness and thereby achieves the cognizance of the subjective conditions around him and also acknowledges that his desire for revenge is a result of his submission to determinism and unenlightened egoism. He can now distinguish the difference between illusion and reality and accepts the "feud . . . as unreal, and a painful wastage of time and spirit" (Murdoch, *TGK* 287). In the Murdochian sense, self-realization aims to improve the self, which helps maintain and build interpersonal relationships. The goodness of people and society depends on the self's betterment. This self-improvement (through a moralistic lens) is what Murdoch mainly aims at in most of her novels.

Conclusion

In the *Karma yoga* chapter of *The Gita*, Lord Krishna says that moral action (*dharma*) pertains to the right course of action in any moral situation. In Peter Mir's case, he had to act morally in the given situation where forgiveness and peace were the need of the hour. Mir finally confronts Clement and tells him, "I want peace of course. I want something clear – like an equivalence – only not like it was before" (Murdoch, *TGK* 295). Thus, Peter Mir understands the essence of moral duty. By the end of the novel, Peter Mir acknowledges his initial deranged desire for revenge as a mere passing illusion that helps him realize the true meaning of peace and reconciliation. In her philosophical work, The *Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch argues that "In the moral life, the enemy is the fat relentless ego" (Murdoch, *SG* 53). We can overcome this ego by attending to others and the world other than ourselves. Peter Mir, on the other hand, by ceaselessly attending only on himself, gets a limited perspective of the world's reality, and this, in turn, closes his eyes to the goodness present around him. Peter Mir is able to alter his consciousness through realism, unselfishness, and objectivity. He realises that he was all the while seeking revenge and violence instead of kindness and forgiveness. These qualities help him perforate the cloudy mist of selfishness and see the world of reality. This transformation is what the readers see towards the end of the novel. The paper, thus, traces Mir's journey from illusion to realisation through the path of *Karma* as explained by Lord Krishna in The *Gita*.

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"How long does the journey take?"- Navigating Precarity and Precarious Itineraries in Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*

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Abstract

The trope of the protagonist's homecoming post triumphing over ordeals, is a quotidian literary scene. Christy Lefteri in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* (2019) limns how the population caught in the crosshairs of conflict is prone to loss of life, livelihood, family, home, land and everything normal and familiar. The paper, through a close textual analysis, endeavours to probe into geographies of humanitarian crisis, activating a tryst with home and asylum, displacement and dispossession, loss and memory, reality and construct, journey and stasis, suffering and confronting, guilt and grief, blindness and illusion and so on. The sense of home not only manifests as elusive or as plural possibilities but can transmute into an entity of the past in a dystopic clime. The text through the lens of precarity dovetails two vulnerable dispositions for the refugees — the warzone of Syria and the journey of escape — only to discern congruities between the two.

Keywords: home, precarity, violence, refugee, journey, Syria

> Where was home now? And what was it? In my mind it had become
> a picture infused with golden light, a paradise never to be reached.
> – *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*

The quoted statement resonates with the psyche of refugees, their homes and routine lives now celebrated only through a sense of belatedness and nostalgia. While nature might sometime fashion in its sui generis manner to usher calamities, the tenor of human barbarism conjures abject scenarios, consistently expanding the spectrum of inhumanity. In the recent past, the visuals of people clinging to the peripherals of an aircraft and falling off midair during the 2021 Taliban takeover of Afghanistan exhibits the sheer impulse to escape an impending adversity, even at the cost of inevitable death in the process. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 witnessed a total of 11.6 million Ukrainians remaining displaced at the end of the year, precipitating "the fastest displacement crisis, and one of the largest, since the Second World War" (Global 8). The Syrian quagmire remains unabated, leaving the common population victim of umpteen repercussions of war. The snapshots capturing the unannounced explosions, battered buildings, terror-stricken faces of children, hapless throngs of uprooted people, escapes in flimsy vessels and the overall commotion of Syria are not foreign to global mass, stirring occasional indignation. The image of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian lying perished on the shore, from 2015, not only rephrased the definition of tragedy but dilated spectres of human agency and potency. Christy Lefteri in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* (2019) casts the scathing realities of a war-torn landscape of Syria and the precarity its people are subjected to.

The text centers on the quandaries of Nuri, the titular beekeeper, his artist-wife Afra and their quest for asylum in the U.K., after their lives are upended by the protracted Syrian crisis. The death of their son, Sami, owing to a bomb blast, the sudden threat to Nuri's life and the escape of his business partner and cousin, Mustafa, to the U.K. prompts them to follow suit. They are representatives of the exodus occurring hitherto since the last decade across and outside Syria. A cursory glance at history entails migration as a ubiquitous exercise and it has been employed as a theme explore the human condition (White 6), and hence, the flight of refugees indubitably corresponds to it. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR). At the end of 2022, more than 1 in 74 people worldwide remained forcibly displaced, an estimated 108.4 million people owing to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order (Global 7). At the end of 2022, 1 out of 5 refugees were a Syrian, accounting for 6.5 million hosted in 131 nations (Global 19), in addition to the internally displaced population. Lefteri's narrative presents a nuanced delineation of the conspicuous ordeals of the refugees, navigating the unfrequented blend of their corporeal, mental and emotional coordinates.

The concept of precarity came into action primarily concerning the insecurity and inconsistencies of labour market, employment, rights of workers, particularly that of migrants. It may also be employed to describe "a lack of other resources, such as physical safety and emotional stability, that negatively affects the lives of people alienated or marginalized by society" (Hemmann 201). It has permeated into intersectional discourses to study other state of affairs. Judith Butler describes precarity as a "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (*Frames* 25). Liisa H. Malkki sees precarity as "a workhorse concerned with the experiences of refugees and other displaced people, whose very existence is one of uncertainty and risk" (qtd in Hodge 85). The Syrian landscape, specifically that of Aleppo, is depicted in the text in all its mayhem. Through Nuri and Afra in particular, Lefteri draws on the predicament of civilians turning into migrants in warzones,as if led through a coerced passage from innocence to experience, at the expense of irreparable loss.

Emanuela Tegla (2019) mentions how the vignettes of their home city (and lives) leading up to the war seems as "an almost idllyic place" (656), charged with family dinners, bee keeping, and domestic pleasures. It undergoes a conspicuous metamorphosis, evident amidst "skeletons of trees and on craters and wires and broken walls" (Lefteri 35), streets stinking of "death and burnt rubber" (45), and the bombardments leaving houses "like carcasses" (39). In that macabre ecology, Sami's childlike naïve imagination evokes the idea of living in Lego houses in order to withstand any havoc. While the river is filled with corpses, the air of Syria is raided by planes, and the streets are patrolled by snipers. The currency of carnage turned Aleppo

"like the dead body of a loved one . . . no life, no soul . . . full of rotting blood" (Lefteri 38). The horrors prevailing in Syria are evident as two armed men bet by practicing their target skills by shooting an eight-year-old and obstructing the mother from reaching her dead child. The usual sights of lining up young people on the edge of the river and shooting them highlights the anarchy. A similar scenario is mapped in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013), as the number of corpses multiply after the US invasion of Iraq.

Home epitomizes familiarity, safety, belongingness and security, and hence, its loss engenders vulnerability, generating a sense of danger. With the escalation of war, "the image of home started to change, the comfortable home turns to such fearful, scattered and damaged place, and the feeling of security has been threatened" (Lamiche and Belagraa 38). The characters thus resort to nostalgia and memory along with human relationships to confirm a sense of belonging (55). The entity of home and life for the civilians lay in sustained abstractions as the unremitting conflicts endanger the configurations of homes, individual lives and consequent erosion in family units. Lamiche and Belagraa in their study "Narratives of Homeland: Displacement and Homelessness in Christy Lefteri's The Beekeeper of Aleppo" (2020) indicate that its characters imagine Aleppo "as it was before the war, as if it has never been touched and destroyed" (56-57). The unparalleled attachment to their past is evident as Nuri still opts for a world probably resembling what he las lost:

> A place where the sun is just rising, touching the walls around the ancient city and, outside those walls, the cell like quarters and the houses and apartments and hotels and narrow alleys and an open-air market where a thousand hanging necklaces shine with the first light, and further away, across the desert land, gold on gold and red on red. (Lefteri 4)

The ease of death that enveloped Aleppo impels Mustafa, a man tethered to the bees, to work in a morgue anticipating the corpse of his missing teenage son. Moreover, the vandalism of the apiaries not just destroyed their livelihood for Nuri and Mustafa, but also stripped them off their sense of life, stimulating "a feeling of emptiness…" (19). According to Hashim and Frak in "The Anonymous Identity of Forced Migrants: A Postcolonial Study" (2021), the wreckage of the bees' colonies mirrors the internal and external devastation of all the characters that are typical to almost migrants (52). Unlike the segregation of the human population on abstract markers, the uncertainties unleashed by one group on the other, or the incessant shades of anarchy, the apparatus of beehives register a synthesis of hard work and harmony. Though he is exhausted, the very thought of apiaries at Mustafa's locality in England quells Nuri's inertia: Where there are bees there are flowers, and where there are flowers there is new life and hope" (Lefteri 30). It corroborates that apart from fellow humans or the spatial connotation of houses, non-human entities can also provide a chance at healing along with a sense of family, home, and normalcy, diluting the sense of being precarious. Hence, Mustafa shows gradual adaptation to his new environments in the U.K. by working with the bees in England.

Besides turning passive spectators to the wasteland and loss of close ones, the

ordinary population is rendered completely rootless and vulnerable post the voluntary or coerced exit from their homes. In the text, the journey of the refugees is deemed analogous to Odysseus, filled with hurdles; the latter strives to return home while the former lacks it now (Lefteri 261). The pathos of the refugees is aggrandized as they encounter othering in places they traverse or seek shelter, relying completely on the uncertainties of asylum by host nations. As an example, the lack of proper documentation hinder Afra's visit to a doctor in the UK, her refugee identity gaining prominence over her status as an individual. Though they are accommodated in the B&B that reeks of "the smell of terrible journeys filled with fear" (148), their helpless status compelling them to put up with its dilapidated and unhygienic interiors. They are reminded of the repercussions of their stay overtly through a billboard stating "there are too many of us, that this island will break under our weight" (3). Again, Nuri and Afra relatively have a greater chance of obtaining asylum than the Moroccan man or Diomande from the Ivory Coast. The irony of their Syrian citizenship is palpable regarding asylum status as their vulnerability deems them "the lucky ones, because we have come from the worst place in the world" (Lefteri 6). Nuri encounters a woman whose asylum has been denied for seven years in England, underscoring how the journey even after reaching safe desired destination remains uncertain. The text cites the refugees that are stuck in some camps for prolonged periods with hardly any hope for further movement owing to lack of resources, documents or a warranted cause that fits the authorities' requirements. Guignery sees the refuge seeking people as "placed in an in-between or liminal position, waiting in an airport, in a camp, at the border, limit or threshold between two worlds, no longer belonging to the place they left, not yet belonging to the place they currently inhabit" (Precarious Balance 2022). Thus, precarity "does not flow from the movement of refugees across borders; it is imposed upon them by states who seek to regulate, validate, or otherwise control bodies in motion" (Hodge 89). Furthermore, refugees that resort to illegal means of entering a state have to play accordingly. Afra undergoes transformation by dyeing her hair to "bleached out the Arabic" (5), to ensure a smooth entry to the U.K. The change of their physical appearances to reach England contours the need to fit into "familiar" and potentially "safe" identities. Their new identities (names) are of Italy-origin and they are advised to refrain from speaking Arabic throughout their air journey lest it attracts suspicion. Though it pertains to the protection during their illegal passage to potential safety, the fact that Arabs attract attention in the West corresponds to persisting prejudices. For Hodge (2019), precarity is a process and people are not precarious but factors such as interactions with individuals, state policy and practice at the borderline make the refugees so (84).

The precarity of bodies extends to the psyche, as the subjects undergo intense emotional turbulence throughout. Afra witnessed the transformation of the very places of Syria whose paintings garnered her recognition. An artist by profession, the loss of sight translates into the allusive blighting of her creative potential by growing immune to decay, waste and dread. She later realizes how it was not the bomb that blinded her, but the sight of Sami's death, with the doctor suggesting the possibility of

a trauma-induced state. Mustafa recounts how a refugee girl lost her voice highlighting "…who knows what this girl has been through, what she has seen" (Lefteri 98). Nuri and Afra abstain from intimate physical and emotional contact, lost in their worlds. In addition to the tragic experiences common to them, they are also subjected to individual passages of trauma. While Afra experiences loss of vision, Nuri's psyche conjures up visions. His trauma is manifested through an illusory disposition in the form of Mohammed, a young boy of Sami's age, that he constantly tries to protect to recoup the lost sense of fatherhood, later diagnosed by the doctor as signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Afra witnesses the death of Sami closely, endures molestation by Fotakis, and experiences emotional estrangement from Nuri. On the other hand, Nuri is burdened with the guilt of murder and blames himself for Afra's predicament in adjunct to not confronting Fotakis. The text meditates on the collective consciousness of the refugees, saturated with their distressing past and the anticipation and fear regarding asylum. The Moroccan man, Diomande, or Angeliki dodges the question of their origin or their journeys, and finally, when they recount their stories, it is apparent that their hesitancy corresponds to a painful revisitation of the past. Furthermore, the young Diomande's "eyes of an old man" (147), his physique like that of a "corpse or a bombed-out building" (78), Mustafa's apparent signs of aging, Nuri considering himself as "a broken man" (31) are evocative of the precarious lives have endured. The text complicates actions by creating ethical dimensions for the characters as well as the readers. Mustafa kills three shooters in Syria involved with killing young boys to avenge his son's murder. In a similar vein, Nuri contributes to the murder of Nadim after witnessing his iniquitous dealings by preying on minors at the camp. Instead of presenting it as a semblance of poetic justice for the dead, Nuri is guilt-ridden, depicting the unfrequented ramifications of war. Here, the flight does not tantamount to the erasure of precarity, as the harrowing past, the dismal present and an uncertain future hover over them.

　　The lack of agency of ordinary citizens contributes to their refugee status, as they prioritize their lives over their identity, home and land. However, the narrative postulates that refugees like Nuri and Afra undertake the journey to escape death, which in turn annihilates them, if not physically then metaphorically. The fact that the timeframe to reach safety or desired destination is uncertain and in adjunct requires financial means to meet the expenses, underscores how some people have to stay back despite the urge to flee. The refugees undertake perilous routes to reach country borders, escaping surveillance and forces of nature. The dangers hovering on the people in transit pose the lack of alternatives, inclining towards the possibility of safe alight elsewhere over doomed futures at home. Nuri illustrates the harrowing episode of a man lowering a young girl into a large saucepan attached to a long cable to transfer her across a river. Furthermore, the peril is maximized on the unpredictable voyage to Turkey, a flimsy small rubber boat carrying a group of passengers in the turbulent sea. They encounter a near-death experience as their boat capsizes midway and the passengers struggle to get on board until rescued by another boat. The conversations before the journey intimates that a boat toppled the previous night, leaving only four

survivors while eight bodies were found.

They undertake a tedious and excruciating journey from Syria, passing through different camps, that is heightened in Athens. The refugees and asylum seekers from different places populating the text testifies how "lives are supported and maintained differently, and there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe" (*Precarious* 32). The refugees refrain from questioning the chaos and scarcity for fear of deportation. The situation in Syria is replicated particularly in Pedion tou Areos, where people fall prey to the treacherous interiors of the transit camp, which they had attempted to escape in the first place. Angeliki, a refugee, claims herself already dead, exposing the cynical atmosphere looming over the camp: "'This is the place where people die slowly, inside. One by one, people die'" (Lefteri 206). According to her, the place is involved in child trafficking, either for sexual objectives or organ trade. The constant paucity of resources and the lack of vigilance turn survival in the camp into an arduous struggle. The place is infested with thieves and crime, generating further disruptions in the refugees' attempt to reach their desired destinations. Angeliki had left Somalia to escape its deplorable state post famine and later Kenya, but her baby is stolen in the camp while she claims her blood has been poisoned. In a similar vein, it is hinted that the teenage brothers from Afghanistan are targeted by predators. In fact, Nuri, too, is wounded by Nadim as he discovers the latter's involvement in the covert sexual activities. In contrast to the bees that work as a community, human nature is plagued by ulterior motives, adding to the existing precarity. Even in the direst circumstances, there exists overtly engaged or masked opportunists: "People are not like bees. We do not work together, we have no real sense of a greater good" (98). For instance, the smuggler, Mr. Fotakis, exploits the situation explicitly by forcing himself onto Afra in the absence of Nuri, highlighting gendered precarity, how women are susceptible to varying degrees of physical and emotional abuse. The lack of confrontation on their part with Fotakis stems from their fear of jeopardizing their only ticket to escape.

The camps fashion as a palimpsest with fresh woes attached with every incoming batch of refugees. For instance, the teenage brothers fled Afghanistan to escape persecution by the Taliban. In a similar vein, Diomande describes the struggles marked by civil unrest and war that he has escaped. The text traces the predicament of ordinary populations often caught in the political impasse. Judith Butler in *Frames of War* (2009) depicts precarity as the "politically induced condition of maximized precariousness for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence who often have no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection" (26). Hence, Diomande's preparation for his asylum interview is filled with the history and politics of his land, reflective of how the political affects the personal:

'I think, Diomande, that they will want to hear your story.'
'This my story!' Diomande insists.
'How else will they understand if I don't tell it?'
'Maybe they know these things.'
'Maybe they not know. If they not know, how they will understand why I need to be

here?' (Lefteri 190)

The flight of civilization to whatever degree of progress is axiomatically punctuated by human bestiality. The text at times refers to such instances of the past and posits that the Syrian crisis is not an unprecedented affair in the trajectory of human existence and people have been time and again pushed to precarious existence. Nuri is enlightened about a camp in Leros: "This island was a leper colony once . . . this asylum was like a Nazi concentration camp. People were caged and chained without names or identities. The children here were abandoned, tied to their beds all day" (164-65).

It is observed that the protagonists or the other refugees and asylum seekers do not stay put in the precarious state they are subjected to. Even in a clueless mode, they counter that precarious existence by daring to move out of those spaces and circumstances, even if it means stepping into different forms of precarity, moving from the threatening environment of home country seeking uncertain refuge of host country, made possible only by a parlous journey. For instance, Afra, though initially resolute to stay in their house and awaits a bomb to strike them eventually agrees to leave. She is also hesitant to cross the turbulent sea after reaching Turkey, but continues with the journey. However, it is still uncertain that resettlement (if granted asylum) in the new nation would provide a worthy life. By the end of May 2023, the UNHCR's global estimates of refugees and asylum seekers touched a staggering 35.4 million, showing how precarious circumstances continue in sundry forms and frames (Global 10). The precarity for Nuri and Afra does not end as the question of alternatives lurks if denied asylum or deported from the U.K, or the troubles of settling down if granted asylum. Hence, their itineraries are incomplete, harbouring a wish to reach "home". Though borders segregate populations, such scenarios should create global solidarity akin to what Butler has put forward in the 9/11 aftermath (for the U.S. to see it as a chance) "to start to imagine a world in which that violence might be minimized, in which an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community" (Precarious xii). The text depicts that despite the refugees are strangers, the village women in Turkey offered them food and blankets, implying how humans should act in need.

The text states Lefteri's lineage of Cypriot refugees and her volunteering at a UNICEF supported refugee camp in Athens, thus assisting her to indulge in a stirring project to counter the homogenous and myopic rendition of refugees in media. There already exists a bank of narratives centered around refugee experience, however, the subject itself justifies and invites its copious presence. It is a truism that while conflicts vary apropos of modalities and corollaries, human misery is constant. Alongside the arduous physical journey, the narrative escorts us through an odyssey of dolour, vulnerability, hope and endurance. Here, the escape from the conflicted homelands is not the ultimate crucible as newer forms of precarity lurks for the refugees, but how they continue to move forward being in a precarious existence throughout with the hope of erasing it altogether. The inklings of positive futures are offered in the narrative by Afra recovering her sight and their meeting of Mustafa, but

the narrative makes us think about those stranded in the warzone, stuck in transit and those who have perished on their way out.

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Otherness and Displacement in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys

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Abstract

English hegemonic colonial rule of the other parts of the world was based on unequal power relations and the domination of people from different cultures and ancestral backgrounds. Like the other colonized territories, the Caribbean was one of the countries whose social, political and cultural structure was dominated by England. During its rule in the Caribbean, Britain enslaved black people and forced them to work in the sugar cane plantations thus, created hostility between the Creoles and the black. More importantly, the colonizer othered the indigenous dwellers and the colonized people felt secure neither in their homelands nor in the colonizer's country which led to displacement. After the proclamation of independence, postcolonial writers from the former colonies tackle post-independence problems inherited by colonization in their work. Jean Rhys also handles controversial postcolonial concepts in her work. Her novel titled *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a notable narrative of the turbulent Caribbean life after the Emancipation. This paper in this sense explores *Wide Sargasso Sea* in terms of its representation of otherness and displacement in the context of postcolonial studies.
Keywords: Otherness, Displacement, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys.

Introduction

It is of utmost importance that Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) is one of the most stimulating and inspirational texts for Jean Rhys to produce *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) incorporating distinct and similar issues. Growing up in the Caribbean island of Dominica, the author Jean Rhys portrays the bleak effects of colonization and otherness through her character Bertha Mason in the novel. Though Bertha is silenced in *Jane Eyre*, it is apparent that she is free to voice her feelings in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which consists of three parts, namely the heroine's, Antoinette's, narration in the first part, Mr Rochester's in the second, and the final part, narrated by the protagonist once more.

Thus, in terms of narration, it may be pointed out that *Wide Sargasso Sea* has a symmetrical structure which also depicts the theme of racial otherness as stated by Maria Olaussen, in her article titled "Jean Rhys's Construction of Blackness as Escape from White Femininity in "Wide Sargasso Sea" as follows: "With the imprisoned madwoman in Thornfield as both starting point and end, Rhys starts her narrative. The narrator is the madwoman but her tale is the young Antoinette's. The theme is the fear and the possibility of losing one's whiteness" (1993, 69).

Olaussen in the above-mentioned article also points to the narrations of Rochester and Antoinette and the dichotomy between the white and black female identity concerning freedom and/or racial differentiation in particular:

> It is finally the combination of both Rochester's and Antoinette's narratives that points towards blackness as the escape from white femininity… Antoinette's use of black strategies of resistance reinforces the meaning of blackness as freedom. In exploring the construction of a particular white female identity, Rhys denies the existence of systematic oppression of black women. They, in turn, become "prisoners of another's desire" as the white Creole madwoman is set free. (1993,81)

Likewise, Lee Erwin in his article titled "Like in a Looking-Glass: History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*," explains the two narratives, thus, the voices of both Antoinette and Rochester as follows: "This is not to suggest a reconciliation or synthesis of two views; on the contrary, it is to argue that the impossible desire evident in Antoinette's narrative, that is, to occupy a racial position not open to her, only realize itself in the gaze of the Other, in an attempt to perform the impossible feat of seeing herself from the place from which she is seen" (1989, 155).

Transforming Charlotte Brontë's romance into the reexpression of the Caribbean girl, Jean Rhys creates a new stage for the oppressed nations who were once doomed to suffer because of imperial ideology leading to the colonization of the West Indies. Antoinette, whose name is changed to Bertha by the intruder, is associated with madness and "appears as a compound of woman and beast" (Maurel 2009, 155) in the Victorian Period othering the colonized for her identity. As the daughter of an ex-slave owner, Antoinette leads a life ridden with contradictions, and she is caught between the black, her parental background and the white. She is on the one hand, regarded as a white by the ex-slaves, on the other, a subaltern by Rochester who devalues her. Although the novel celebrates Antoinette as a defiant character at the end of the narration, it is also regarded as a problematic portrayal of Creole life from an authentic Creole perspective. The family's life after the Emancipation is traumatic since "Annette has to marry Mr Mason for her survival in the patriarchal social set up prevailing all around" (Azmat, 2018,96), loses her son and experiences madness which affects her daughter's life both in the Caribbean Islands and then, in London where she is locked in an attic and estranged. The turbulent depiction of the Creole Caribbeans especially Antoinette traces the marginalized people both in the national and international context since they are excluded both by the native black Caribbeans and the whites.

Being an oppositional voice to the European's expression of *the other*, the Caribbean fiction foregrounds the postcolonial construction of otherness and displacement from the colonizer's perception and displays the uprooted other in the Caribbean context.

Otherness and Displacement in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

The issue of imperialism and its traumatic effects including migration and displacement are postulated in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) by Edward Said as follows: "… it .. produced more refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and exiles than ever before in history… it also produced homeless wanderers, nomads, and

vagrants, unassimilated to the emerging structures of institutional power, rejected by the established order for their intransigence and obdurate rebelliousness" (1994,332). Said furthers his statement related to the devastating outcomes of imperialism for the othered and enslaved natives. The author explains the dramatic experiences of the natives under five main headings:

> the power to observe, rule, hold, and profit from distant territories and people… an ideological rationale for reducing; then reconstituting the native as someone to be ruled and managed… "civilizing mission" … accompanied by domination …"The best that is thought and done" is considered an unassailable position… after the natives have been displaced from their historical location on their land, their history is rewritten as a function of the imperial one. (1994,131-132)

Within this context, orientalism is also defined as a concept indicating a considerable difference between the East and the West, and the negative and positive traits respectively, thus leading to displacement and otherness by Said as follows:

> … Orientalism, or the 'study' of the Orient, 'was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted a binary opposition between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")… this opposition is crucial to European self-conception: if colonised people are irrational, Europeans are rational; if the former are barbaric, sensual, and lazy, Europe is civilisation itself, with its sexual appetites under control and its dominant ethic that of hard work; if the Orient as static, Europe can be seen as developing and marching ahead; the Orient has to be feminine so that Europe can be masculine. (1994, 47)

In this respect, the colonized is inevitably described by the colonizer via negative adjectives as explored by Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*: "'the East' is constructed as barbaric or degenerate" (2015, 108). Such an underestimating perception is also detected in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* which is a fictional representation, fraught with similar numerous hostile features as stated by Loomba: "… laziness, aggression, violence, greed, sexual promiscuity, bestiality, primitivism, innocence and irrationality are attributed (often contradictorily and inconsistently) by the English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese colonists to Turks, Africans, Native Americans, Jews, Indians, the Irish, and others" (2015,107).

By the same token, Homi K. Bhabha in his *Location of Culture* explores the issue of identity and the concept of the Other as follows: "In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image- missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype- is confronted with its difference, its Other" (2012,46).

Concerning literary texts, as Bhabha says, Ashcroft et al., in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) also declare the significance of such global themes as place and displacement, which result from migration and colonization, in post-colonial texts: "A major feature of post-colonial literature is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (1989,8).

Ashcroft et al., discuss the meanings of the terms, dislocation and cultural denigration, and the inevitable bleak impacts of migration, as follows: ".... A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model" (1989, 8-9).

It is also assumed that Otherness does not connote something favourable since it suggests difficulties and anxieties due to new experiences in social, cultural, linguistic and spatial terms and inevitable binary oppositions: "Landscape, flora and fauna, seasons, climatic conditions are formally distinguished from the place of origin as home/colony, Europe/New World, Europe/Antipodes, metropolitan/provincial, and so on, although, of course, at this stage no effective models exist for expressing this sense of Otherness in a positive and creative way" (Ashcroft et al., 1989,11).

Considering all the above-mentioned eminent theorists and their salient comments presented in their work, it may be pointed out that Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a critique of the otherness, related to gender and race, colonization, through the representation of a young Creole girl, Antoinette. Within this frame, it is worth quoting Teresa Winterhalter who refers to the fact that: "Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* lies between Rochester's England and Antoinette Cosway's island, between the opposite categories of colonizers and colonized, between the world of capitalism and post-Emancipation West Indies, and between privileged men and dependent women. Among these oppositions; however, Rhys does not create easy allegiances" (1994,214).

Antoinette's and her mother's traumatic experiences, and isolation and alienation after the death of Antoinette's father, the effects of the Emancipation Act, and thus, her identity crises are best explained in the following quotation:

> An important factor that leads to the fragmentation of Antoinette's identity and her identity crisis is concerned with race/ethnicity. Antoinette is a white Creole, a woman of mixed Black and European ancestry. After the Emancipation Act 1833 under which Britain outlawed slavery in all its colonies, the suppressed hatred between blacks and whites was released and increased. As a result, Antoinette's childhood has been replete with racial violence, discrimination, anxiety, poverty and fear. All these problems affected her desire to construct her own identity or her independent self and eventually led to the definite destruction of her identity. (Yousef, Abu-Samra 2017, 112)

It is notable that Antoinette's mother Annette feels the racial discrimination and hatred of the black, and the possible dangers, but her husband is not able to share her feelings and any tension related to them: "I will not stay at Coulibri any longer… It is not safe. It is not safe for Pierre" (31). However, out of hatred, the estate is set on fire which leads to the death of Antoinette's brother, and the gradual madness of the mother and Antoinette's and her mother's separation. The fire, which is clearly associated with the

anger and hostility of the emancipated black slaves, also foreshadows the fire at the end of the novel, which may be read as the expression of Antoinette's madness and revenge for her exploitation as well.

The second part of the novel presents Antoinette and her husband Mr Rochester who dislikes the land and the inhabitants and hates Antoinette because he finds her different in her upbringing, communicating with people around her and so on. Moreover, Mr Rochester is not able to adapt to the new land which is thoroughly different from his hometown, London. His description of the other's country as "I feel very much a stranger here… 'I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side" (117) is related to the othering politics of the West. Rochester manifests his ideology about both Antoinette and the place where she was born and raised. Additionally, he always refers to the land and its inhabitants as persons and places hiding some secrets to be discovered justifying his colonial attitude to the Other: "It was a beautiful place-wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, "What I see is nothing- I want what it hides-that is not nothing" (79). So, Antoinette is not very much different from the land Mr Rochester detests.

Antoinette, who is a Creole girl, is accepted neither by the colonizer nor the black community, but after her marriage to Rochester, she somehow idealizes England as a country to belong. At first, she utters her hopeful expectations about life in England as; "I live in England and different things will happen to me" (100), but then the same Antoinette describes how she is displaced stating that "For I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging" (101). In addition to that, the protagonist is othered by being given a different name different from the native one. The idea of otherness and colonization is best represented when Mr Rochester keeps calling her "Bertha" to oppress and suppress her: "Goodnight, Bertha. He never calls me Antoinette now. He has found out it was my mother's name" (103). However, she rebels against this insult: "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into something else, calling me by another name" (133). As Earl McKenzie states in his "Tragic Vision in Wide Sargasso Sea," "Rochester goes to great lengths to try to subjugate and destroy her" (2009, 60).

In the third part, the othering process is complete, as Antoinette, who "…hear[s] the man's voice, Bertha! Bertha!" (170), is locked up in the attic where "Time has no meaning" (166). Her burning the place down in her recurring dreams foreshadows the end of the novel whose last lines read as follows: "…then I got up, took the keys and unlocked the door. I was outside holding my candle. Now at last know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage" (171).

As Kelly Baker Josephs explains in his "'Fighting Mad': Between Sides and Stories in *Wide Sargasso Sea*" in *Disturbers of the Peace*, "Each dream marks a transition in Antoinette's life. These three transitions are connected to England's interruption of Antoinette's search for safety" (2013, 90). Thus, the significance and

the symbolic meanings of each dream are explained by Josephs as follows:

> Though it repeats the imagery of the first two dreams, Antoinette's third dream ends her flight. The first two dreams express her fear of the immediate future, while the last one shows that she has come to accept what she "must do." She dreams of setting fire to Englishness, represented by Thornfield Hall and her husband, and aligns herself with the Caribbean, represented by Christophine, Tia, and Coulibri. At this point, however, the text rejects her effort—"[She] jumped and woke"…—deferring her death and her escape from England. When Antoinette wakes, her thoughts are lucid and determined; she is not the confused lunatic of Brontë's novel. (2013, 90)

Throughout the novel, it is overtly seen that Antoinette complains about her loneliness: "I got used to a solitary life, but my mother still planned and hoped" (16). She adds, "They hated us. They called us White cockroaches" (20). Antoinette's defining herself as a "white cockroach," (99) is explored in the following statement: "Not quite English and not quite "native," Rhys's Creole woman straddles the embattled divide between human and savage, core and periphery, self and other" (Ciolkowski 1997, 340). Antoinette knows that she is not accepted by the white and the black society and voices her displacement as: "I wish to stay here in the dark… where I belong"(123).

It is also clear that Antoinette does not belong anywhere, there is no place she feels secure, and she longs for the lacking safety: "There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss. The barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers" (24). As stated by McKenzie, "Like the Sargasso Sea, a mass of seaweed surrounded by swirling currents in the Atlantic Ocean, the novel's troubled heroine is suspended between England and the West Indies and belongs fully to neither" (2009, 56). Antoinette craves for security, she says, "This convent was my refuge…" (51). In this respect, as Hellen Carr claims, "'homelessness' is the terrain of Rhys' fiction," "dealing as it does with those who belong nowhere, between cultures, between histories" (1996, 14). In her marriage, she accepts whatever she lives and experiences, "As I had agreed to everything else" (60). Related to her married life, she pours out her feelings as follows: "… he does not love me, I think he hates me" (99). And thus, it is seen that Antoinette is othered by her husband: "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either. And when did I begin to notice all this about my wife Antoinette?" (61). The husband's words about the servant Amelie prove his doubts about both the persons and the place he inhabits: "A lovely little creature but sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps, like much else in this place"(59). He states that "Well, I answered annoyed, that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and a dream" (73). He adds, "Looking up smiling, she might have been any pretty English girl and to please her I drank" (64).

It is clearly observed in the novel that "Rochester's pursuit of his main motive (wealth) leads to Antoinette's subjection, madness and incarceration, alienation and eventually, even to her death. Antoinette's main motives (happiness and peace) are thwarted. Christophine's hopes (for Antoinette's well-being, and her own) are also

unrealized" (McKenzie 2009, 69).

As Barbara Ann Schapiro explains in "Boundaries and Betrayal in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea," order and stability are distorted not only in the psychic order or structure but also in the physical world and this distortion has a profound effect on both socio-cultural and personal relations:

> The collapse of rational order, of stable and conventional structures on all levels, distinguishes Rhys's vision and places it squarely within the modernist tradition. Like many modernist works, Rhys's novel explores a psychological condition of profound isolation and self-division, a state in which the boundaries between the internal subjective world and the external object world have dissolved. Terror and despair form the corresponding affects… The fractured interpersonal relations have intrapsychic repercussions…. Cultural and personal pathology, in other words, are interlinked (1995, 84, 103)

In this respect, it is essential to refer to the fact that Rhys' novel incorporates the meaning of being English as well: "*Wide Sargasso Sea* also inquires into the production of knowledge about Englishness and, in the process, puts Englishness itself into crisis" (Ciolkowski 1997, 337). Within this context, what Antoinette feels about being a Creole girl, thus, her conflicts and anxieties she experiences are explored as follows:

> Antoinette's narrative is literally shaped by the uncertainties of a Creole vision that is fractured by the contradictory claims of British colonial history and the cultural residues of a dying West Indian plantation society. Her impossible task… is to negotiate between the contradictory logics of British colonialism while also wending her way through the Creole culture and postemancipation English society that continue to elude her. (Ciolkowski 1997, 340)

It is also useful to refer to Gayatri C. Spivak, who, in "Three Women's Texts and A Critique of Imperialism," points to the fact that "Antoinette, as a white Creole child growing up at the time of emancipation in Jamaica, is caught between the English imperialist and the black native. In recounting Antoinette's development, Rhys reinscribes some thematics of Narcissus" (1985, 250). The writer draws a parallel between Antoinette and Narcissus in that both regard their selves as their Others: "In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus' madness is disclosed when he recognizes his Other as his self: "Iste ego sum. 'Rhys makes Antoinette see herself as her Other, Brontë's Bertha. In the last section of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette acts out *Jane Eyre*'s conclusion and recognizes herself as the so-called ghost in Thornfield" (1985, 250). The author furthers the statement describing Rochester in terms of Oedipus Complex: "If in the case of Antoinette and her identity, Rhys utilizes the thematics of Narcissus, in the case of Rochester and his patrimony, she touches on the thematics of Oedipus" (Spivak 1985, 251). With reference to Rochester, it is also postulated by Spivak that, "In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the character corresponding to Rochester has no name. His writing of the final version of the letter to his father is supervised, in fact, by an image of the loss of the patronymic" (1985, 252).

As detected in the novel, represented as the Other, Antoinette, leading a

chaotic life in which she does not know what to do, is quite hopeless: "I am not used to happiness, she said. It makes me afraid" (84). She even wants to die: "If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn't have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don't believe me? Then try, try, say die and watch me die" (84). And Mr Rochester, acting as the colonizer, helps her symbolic death: "Die then! Die! I watched her die many times. In my way not in hers. In sunlight, in shadow, by moonlight, by candlelight" (84).

It is thus unequivocal that Antoinette is definitely the Other for Mr Rochester: "As for the happiness I gave her, that was worse than nothing. I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did" (85). She is well aware of the fact that there is no room for happiness for her, as repeated in the novel in the image of a White cockroach, with reference to racial otherness and displacement: "It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us White niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all"(93).

Within this scope, it is also useful to refer to Carine M. Mardorossian who investigates one of the main themes, racial otherness, in the novel, in her article titled "Shutting up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea" as follows: "*Wide Sargasso Sea* foregrounds black resistance without, however, offering unmediated access to alternative "negro traditions" or to a counterdiscourse to an imperialist way of knowing… it highlights the ways in which black creole agency was primarily identified as criminality and affirmed not for its own sake so much as to justify the subjugation and obscure white domination" (1999,1078).

Formulated as a rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* questions the patriarchal and colonial hierarchical order as clearly explained in Jean Rhys' letter to Selma Vaz Dias as follows in which she refers to both the colonial and patriarchal hierarchy:

> I've read and re-read "Jane Eyre" of course, and I am sure that the character must be "built-up"... The Creole in Charlotte Brontë's novel is a lay figure - repulsive which does not matter, and not once alive which does. She's necessary to the plot, but always she shrieks, howls laughs horribly attacks all and sundry- off stage. For me (and for you I hope) she must be right on stage. She must be at least plausible with a past, the reason why Mr. Rochester treats her so abominably and feels justified, the reason why he thinks she is mad and why of course she goes mad, even the reason why she tries to set everything on fire, and eventually succeeds. (Jean Rhys, in a letter to Selma Vas Dias, April 9, 1958)

In this respect, with reference to the act of rewriting, as Adrienne Rich explains in "When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Re-Vision," rewriting is required for self-knowledge, and self-assessment which may provide both the reader and the writer with different points of view related to socio-cultural, and racial oppressions: "Re-

vision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction, is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival… And this drive to self-knowledge, for who is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructive of a male-dominated society" (1972,18).

Concerning the writing process, it is also necessary to point to the following discussion by Rich who refers to the fact that especially for female writers, changes and revolutions related to gender issues in the writings of the past will help them to set sail for new horizons as discovered in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* which may offer a kind of healing and discussion of this issue:

> We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. For writers, and at this moment for women writers in particular, there is the challenge and promise of a whole new psychic geography to be explored. But there is also a difficult and dangerous walking on the ice, as we try to find language and images for a consciousness we are just coming into, and with little in the past to support us. (1972,18-19)

Conclusion

Colonial ideology described as the control of a territory by another power for economic and political reasons is a form of imperialism which exploits others. It considers the occupied nations to be the other who is uncivilized, backward and rootless. The colonized are never at the same status as the outsider and they suffer from various illnesses after the withdrawal. In addition to the oppressive and racial approaches during the colonial period, the hegemonized nations face the othering policies and they do not belong anywhere.

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* as one of the outstanding representations of post-independence fiction portrays a Creole family caught in between the black and the white. After the Emancipation, both Annette and Antoinette, the symbolic names for the colonized nations, are othered and they do not have a place to feel like theirs. Although Annette's and Antoinette's identities change from Cosway to Mason and Rochester respectively, both the mother and her daughter are accepted neither by the indigenous people of the Caribbean nor the occupier himself. For the black natives, they are cockroaches and ugly and mad figures for the oppressor. In each of their attempts to find a place to belong, Annette and Antoinette find themselves in darkness. All in all, the post-colonial period creates displaced and othered personalities who are subject to the destructive effects of imperialism and colonialism. Josephs's comments related to the colonization and otherness; the identity of the other or the third space, and binary oppositions which defy surface meanings in *Wide Sargossa Sea* read as follows: "… madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is fraught with questions of colonial identity, place, and order. In insisting on "other sides" and third spaces, *Wide Sargasso Sea* complicates the fixity and dualism – black/white, European/native, mad/sane – that those in power are invested in maintaining, especially during periods of social

upheaval, such as during abolition (the setting of the novel) and decolonization (the period of its creation and publication)" (2013, 71).

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Re-engaging Travelling Theory: Transitional Identities in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, a massive and diversified system of migration has emerged and developed on different levels: national, regional, and global, intensifying the expansion and acceleration of cross-border interactions. With the increasing interaction of different societies and cultures, the question of identity is at stake. The cultural theorist Edward W. Said claims in his influential article "Travelling Theory," that theories or ideas have no fixed meaning, rather they take on other implications depending on when, where, and how they are deployed. According to him, when a theory traverse the distance, it is somewhat altered in a different space and time frame. Following this observation, the present article intends to analyze the identity formation of racial and ethnic minorities in Britain, focusing on the correlation between the transformation of theories and transition of identities. Drawing upon the concept of travelling ideas or theories introduced by Said, this article aims to examine how migration process provides possibilities of redefinition and reconfiguration of immigrants' identities. In doing so, the article employs a case study based approach to analyze how the transformation of immigrants' identities is related to travelling theories with a special reference to Hanif Kureishi's debut novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990).
Keywords: transformation, migration, acculturation, identity crisis, diaspora

Introduction

Over the years, the quest for identity- a basic human need to structure one's personal identity in relation to others- has increasingly become a central tenet in the contemporary humanities and social sciences. The rapid growth in migration is one of the major factors influencing the identity of an individual. The cultural clash within a society, arising from the frictions engendered by the intensification of globalization, international and intercontinental tourism further exacerbates this crisis of identity or rather a cultural identity. Although, globalization and migration are not the recent phenomena, yet they have contributed extensively to the richness in the diversities of ethnicities, cultures, and languages. This cultural and ethnic diversity further leads to the dilemma of negotiating identities and cross-cultural conflicts among immigrants. Several contemporary studies on migration such as South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity (1990) by Clarke et al., Global Diasporas: An Introduction (2008) by Robin Cohen, Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization (2009) by Graham Huggan, and Insider Research on Migration and Mobility: International Perspectives on Researcher Positioning (2016) by Voloder & Kirpitchenko among others provide a comprehensive analysis on migration theories while observing

migration as a process that changes the economic, demographic, social, and cultural structures, thus creating "a new cultural diversity, which often brings into question national identity" (Castles et al. 1993, 7). It is thus apparent that migration whether voluntarily or involuntarily is one of the pivotal factors exacerbating the dilemma of cultural identity among communities of colour. The contemporary postcolonial authors such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, Andrea Levy, Arundhati Roy, Hanif Kureishi, Monica Ali and Zadie Smith to name a few have made an influential effort to underscore the issues pertaining to the survival of migrants such as cultural bereavement, fragmented identity, othering, gender binarism, oppression, translation, and white privilege. Focusing on the process of acculturation and assimilation, their oeuvres depict the transited identities of immigrants that are constantly in a process of negotiation and reconfiguration. Cast within the above context, this paper makes an attempt to scrutinize how the transformation of identity is associated with the concept of Travelling theory and, how the process of migration and transnationalism reconstruct immigrants' identities as revealed in The Buddha of suburbia, the semi-autobiographical novel authored by Hanif Kureishi. Thus, in order to perform thorough scrutiny of the various facets of identity transformation, the present study delineates various socio-cultural and psychological forces that influence identity formation among communities of colour in the novel chosen for study.

The Correlation between Travelling Theories and Transformation of Identities

In 1982, Edward W. Said, the Palestinian academic and critic, proposes the idea of 'travelling theory' in the article of that title while arguing, Ideas and theories, like peoples or schools of thought, itinerate "from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another," and take on different implications depending on when, where and how they are deployed. Thus the way the ideas or theories are altered while transgressing the spatial, temporal, and linguistic barriers seems similar to what Saxena and Sharma refer to as the process of identity transformation. In their article 'Transformation of Identity as a Travelling Concept: A Case Study', Saxena and Sharma (2018) proclaim that identities like ideas or theories tend to change across time and space. Drawing on Said's 'Travelling Theories', they observe that identities like theories are reconstructed and redefined with the change of space and timeframe and in the process are shaped and redefined among socio-cultural and political contexts. The four stages involved in the alteration of ideas or theories as explored by Said appear similar to migration process and transformation of identities. According to Graham Huggan, the idea of travelling ideas or theories facilitates:

> in understanding culture, not as a stable entity but as an intersection of different trajectories; in understanding identity as being formed and reformed on the move; and, not least, in understanding theory as a horizon of figuration, as a shifting composite of metaphors that travel, as ideas themselves travel, in time and space. (Huggan 2001, 124).

Following this observation, the present article employs Said's notion of travelling theories to investigate the identity reconstruction among communities of colour in British mainstream society. The study argues that while people traverses the cross-cultural boundaries, their culture and identity comes into contact with a different environment and encounters different spatial environment and temporal factors. Over a period of time, an immigrant's identity is distanced from his/her original self and incessantly re(defined) as per the condition of acceptance and resistance and is reoriented in relation to new circumstances. Thus, the interplay of the acculturation process, cultural bereavement, along with the biological and the socio-psychological factors fully or partially contribute to the transformation of the identity of an individual. In his *Imaginary Homelands*, talking about his controversial novel *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie reveals his ideas on transformation of identities and hybridity:

> *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, and the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. (394)

This complex interplay of potential vulnerability dynamics eventually leads to drastic changes in immigrants causing them to adopt a global identity that preserves their inherited culture, and embraces the culture of the host nation as well, thereby transforming them into what Bhabha refers to as hybrid identity (1994).

Negotiating Identities through Transformation: A Case Study of *The Buddha of Suburbia*

In recent decades, social identities or rather cultural identities have become increasingly influential with the shifting of geopolitical spaces. However, identities which are generally seen as fixed are in flux, always in process and are redefined in relation to the perceived socio-cultural interest (Hall, 1990). The integration of diverse cultures and ethnicities within a society, engendered by the intensification of transnational connectedness further obfuscates this scenario. Taking this into account, the study tracks the itineraries of identity transformations of Black liminal Britons who are in a quest for self-empowerment in Hanif Kureishi's The Buddha of suburbia. Deliberating upon the notion of the malleable and mutable identity, this article explores the role of socio-cultural, political, psychological, and historical factors in redefining immigrants' identities, and how it has made their life vulnerable to the positive and negative effects of transnationalism and migration.

Set in 1970s Britain, Hanif Kureishi's bestselling novel The Buddha of Suburbia (1990) gives an account of the lives of quintessential liminal Britons so as to expose their vicissitudes and daily afflictions in a multicultural society (Philippe Laplace, 2003, 97). The narrative brings attention to the predicament of Asian immigrants, Haroon Amir and Karim Amir, who find themselves caught between two

conflicting cultures. The clash between two conflicting societies, cultures, and languages pushes them into a crisis if identity, preventing them from creating a sense of self. The complex interplay of different cultures, languages, spatial and temporal factors, and ethnicities calls forth the creation of the hyphenated identities, leading immigrants to undergo different identity transformations. Through his characters, Haroon and Karim, Kureishi illustrates that identity is a process- evolving rather than fixed, plural rather than singular, fluid rather than firm, and is influenced by both spatio-temporal moves. He explores the means by which immigrants' identities are shaped and "transformed by its new uses and its new position in new times and places" (Said 1983, 227). The narrative opens with a cultural dilemma of Karim who finds himself straddling two identities and cultures. Right from the beginning of the novel, we find how Karim's alienation from the mainstream results in a quest for true self and how he endeavors to negotiate two cultures while looking for an identity to associate with, as expressed in his own words:

> My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman.... Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it (3).

This assertion of Karim's identity crisis, of in-between positionality calls attention to the way in which immigrants are considered as outsiders despite their prolonged stay in Britain (Kara, 2020). Despite being born and bred in Britain, he is often seen as a "funny kind of Englishman" by other people, "a new breed" (3). This ambiguity of 'belonging/unbelonging', 'insider/outsider is a vital part of the character of Karim, especially his dilemma toward his mixed background. In The Location of Culture (1994) Homi K. Bhabha describes how the outcome of this contact creates what he calls a "Third Space of enunciation" (37), the space which is indeed the starting point of transformation of identity.

This dichotomy of 'insider/outsider and belonging/unbelonging' is further explored through the character of Haroon, Karim's father, who despite being in Britain for more than twenty years is still striving to find his identity and place in the mainstream of the society. Working as a Civil Service clerk, he spends his entire adult life trying to integrate into the mainstream culture of Britain, carrying a blue dictionary in his suitcase to make sure he learns a new word every day. Through the portrayal of Haroon, Kureishi explores the experiences of quintessential 'other': someone who straddles two cultures and shifts his liminal position to negotiate everyday life in Britain. Despite his prolonged stay in London, Haroon is considered as cultural, economic, and social outcast. Even at his workplace, he seems to be trapped in structural racism as he has been passed over for promotion for a younger white man: "The whites will never promote us. […]Not an Indian while there is a white man left on the earth. You don't have to deal with them – they still think they have an Empire when they don't have two pennies to rub together" (27). The sense of othering that he perceives in those around him makes him feel alienated and isolated that further leads to his perpetual quest to assimilate and carve an identity in the

mainstream society.

Through Karim and Haroon's experiences, Kureishi draws attention to the insider/outsider positioning of Asian immigrants, who as liminal beings face challenges to their identities and go through multiple identity transformations as part of their settlement and survival in British mainstream society. Kareem's conversation with his friend Jamila clearly indicates about his struggle of negotiating cultural identity, which eventually culminates in a fractured self: "Yeah, sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went Black American. The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and pakis and the rest of it" (53). These words explicitly demonstrate the identity crisis of new generation youth, who despite being born and bred in Britain, face challenges in establishing their identities and in adjusting along the racial continuum. Karim's life is defined by the diasporic chronotype, that is inherently split into two (or more) parts that are inflected through each other; where he participate in and, at the same time, transcend both cultures, oscillating and negotiating between stability and mutability, identity and difference, here and there, and now and then:

> I felt ashamed and in complete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies... [Dad] was always honest about this: he preferred England in every way. Things worked; it wasn't hot; you didn't see terrible things on the street that you could do nothing about. He wasn't proud of his past, but he wasn't unproud of it either; it just existed, and there wasn't any point in fetishizing it, as some liberals and Asian radicals liked to do. So if I wanted an additional personality bonus [of an Asian past], I would have to create it (212-13).

Karim's hyphenated identity puts him in an existential void, a constant dilemma of negotiating and navigating two cultures, societies, identities and languages. In an attempt to assimilate into the mainstream culture, he endeavours to negotiate and cross over the social boundaries through the multiple nuances of his identity that are shaped over time, space and in different socio-cultural milieus.

Both Karim and his father, Haroon take on the role of 'postcolonial exotic', and leverage "the global commodification of cultural difference" (Huggan, 2001: xvii) to survive in and transcend the physical, spatial, temporal and discursive boundaries that circumscribe their lives. They make every effort to become the 'exotic Indian', people expect them to be. In an attempt to assimilate himself into British cultural landscape, Haroon dons the identity of a self-proclaimed guru for upper-middle-class suburbia. The creation of an alternative identity as a 'guru' allows him to establish a secure sense of self. Not only does he exaggerate his accent but also starts teaching yoga and Eastern philosophy to the Whites, thereby attracting Britishers' interest and attention. Through Haroon's metamorphosis, Kureishi brings into focus the multicultural identity, stressing the need for hybridity, assimilation, and acculturation. Similarly, Karim, who is of mixed background, belongs to more than one culture at once. Rather than choosing one before the other, he adopts a multicultural identity and keeps connections to both the cultures. In order to assert himself in the British society, he takes a transcultural identity that develops in him a

sense of self in a predominantly white environment. Through Karim's and Haroon's journey of metamorphosis to redefine themselves in a quest for self-empowerment, Kureishi points to the fluidity of identity that "is constantly producing and reproducing [itself] anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1990, 235). Hence, it can be argued that like "theories/ideas", immigrants' identities are also influenced or rather transformed in the process of migration, and take varied shapes that involve "acknowledged or unconscious influence, creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation" (Said 1983, 226). By allowing his protagonists to adopt hybrid or global identity, Kureishi draws attention to the fact that identities are dynamic, always in process, flux, never fixed or static, as affirmed by John McLeod: "Hybrid identities are never complete in themselves…they remain perpetually in motion…open to change and reinscription" (2000, 219). By adopting a transcultural identity, both Haroon and Karim establish a secure sense of self and create a space for their own cultural identities in "new position, new times and places" (Said 1983, 227). Through the creation of Karim and Haroon, the novel celebrates the ideas of hybridity, individuality, and individual freedom. Furthermore, the novel calls for a more tolerant view of different cultures and a broader perspective on what constitutes identity, which is increasingly important in this era of transnationalism and globalization as our communities become more and more culturally diverse.

Conclusion

In the light of the discussion so far, it can be argued that Kureishi, through his literary representation, delineates how cultural identity of an immigrant is influenced by the change of place and conditions as well as by its intersection with the contested spaces they occupy. Through the representation of his main characters, Haroon and Karim, Kureishi aptly illustrates how identities like ideas or theories travel while traversing the distance, and thus are continually constituted and molded by the local political, socio-cultural, environmental and structural influences. Both the characters exhibit that identity is not fixed or static but rather contingent; constructed and performed, always in motion. Through his characters' metamorphosis, he emphasizes that adaptability, change, and transformation are essential skills to survive in a foreign land and to claim one's identity and subjectivity in the mainstream society. Emphasizing the pliability of identity, Kureishi demonstrates that identities, that are often considered as static or fixed, are mutable and are redefined and reconfigured in transgressing the boundaries. Hence, it could be conceptualized that the socio-political and cultural milieu of the host society play a vital role in the construction and transformation of immigrants' identities that are influenced, challenged, shaped, and reconstructed among spatial and temporal frames.

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Listening to Terrorists: Importance of Inclusive and Polyphonic Discursive Space in Robin Soans' *Talking to Terrorists*

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Abstract

This article observes the discursive space that the play "Talking to Terrorists" by Robin Soans occupies, by juxtaposing monologues of people who have differing opinions on issues related to terrorism. This verbatim play is successful in its inclusivity towards alternative voices in our society to create a polyphonic text. This study points out how the play questions the binaries in relation to victim-victimizer or accuser-accused or extremist-nationalist dichotomies in our media and cultural discourses.

Keywords: Inclusive discourse, verbatim theatre, theatre of facts, terrorism, Talking to Terrorists

Robin Soans, a British playwright and actor, has garnered recognition for his distinct writing style characterized by verbatim theatre. Born in 1947, Soans has made notable contributions to this genre, which involves utilizing authentic interviews and testimonies as foundational elements in theatrical productions. His *oeuvre* frequently delves into socio-political themes, providing a platform for individuals and communities whose narratives have been marginalized or overlooked. Prominent examples of Soans' works include *Talking to Terrorists* (2005), a probing exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of terrorism and its societal ramifications, as well as *A State Affair* (2000), delving into the experiences of British immigrants. Through his verbatim theatre approach, Soans skillfully infuses his works with authenticity and profundity, thereby amplifying the voices of real individuals and casting illumination on significant societal matters. This article examines the manner in which Soans' verbatim theatrical work, titled *Talking to Terrorists*, manifests as a courageous and articulate expression of dissenting perspectives within the context of contemporary society, particularly in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks.

The play was a joint venture by Out of Joint Production House and the Royal Court Theatre in London. It premiered at the Theatre Royal in Bury St. Edmunds, England on April 21, 2005 and was published by Oberon Books, London in the same year. Robin Soans and his team conducted interviews with people who are connected to various aspects of terrorism. Verbatim theatre is a play-making methodology where the playwright/theatre crew interviews people in relation to a selected theme. Soans interviewed individuals from different terrorist organizations, state representatives, media personnel, anti-terrorist military squad members, and common people who were affected by terrorist attacks. From these interviews, Soans artistically chose certain people who could represent various dimensions of

terrorism. Most of the representative characters are unnamed, and the character list includes an Ambassador (AMD), a Journalist, a Diplomat, and Peace Workers. There are characters from revolutionary organizations like the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), the Uganda National Resistance Army (NRA), and Palestine's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AAB). Family members of people who were killed by terrorist attacks, as well as imperial powers, are also present in the character list.

Each of these characters gives their version of terrorism. Soans doesn't make any artistic or political interventions on their dialogues. The characters don't have many dialogues, but only monologues. They speak directly to the audience. Soans' only intervention is in juxtaposing these monologues. He places contradictory monologues side by side so that the readers/spectators get multiple dimensions on the topic. This narrative style itself paves the way for an inclusive discourse on issues related to terrorism.

Talking to Terrorists discusses the importance of resolving issues related to terrorism not through war, violence or conflict, but through negotiations and peaceful discussions with the terrorists. The playwright is trying to bring out an important issue that he visualized while conducting interviews both with the victims and the victimizers of terrorism who were similarly affected by contemporary global paranoia in relation to the 9/11 attacks. In the play's preface, Soans mentions his interaction with a relief worker at a village which had been recently destroyed by the American forces. When the relief worker spoke to the villagers, the relief worker discovered that the villagers were not angry because they were hungry and homeless, but because they had a story that no one listens to. The relief worker told Soans, "A huge part of what we call terrorism arises from no-one listening" (Soans i). Soans, through his play, wants to emphasize not just the unheard stories of former terrorists throughout the play, but he wants the audience to hear the tales of everyone involved and affected by terrorism. This provides a platform for the audience to listen to the stories of those affected by terrorism, including both victims and victimizers.

The play opens up with SS1 (Ex-Secretary of State) and her husband discussing terrorism in general on the basis of media reports and TV news channel discussions. Phoebe, a relief worker and Edward, a psychologist then discusses about children involved in terrorism and the politics of it. Phoebe leaves and Edward talks about the difficulties of being a young Muslim in Luton, which leads to a sort of flashback conversation between four Muslim boys named Momsie, Aftab, Faiser, and Jab. The playwright purposefully informs the readers/audience of post 9/11 cultural condition of Islamophobia through these Muslim boys. After Edward's conversation, the five ex-terrorists (former members of the Irish Republican Army, the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Kurdish Workers Party, the National Resistance Army from Uganda, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade from Bethlehem) discuss their past experiences, including where they grew up and how they first encountered terrorism. These four men and a women exchange tales of their early years and their testimonies. Some went to prison, while others held meetings with their group's members to

discuss issues in their communities and governments. The first act of the play ends with the Bethlehem schoolgirl sharing her bitter experience of life in Israel around Christmas and how she feels hostile towards local Israeli soldiers.

The second act of the play begins with a conversation between the ex-Ambassador and his partner Nodira, discussing the ambassador's duties. The ex-Ambassador expresses his concern over the military's intelligence and their reliance on information gathered through torturing political prisoners. He sends a letter to London stating, "We are selling our souls for dross" (Soans 70). Later on, he emphasizes that evidence gathered under torture is incorrect, and it is morally wrong for London to support the American position by working with and using such information. The play then progresses with a flashback of the Ex-Ambassador's earlier years when he discusses London's sharing of information with Linda, Matthew, and Michael. This conversation eventually leads the ambassador to conclude that it would be immoral to continue in his role. Soans' Ex-Ambassador is based on verbatim quotes from Craig Murray, formerly the British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, and his wife Nadira Alieva, an ex-government minister, and Mo Mowlam, who was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland earlier.

Need for an Inclusive and Polyphonic Space

Polyphony refers to a literary technique in which multiple voices or perspectives are presented in a work of literature. This can be achieved through the use of multiple narrators, conflicting points of view, or the incorporation of different genres or styles within the same text. The term was originally coined by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who used it to describe the complex and dynamic relationships between different voices and perspectives in the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky. In his work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin states that "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels" (6). *Talking To Terrorists* celebrates this plurality of independent and unmerged voices. Most importantly, none of these characters replicate the authorial voice in any manner. Bakhtin makes it clear by further stating, "What unfolds in his [Dostoevsky's] works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (6-7). The characters in Soans' play also share this plurality of consciousness. They enjoy equal rights inside the text of this verbatim play without any authorial interventions.

According to Bakhtin, every utterance is shaped by the social context in which it is produced and is therefore always in dialogue with other voices and perspectives. This means that all language use involves a kind of negotiation or exchange between the speaker and the listener, as well as between different cultural, social, and ideological forces that are present in the discourse. The characters in this play engage

in a dialogue primarily with the audience and also with the cultural, social, and ideological forces. This dialogism helps the play create a discursive space for the audience to objectively and introspectively comprehend the topic. The use of polyphony and dialogism can create a sense of complexity and richness in a work of literature, as well as highlighting the diverse and often conflicting perspectives that exist within a given society or culture. The diverse voices in *Talking to Terrorists* are mutually conflicting as well as politically inclusive.

Foucault argues that power is not just something held by individuals or groups, but rather a pervasive force that operates throughout society. Power is not just exerted over others but is also diffused and internalized within social relationships and institutions (Foucault, "The Subject" 778). In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, he shows how modern institutions of punishment, such as prisons, are part of a larger system of social control that operates through surveillance and discipline.

Punishment must not simply be a spectacle to arouse fear; rather, it must function as an ordered series of retributions, which gradually diminish the fault, until it is reduced, almost without a trace, to a mere administrative incident in which the guilty party is no longer anything but a name, a number, a series of gestures, repeated without meaning on a pointless machine. (Foucault, *Discipline* 58).

According to Foucault, the modern prison is not just a physical institution, but a complex system of power relations that is designed to regulate individual behavior and create compliant and docile subjects. This system operates through a variety of techniques, including surveillance, monitoring, and punishment. Modern critics like Baudrillard are of the opinion that it is the global surveillance systems operated by capitalist and fascist regimes that have resulted in the formation of terrorist groups, which are seen by them as liberation movements. "One man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter" (Colleran 115) is a popular aphorism that has been attributed to various authors. In this context, the importance of inclusive dialogue becomes radical. Foucault argued that "inclusiveness can challenge the power structures that exist within society" (Peters et al. 99). By creating more inclusive institutions and social relationships, power can be redistributed more equitably and marginalized individuals can be given greater access to resources and opportunities. Dan Allman's work, titled *The Sociology of Social Inclusion*, is important in this context. For him, the modern thoughts on inclusion began with Rene Lenoir's *Excluded: One in Ten French*. Allman sees inclusion as "a means to reintegrate the large numbers of ex-industrial workers and a growing number of young people excluded from opportunities to join the labor force in the new economies of the 1970s and beyond" (8). The inclusion of the excluded creates the new French social contract. For Foucault, inclusion is a way to challenge the power structure, and for Lenoir and Allman, it is a new labour strategy to create a new democratic social contract. Soans' play fundamentally acts an applied theatre in this sense of challenging the power structure as well as a new social contract by incorporating the philosophy of inclusiveness.

Let's look at how the play *Talking to Terrorists* acts as a democratic space for inclusiveness and polyphony. Soans' topic of discussion revolves around terrorism, a subject that is often clouded with prejudices. Most of the discussions around the topic exclude the culprits involved and focus on what the state, bureaucracy, and media say about terrorism. Here, Soans adopts characters from all factions of the topic, including ex-terrorists, terrorists, peace workers, state ambassadors, journalists, diplomats, weapon dealers, school children, and refugees. This wide range of characters represents a polyphonic and inclusive structure of the play. Soans also wants to balance his views on terrorism by adding politicians and victims to illustrate the theme that talking to terrorists is the only way to create peace and end the misery of conflict. Another part of Soans' idea is that terrorism is a vicious circle and he mentions several times that the idea of terrorism emerges from terrorism, such as the case with the Bethlehem school girl who states in Act One that she hopes her Christmas will be better than the last few days and that the soldiers are beginning to pester her. It is revealed in Act Two that the Bethlehem schoolgirl was quite happy with the 9/11 disaster in America when she says:

> When I first saw the Twin Towers on television, I felt sorry. But now I feel
>
> happy that they died. It's their turn to suffer. I could see many thousands of
>
> them die. I wouldn't feel a thing. (Soans 97)

The world is made to believe that thoughts such as these make human lives expendable, thereby justifying revenge that leads to acts of terrorism or support for it. Ultimately, Soans expresses the idea that terrorism is bad, but terrorists aren't monsters. They are humans with a message and need to be talked to in order to resolve any issues.

The idea of talking to a terrorist might seem axiomatic, as liquidating or diluting resistance movements has hardly worked in human history. The stark binary between nationalists and terrorists after 9/11 is the key issue that is discussed in Soans' play. Soans portrays differing viewpoints of both groups through a series of monologues. As a character in the play, the Ex-Secretary of State says, "Tony [Prime Minister Tony Blair] seems to have learned nothing from history. If you want them to change their minds, you have to talk to them. They won't do it very willingly because they don't trust you, but yes, you have to talk to terrorists" (Soans 28). The former Ambassador (AMB) is another character in the play who is a spokesperson for the Uzbekistan revolutionary group. In the play, he recalls how Michael, a Foreign Ministry lawyer, justified the tortures inflicted upon the Uzbeks by the British army. Here, the audience gets the perspectives of the terrorists as well as the nationalists.

> MICHAEL: I am not an expert on the U.N. Convention on Torture,
>
> but I cannot see we are in material breach of any provision simply by
>
> possessing, or   indeed using, information obtained under torture, and
>
> subsequently passed to us. (Soans 72).

These two perspectives, that of the extremist and the nationalist, are blended in such a way that the readers can gain different perspectives on the same topic. This illustrates how the play creates an inclusive discursive space in its text. Such dialogues

satirically reproduce mainstream media's tendency to talk *about* terrorists instead of talking *to* them. The distortion of truth is shown clearly when the lawyer Michael attempts to provide a legal definition rather than an ethical one to validate his superiors' acts of torture. The facts from Uzbekistan consistently contradict the official line.

One of the challenges of talking to terrorists is that one must first have the language to communicate with them. This language should be given priority to understand that terrorists as a group largely represent militant nationalist organizations rooted in a specific political and economic context. However, in the post-9/11 and post-7/7 discourses on critiquing terrorism and justifying the "war on terror," Al-Qaeda has become the signifier for all terrorist organizations. This is the concept that is propagated to justify neo-imperial military endeavors. This simulative strategy was not a message that most people desired to hear from an artistic representation. Michael Billington, in his review of the play, described it as, "At its highest point, as in the contrapuntal recollections of the Brighton bombing, it also proves that edited memories can achieve the potency of art" (Billington). For Billington, the juxtaposition of both the terrorists' and victims' memories within the play on the Brighton bombing created explorations into terrorist violence from different dimensions. There were sharp criticisms of the play *Talking to Terrorists* as it was staged immediately after the London bombing, which haunted the British severely. It is not a scene-stealer kind of play, but it subtly invokes a political debate in the minds of its consumers. Nancy Fraser, in her phenomenal essay "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," elucidates the possibility of "subaltern counter-publics" (59) as the dominant public sphere contains "a number of significant exclusions" (60). Art and literature have always shared the privilege of creating this subaltern counter-public. In studying the role of theatre in creating a theatrical counter-public, Eldhose notes that, "There is a very conspicuous role for theatre—especially political theatre in creating a [counter] public sphere" (65). Soans' politics are giving space to significant exclusions in our society and thereby creating a subaltern counter-public.

Talking to Terrorist and the British Audience

The period from 2000 to 2010 was a time of significant cultural change in Britain. The country had just entered the new millennium, and there was a sense of optimism and possibility in the air. At the same time, however, there were significant social and political challenges facing the country. The early 2000s saw a rise in multiculturalism, with a growing awareness and appreciation of the diverse range of cultures that make up modern Britain. Though the cultural scenario of the nation was widening, the political context of the period was dominated by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the terrorist attacks on London in 2005. These events had a significant impact on British society, leading to increased government surveillance and a growing sense of anxiety and insecurity. During the 2000s, British theatre was

deeply impacted by the global events of the time, including the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq War, and the London bombings. Many British playwrights responded to these events by creating works that explored themes of terror, war, and their impact on individuals and society as a whole. Some fine example are, David Hare's *Stuff Happens* (2004), which dramatized the decision-making process leading up to the Iraq War, and David Greig's *The American Pilot* (2005), which explored the impact of the war on a small village in Afghanistan.

In addition to these works, British theatre during the 2000s also saw a renewed interest in political theatre and socially-engaged theatre. Many companies and artists sought to use theatre as a tool for activism and social change. For example, the group "Arts Against War" organized a series of theatrical events in protest of the Iraq War. In short, the theatre of the 2000s in Britain reflected the anxieties and uncertainties of a changing world, as well as a desire to engage with pressing social and political issues in a meaningful way. As mentioned earlier, *Talking to Terrorists* is an attempt to address the political issues of the period. The British people, who were the audience for theatre, were confused and fearful due to the political unrest. The title of the play is drawn from an initial comment in the text, "talking to terrorists is the only way to beat them" (Soans 25). This statement proclaims the politics of the play, which emphasizes the need for an inclusive play text that incorporates alternative voices in society. Jeanne Colleran, in his work *Theatre and War: Theatrical Responses Since 1991*, opines about *Talking to Terrorists*, stating that:

> It tries to explain how one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter, and it grounds the violence in the twin incitements of poverty and political exclusion. As a verbatim play, one taking directly from recorded interviews, *Talking to Terrorists* should not have a pre-determined thesis: the point is to see what emerges from the research. *Talking to Terrorists* wants its audience to understand what drives people to commit acts of terrorism; it seeks politically and psychologically credible explanations for this particular kind of violence. (115)

The play created massive responses both in favor and in opposition to its representation of alternative voices that are totally unacceptable for the public. The play never propagated terrorism in any sense. Neither has it suggested that terrorism is the only way to resolve the political and cultural issues in the present society. Rather, it suggests that talking to terrorists is an effective means to deal with terrorism.

"Is the accuser always holy?"

This is a question that arose as part of diverse discourses propagated after various terrorist attacks in the first decade of the twenty first century. This play attempts to undertake a counter reading of the socio-political representation of 'terrorist' in the immediate context of 9/11 attacks. Most of the literary works, theatre performances, news shows, during that point of time, tried only to address the trauma

experienced by victims of the terrorist attacks. Soans' text argues that contemporary media employs certain simulative strategies to project the victim's trauma and hide the victimizer's trauma. To be specific, every victimizer claims to be a victim at some other point of time in history. But this history never gets documented. This play is placed within a broader historical, political, economic, and social context.

Theatrical interventions on issues related to global conflict raise two important questions: primarily, how are ideas like terror and trauma represented in performance, and secondly, how does such a performance interact within the surrounding cultural context. *Talking to Terrorists* addresses both of these questions. The play suggests that the only way to tackle terrorism is to create a space for dialogue with terrorist groups, which are often made up of dissatisfied people in society who struggle and fight against establishments and authoritarian governments. The British audience is very familiar with these kinds of groups, as British imperialism had a violent past that lasted for centuries until Sinn Fein, an Irish republican political party, came to power. This fact serves as a reminder that Britain has had earlier examples of the futility of violence in solving issues related to political questions.

To conclude, Soans' play *Talking to Terrorists*, transmits, transforms and estranges the very language of theatre performance in the context of evolving discourses on terror and trauma. Theatre becomes a space to rethink the existing notions of terrorism and anti-terrorism in the context of the 9/11 attack, the following War on Terror, and British participation in the Iraqi invasion. The traumatic experience of people, who are involved in the issues related to the neo-millennium global terror, is transmitted from the person on the stage to the audience as a form of dissent. Soans does not ask his audience to become terrorists or even to support terrorism or violence in any manner. Rather, he interrogates the criteria for categorizing and stereotyping someone as a terrorist and the other as nationalist. He also satirizes the pointlessness of neglecting the alternative voices in the society. The impossibility of such talk is a result of the inadequacy of the existing discursive practices that are controlled and manipulated by corporate media. The play states that talking to the terrorist is a platform for listening to the muted voices in the society. Thus, theatre here becomes a thesis in conflict resolution.

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Problematizing the 'Secular': Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* as a Postsecular Text

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Abstract

Leila Aboulela's novel *Minaret* (2005) is the story of a Sudanese girl Najwa's fall from an elite class to poverty, her exile to London, the loss of her family, her loneliness and the brief romance with a young lad in whose home she works as a baby sitter. Najwa struggles with her alienation and purposelessness until she finally turns to faith for identity and empowerment. The gradual rediscovery of Islamic faith makes her renounce all romantic and material prospects as she goes into a willing submission to faith. Whether her willing subordination and negation of modern notion of liberty is 'dismissive of agency' as claimed by some, or 'performing piety' and 'positive freedom' will be discussed in this paper. The paper will discuss how Minaret can be seen as a postsecular text within the English novel form and tradition that foregrounds Islam as a solution to the frustrations of exile and alienation.
Keywords: Islam, Piety, Performativity, Identity, Migration, Alienation

Leila Aboulela, the Sudanese-British novelist, is a prolific writer. Through her fictional writings, she has gained international reputation for herself and is considered a seminal writer of the Arab-Anglophone tradition. She along with other Arab-African women writers like Ahdaf Soueif, Leila Halaby and Fadia Faqir, expounds the Arab-African Muslim woman's experience in migrant situations. Her protagonists are women who suffer the dilemma of identity, assimilation and belonging in diasporic conditions. As such her novels are distinctively marked by a feminist and diasporic consciousness. He female protagonists are caught up in migrant situations away from their homes and suffer what Homi Bhabha calls 'unhomeliness' to describe the plight of women in exile in western countries in a postcolonial situation. In hostile Islamophobic conditions, these women are torn between the pressures of secularization, westernization and resistance to assimilation. The crisis of identity renders these women hybrid and alienated, aggravated by racial and gender discrimination. However, amidst this chaos and confusion, these women protagonists invariably turn to faith as a source of contentment, identity and empowerment. Facing the typical migrant problem of dislocation and identity crisis, Aboulela's characters turn "to religion as a site of translocal identity formation, which offers her characters the possibility of resisting the hegemonic pressures of assimilating into a secular present" (Steiner 8).

Faith for Aboulela is not just a cultural and religious denomination for people in migration, but a site of identity formation and locatedness that transcends all other markers of identity like race, ethnicity, color and nationality. Her protagonists- be it Sammar in *The Translator*, Najwa in *Minaret* or Natasha in *The Kindness of Enemies*-choose an Islamic ideological way of life to ward off pressures of secularization,

assimilation and hybridity and foster an identity that is Islamic rather than one based on their race, color, ethnicity or nationality. Faith - Islamic faith - provides her characters "a solid frame of reference" who otherwise are dislocated and alienated from their roots. "In exile, religion becomes a home away from home, and an anchor for a troubled and tortured identity" (Nour 337). Living a life of exile and dislocated from their origins, her women protagonists embrace faith and forge their true identity as Muslims. As such Leila Aboulela's novels can be seen as Postnational and Postsecular texts where Islam is a centrally located force and a marker that transcends all other markers of identity.

Leila Aboulela's first novel *The Translator* published in 1999, was described as 'the first halal novel written in English' by the British Muslim News as the novel very subtly foregrounds an Islamic faith through an English novel form. Her second novel *Minaret* (2005) reiterates her position regarding faith as enlightening and empowering within a diasporic and essentially Islamophobic situation. The protagonist, Najwa finds solace and strength in faith after her debacle from being elite to a destitute. Although the novel has been criticized for its "apparent endorsement of submissiveness and a secondary status for women" (Morey 301), Minaret attempts to make an authentic representation of believing women who practice religion and consciously manifest their identity living on foreign lands away from their homes. Minaret foregrounds what Abbas calls "the issues of Islamic faith in the life and choices of its central protagonists" (Abbas 87). Making the imperatives of belief as the central tenants of the novel, it offers a subtle critique of "that normative materialist and secularist individualism against which religious faith- and in particular, proactive Islamic faith- is viewed as peculiar, aberrant, and incomprehensible" (Morey 302).

In the wake of the Orientalist misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims through a vast gamut of literature produced in Europe over centuries, Minaret can be seen as dismantling many of these stereotypes and misrepresentations of Muslim women, by presenting her women protagonists in a new light, healed and empowered by their faith and its practice. Rather than accepting the western Orientalist discourses that trivialize and degrade Islam and women, Leila Aboulela adopts "a subtle transgressive discourse which engages with Orientalist and postcolonial tropes in such a way as to project herself (…) as a representative for Islam" (Nash 45).

Bringing religion to the centre stage of the lives of its protagonists and making it the axis around which their lives revolve, not only negates the secularist theory where religion is seen as redundant, but also becomes an important stance in the postcolonial scenario where faith is seen as 'political' or just a cultural/traditional obligation.

Postsecularism, that problematizes the normative primacy of secularism and secular perspectives in the modern world, reiterates religious conviction against the charges of its orthodoxy and redundancy. Through her novels, Leila Aboulela glorifies religion for its ability to act as an anchor in the lives of women who are

dislocated on account of their migration to European countries, and feel alienated and discriminated particularly in the post 9/11 ambience of events. However, in the aftermath of the events of 9/11, Postsecularism as a critical discourse became conspicuous and the need to reevaluate and "reappraise the nature of faith as a driver for political action in the world" (Morey 302) began to be debated.

Clayton Crockett argues that "the concept of postsecularism refers to a breakdown of modern liberalism because modern liberalism relegates 'religion' to a specific sphere of private belief" and that "postsecularism indicates an epistemological distance from the premises of secularism" (Crockett, 06). As a Postsecular text, *Minaret* brings religion to the centre stage and makes it pivotal in the life of its protagonist Najwa. Her life in Khartoum had been a completely westernized one. She used to spend nights in the American Club and rarely prayed or fasted. One morning after coming back from a night party in the American Club, Najwa hears the Azan, but does not bother to pray. Uneasiness doesn't let her sleep as she hears her servants readying themselves for prayers. "They had dragged themselves from sleep in order to pray. I was wide awake and I didn't" (*Minaret*, 35). Najwa's life changes dramatically after her father's arrest and execution. After being raised in an aristocratic and westernized environment in Sudan of 1980's, Najwa's life falls apart when a coup deposes the President. Her father, being a close aide of the president is arrested on the charges of corruption and later on executed. Najwa, her mother and brother have to run for their lives and take political asylum in Britain. When her mother dies and her brother is arrested for indulging in drugs, she becomes a destitute and has to fend for herself in a foreign country where no one owns her. "There are all kinds of pain, degrees of falling … When Baba was hanged, the earth we were standing on split open and we tumbled down and that tumbling had no end, it seemed to have no end, as if we would fall and fall for eternity without ever landing" (*Minaret* 59). Her acquaintance with Wafaa and other women from the local mosque, who perform the last rites of her dead mother, invite her to the mosque. It's at this point that Najwa's life takes a turn. She had never prayed or fasted genuinely, except occasionally for gaining good grades in exams of losing some fat. "I had prayed during Ramadan, during which I fasted mostly in order to lose weight and because it was fun. I prayed during school exams to boost my grades… It would be difficult for me to pray, to remember the times of the prayer, to wash, to find clean cloth to cover myself" (*Minaret* 144). She remembers occasions when she heard the azan (call for prayers) or watched her servants pray, but did not bother to pray herself. "We heard the dawn azan as we turned into our house…The sound of the azan, the words and the way the words sounded went inside me, it passed through the smell in the car, it passed through the fun I had had at the disco and it went to a place I didn't know existed. A hollow place. A darkness that would suck me in and finish me" (*Minaret* 34).

Najwa's desire to have a home and a family, for which she had been waiting for long, makes her reconnect with Anwar who has also taken refuge in London after change in the political setup in Sudan. Anwar, a leftist and westernized man who

criticized her father openly, had attracted Najwa when she was in college in Khartoum. She dreamt of a married life with him in spite of his dominating and humiliating attitude towards Najwa. She comes close to Anwar again in London and without bothering for any scandal gets sexually involved with him. After her sexual intimacy with Anwar, she has a sense of guilt and regrets losing her virginity before marriage. "It was strange that someone could come close to me like that…Who would care if I became pregnant, who would be scandalized? … A few years back, getting pregnant would have shocked Khartoum society, given nay father a heart attack, dealt a blow to my mother's marriage, and mild, modern Omar, instead of hating me, would have called me a slut. And now nothing, no one" (*Minaret* 156). She has a realization and starts repenting her sinful life. The absolute freedom she is having in London worries her- "This empty space was called freedom" (*Minaret* 156). She wants to settle in life and asks Anwar to marry her only to be disappointed in return. Najwa realizes that the freedom of a physical relation with Anwar does not mean liberty and empowerment, but rather subjugates her further. In the company of Anwar, she is reduced to a mere sexual object with no dignity and self respect. Instead of honoring her and protecting her against the sexual advances of his flat-mates, Anwar accuses Najwa of narrow mindedness and too much concerned with the importance of virginity. "'Like every other Arab girl,' he said, 'you've been brainwashed about the importance of virginity'… the soreness would go away. He said the guilt would go away… He was right about the soreness but the guilt didn't go away" (*Minaret* 157).

Realizing the futility and vulnerability of being in relationship with Anwar, she shuns the abusive and humiliating male domination and takes refuge into an exclusively female world in the mosque. "I'm tired of having a troubled conscious. I'm bored with feeling guilty" (*Minaret* 215). The vacuum in her life, the hollowness and emptiness are alleviated somewhat when she starts going to the mosque and praying regularly. She dawns hijab and wears modest clothes and starts learning the Qur'an. "Now I wanted a wash, a purge, a restoration of innocence. I yearned to go back to being safe with God" (*Minaret* 213). The freedom and liberty that is so much valued in the modern and western world seems worthless and repressive to Najwa who turns to faith for stability and coherence. When Wafaa invites her to the mosque she willingly accepts it: "Yes, I wanted to pray in the same way that I wanted to sprout wings and fly. There was no point in yearning, was there? No point in stretching out" (*Minaret* 159-160). The mosque provides a place of solace and comfort to her against the alienation and frustration of the life she had been living at home or with Anwar in London. To the disoriented Najwa, the mosque acts as a harbor that stabilizes her life and "provides a sense of security, well-being and locatedness" (Chambers 184).

Resurgence of faith and observance of prayers have a healing effect for Najwa and she regrets having spent her past in ignorance and away from God. The atmosphere of the mosque reawakens and rejuvenates Najwa and she has a true

realization of herself and her identity as a Muslim. "I liked the talks at these gatherings because they were serious and simple, vigorous but never clever, never witty. What I was hearing, I would never hear outside, I would never hear on TV or read in a magazine. It found an echo in me; I understood it" (*Minaret* 213).

Ironically, in Khartoum when she was in a university, she is strangely attracted to girls who covered their bodies modestly and offered prayers in the lawn. She used to watch them and something fascinated her from inside. She envies these girls and is disappointed on not seeing them. "I got up and walked away in the direction of the lecture room. I couldn't see the students praying anymore and I felt a stab of envy for them. It was sudden and irrational. What was there to envy?" (*Minaret* 44). In spite of the fact that she was raised in a house where religion was a mere cultural symbol, she often felt uneasy and guilty that she and her family didn't pray. When she starts learning the *Qur'an*, she understands then reason why she envied the girls or her servants when she heard them praying. "This was what I had envied in our gardener reciting the *Qur'an*, our servants who woke up at dawn. Now when I heard the Qur'an recited, there wasn't bleakness in me or a numbness, instead I listened and I was alert" (Minaret 214).

When Najwa dawns the veil, she feels empowered as it allows her freedom to move in the public sphere without being sexualized and objectified. She feels invisible in this new cloth: "Around me was a new gentleness. The builders who had leered down at me from scaffoldings couldn't see me any more. I was invisible and they were quiet. All the frissons, all the sparks died away" (*Minaret*, 217). Najwa's choice of faith is a true expression of her agency that allows her to negotiate her identity as a Muslim, what Saba Mahmood calls 'positive freedom.' Stranded on a foreign soil away from home, faith/Islam becomes an indispensable component of her identity that can't be taken away. She becomes an observant Muslim and it works miracles for her. Faith works as a purifier for her as she is purged and purified of her sins and past mistakes. "This was the scrub I needed. Exfoliation, clarifying, deep-pore cleanse - words I knew from the beauty pages of magazines and the counters of Selfridges. Now they were for my soul not my skin" (*Minaret* 217).

Commenting upon Leila Aboulela's fiction, Wail Hassan remarks that her stories are "narratives of redemption and fulfillment through Islam" and to all her female protagonists who are caught up in alien lands- distraught, alienated and fragmented, "Islam is the solution" (Hassan 300). Islam not only acts as a spiritual entity by guiding its practitioners in matters of faith, it also acts as a source of identity to them as they are uprooted from their origin living their lives in foreign. Islam becomes a fundamental marker of their identity that has the potential to transcend all other makers of identity like race, ethnicity and nationality. When Najwa meets Tamer, a young and religious man of Sudanese-Egyptian origin, she is attracted towards him. In fact, both are attracted towards each other simply because of their faith. When Najwa asks him about his identity he has no compunction calling himself a Muslim rather than a Sudanese or Arab or African. "Do you feel you're Sudanese? ...

My mother is Egyptian. I've lived everywhere except in Sudan: Oman, Cairo, here. My education is Western and that makes me feel that I am Western. My English is stronger than my Arabic. So I guess, no, I don't feel very Sudanese though I would like to be. I guess being a Muslim is my identity" (*Minaret* 110). Najwa too feels the same way by proclaiming herself a Muslim suppressing her nationality and ethnicity. "'I feel that I am Sudanese but things changed for me when I left Khartoum. Then even while living here in London, I've changed. And now, like you, I just think of myself as a Muslim'" (*Minaret* 110). Significantly, Islam becomes a frame of reference and a true marker of identity for both Najwa and Tamer who are living as migrants in Britain facing racial discrimination and pressures of assimilation. Najwa and Tamer are a sharp contrast to Anwar, Randa, Lamya and her friends who degrade their culture and religion and adopt western ways of life. "I turned the pages of an old Time magazine. Khomeini, the Iran Iraq War, girls marching in black chadors, university girls ... A woman held a gun. She was covered head to toe, hidden…Totally retarded,' she said…'We're supposed to go forward, not go back to the Middle Ages. How can a woman work dressed like that? How can she work in a lab or play tennis or anything?" (*Minaret* 32). They shy away from their true faith based identity and prefer western and secular identity for themselves.

When Najwa goes to the mosque, she gets to see many women from different nations inside the mosque. They all are in their veils which conceal their national, ethnic and racial identity. The only thing that unified them was their faith. Claire Chambers argues that for Aboulela and her women protagonists, "Islam is far less an ideology than a code of ethical behavior and a central marker of identity in the fragmentary world of migration, asylum and family disintegration" (Chambers 88). In this sense Minaret can be deemed Postnational text were the idea of a nation, race, ethnicity, gender and color etc. become subservient to faith as the only marker that determines true identity.

Najwa and Tamer's Arab-African roots lose importance as both consider themselves Muslims and are united by faith. Najwa wishes to marry Tamer and even become his concubine for she is fascinated by Tamer's religiosity. He is sympathetic, understanding and protective, a complete contrast to the 'modern,' 'westernized' and 'liberal' Anwar. However, her love and desire for Tamer is contingent upon its realization within an Islamic ethos. She gives up her love for Tamer and discourages him as she feels it goes against Islamic values. In marrying Najwa, Tamer was actually disobeying his mother which she thought was immoral and sinful. As such, in both her love and renunciation, Najwa is guided by faith which becomes the central and the only principle in her life. She is of the opinion that their misfortunes were because of their sinful life. She tells her brother Omer in prison: "'If Baba and Mania had prayed,' I say, 'if you and I had prayed, all of this wouldn't have happened to us. We would have stayed a normal family.'… 'Allah would have protected us, if we had wanted Him to, if we had asked Him to but we didn't. So we were punished'" (*Minaret* 89).

Najwa's extreme religiosity and submissiveness have come under attack by

critics like Wail Hasan and Sadia Abbas, who question "the way the novel as a whole appears to endorse types of female renunciation and doctrinal orthodoxy favoured by the stricter Salafi theology" (Morey 303). Najwa's extreme piety and her utter willingness to be under male protection have been called by Abbas as "conceding too much to restrictive conservative gender norms" (Abbas 62). This effectively means reinforcing gender stereotypes that western orientalist literature is replete with. When she is renouncing her romantic love in favour of religious obligation and subordination, she is not "dismissive of other modes of agency" as accused by Wail Hassan, but 'performing piety' in Saba Mahmood's terminology.

For Hassan, Najwa's choice of religious subordination is "a complete disavowal of freedom and agency that plays into the hands of right-wing interpretations of Islam" (Hassan 313). However, for Najwa, faith and its practice is a willed action that provides 'positive freedom' to her. Her dissatisfaction with western liberal values and absolute freedom leads her towards choosing religion and its subservience which protect and empower her. The feeling of emptiness and hollowness are overcome by resignation to faith and she has a strong sense of identity as a Muslim. In company of other Muslim women in the mosque, she feels a sense of connectedness and locatedness. The mosque acts like an anchor in her life providing her stability and direction. Her relationship with Anwar is supposed to be in line with the modernist ideals of liberty and freedom of women, but rather than feeling free and empowered she is subjugated by the dominating, humiliating and exploitative Anwar who treats her like a sexual commodity. She seeks empathy and protection which is provided not by Anwar but by Tamer- a religious man- whom Anwar calls 'a religious bigot'. Najwa's active realization comes only when she embraces faith which becomes the bedrock of all her actions even if they lead to relative subordination and renouncement of romantic and erotic fulfillment. This is in contrast to the western romantic novel tradition that visualizes secular gender harmony and material fulfillment. The novel is a conscious attempt at reworking the 'secular form' of the novel into a religious and spiritual one. However, it should also be borne in mind that the traditional form of the western novel is not entirely a secular one. From the very beginning religion has been inseparably present in the English novel demonstrated by novels like John Bunyan's *The Pilgrims Progress* (1678) which is a Christian allegory and *Daniel Defoe*'s *Robinson Crusoe (1719) which* is symbolic of baptism and rebirth into a new Christian life. As far as women novelists are concerned Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) also manifests a Christian motif when Jane refuses to marry Rochester as long as he is married to Bertha, the mad woman in the attic. Jane's refusal to marry Rochester is in many ways similar to Sammar's condition set for marrying Rae in Aboulela's *The Translator*. Sammar will not marry Rae until he says the shahadah and becomes a Muslim. In Minaret also, religious consideration becomes the first and the foremost condition for Najwa to decide the future of her romantic relation with Tamer. In this sense, *Minaret* is a continuation of the English novel tradition, albeit it reworks the novel form and brings Islam to the centre stage. The

novel can be said to preach and advocate Islam through its English form.

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"She was an actress": Fantasy, Role Play and Social Anxiety in Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*

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Abstract

The human mind in isolation becomes detrimental to the life of an individual in society, and in terms of self-actualization. This is the problem statement with which I explore the character Cress in Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*. Her role-play mainly derives its essence from her imaginations of fantastic scenarios. They reveal her unfulfilled desires, and give a glimpse of her severe lack of socialization skills. The sense of self, insecurities and an extended battle of gaining a hold on her self-identity are of primary focus in this paper. The paper seeks to explore the story-worlds created by Cress as means of dealing with her social anxiety, and her real-time heroic quests in context of her identity formation. Role-play undertaken by Cress in specific situations reveal her fear of being rejected by her friends, by her love interest Thorne and her desire to have belongingness with people.
Keywords: Anxiety, Desires, Fantasy, Identity, Social, Unconscious

Introduction

Young adult fictions have the scope to create worlds within and outside the characters, giving authors a chance to bring in novel and unreal ways of being, becoming and existing. The intentionally marvelous story-worlds, most specifically the world of the minds of the characters (albeit relating with the worlds within the readers' mind), enable the narrative to bridge in metaphors and connotative abstractness. These layers house several realistic issues to unravel and ponder upon. In this regard, the relationship of the human mind with the social worlds it inhabits, as well as draws cues of identity and social performances from, needs to be explored. This paper takes up a study of fantastic products of imagination through mentally created scenarios and mental conditioning of oneself to *become* someone else, in order to get through situations of crisis and anxiety.

The subject of the study is a character called Cress, in Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles* (2012-2016) series. In this series, Earth and Moon are at a stage of geopolitical war. The Lunar Queen Levana initiates a bio-war by spreading a deadly pandemic called Letumosis on Earth. Her kingdom, Luna (evolved from an Earthen colony on the Moon), consists of a race called Lunars with special powers to 'glamour' (mentally manipulate bioelectric wavelengths of others' minds) the people and control their body and mind. In the Lunar society, a section of children who fail to acquire the ability of glamour are ostracized from birth and kept in hibernation. The blood of these children, called Shells, is harvested by Levana to make vaccines against Letumosis. Cress is one such Shell imprisoned as a young child in a satellite for seven years after being discovered as a talented hacker. She goes on to escape from her captivity and aids the protagonist of the series, Cinder, a.k.a. the long-lost Lunar Princess Selene, to stage a rebellion and later successfully overthrow Levana. From birth, Cress is abandoned by her mother because of being the socially disadvantaged Shell and grows up till the age of nine in hiding on Luna. Thaumaturge (Lunar law

enforcers) Sybil, a right-hand of Levana, discovers her and uses her for hacking into Earthen databases. Trapped in the satellite, Cress grows up into a teenager and is rescued by Cinder and Carswell Thorne (ex-American military, escaped convict, and the man with whom Cress falls in love solely based on his life-story). Fantasy and imaginations of scenarios, along with stylizing herself into roles which appeal to her more than the reality in which she lives, become part and parcel of her life.

In the wake of the influential works on dreams, the formulation of the Id-Ego-Superego matrix by Sigmund Freud, and later models of the Psyche and Archetypes by Carl Gustav Jung, psychoanalysis as a school emerged as a wave of scholarship. Actions and behaviours of real-time, and/or fictional, people began to be understood alongside their unconscious, subconscious and conscious states of mind, emotions, desires and personalities. The mind and its complex intricacies have managed to generate a palpable wave of interest, especially for the literary scholars. One such line of thought is making sense of the motivations driving imaginations, dreams and fantasies within people. The symbolism of these mental works is explored by psychoanalytic school of thought in context of the lived realities of the subjects concerned.

Fantasy and the act of fantasizing about something become crucial aspects that ultimately aid in building ideas of oneself, or negotiate the perceived images of the self in social interaction. As a genre of literature, fantastic narratives are anything that defy reality (Hahn 200; Gwenllian Jones 160) and move into something spectacular, awe-inspiring and beyond conceivable positions of the world. There are different elements which define a genre as fantasy. The life narrative of Cress within the macro-narrative of *The Lunar Chronicles*, is her own story and fantasy of there being a hero, an adventure awaiting her, encounters with unexpected elements, and romance. According to Carl Gustav Jung, in his work *On the Nature of Psyche* (2001), fantasy is worked on by the people in a manner in which themes are developed "according to individual taste and talent" by using several "dramatic, dialectic, visual, acoustic" manners (133). He further lists several creative forms through which this "individuation process" is carried out and drama is one of them (Jung 133). Cress's individuation of her fantasies develops around the theme of her isolation and the roles she imagines herself and others, specifically Thorne, in. On different social occasions where she has to encounter unfamiliar faces, she executes her role plays with a confidence she has never portrayed before. This becomes the mode in which she brings to action her fantasies of her individual experiences.

In this regard, the linkages of the fictional worlds created by Cress in moments of anxiety (by acting, exploring, and being a beautiful hero), with the situations around her, are studied in this paper. Her sense of deprivation rooted in the stages of severe loneliness and socially inhibited surroundings will be the fulcrum of analysis in the paper. She creates alternate versions of herself, personalities she wishes to be at crucial stages of the actual narrative. These alternate imaginations of her preferred self in opposition to what she believes herself to be, reveal a lot about the lives led by such deprived individuals. Identity, its socially-empowered formation and sustenance become main focus areas in this paper.

Imagined Selves: Dealing with Social Anxiety

Psychologists characterize social anxiety as a disorder of the personality in

which the person feels self-conscious, constantly gets the feeling of being watched and judged by others, is unable to make eye-contact with others ("Social Anxiety Disorders"; Higuera). The self-consciousness in any person who is constantly feeling anxious in social situations, is somehow related to the socialization skills that should be developed in an individual from childhood. Studies on emotional deprivation and social anxiety revealed that "Social isolation also becomes emotional isolation, and a person has only their own worrisome thoughts to keep them company and help them process their challenges. These doubts and worries breed more pervasive anxiety" (Nowak). Thus, isolation breeds the negative tendencies about their own selves and the world, within people who go on for a long period without contacting others.

Cress's phase of isolation in the satellite is for seven years, especially in the age of adolescence. Away from the society from childhood till teenage, and the rapid influx of peers on the spaceship *Rampion*, after being inducted into Cinder's gang of rebels, impact her socialization abilities dynamically in a short span of time. She fiddles a lot, refuses to look at any face which will make her emotionally vulnerable during interaction. Her refusal to meet Thorne's eyes is a sign of her insecurity of being judged by the man she loves the most. There is a trademark air of hesitancy ascribed by Meyer onto Cress's character, in all those sections of the narrative where her slouching body language and stuttering speech (especially in the initial phases of her living with Cinder and the others) are repeatedly emphasized to be her way of being and existing around people. There are small instances where she willingly adopts a confident pose and tone in voice. In making Wolf, another character, have food while he is grieving the kidnapping of his love-interest Scarlet, Cress is surprised momentarily at her own self alongside Wolf. The confidence of Cress grows as she acclimatizes to her new, people-filled surroundings.

The role of fantasy and imagination in dealing with social situations and overcoming the anxiety subsequent to encounters with new people need to be explored. This paper seeks to analyze the psychological mind-work in the created fantasies of Cress at different stages of the narrative, and her life, in order to understand the impact of her social deprivation. Her unbridled and exuberant emotions, as well as repressed, unconscious desires play a role in her journey of discovering herself.

Phase of Loneliness

The isolated lifestyle of Cress is something which becomes a strong hurdle to her process of understanding or coming to terms with the basic idea of who she is, and what she is capable of. The role of family, parental love, friendship and social skills with different levels of society and different kinds of people has an impact on the overall personality of a child. Attachment styles and stability of such emotional attachments, are said to be forged in the first six years of life, setting the stage for all kinds of future relationships an individual may establish throughout adolescence and different stages of adulthood (Ciccarelli and Meyer 290). Childhood is that phase where emotional development is secured not only through the bond with the mother, but with peers or anyone "who shares a warm relationship" with the child (Mitchell and Ziegler 242-244). Cress's childhood becomes emotionally empty and socially depressing since she is cut-off from her parents, and she lives among "other Shells

[who] were so content to accept their stifled existence, [that] they mocked her for trying to escape, even if the escape was only in her own mind" (Meyer, "After Sunshine Passes By", 162).

In the short instance where she is shown on Luna with her last group of peers, Cinder appears to have few countable friends. Despite her lack of friends, she is the one who manages to download learning applications on a portscreen (a futuristic electronic tablet) to educate herself and her friends in a hands-on manner. The social isolation of being politically sidelined from the public role of being a Lunar citizen, is visible in her fantasy of being a soldier for her ruler, Levana. Her fantasy is given as follows:

> At nine years old, Crescent Moon was the youngest infantry soldier in Luna's great warrior army. She stood at perfect attention in the front line of her platoon- back straight as a pin and arms locked at her sides. She was proud of her service to the queen. Already she had been hailed for her bravery and even honored with a medal of courage from Commander-General Sybil Mira after the battle of- (Meyer, "After Sunshine Passes By", 161).

Cress (originally Crescent Moon), imagines herself as a valued and honored citizen in a moment where her existence is considered a social burden. Her ambition to gain freedom, love, admiration and honor is visible in this image. Another imagery of freedom and public approval is seen in her imagination of herself as an actress in the satellite when she is surprised by a video conference call by Thorne, the man who has managed to become the romantic hero of her dreams. The immediate need to overcome her ragged appearance with unkempt and uncut, long hair that spills across her room is stimulated because of Thorne's surprise at the same. She views this as a negative first impression before a man she desires to love. While overcoming her embarrassment below the table, Cress adopts role-play to condition herself to communicate with the first set of people in her seven years of isolation. Her new fantasy is described as follows:

> She was- she was-
>
> *An actress.*
>
> A gorgeous, poised, talented actress. And she was wearing a sequined dress that sparkled like stars, one that would mesmerize anyone who saw her. She was not one to question her own power to charm those around her, any more than a thaumaturge would question her ability to manipulate a crowd. She was breathtaking…. This was not her bedroom, her sanctuary, her prison. This was a drama set, with cameras and lights and dozens of directors and producers and android-assistants milling about (Meyer, *Cress* 43).

Cress's fantasy reveals that her imprisoned reality has created several layers of self-censoring and self-depleting instincts in her insecure mind. Her inability to gather her wits during interpersonal communication with an entirely different society than her own, after seven years of silence aboard a ship, makes her imagine herself as a public figure. The image of being a popular and charming actress with a confidence which is unmatched, shows her desire to overcome her inhibitions and insecurities. Her need for confidence in basic communication with a few new people, makes her desire to be a figure who has to gain instantaneous attention and approval from large masses of unfamiliar people daily. Her physically deprived and mentally delimited state makes her fantasize of being the most socially ingrained personality. In Cress's fantasy, the

satellite transforms into a drama set where countless people are waiting to direct her, to witness her work and to assist her- which shows a desperate need for care and attention from many people. She calls the satellite a sanctuary and a prison; although it is a familiar spot for her to retreat to while attempting any new conversations, the satellite is also a painful reminder of the highly secluded and isolated identity she houses.

In both these fantasies, she seeks the social acceptance and a stable identity in a community which will sustain her needs as a person- to interact, to emote and to share her feelings, views and perspectives. The idea of encountering new faces excites her- which makes Earth seem like a place of adventure and restructuring of her sense of self. The opportunities on a new planet where her Shell identity does not matter, makes her yearn to be part of the planet. In this regard, the next phase of her life begins, which gratifies her need for love, friendship, companionship and security.

Hero, Friends and an Adventure

Her imprisoned state makes Cress dramatize her situation in the hope that she will one day be able to escape her isolation. The fantasy of being a "damsel in distress" and imagining Thorne to be the "compassionate and chivalrous" hero (Meyer, *Cress* 29, 48) shows that Cress is desperate to escape those confines of being in a satellite in deep space, with no way to leave except a spaceship. However, her love for Thorne metamorphosizes his personality to be picture perfect and heroic, loyal to the core. However, after being rescued, Cress finds Thorne to be unashamedly flirtatious- be it with humans or with escort-droids. She feels let down and foolish for having entered a one-sided emotional relationship in her mind. The gratification of her need for security, which she hopes to have from Thorne, is definitely earned during the group's escapades from the Lunar soldiers and Earthen officials who are chasing after Cinder. However, beyond these moments of exhilaration, Cress starts losing hope that Thorne will ever love her back. Although Thorne eventually falls in love with her, to the point that he starts showing his vulnerable state (beyond the mask of narcissistic indifference he intentionally wears to avoid emotional attachment), Cress's insecurity does not allow her to believe his love when he first professes it. Thus, the clash of the fantasy of Thorne's heroism held within her head, with the real-life image of a person with flaws of his own, gives her desire to have a perfect protector and lover, a strong setback. From being overly dependent on Thorne, as well as having the constant need to get his approval, Cress slowly finds her way out and starts to explore her potential as a hacker by aiding Cinder and her other friends.

When Thorne and Cinder attempt to rescue Cress, Thaumaturge Sybil (whom Cress calls as Mistress) locks Thorne and Cress within the satellite and sends it crashing to Earth, where the two find themselves stranded in the Sahara Desert. On way to find a civilization, Cress suffers a panic attack when she realizes that Thorne has lost his eyesight and she has to lead him in a surrounding she is encountering for the first time. In the narrative, Cress is seen to deal with her anxiety and panic attacks by imagining an optimistic role for herself. This mechanism of dealing with her psychological problem makes the reader aware of the role fantasy plays in the day-to-day survival of Cress, at a time where her intellectual, social and emotional limits are being tested constantly. After a lull of seven years with an AI stylized to sound like her

ten-year-old self talking back to her as a pseudo-younger sister, Cress finally has the company of Thorne. But their state of emergency forces her to become the bravest explorer who will not disappoint Thorne. This makes her fantasize that she is an explorer, an archaeologist, a scientist, a treasure hunter, a master of land and sea whose life is an adventure, and where she will not be "shackled to this satellite anymore" (Meyer, *Cress* 140). Her new fantasy is that of being a quest-taker; all the roles she imagines are professions which are investigative and a journey from the unknown to the known. The desire to be the explorer and undertake her own adventure is her desperate need to taste this new-found freedom without fear and inhibition. Although this is a fantasy which is half manufactured out of panic, she is determined to lead a new identity of independence as she forgoes the metaphors of being a heroine who basks in others' appreciation, or a "damsel in distress". This marks a point where her dependent and deprived psychological state, insecurity and fear, started getting their first outlets out of her mental framework. Her journey of self-identification begins in the desert.

Regaining Confidence in her Skills

Although Cress is picturized as a young woman severely lacking social skills as required for peers at her age, she is nevertheless quite clever when it comes to being resourceful for her survival. Her childhood self is admirably more confident about her abilities than when she is imprisoned in a satellite full of gadgets at her disposal. In the satellite she has consoles to learn about every kind of knowledge there is to learn. Cress becomes intellectually more capable than the other characters, including Cinder (who, as a cyborg, literally has a computer in her brain). Cress's confidence is diminished because of the hopelessness her state of confinement brings within her; however, her confidence and hope keep growing because of her fantasies.

Cress's personality and her anxiety are a complex which grows with the years she adds to her life right after taking birth. Like any other Shell, she is given away by her mother to the Thaumaturges to be isolated as unworthy citizens of Luna. However, there is a rebellious streak in Cress which sets her apart from the others. This streak grows after Cress stops depending on fantasies coloured with emotions. Her role changes from being emotionally insecure to using role-play to overcome her fear of public places and unfamiliar faces. Her individuation process changes colour from gaining approval to utilizing her inner capacities and talents to serve a larger purpose beyond her personal sense of satisfaction. The public role of being a rebel in charge of technologically infiltrating the antagonist Queen Levana's realm, becomes her goal of gaining the life of agency and individuality in the society where she is born.

In the novel *Winter*, when Levana is holding a ball celebrating her coronation as the Earthen Empress of Commonwealth (post forcibly marrying Kai, the Commonwealth Emperor and Cinder's love interest), Cress and Thorne are given the job of infiltrating the palace to initiate the rebellion Cinder has planned. While doing so, when Cress finds herself attending her first public event in her life as a fake Lunar aristocratic lady, she gets anxious with the scope of her dramatizing abilities. Thorne comes to her aid with a new interpretation of the action of fantasizing and role-play-that of making it her weapon against her lingering social anxiety instantaneously.

Previously, in the desert where Cress imagines herself to be an explorer out loud, Thorne presumes her to be delinquent and abnormal since Scarlet had warned them of the psychological aftereffects of long periods of seclusion. However, in the scenario of the ball, Thorne asks Cress to "pretend you belong here and everyone else will believe it" (Meyer, *Winter* 588). He has understood that fantasizing is her tool of dealing with the aftereffects of her social anxiety. Cress starts deploying her role-play. Habitually she imagines herself in the role of a lunar aristocratic lady in the arms of the most handsome man she knew in her life. But she says further: "But most important . . . "I am a criminal mastermind and I'm here to take down this regime" (Meyer, *Winter* 589). When Thorne jokingly says that the role of a mastermind and a criminal is his, she says she stole his line. There is an evolution in the nature of roles she fantasizes herself in. While the situation-dependent and emotionally-charged role of being beautiful, powerful and loved by Thorne repeats itself, Cress steals the role of being a mastermind from the Hero of her fantasy. The role which gives the role-player the most significant part of the narrative-that of rebellion and revenge, as well as the agency to be individualistic and free- is taken consciously by Cress from the male hero.

These role-plays and the shift of importance in the list of priorities through which Cress individually colors her fantasies, show that her social anxiety is curbing itself into a situation where Cress is adding on more real-time social roles onto her personae. Her real-time entanglement with the world makes her fantasies come closer to the actual reality she lives in moment-by-moment. The journey of her identification reaches its pinnacle where she asserts her individuality as a hacker, as a rebel, as a woman and as her own self. Unbridled with any kind of an isolation, deprivation and armed with emotional and social support from Thorne and her friends, Cress forges new identities for herself.

Conclusion

Identity and working over oneself through imagination is impacted by the social, emotional and psychological makeup of the human mind. Cress's social anxiety is remarkably present in her adolescent age, at a developmental period where identity-formation takes place rapidly. Her insecurities with people despite her intellectual caliber make her battle hard with several challenges. However, Cress's innate will and desperate need to make her life her own enables her to triumph over her fragmented sense of self. The social roles and their diversity- beyond romance- makes her solidify herself in the real-time world and aids in her process of being aware of her reality rather than escaping it. Role-play and fantasies are both shackles and life-savers to Cress; they initially bind her to hyperbolic emotional reactions and unrealistic dreams, yet become the tools with which she starts assimilating herself in the society.

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Ecofeminist Assertion in Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café*

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Abstract

Eco-feminist speculation has an exacting and important association with women and the natural world. Eco-feminism understands the suppression of women and their mistreatment in phases of the subjugation and operation of the environment. As a movement, ecofeminism embraces the idea that the oppression of women and the oppression or destruction of nature are closely connected. Naylor discusses gender conditioning with eco-feminism perspectives through her novels, especially *Bailey's Café* (1992), a collection of loosely intertwined stories about women who have been living at the edge and fighting their lonely battles yet display remarkable courage and fortitude while clinging to their own spiritual core and their connection with Mother Nature. The focus in the present paper shall be on two women characters - Eve and Sadie - whose affinity with Nature is very natural and becomes a metaphor for their survival amidst the tortures they bear along the journey of their lives. This close bonding with Nature empowers them spiritually and Eve and Sadie derive strength from their deep connection to assert themselves.
Keywords: anthropocentricism, ecofeminism, ecocriticism, post-humanist, African-American.

Introduction

The anthropocentricism of Western cultural tradition, though based on humanism and sanctioned by religion, is thwarted by Eco-criticism, which outrightly rejects notions that are socially and linguistically constructed. The eco- critics contend that all the givens or accepted norms are simply and actually fluid and unstable. The movement founded by Cheryl Glotfelty and Jonathan Bate in the US and Britain respectively, though inclusive in its approach, paved the way for debates and discussions on the issue of nature and culture, but remained spearheaded by men; is not very sensitive to issues of sexism. Eco-feminism, though evolved simultaneously as eco-criticism, owes its origin to the efforts made by women writers in the United States of America, where various conferences were organized to create a platform for the early proponents of eco-feminism to come together. Ynestra King, the Founder and Organizer of the Women and Life on Earth Conference of 1980 and the Women's Pentagon Action in 1980-81, declared at the Amherst Conference:

> We're here to say the word ECOLOGY and announce for us as feminists it's a political word- that it stands against the economics of the destroyers and the pathology of racist hatred. It's a way of being, which understands that there are connections between all living things and that indeed we women are the fact and flesh of connectedness. (quoted in "Ecofeminist Thought" 40)

Mary Daly in 1974 called for communalized family and work arrangements, equal distribution of decision-making between men and women and among all levels of society, and an ecological technology focused on the development of non-polluting, alternative, and renewable energy resources—in other words, a new synthesis of feminism and ecology:

> Most simply put, eco-feminism is a movement that makes connections between environmentalists and feminisms; more precisely, it articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender, race and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment. (Sturgeon 23)

Thus, the basic tenet of ecofeminism is based on the belief that there is a close connection between nature and women. Ecofeminists hold a holistic vision of all human and non-human environments. Gloria Naylor, the renowned African American writer, always believed in the core Afrocentric values that encompassed a holistic view of the universe, wherein all living things and beyond have space. She fought against the multiple oppressions black women had to face in the white male world in their struggle for freedom and equality. While writing about the multiple jeopardies, African-American women had to face on the basis of class, sex, race, and marital status, Gloria Naylor also simultaneously explored African-American women's close affinity with nature. Although Black women have been at the forefront of working for the conservation of nature, their role has been negated, as has the role of Black women writers in portraying the strong and natural connection between women and nature.

Bell Hooks states that "living in modern society without a sense of history, it has been easy for folks to forget that black people were first and foremost a people of the land, farmers" (36). Ecofeminism states that not only are black people so connected to the land, but women have always been linked to Nature. Women are also linked to nature by the "ancient identity of nature as a nurturing mother" (Merchant 472), which means that this connection, though fairly recently termed ecofeminism, has been recognized by human ancestors for that deep bond which has always existed between women and nature.

As a movement, Ecofeminism aims at dismantling the matrix of oppression imposed by patriarchal structures strengthened by dualistic hierarchies of male/female, culture/nature, and white/black. Nature and black women have always been othered and marginalized by the dominant white patriarchy, driven by power and a strong desire to dominate and control 'others.' Naylor has steadfastly dismantled the stereotypes of black women and portrayed them as rebellious spirits, often fighting their lonely battles with wisdom and strength. Ecofeminists argue that nature and women are in the other's position, and the root cause of oppression is social hierarchy and anthropocentrism. Therefore, to solve the ecological crisis and eradicate social inequality and oppression, they need to connect the feminist movement with the ecological movement to challenge patriarchal and anthropocentric ideologies and create a harmonious world.

This process of subjugation has been sustained relentlessly through the

representation of human domination over nature, man's oppression of women, and the whites' intolerance of the black caused by patriarchy and anthropocentrism. In contradistinction to this stance, Naylor proposes to take equality, freedom, love, and care as the core values to replace hierarchy in a patriarchal world, thus visualizing a Naylorian world order—a post-humanistic world where nature has been given its due place in the universe. Apparently, *Mama Day* is closest to Naylor's ecofeminist vision of the world, where Mama, the protagonist, is akin to and at the same time one with the celebration of nature as her cultural traditions are rooted in the island's mythic past. *Bailey's Café* has been variously analyzed but ecofeminist lens. The present paper attempts to study Gloria Naylor's novel *Bailey's Café* through the prism of ecofeminism.

Naylor's novel *Bailey's Café* (1988) resounds with mythic undertones and the 'blues' permeate the stories steeped in pain. Though there are many stories, Eve's and Sadie's stories strike a chord in their deep connection with pain and how they find solace in their connection with nature. The strength Eve and Sadie derive from their bonding with nature paves the way for their assertion as individuals. S. M. Shaw contends that empowerment is a central characteristic of resistance. Women's Empowerment entails 'power to' which paves the way for new opportunities and identities not based on traditional gender norms. Parry et al. argue that women demonstrated their personal deployment of power and the ensuing freedom to develop new identities by establishing the garden as a site where roles and identities were not based on gender. (quoted in Bhatti et al., 463)

Alongside Bailey's Café is Eve's Bordello, where women from various sections of society who have been ostracized and have been victims of intersectional violence in society, seek shelter. Karen Jay Fowler aptly refers to Eve's place as a "Phantasmagorical boarding house" (Fowler 26). It has no fixed address but is distinguished by a garden of wildflowers that again defy time by remaining perpetually in bloom. Eve, as the name suggests, is our maternal ancestor, whose mythical creation, association with flowers and gardens, and her Godfather's claim that he was the one who would decide "when she was born" (82), authenticate the parallels in both the stories. Due to his persistence in telling the story of her 'birth,' Eve begins to believe that she owes her existence to this man. Assigning this much power to the Godfather aligns him with the enslaved African's view of God in Protestant Christianity who was not only the creator of the cosmos but the creator of history.

Eve is, however, able to undermine his subjection during an 'earth-stomping act.' She had been nurtured by Godfather, who punishes her womanly maturity with neglect: ""I was forced to go through months and months with no one and nothing to touch me" (83), hence the natural urge to be touched gets so overpowering that she finds herself pressed to the ground with Billy Boy dancing and stomping around her. Her strong urge to be touched is satiated by the earth beneath her. "And I felt the warm earth against my warm flesh, pressed so hard into the ground I could hear my heart beating in my ears—beating in time with the last throbbing warmth of the sun in the packed dirt under my stomach and thighs" (86). Eve, at this point, believes in

expressing herself rather than suppressing her natural instincts as dictated by patriarchal society. When Godfather finds out about her act of defiance, he throws her out of his church and out of the town. Eve intones, "He said I was going to leave him the same way he'd found me, naked and hungry" (88). Maxine Lavon Montgomery argues that "Perhaps the most definitive change in Eve's evolving consciousness occurs when she comes to recognize his church as a social construct, reflecting the hierarchies of a society that relegates women to the undesirable position of subservient 'other." (Montgomery, "The Authority," 28)

Eve's journey after her expulsion is reminiscent of the journeys that women have undertaken throughout history, fighting lonely battles till they gained some awareness of their situation. During her long walk from Pilotown, through Cajun country, and on to New Orleans, Eve encounters delta dust, describing it as wet and needing moisture to exist (90). "Layers and layers of it were forming (dust), doing what it existed to do, growing the only thing it could find in one of the driest winters in living memory" (90). Layers of dust symbolize women's complete erasure in the historiography until their rebirth, i.e., regaining their consciousness. Undoubtedly, on her journey through Delta, Eve gains a full understanding of the powerful identity that her sexuality gives her. Eve, whose name means 'mother of all living' is essentially 'self-generated,'(Mongomery, "The Authority" 29) signifying Mother Nature. She is what Karla Holloway describes as the ancestor, and it is her narrative in particular "whose discrete patterns signal the recursive structure present in black women's writing—a structure repeated in the other narratives that comprise the text" (quoted in Montgomery, "The Authority" 29).

The tragedy associated with Eve's story, blues pathos, transcends the boundaries of pain, suffering, and hopelessness. 'The Delta Dust, from which Eve emerges as a radical black female subject, serves as a metaphor for the Black female literary tradition, and the garden with only wildflowers represents Black women waiting to bloom. After her survival through the rigours of the long trek, she gains insight into herself, a spiritual awakening, which makes her rise above her own pain: "I don't spend a lot of time with the right or wrong, good or bad, of what I am - - I am what I am" (85). The Godfather's domination and control of her body and identity transform through Eve's radical vision of her role and image as a woman in his world. This episode marks Eve as her own being and is a reflection of her resistance to her creator, "Godfather always said he made me, but I was born of the delta" (90). Her recreation in Delta has not been explained by Naylor, and by using her mysterious rebirth, Naylor intends to portray her as a mystical person. She grows up and walks into New Orleans "neither male nor female" (91). Once she feels empowered by this knowledge, she extends the same self -love to all the battered and tortured souls out there, without passing any judgement on them. In the garden, she nurtures flowers along with her place, constructing and connecting with 'the blues aesthetic.' Her resurrection places her in direct opposition to the Godfather. Eve can be equated with an African conjure woman who, as a historical figure, a healer, and a spiritual leader, survived the transition from the Western coast of America to the new world. When the

women come to Bailey's looking for Eve, he tells them, "Go out the door, make a right, and when you see the garden—if you see the garden—you're there" (81). The connection with nature is deep and spiritual.

Her role as a mother and healer is symbolic of mother-nature, and the imagery of the garden reflects her identification with herself. Raisborough and Bhatti firmly believe the garden to be a politically charged space and a space of agency for women. They claim it is a space in which women can gain empowerment, allowing them to reposition their active and confident relations with others as well as their active relation to socially recognizable gendered norms" (474), which includes acts of patriarchal resistance and reproduction in relation to nature.

The other story in this context is the self-effacing existence of Sadie, who, in her frustratingly painful quest for belonging, underscores the collective need for the sense of stability that a connection with maternal origin initiates. The desire for belonging and kinship propels Sadie forward in life as she strives hard to find unconditional love, which her abusive mother denied her. Sadie was tormented, and her mother's insensitivity towards her fragmented her interiority. In her torturous journey, torn by her mother's callous and ruthless attitude and her husband David's apathy towards her, Sadie invests all her life in the tiny red geranium flowers blooming in the little space in the backyard of her dilapidated shack:

> She grew the red geraniums on the back porch in any sort of container she could salvage: Mason jars, dented tin buckets, fruit crates, and a few real clay pots that she scraped from the house to buy. They were the reddest flowers she could find, hardly enough to thrive through the soot and vibrations. She used garbage peels and horse manure to enrich the soil she got from public lots on the other side of the town. Each spring, when they came into full color, Sadie had the garden she needed to round out her dream. (55)

Sadie, a victim of triple jeopardy, invests all her happiness in the fulfillment of her desire—to nurture the flowers that lighten up her otherwise dismal and dreary life. Having been thrown into prostitution by her own mother, Sadie strives to maintain ladylike posture, thus setting up "dialectical tension embodied in the dichotomous roles of virgin and whore that, according to Naylor, delimit women's achievement and identity" (Montgomery, *The Fiction of Gloria Naylor* 5).

Naylor delineates Sadie's character using broad strokes so that the woman defies the stereotype of a hypersexual black female. Although Sadie is a prostitute and has been forced to do so primarily for her survival, she is conscious of not charging a single penny beyond what she requires to pay her bills or her daily subsistence. Her precarious and zealous efforts to maintain her dignity despite her marginalized existence transform her dwelling into the place she associates with home. As a thirteen-year-old, she has nurtured her dream of an idealized home with a picket with a green fence and a lush garden, "There was to be a trim white bungalow with a green picket fence; she would keep the front yard swept clean of leaves and pick all the withered blooms from their fence full of roses" (44).

It is the dream and its promise of familial stability that both sustain and, at the same time, elude Sadie in her search for a place of fulfillment and belonging. Her marriage to an abusive and alcoholic husband, thirty years her senior, proves detrimental to the dream of her home, along with a beautiful green picket fence. She had been tossed from the cruelty of her mother's vicious treatment into the streets and from the streets to the tyrannical control of her husband Daniel, "She went off with a man older than her, old enough to be her father, and she ended up living with her mother again for the next twenty–five years" (51). She threw herself completely into the household drudgery, "The days it wasn't sewing; it was firing and scraping the cast-iron pots. And the days it wasn't that, it was working on her *garden*" (52). The italicized Garden is the metaphor for the only space, the only respite from her monotonous routine. Her garden is "a gendered space of female creativity," links the anguished woman with countless other black women of the past and the present. Sadie actually believed in "growing food to sustain life and flowers to please the soul" (hooks 105).

As Alice Walker explicates in her book, *In Search Of Mothers' Gardens* (1983), gardening was fundamental to their existence. Regarding her mother, Alice Walker writes, "Whatever she planted grew as if by magic. Whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden" (Walker 241). Naylor here has made an intertextual connection to Walker's writing and thereby placed her writing in Black ecofeminist lineage. Alice Walker writes in her book, *In Search of Her Mother's Gardens (1983)*:

> And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read. (240)

However, one solitary incident in Sadie's life transforms her entire life. Her life with Daniel had been devoid of any meaningful existence apart from the flowers which grew in her backyard. So when she steps out after a prolonged bout of sickness from her shanty to look up at the only source of her sustenance, she finds that her "geraniums dying. . . but they were all brown-spotted and parched the day she got out of bed" (54–55). Sadie, who had always been so self-effacing, never raised her voice, suddenly finds herself shaking with anger, and her voice shocks Daniel, "I asked you to water these. She turned those strange eyes on him . . . I ain't your hired help, And I been meaning to get rid of them anyway" (55). Daniel, in order to make good on his threat, bent down to pick up a pot. Her simple gesture of trying to stop him throws him off balance, and he finds himself hitting the porch floor on his back, shocked and confused by her words, "They leave, I leave" (55), which she uttered in a tone of finality without mincing words.

Her simple words, spoken with firm conviction, apparently had no impact on him, as he went on smashing her pots. Suddenly, something made him take a peek inside, and Daniel actually found her packing her bag. Daniel rushed inside to snatch the weather-beaten bag from her hands and finally gave in, "They stay" (56). The

woman had found her agency through her only love—her geraniums. Sadie embraced her existence of dull monotony as her flowers infused her with a fresh lease of life. "Without a word, she left the bedroom and began to clean up a week's worth of dishes" (56), piled up during her illness, waters her geraniums, and claims space for herself as well as her flowers. Sadie bore with fortitude and stoicism the rejections and torments of her mother and husband but could not bear the lifeless and listless look of her flowers she had nurtured like her own children. For thirty odd years, she wrapped herself in complete silence, bearing the brutalities life inflicted on her, but this single incident changed her entire life. She had breathed life into the small patch of garden she had created. Black women, through such creative acts, had been finding the solace they lacked in their daily dull and drab existence. Alice Walker, in her essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens," categorically explains that gardening provides a space for black women's stifled existence.

As the narratives of racist western society had associated blacks with "untamed nature" for a long time, black women could not find smooth entry into the ecofeminist movement. Due to their pejorative insensitivity towards their environment, simple household chores like cooking, cleaning, root work, and especially gardening formed the core of their existence. Without these activities, they feel incomplete, as Sadie's passionate outcry, "They go; I go," vehemently supports the fact that for the African-American women especially, gardening and all the creative chores are an extension of their personalities and a symbol of their being—their survival. This little space can be seen as a place of escape, the action of physical activity, and finally as an experience of being involved in an intimate relationship with nature that helps one connect with the earth. Foss and Foss in the essay, "Personal Experience as Evidence in Feminist Scholarship":

> Personal Narratives about the events of women's lives, their feelings about those events, and their interpretations of them reveal insights into the impact of the construction of gender on women's lives, their experiences of oppression and of coping with and resisting that oppression, and their perspectives on what is meaningful in their lives. (39)

The African-American women are basically nurturers within the African-American literary world. The motif of gardening functions as a pivotal expression of Black female creativity, especially at moments when black women had little time or opportunities to write. Gardening is also synonymous with writing. Naylor envisions black women claiming agency in their role as nurturers. Eve claims her space and agency while simultaneously empowering other women, and   after the destruction of Sadie's little green patch, she bravely overcomes her jeopardized sense of gender and her identity as she feels that she is losing a part of herself—her red geraniums. The women, Eve and Sadie, by claiming their little spaces, have been successful in asserting their kinship with nature. A feminist conceptualization of women's empowerment embodies 'power to' as opposed to 'power over' (Bunch and Fronst 554); hence, Eve and Sadie have the power to exercise self-expression, self-esteem,

and self-determination. The gardening forges their connection with the creativity and identity of black women of the past and present. According to Gloria Naylor, destructive and exploitative behavior occurs due to the domination of masculine values; hence, more emphasis on feminist values that promote a healthy balance, is needed to restore the balance. Ecofeminism is actually life-affirming, empowering, and a strong expression of self-assertion which recognizes that the personal is political.

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Betrayal Trauma and the Haunting Past in Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*

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Abstract

Through the lens of betrayal trauma theory, this paper intends to analyse Jude's contentious trauma in Hanya Yanagihara's 2015 novel, *A Little Life.* This controversial book attracted both praise and scorn for its vivid depiction of Jude's childhood sexual abuse and how it shaped him into a self-harming adult. The protagonist of novel, Jude, was subjected to severe forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, and sexual violence in his childhood. This type of trauma usually falls under the category of betrayal trauma. The paper illustrates the portrayal of trauma and the complex interplay between memory, trust, and healing. It provides insights into the profound emotional impact of betrayal trauma and elucidates the struggle to reconcile with a painful past in the context of Yanagihara's powerful and haunting narrative. The paper explores how betrayal trauma can lead to dissociation, betrayal blindness and self-harm, as seen in the novel.
Keywords: Betrayal Trauma, Trauma, *A Little Life*, Sexual Abuse, Self-Harm, Child Abuse.

Introduction

The concept of trauma emerged in 1960s from a number of different fields of social concern investigating the effects of exposure to physical and interpersonal violence. As it has progressed, it now encompasses the study of the underlying connections that exist between traumatic experiences, chronic pain, and disability. Hanya Yanagihara, an American author of Korean-Japanese descent, born in 1974, addresses these issues in her works within the uncomfortable contours of trauma theory. All three novels that she has produced, *The People in the Trees* (2013), *A Little Life* (2015), *To Paradise* (2022), deal with the theme of childhood abuse, which falls under the category of "betrayal trauma," which occurs when the victim is betrayed by the person who serves as their primary caregiver or their source of security and survival. This form of child abuse typically results in the alienation and isolation of the victim. Yanagihara's comprehension of her characters' lives appears to be heavily influenced by her understanding of the loneliness of the human condition and trauma ensuing from it. In her article for the *Vulture*, Yanagihara mentions that throughout her life, she has been influenced by artworks in either their subject matter or emotional resonance. Chip Kidd's 1996 cover for a New York Times Magazine article by Andrew Sullivan was one of the significant pieces of art that influenced her writing, which had an ombre sort of writing style (Yanagihara). This style is frequently mirrored in her writings, which often conclude on a dark, traumatic note.

Psychological trauma has long been considered to be significantly influenced by betrayal (Martin et al. 111). Betrayal trauma takes place when the individual or

institution that a person depends on for survival, seriously violates them and their trust. (Freyd 45). This theory makes use of research on social contracts to describe how people are capable of recognizing betrayals. However, Freyd contends that there are specific situations in which doing so may be detrimental to survival. Such incidents have significant psychological effects on the victim that include amnesia, dissociation, self-harm, and other issues.

Yanagihara's second novel*, A Little Life*, depicts the life-threatening representation of sexual abuse in the protagonist, Jude's childhood, as well as its terrible ramifications seen in Jude's journey to become a self-harming adult. He is a New York lawyer who was abused sexually and physically for many years as a child and had been tremendously impacted by the trauma ever since. The portrayal of trauma in the novel is exhausting, overwrought, and extremely depressing; every emotion is excruciatingly detailed. As Tim Adams notes in an interview for *The Guardian*, Yanagihara "[…] wanted there to be something too much about the violence in the book, but [she] also wanted there to be an exaggeration of everything, an exaggeration of love, of empathy, of pity, of horror. [She] wanted everything turned up a little too high" (Yanagihara). Hence, the treatment of trauma in Hanya Yanagihara's book *A Little Life* is intense.

Jude St. Francis, the protagonist is fittingly named after a martyr saint, who never gets to take advantage of his quick rise to success. Jude's concealed backstory is gradually revealed as Yanagihara's story progresses: a South Dakota monastery where he was regularly assaulted by Brother Peter and Father Gabriel; the continuous journey of torture and forced prostitution into which he was taken by a trusted captor, Brother Luke; the shelter where the counsellors sexually molested him; and eventually the psychotic Dr Traylor who confined, raped, and ultimately disabled the helpless boy by running him over with his car as he attempted to escape, leaving Jude with a spinal injury from which he suffers throughout his life. The character's psychological distress is evident through self-harm involving the slitting of limbs, ultimately leading to his demise near the conclusion of the novel.

Narrative Structure of *A Little Life*

The book is narrated in a manner in which the episodes from past and present are linked together. It showcases the adverse effects of post-traumatic experiences on the structure of recounted events and highlights the disruption caused by trauma (Stallman 236). The narration gradually reveals Jude's history and his unsettling traumatic experiences. Jude is introduced as a successful lawyer but the novel subtly provides glimpses into the depths of his troubled past. With the narrative unfolding, Jude's severe physical disabilities become a compelling indicator of a history of childhood trauma. As the novel progresses, it becomes evident that Jude's time at the monastery was impaired by the infliction of both physical and sexual abuse,

perpetrated by the very monks who were entrusted with his well-being. These appalling acts leave an indelible mark on Jude's psyche, leaving him scarred. However, as the story progresses, Jude finds solace and refuge in his friendships, especially Willem, Malcolm and JB. The harrowing details about his past are revealed through their conversations as Jude begins to trust them. These discussions delve into the themes of self-hatred, abandonment, and enduring the psychological repercussions of his childhood trauma. Jude undergoes various medical treatments and consultations as his health deteriorates and it is during these encounters that compassionate medical professionals such as Andy and Dr Solomon slowly unravel Jude's deep rooted physical and emotional scars. With every consultation, the narrative gradually discloses the extent of his afflictions, shedding light on the profound trauma he has endured.

The fragmented narrative structure, a hallmark of post-postmodernist writing aptly reflects Jude's mental state. Throughout the narrative, Jude is haunted by intense and invasive flashbacks, wherein fragmented memories resurface unexpectedly, provoking emotional distress and a profound sense of disorientation. These recollections provide a clear reflection of Jude's fractured psyche. Among the recurring patterns in the novel is the traumatic period Jude endured with Brother Luke, during which he was coerced into prostitution. These distressing memories entwine with other tragic experiences of abandonment that Jude has endured, further contributing the fragmented nature of his recollections. During moments of solitude, Jude frequently finds himself drawn into the depths of his dark memories, a process that begins with fragments of recollections gradually resurfacing, "All evening he had seen, as if in peripheral vision, fragments of scenes drifting before him, and over dinner he had fought to stay rooted, to not let himself wander into that frightening, familiar shadow world of memories" (Yanagihara 427). These fragments serve as a prelude to episodes of self-harm, initiating a haunting journey into the depths of his troubled past, "now he made long, careful cuts down his left tricep, counting the seconds it took to make each one—one, two, three—against his breaths" (428). Through this narrative structure, Yanagihara skilfully captures the intertwining threads of memory, trauma, and self-destructive behaviour, painting a stark portrayal of the lasting effects of Jude's harrowing past on his present existence.

Dreams as Echoes of Troubled Past

Freud stressed that dreams are psychological phenomena where fragments of unconscious experiences resurface erroneously, tormenting individuals in the form of distressing nightmares and flashbacks (Freud 12). Domhoff proposed that the dreaming mind acts as a metaphorical canvas upon which unresolved trauma is symbolically expressed (Domhoff 191). Jude frequently finds himself immersed in graphic dreams that transport him back to his tumultuous past, specifically his experiences following his departure from the monastery; "he was in one of the motel

rooms, and there was a group of men, and they were grabbing at him, and he was desperate, trying to fight them. But they kept multiplying, and he knew he would lose, he knew he would be destroyed" (Yanagihara 361). In his dreams, a serious sense of shame and helplessness permeates his psyche, encapsulating the complex emotions he grapples with. These dreams serve as poignant manifestations of his intense feelings, providing a channel through which his subconscious mind tries to process and confront the lingering burdens of his history.

Jude has a recurring dream of hyenas chasing him in an imagined home— a metaphor for his past catching up to him. These dreams emerge following a traumatic incident of severe physical and sexual abuse inflicted upon him by Caleb: "He felt sometimes as if his months with Caleb were a pack of hyenas, and every day they chased him, and every day he spent all his energy running from them" (Yanagihara 341). His usual self-harm mechanism had stopped working. With the return of hyenas, his memories of years of sexual abuse came back to haunt him: "He dreams that he is still fifteen, that the previous thirty-three years haven't even happened. He dreams of specific clients, specific incidents, of things he hadn't even known he remembered" (528). The overwhelming recollections of his teenage years emerge, encompassing the haunting experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse. In his dreams, Jude's current sense of self becomes increasingly elusive, leaving him feeling helpless and reminiscent of his past experiences as an exploited young boy.

Betrayal Blindness

Humans possess a remarkable ability to detect deception and cheating, known as the "cheater detection mechanism" (Cosmides & Tooby 32). It is an adaptive and self-protective response to sever connections with betrayers. However, in cases of intense betrayal, individuals may experience "betrayal blindness," a state where they are unaware of the betrayal (Freyd, 51). This lack of awareness can manifest in different ways, including complete amnesia of the traumatic event or a biased perspective that presents the events in a more favourable light, potentially involving self-blame. In a haunting recollection from his past, Jude recalls a traumatic incident involving Brother Michael, who subjected him to physical violence and sexual abuse. During this encounter, Brother Michael intentionally fosters a sense of burden within Jude, highlighting the costs associated with providing for him. Overwhelmed by guilt, Jude finds himself compelled to offer apologies, internalizing a belief that he is somehow responsible for the hardships endured by those around him: "He looked for somewhere to hide, but there was nowhere, and instead he began to cry, turning his face to the wall and apologizing as he did" (Yanagihara 327).

Jude frequently reflects on the dreadful period when he was under the control of Brother Luke. During this time, he endured starvation and exploitation at the hands of Luke's clients. During these moments of contemplation, feelings of regret and guilt weigh heavily on Jude's conscience. He grapples with the notion of whether his

actions somehow contributed to the circumstances he finds himself in. He ponders if there was something he did that ultimately led to his abandonment by his previous primary caregiver in the desolate alley behind the drugstore where the monks found him: "Was it when I ruined Luke's daffodils? Was it when I had my first tantrum? And, more impossibly, was it when I did whatever I did that made her leave me behind that drugstore?" (Yanagihara 129). After Jude is forced into prostitution, Brother Luke employs insidious tactics to distort Jude's perception of the events. Brother Luke effectively instils a sense of betrayal blindness in Jude, leading him to believe that he derived enjoyment from the abusive encounters and willingly engaged in them: "I could tell you liked that one, am I right? Don't deny it, Jude!" (366). This deliberate manipulation contributes to Jude's inability to fully comprehend the true nature of the betrayal inflicted upon him, further deepening his psychological distress.

Blindness can have implications for partner preference and relationship dynamics. According to Gobin, those who suffered significant betrayal trauma as children and adults reported being more tolerant of verbal hostility in a possible partner abuse (Gobin 155). Jude leads an almost entirely celibate existence in response to his experience of sexual abuse, but halfway through the book, Jude has a brief, catastrophic affair with Caleb. Caleb's interactions with Jude serve to engender feelings of shame in regard to Jude's disabilities. During an episode where Jude experiences difficulty walking due to both his self-harm tendencies and spinal condition, Caleb further exacerbates Jude's emotional distress by stigmatizing him. By comparing Jude's gait to that of Frankenstein's monster, Caleb perpetuates a sense of otherness and abnormality. Consequently, Jude finds himself compelled to offer apologies: "I'm sorry, I wasn't aware of it" (Yanagihara 282). This reflects an internalisation of a belief that he was somehow responsible for the perceived aberrations and societal discomfort caused by his disabilities.

Silence around Trauma

Trauma, as delineated by Caruth, necessitates a style of representation that, via gaps and silences, displays its incomprehensibility in text (Caruth 11). The betrayal trauma theory contends that experiences involving a high degree of betrayal will eventually cause dissociation, forgetfulness, and/or shame (perhaps as a direct effect of the trauma or maybe because of betrayal blindness) (Freyd 49). Jude suffers from an extreme sense of shame and disgust about his past and himself. He barely talks about his past; choosing silence and repressing trauma further down his throat, "Jude's secretiveness had been motivated by shame" (Yanagihara 448). Jude deeply harbours remorse regarding his past experiences within the monastery, specifically the distressing ordeal of being subjected to forced prostitution orchestrated by Brother Luke. To Harold, his trusted professor, Jude confesses: "I've done terrible things, things I'm ashamed of, and if you knew, you'd be ashamed to know me, much less be related to me" (174).

Jude is an example of a traumatised victim who refuses to speak about his past or even present trauma, but this silence is not necessarily a result of the victim's incapacity to do so. He had used silence as a coping method since his early college years but later on it became a symptom or effect of tragedy, when "his silence had begun as something protective, but over the years it has transformed into something near oppressive... Now he cannot find a way out of it, even when he wants to" (261). Jude, like most trauma survivors, adapts silence as a coping mechanism, reflecting a survival-focused state where words are insufficient and verbal recollections threaten to fracture a fragile sense of self. In the presence of intense trauma, silence serves as a self-imposed firewall against the risk of complete psychological fragmentation (Ritter 190).

Haunting Past: Self-Hatred and Self-Harm

The traumatic events have a detrimental impact on the victims, which is seen in their post-trauma behaviour. Any behaviour that results in self-injury without regard to suicidal ideation is referred to as deliberate self-harm (Briere & Gil 611). According to developmental theories of mental health, victims of childhood sexual abuse engage in a variety of self-destructive activities that may serve to alleviate the emotional trauma connected with their assault (Wonderlich et al. 201). Self-harm is tied to the experience of bodily ownership and the sense of agency. A sense of bodily ownership is the perception that diverse body components belong to a single body (Blanke et al. 154). Detachment from bodily sensations, such as having the impression that one's own body does not belong to them due to exposure to trauma, has been connected to dissociative symptoms. This dissociation causes Jude to develop a tendency of self-harm as a twisted way of regaining control over his body that was lost to him due to sexual abuse.

Due to his recurrent experiences with sexual molestation by monks at the South Dakota monastery, he develops self-harming behaviours at the age of 10. Brother Luke then tempts him out of the monastery and forces him into prostitution. After that, he is placed in foster care, where the counsellors sexually abuses him. The traumatic experiences Jude endures impacts his mental health. Subsequently, he is taken to a medical professional named Dr Traylor, who regularly inflicts physical and sexual harm on Jude, leaving him with physical disabilities. Due to his prolonged exposure to sexual assault, he develops self-harming tendencies that persist till the end of his life. For him "it was a form of punishment and also of cleansing, it allowed him to drain everything toxic and spoiled from himself, it kept him from being irrationally angry at others, at everyone, it kept him from shouting, from violence, it made him feel like his body, his life, was truly his and no one else's" (Yanagihara 426). Many researchers believe that self-harm is a way to regulate the emotions, cleanse, or a non-adaptive trauma coping strategy that helps people deal with pain and stress (Favazza 137). Jude's self-harm turns into a refuge that shields him from the

relentlessly resurfacing memories from which he can no longer safeguard himself (Kellermann 334). It allows Jude to create a psychological barrier between himself and the distressing content of his past, providing a temporary respite from the overwhelming emotions associated with his traumatic history. He often fantasises of "emptying a container of gasoline over himself and then striking a match, of his mind being gobbled by fire" (Yanagihara 339).

Jude's experience does not cause him to feel grieved by what he recalls. Instead, he appears to have become convinced that he is truly worthless as a result of the abuse he endured at multiple stages of his life at the hands of primary caregivers (Karlsson 11). The issue is also of metaphysical rejection of any possibility of justice, compensation, or even reform. Yanagihara uses the phrase that provides the title "The Axiom of Equality" to a chapter in the novel to illustrate Jude's mental state. Jude uses this expression, which is derived from the algebraic rule "that x always equals x," to rule out the idea of social mobility (Yanagihara 296). The meaning, when applied to his own life, is that "the person [he] was will always be the person [he is]..." He may be feared in court as much as respected. But in essence, he feels that he is the same, a despicable individual who should be hated (297). This devastating statement illustrates Jude's incapacity to get past his early experiences; he believes that he is inherently unworthy. As a result, the principle of equality serves a meta purpose in the story. First, it is a method of explaining the traumatized person's rationale. Second, it provides a means of describing the true consequences of trauma. According to Yanagihara, $x = x$, that is, one's trauma is probably something that cannot be recovered from.

Conclusion

The narrative presents a compelling argument regarding the significant impact of traumatic experiences on an individual's psyche, illustrating how such events can shape their perception, awareness, and capacity to survive in challenging circumstances. Jude's violent experiences are represented with an unwavering and poignant realism, employing a narrative approach that captures the essence of his trauma. The novel artfully presents the backdrop against which Jude's experiences unfold, utilizing simple yet striking details to evoke a overwhelming sense of his suffering. The narrative structure reflects a traumatised mind's inability to sustain linearity. This leads the novel to vacillate between elevated metaphor and unyielding simplicity, much like the protagonist does when he is either steadfastly battling or succumbing to the weight of his tragic past.

In the horrible context of sexual assault, *A Little Life* depicts injustice and exploitation on a dreadful scale. Jude battles with the psychological repercussions in addition to the severe bodily impact of the said assaults. This investigation employed the selected novel to demonstrate that there is a substantial connection between traumatic experiences and acts of self-harm. Jude's character exemplifies how trauma resulting from betrayal often renders the victim unable to fully acknowledge the

extent of their traumatic experiences. The persistent incomprehensibility and repression of the trauma not only give rise to psychological difficulties but also increase the individual's susceptibility to self-harm. After years of dealing with the effects of sexual assault, Jude succumbs to excessive and intentional self-harm and commits suicide towards the end of the novel. Through its main character, the novel draws attention to the relationship between traumatic experiences and the propensity to engage in self-inflicted harm.

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Botanical Imagination in Poetry: A Phytocritical Reading of Louise Glück's *The Wild Iris*

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Abstract

Literature from all eras and civilizations frequently features plants. A phytocritical approach to literature focuses on how vegetal life—forests, trees, shrubs, flowers, herbs, orchids, wildflowers, and garden plants—is portrayed in literary works. It frequently centres on the symbolic significance of plants as metaphors, linguistic techniques, tropes, and narrative elements. This essay attempts to make a phytocritical analysis of Louise Glück's collection of poetry *The Wild Iris* (1992) and explore the botanical imagination of the poet. In the process, the essay addresses the following questions: How does Glück represent plants and flowers in the collection? Does the flora symbolism spell an ethic of earthcare and/or go beyond it? How does the poet engage with "vegetal dialectics" and "vegetal memory"?

Keywords: Ecocriticism, phytocriticism, vegetal poetics, Louise Glück, The Wild Iris

Introduction

In *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), a landmark study of the American history of nature writing, Lawrence Buell states that the environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination, the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it (2). Buell further asserts that a common vision of non-appropriative and non-hegemonic links to the nonhuman domain is necessary for the settlement of the world's escalating environmental issues. This imaginative (re)envisioning of nature is made possible by literary works. More precisely, environmental literature offers a way to inspire the progressive imagining—and reimagining—of the natural world in order to actualize ethical interchange with non-human life and milieux (Buell 7-8). Similarly, the book *The Bioregional Imagination* (2012) internalises the notion that the imagination is a crucial tool for creating exciting possibilities for living locally in bioregions and globally within the biosphere. But such ideas give rise to certain pertinent questions: Is it feasible to approach imagination in ecocritical terms as a multispecies interaction of the feelings, thoughts, and deeds of humans, plants, and others, while still avoiding the traps of anthropocentrism? How do humans think about plants? How do plants think about humans? These questions are not intended to be rhetorical. This article attempts to address these questions, while making a phytocritical analysis of Louise Glück's *The Wild Iris* (1992).

Louise Glück (born 1943, New York, U.S.), a dominant figure in American poetry, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2020, "for her unmistakable poetic voice that with austere beauty makes individual existence universal" (*NobelPrize.org*). Her long and varied literary career includes the publication of

collection of poems like *Firstborn* (1968), *The House on Marshland* (1975), *Descending Figure* (1980), *The Triumph of Achilles* (1985), *Ararat* (1990), *The Wild Iris* (1992), *Meadowlands* (1996), *Vita Nova* (1999), *The Seven Ages* (2001), *Averno* (2006), *A Village Life* (2009), etc. For *The Wild Iris* (1992), Glück received the Pulitzer Prize in 1993. Her works take the readers on an inner journey by examining their most private, intimate emotions as she deals with universal themes as life and death, nature and history, desire and isolation. The engagement with myth, fairy tales and the Bible substantially informs her poetry. Undoubtedly, nature, plants and flowers are also key preoccupations of Glück's *oeuvre*.

Phytocriticism and Poetry

Phytocriticism as a literary theory is concerned with how plants and literature interact. Specifically, it looks at how plants are portrayed in literature and how such representations speak to wider cultural and societal attitudes towards the natural world. A phytocritical approach is, thus, defined as a plant-based kind of critique that focuses on how vegetal life—forests, trees, shrubs, flowers, herbs, orchids, wildflowers, and garden plants—is represented in cultural artefacts, including but not limited to literary works. This environmentally conscious ecocritical specialisation has a tendency to focus on the figurative potencies of flora as symbols, metaphors, tropes, linguistic devices, and narrative artifices (Ryan 10–11). Ryan cites Buell's interpretation of William Faulkner's short story "The Bear" as having treeness matters, but the identities and the material properties of the trees are inconsequential (11). Buell's argument is applicable to different literary representations of and approaches to botanical themes where vegetality matters, but the actual material worlds of the plants themselves remain marginalised. A phytocritical perspective to Glück's *The Wild Iris* highlights the roles played by botanical entities in poetry and examines how plants are shown, evoked, mediated, or given life in the language of poetry.

Botanical Knowledge of Glück and Genesis of *The Wild Iris*

Short observations in interviews are more often used to indicate Glück's underlying interest in vegetative materialities and her acquisition of botanical knowledge. As an illustration, Glück jokes in an interview with *Beltway Poetry Quarterly* that she got a lot of horticultural inquiries after the release of *The Wild Iris*, and she was not a horticulturist; she instead learned a great deal about plant ecology and behaviour—as described in the cycle of lieder—through White Flower Farm brochures and from growing flowers (Cavalieri and Glück n.p.). Glück's botanical poetry reveals her involvement in the American folk tradition of cultivating ornamental flowers, which is characterised by the informal sharing of first-hand

experiences with other gardeners through informal observation, word-of-mouth, and other forms of convivial exchange, as well as the dissemination of practical knowledge through ephemeral publications like horticultural catalogues (Ryan 141). Furthermore, Glück's experience of growing flowers in Vermont's widely varied environment made her aware of the seasonal patterns of plants, which in turn had an impact on the organisation of her work. As an illustration, the poem "The Silver Lily" is situated towards the conclusion of *The Wild Iris*, reflecting the species' blossoming towards the end of summer and the start of autumn: If you are a gardener, you are aware that this [lily]—not the daylily, but the Asiatics and other varieties—[blooms] in Vermont, where this garden was, towards the very end of summer. Additionally, frequently the snow falls before they can even bud (Cavalieri and Glück n.p.). Although Glück claims that she is "not a horticulturist"—a claim that underplays the fact that she grew flowers at this time—she can tell the difference between a daylily (Hemerocallis spp.) and an Asiatic lily (Lilium asiatica) in the interview. It reveals her knowledge and interest in plants and flowers. Growing flowers in her backyard became a love for Glück, and this progressively influenced her literary style. Glück's actual garden in Vermont developed into a physical centre for creativity centred on close human relationships with produced plants. Glück's *Proofs and Theories* (1994), which was published two years after *The Wild Iris*, makes a passing reference to her move from metropolitan places to rural Vermont, where she penned this Pulitzer-winning collection of poems and started a successful career as a university writing instructor. The first chapter "Education of the Poet" describes the poet's literary education in great detail, but glosses over her training with plants (3-18). Her poetry has considerable botanical content and roughly half of the titles in the sequence *The Wild Iris* include the names of flowers.

Voices of *The Wild Iris*: God, the Poet, and the Flowers

The most noticeable thing about Glück's *The Wild Iris* is that plants and flowers are speakers in different poems in the collection. God, the poet, and the flowers in the poet's garden are three of the "voices" in the conversation that makes up *The Wild Iris*. Thus, the garden's natural cycle of life, death, and resurrection serve as both the literal setting and the framework for this "discussion," in which the plants and flowers—a pathetic fallacy with a vengeance—actively participate.

God, who makes an appearance in several of the poems as a character having a conversation with the flowers, is one of the collection's most important voices. God communicates clearly in many poems, i.e. "Clear Morning," "End of Winter," "Spring Snow," "Retreating Wind," "April," "Midsummer," "End of Summer," "Early Darkness," "Retreating Light," "Harvest," "Sunset," "September Twilight" and "Lullaby." The speaker/God conveys his annoyance with the restless, intellectually immature, and at the same time haughtily egotistical mankind in the majority of these poems. It seems that the Creator is not happy with what he has

made. In "Clear Morning" humans are too busy with recognising material objects as they come into their range of vision, and are unable to comprehend God's metaphysical disdain for the particulars of the physical cosmos. God believes that one of the obstacles to man's spiritual advancement is the clematis' eye-catching beauty (Glück 251). In the poem "Snowdrops," God addresses the flowers directly and requests that they "tell [Him] about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine" (250). This conversation establishes the tone for many of the poems of the collection, which use flowers as a means of communication between the divine and the human.

The poet's own voice, which utilises the flowers as a way to explore her own experiences and feelings, is another important one in the book. The iris is used as a metaphor for the frailty and resilience of the human spirit in "The Wild Iris," for instance, as the speaker tries to comprehend the purpose of her life (245). The flower represents sacrifice and rebirth in "The Red Poppy," embodying the complex interplay between life and death that forms the collection's core (271).

Thus, Glück makes the flower a referee in the conversation between the human and the divine speakers and she weaves a rich and complex tapestry of imagery and meaning across the collection by using the flowers as a tool to ponder on the mysteries of life, death, and the natural world. By giving the flowers themselves a voice, Glück imparts agency to the flowers as well as paints a vivid and compelling picture of the natural world as a place of profound spiritual and emotional importance. Piotr Zazula (2020) discusses how agency changes in *The Wild Iris*. He cites *The Wild Iris* as the finest illustration of transpersonal transformations in agency and perspective as in this collection the personified plants "speak" for nature. For instance, in the poems like "The Wild Iris," "Trillium," "Lamium," or "Snowdrops," the speaker is the poem's namesake flower. The speakers of the poems' lyrics are a variety of flowers, trees, bushes, or grasses, from those that are well known to those that are only known to individuals who love gardening (such as "Scilla," "Violets," "The Hawthorn Tree," "The Jacob's Ladder," "Witchgrass," "Clover," and "Ipomea"). Significantly, some of the flowery speakers do not provide comforting pantheistic truths about the eternal cycle of life. For instance, the iris recalls its own death and subsequent rebirth into a new life, whereas the trillium acknowledges that upon first awakening in the forest, it "knew nothing" and "could do nothing but see" (245). According to the lamium which lives in the shadows, "Living things don't all require / light in the same degree. Some of us / make our own light" (249). By making such cryptic claims, Glück not only tries to depict a way of life that is entirely different from humankind, but it also seems to imply that humans could learn a lot from the world of plants, particularly in terms of one's understanding of one's place in planetary life processes and one's ability to accept one's own unavoidable death.

Floral Symbolism

Louise Glück in *The Wild Iris* makes extensive use of flora symbolism, with

both familiar and unfamiliar flowers serving as powerful metaphors for the themes of the poems. The title poem "The Wild Iris" introduces Glück's preoccupation with flowers in the collection (245). It is a complex and symbolic poem on dying told through the perspective of a flower. The flower speaker of "The Wild Iris" describes what it means to live, die, and be reborn. The speaker suffered, but "there was a door" at the end. The door represents happiness, hope, and serenity. The poem introduces a polyvalence of references. It is written from the perspective of a wild iris and it alludes to the myth of return from death, reminiscent of Hades or the myth of Persephone. Literally speaking, a wildflower with consciousness and wisdom offers its perspective, but this same iris could also be read as the mythological daughter of the sea god Thaumas and an Oceanid, and sister of the Harpies. In the myth, Iris is a bridge between humans and Olympian gods, serving as a messenger, much like the flower in the poem which is a connect between the human and the divine.

The garden, which operates as the book's primary metaphor, serves as both a symbol of the Garden of Eden in the Bible and a location where the poet collaborates with her spouse (John is frequently referenced in the book). A young couple is seen in the poem "The Garden" cultivating a row of peas, while it is pouring rain (259). The garden serves as a metaphor for the cycles of life and death in this poem. The speaker muses on the beauty and fleeting nature of flowers, which perpetually blossom and wither. In the end, the garden serves as a reminder of transience of everything and the necessity to discover joy and beauty in the present. Relevantly, in the essay "Reframing Nature Within the Garden Walls," Sarah Mead Wyman writes that the metaphor of the garden offers an artistic space for modern myth-making and knowledge-seeking as artists reconsider the linkages between human and environment (137). She makes an eco-feminist analysis of the selected works of poets Louise Glück and Jeanne Larsen, as well as ceramicist Anat Shiftan. She finds that these artists emphasize that environmental stewardship should take precedence above economic gain or unrestrained human usage and oppose the normalisation of Earth's accelerating devastation. She cites how the garden motif is used by all three to reframe the feminist conversation about environmental protection and sustainability. The idea of a "garden," which includes both nature and geography, symbolises the place where the self and the collective, the idea and the physical thing, the contained and the created, come together. The garden functions as a site of conflict and transformation that combine work and leisure, cultivated and wild, homogeneous and heterogeneous, indigenous and imported, the chaos of generation, and the urge to control. It is a place where the natural, spiritual, and human worlds converge. The highly emotive garden-based work of Glück not only comments on this conundrum, but also offers a lens through which to re-establish the lost connection between people and the natural world, despite the disconnect between human and nature based on a false binary—one that has cost us the health of the planet. In the poems of Glück, distinctions between the supreme human and the alienated natural world dissolve. They eliminate binary

gender norms and substitute a compassionate "partnership ethic of earthcare" (Wyman 144).

The "Matins" and "Vespers" poems make substantial use of the garden as a trope to explore the intricate relationships between life and death, loss and rebirth. For instance, the poet-protagonist likens labouring in the garden to doing so in a "replica" of Heaven by alluding to the biblical story of the Garden of Eden ("Matins" 247). In contrast to Heaven, the garden is "designed to teach a lesson" and the poet-protagonist laments that without the divine, "we didn't know what was the lesson" (247). The relationship between plants and people is highlighted in "The Red Poppy," notably by the central question: "Oh my brothers and sisters, / were you like me once, long ago, / before you were human?" (271). The series of questions that this one is a part of make the assumption that humans and plants are related and had a common ancestor. The poet-protagonist's fixation on herself is constantly challenged by the divine and the observing flowers. As an illustration, the poem "Scilla" criticises the protagonist poet's attempt to distinguish herself from the other characters in the first line, "Not I, you idiot, not self, but we, we" (257). The poem goes on to say, "You are all the same to us,/ lone, standing above us, planning/ your silly lives" (257).

Thus, flora symbolism is a key aspect of *The Wild Iris*, with flowers serving as powerful metaphors for the complex themes and emotions explored in the collection. By drawing on the natural world and the flora around her, Glück creates resonant and evocative imagery that speaks to the universal experiences of human life.

Vegetal dialectics and Vegetal Memory in *The Wild Iris*

According to Ryan, "vegetal dialectics" refers to the oscillation of states of difference and sameness between plants and non-plants (16). A dialectics also modifies the binarizing discourses that surround plant nature, such as the idea that plants lack intellect, feeling, sense, and reaction, allowing the subjectivities and agency of vegetal being to emerge. The reduction of the plant to the zero-point of behaviour, experience, and intellect, against which the animal's skills are tuned to in stark relief, is further destabilised by this non-dualistic approach. The plant is no longer "an object readily available for the subject's manipulation" when people interact with the unique subjectivities of the botanical realm from a non-oppositional perspective (Marder 2013, 7). As a result, a dialectic enables critics to consider plants in terms of "lives" as opposed to unidimensional "life." It is not the plant homogenizable as the crude biological category, but the lively plant that lives, one that is in possession of a life, and one that expresses and enacts its subjectivity within a life-world (Ryan 16).

Glück's botanical poetry enters a dialectic in which plants both influence and are influenced by their environs. By assuming that conscious plants with voices can recall themselves, other beings, and their environments in her human speakers' memories of flowers, Glück avoids reducing the botanical as an unfeeling and

unspeaking entity. As a result, the ontological premise that plants are historically conscious and "have a past, which they bear in their extended being and which they may access at any given moment" is reflected in poetic form in her work (Marder 2013, 155). Additionally, her inter-mnemonic poetic evocation of plant memory involves a "dialogue of memories" between human, vegetal, and other speakers (Ryan 154).

    "Vegetal memory" is the idea that plants and flowers have a memory or awareness ingrained in their physical existence and intimately connected to their cycles of growth, decay, and rebirth. *The Wild Iris* is permeated with vegetal memory and the understanding that vegetative nature is animated and has the ability to communicate in language. The flowers in *The Wild Iris* gain both the capacity for memory and the ability to shape the garden narrative. Glück's garden served as a place for introspection and physical immersion, which led to a change in perspective from the rhetorical portrayal of plant life in *The House on Marshland* and other collections to a view of plants as having memory, learning, behaviour, emotions, and a variety of sensitivities in *The Wild Iris*. It is unreasonable, according to Michael Marder (2016), to rule out the potential of vegetative memory since "survival is impossible without the recollection of past events, without the formation of patterns out of them, and without projecting them into the future via anticipation" (para. 5). Glück's poetization of memory became energised by exposure to plants in the constantly changing New England garden environment. The "dialogue of memories" between human, vegetal, and divine in the collection starts with the first-person address of the iris-speaker to the poet-gardener and reader, in contrast to the four "Vespers" which metaphorically represent memories of the vinca, hawthorn, fig, and tomato. The flower transcends the limited scope of human memory and contains a temporally deep memory that is distinct to the botanical life shown in the sequence. As opposed to the "Vespers" quartet's one-dimensional concentration on human memories of plants, "The Wild Iris" endows the flower with sapient capabilities of memory and consciousness. Irises are perennial plants that preserve the remnants of each seasonal death and rebirth, in contrast to humans, whose insufficient memory affordances obscure the concept of death. Additionally, while it waits for the arrival of spring, the iris displays sensory recall of its burial:

Overhead, noises, branches of the pine shifting.
Then nothing. The weak sun
flickered over the dry surface.
It is terrible to survive
as consciousness
buried in the dark earth. (Glück 245)

The iris-speaker's blunt description of the poet-gardener as "you who do not remember/passage from the other world" (245) underlines straightforward assertion from the floral personae as to how the expansive nature of perennial consciousness always contrasts with the constrained scope of human memory.

Glück evokes the depth and scope of plant memory in "Snow-drops." The poem refers to the common snowdrop (Galanthus nivalis) or a related within the same genus, which is one of the earliest bulbs to bloom in the American New England spring:

I did not expect to survive,
earth suppressing me. I didn't expect to waken again, to feel
in damp earth my body
able to respond again, remembering after so long how to open again
in the cold light
of earliest spring— (250)

The snowdrop's somatic memory of awakening to the earth's sense at the onset of spring is in harmony with the wit and sensibility of vegetal life. In "The Red Poppy," the poppy flower asks, "Oh my brothers and sisters,/were you like me once, long ago,/before you were human?", recalling a prehistoric era in which there were no classificatory demarcations—no subject-object binarisms—between living things (271). Empathic association between the poppy and poet-gardener, which is grounded in the extensive memory of vegetal existence, causes a sharing—a polyvocal melding—of voices by the poem's end. The categorical difference between human subjectivity and vegetal otherness becomes less obvious as a result, which is emphasised by a shared inter-mnemonic language of affect: "I am speaking now/the way you do. I talk because I'm broken" (271).

The flowers in Glück's poems are conscious of more than only their corporeality, the garden environment and its seasonal rhythms, and the poet-gardener's presence. They also recognise and remember individuals from the same species (conspecifics) as well as individuals from other species (allospecifics). The poem "The Silver Lily," which appears towards the end of the autumnal season, poeticizes the phenomenology of allospecific perception (Glück 300). The lily's recollections of daffodils, birch trees, snowdrops and maple seeds voice interspecies empathy and identification:

In spring, when the moon rose, it meant
time was endless. Snowdrops
opened and closed, the clustered
seeds of the maples fell in pale drifts.
White over white, the moon rose over the birch tree.
And in the crook, where the tree divides,
leaves of the first daffodils,
in moonlight soft greenish-silver. (300)

The flower-speaker's nostalgia is supported by science since memory aids in plant survival and communication. The nature of inter-mnemonic dialogue in Glück is, therefore, both poetic and ecological.

Conclusion

Evidently, *The Wild Iris* is a risky book to read. In essence, it's a dialogue between three "voices": God, the poet, and flowers in the poet's garden. The two main "protagonists"—the poet and the God—debate in a sort of arena provided by the flowers, which also serve as a kind of referee. The literal premise and framework for the discussion are the natural cycles of life, death, and resurrection in a garden. Bound together by universal themes and allegories of time, seasons and grief, *The Wild Iris* questions, explores, and ultimately celebrates the ordeal of being alive. The life cycles of a garden, with its seasonal changes, and time variations from dawn through the night, serve as the backdrop for the themes of life, death, and rebirth, with the plants as one of the protagonists.

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Discourses on Women: Role of Social Institutions in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Invention of Wings*

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Abstract

Discourse forms the belief systems, cultural performances, and the social rules and norms of a society. It transmits knowledge which affects the views of people and also the way in which social institutions work in a society. This study examines the relationship between power and knowledge and the effect of various knowledge discourses on women. Sue Monk Kidd's historical novel *The Invention of Wings* (2014) depicts the effect of various knowledge discourses on power relations on the women. Thus, the study is interconnected with the theory of power and knowledge by Michel Foucault and the effect they have on Kidd's female characters. The two main female characters and also the narrators of the novel, Sarah Grimké and Hetty "Handful," are exposed to different discourses of power by the social institutions in their society. The women in the novel attempt to challenge these discourses and their effect on their lives by using different resistance mechanisms.
Keywords: Gender, Discourse, Feminism, Power and Knowledge, Resistance

Introduction

Discourse refers to ways in which knowledge is organized in a society in a way that it structures social relations by institutionalizing a particular way of thinking while undermining others. It influences how ideas are put into practice and how those ideas regulate the conduct of the society, as Stuart Hall defines in "The West and the Rest:" "All social practices entail meaning and meaning shapes and influences what we do---all the practices that we have possess a discursive aspect to them" (291). Discourse creates subject positions, and turns people into controllable objects. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault examines the power of discourse in society: "Discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality in which dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined" (54). Foucault argues that in a society, the social interactions of individuals are controlled through a system of power and knowledge relations, which also dictates their perception of themselves. According to Foucault "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (*The History of Sexuality*, 93). Power is not something that is physically enforced on people rather it is a result of the relations between individuals and society. In *The Subject of Power*, Foucault states, "the exercise of power is not violence, nor consent, but a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more

difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" (789). Foucault's theories suggest that discourses in society play a significant role in determining how women are perceived in society. These discourses are formed by power dynamics that uphold the gender hierarchies in society and restrict the scope for women's agency and empowerment. Foucault's theories have had a big impact on feminist theory, and they have been applied to examine how power dynamics affect sexuality, gender identity, and social norms.

In Sue Monk Kidd's novel *The Invention of Wings* (2014)*,* women face dominant power relations and discourses, which affect their self-perception. Aspects as the education level, career choices, and the standards of womanhood are affected because of the power discourses existing in the society. Kidd's novel is a fictional account of the lives of two sisters who existed in South Carolina, America in the nineteenth century, Sarah Moore Grimké and Angelina Grimké. They were among the first women to take part in the abolition movement in America and were also the early leaders in the women's rights movement. Sarah was also widely known as the mother of the women's suffrage movement. Kidd has also included the account of Handful aka Hetty too in her novel, who was a slave in the Grimké house. Kidd decided to write the fictional account of these women's lives as she was captivated by their story, and the sacrifices they did for their causes (*The Oprah Magazine*, 90-94). These women, though oppressed by the social constructs around them, set out on their own paths and show enough courage to raise their voice.

Power Discourses in *The Invention of Wings*

The Invention of Wings begins with the account of Sarah Grimké's eleventh birthday where she is gifted a ten-year-old slave Hetty "Handful" as a birthday present. Though Sarah is young, she despises slavery and refuses to take a slave as a gift. Despite her refusing to accept this gift, she has to take Handful as her slave. The novel then follows the journey of this duo, a slave and the daughter of the Grimké household that owns her, over the time period of thirty-five years. The female characters in Kidd's novel are affected by several discourses in the society. The novel is set in the nineteenth century Charleston, South Carolina, when the ideas of the equality of gender and race were considered radical.

Sarah is educated at home unlike her brothers, who received a conventional education. Amigot and Pujal state "discourses of women's nature and disciplining and normalizing practices are especially relevant with regard to the production of "proper" feminine bodies and subjectivities" (650-651). Sarah is taught by a home tutor, Madame Ruffin, whom she despises, "I despised her, and her 'polite education for the female mind,' which was composed of needlework, manners, drawing, basic reading, penmanship, piano, Bible, French, and enough arithmetic to add two and two" (22). She was aware of the inferiority of her education as compared to her

brothers'. Sarah is not allowed to receive a true education only because she is a girl, she wishes to be someone in life and wants to know things, but being a daughter instead of a son doesn't allow her to do so, "*Oh, to be a son!* I adored Father because he treated me almost as if I *were* a son" (22). Sarah's wish to be a "son" in order to feel important aptly describes the inequality of gender that exists in her society. Sarah's father is an attorney and judge at South Carolina, Sarah loves to read books from her father's library. She is very good at debates, in a discussion with her father and brothers, Sarah is awed by her father's reaction, "Father slapped his hand on the table. 'If Sarah was a boy, she would be the greatest jurist in South Caroline.' (24)." Because of the gender discourses existing in the society, Sarah's wish to study law or to be a jurist cannot be fulfilled only because she is a woman.

Foucault's view is that power is a product of the individuals' interaction and is deeply rooted in the social relations of society (*The Subject and Power*, 792). Sarah lives in a society where the experiences and self-worth of women are constructed by power relations, Handful remarks on Sarah, "My body might be a slave, but not my mind. For you, it's the other way round" (231). Handful knows that Sarah is trapped same as her but she was trapped by her own mind and by the minds of the society. Foucault asserts in the essay "The Subject and Power" that power is a product of interaction between the individuals in a society and is ingrained in the layers of the social relations (792). Sarah's mind is a slave of the prevailing beliefs existing in her culture, religion, and her society. Sarah's wish to be a jurist is shattered only because it is considered "unwomanly" in the society she lives in, "For a woman to aspire to be a lawyer – well, possibly, the world would end" (24). Sarah is restricted by the limits that are imposed on the females in her society. Sarah's father is well aware of her capabilities and considers her smarter than her brothers, he states when he is near his death, "You were smarter than even Thomas or John, but you're female, another cruelty I was helpless to change" (208). Yet, because of the existing social norms, her father loathes Sarah's wish to be a jurist, and considers it a shameful act, "…You shame yourself. You shame us all. Where did you ever get the notion that you could study law?" (89).

Handful is an urban slave who yearns to live freely, away from the walls of the Grimké household. She sometimes tries to challenge the system of slavery but suffers badly because of that. Kidd has described a black girl who is destined to be a slave along with a white girl who owns her, yet both of them strive for freedom of different kinds. Handful being a slave, longs for the freedom of the body; Sarah although being a white woman is limited by her role as a daughter to the Grimké family, her father remarks, "…we Grimkés do not subvert the institutions and laws by which we live, even if we don't agree with them" (76). When Sarah tries to teach Handful a few alphabets, her books are taken from her, and she is denied access to the books from the library, "…so soon after my books being taken away, quite soured me on the female life" (86).

The women are expected to give up their goals and ambitions for the sake of the family and society, Sarah's anti-slavery ideas and her wish to be a jurist are

discouraged, and she is told to go husband hunting instead, "How highborn and moneyed this husband would turn out to be would depend entirely on the allure of my face, the delicacy of my physique, the skill of my seamstress, and the charisma of my tête-à-tête" (97). Although Sarah's mother discourages her radical ideas, but she seems to have faced the same when she was young which becomes clear when she remarks, "Every girl comes into the world with varying degrees of ambition, even if it's only the hope of not belonging body and soul to her husband. I was a girl once, believe it or not (90)." Even when Sarah goes North and gets involved in the Quaker ministry along with her sister Nina, they are appreciated as long as they do not state their own views, "As long as we talk about being good helpmates to our husbands, it's well and good…but the moment we veer into social matters, or God forbid, politics, they want to silence us like children" (325). Even after joining the Quaker ministry, Sarah for a moment gets self-doubt, "What I feared was the immensity of it all – a female abolition agent traveling the country with a national mandate. I wanted to say, *Who am I to do this, a woman?* But that voice was not mine. It was Father's voice. It was Thomas'…" (366). On the other hand, Charlotte, who is Handful's mother, and has been a slave in the Grimké household since years, longs for freedom for herself and Handful. She is the main seamstress in the Grimké family, when she is not working on her quilts; she works secretly outside to save money in order to buy freedom. She wants her daughter to know their own worth apart from being slaves.

Resistance against Power Discourses by Women

"If you must err, do so on the side of audacity" (9), this little slogan devised by Sarah reflects her courage to resist the societal norms existing in her society. Foucault asserts, "Where there is power, there is always the possibility of resistance" (*Discipline and Punish*, 142), the acts of resistance by female characters in *The Invention of Wings* can be seen in several instances. According to Amigot and Pujal, "Resistances are immanent in relations of power; whether or not these resistances transform a situation will depend on their articulation and proliferation" (662-663). Sarah displays a strong sense of equality and social justice; although she is only eleven years old, she despises slavery, and her refusal to accept a slave as a birthday present marks the beginning of the signs of resistance shown by her. Sarah teaches Handful to read and write a few alphabets, despite her knowledge that her family would never approve of this. She faces the fury of her father, and is banned to enter the library. After she is fiercely mocked and insulted for her "shameful" act of wishing to be a jurist, Sarah expresses her wish to be the godmother to her newly born sister, Angelina. This was her own little act of resistance; though she was not able to go against the wishes of her family, she wanted to mold her sister in her own image and make her the purpose of her life, "From the days Nina was in her crib, I'd proselytized her about the evils of slavery" (99). Nina refuses to take a slave as a present on her eleventh birthday, and Sarah succeeds in a way as this time her mother had to give in, "…Nina had refused her human present with such vehemence, Mother had given up

out of sheer weariness" (179). Nina became the voice of Sarah's radical ideas. Sarah's life takes a turnabout when she goes North when her father is ill, she does not come back right after her father's death as she enjoyed the freedom she experienced away from her home. When Sarah is introduced to the Quaker faith by Israel Morris, and finds out that they have female ministers too, she has the urge to go north again, and she wishes to be a minister there. Though she is blocked by her own mind, "unmarried daughters didn't go off to live unprotected on their own in a foreign place…they didn't throw over their lives and their reputations and their family name. They didn't create scandals" (241). Her decision of leaving home for north is not only an act of resistance against the existing discourses and dominant power relations in her society, but also a resistance against her own captive mind. Angelina, on the other hand, causes scandalous rebellions by speaking out against slavery in the Presbyterian Church in Charleston, and later joins her sister in the North as Quaker. Angelina is more outspoken and headstrong than Sarah, she shares the passion of Sarah against slavery. The two sisters set out on their paths to abolition and the women's movement together. Although Sarah is introduced to the ministry by Israel Morris, he assumes that Sarah's ambition is only a response to her failure to be a part of his life. Sarah turns down the marriage proposal of Israel because he expected her to leave ministry after she is married, "I hadn't imagined you would want to continue with your ambition after we married" (329). Sarah well understood that she cannot have him and her ambition both, and she decides to choose her ambition. In one of the letters to her sister, she states, "How could I choose someone who would force me to give up my own small reach for meaning? I chose myself, and without consolation" (336). Sarah resists against the societal norms expecting women to get married and become good homemakers by instead deciding to dedicate her life to advocacy and activism, and asserts her own independence and agency. Even when the two sisters become part of the abolition movement, they are dominated because of their gender, when Angelina's letter is published in a notorious anti-slavery paper, the response of the ministry was unwelcoming, "Matters like this – they aren't the work of a woman's life" (356), and are told to confine their audiences to only women. When they talk of women's reform, it is seen as a distraction and parting away from abolition, "…these good men who wished to quash us, gently, of course, benignly, for the good of abolition, for our own good, for their good, for the greater good. It was all so familiar. Theirs was only a different kind of muzzle" (382). Sarah and Angelina do not agree to these terms and very confidently refuse to "turn their backs" on themselves and on "their own sex" (382). It did not seem fair to campaign for the slaves' rights while ignoring their own, "Whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do. She is clothed by her Maker with the same rights, the same duties" (383). Later Sarah helps Handful to be free from the confines of Grimké household, and her transformation from a little girl who used to stammer to a strong woman who did not hesitate to state her word is well noticed by Handful, "This ain't the same Sarah who left here. She had a firm look in her eye and her voice didn't dither or hesitate like it

used to. She'd been boiled down to a good, strong broth" (406).

Handful faced both the jeopardy of being a woman as well as a slave. Yet she rebels against the societal norms and discourses in her own ways and refuses to be submissive to the society she lives in and stands up for her own beliefs. Handful is taught by Sarah to read and she uses this ability to gain knowledge. She practices to write in the dirt and steals books to read, even though the slaves are strictly forbidden to get educated. Her very first instance of rebellion was her taking bath in her "owner's" copper bathtub, to which Sarah remarks, "She had the look of someone who had declared herself…" (129). Handful challenges the limitations placed upon her because of her gender as well as race, and fights for her freedom and rights. Handful has learned to be tough and shrewd from her mother, Charlotte aka Mauma, "If mauma can do it, I can do it. I'll do it lame, blind, and backward, if I have to" (197). Charlotte constantly keeps fighting for the freedom for herself and her daughter, Handful has been instilled these qualities by her. Charlotte is the head seamstress in the house of Grimkés, and she uses her skill to assert agency and autonomy in her life. Though she is a slave but maintains her self-respect and dignity till her last breath, she says to Handful, "Don't you remember me for that. Don't you remember I'm a slave and work hard. When you think of me, you say, she never did belong to those people. She never belong to nobody but herself" (348). After her mother's demise, Handful takes the position of the head-seamstress for Grimkés and begins acting on the rebellious tendencies. She makes the plan to escape from Charleston, and to gain freedom for herself and her half-sister sister, Sky. The rebellion of female characters in the novel against the discourses existing in their society highlights the oppressive and unjust nature of the power systems.

Conclusion

Discourses are thought and knowledge systems that are formed and perpetuated by social institutions and power structures. Discourses influence how we perceive the world and how we fit into it, and how people in authoritative positions use them to manipulate both the individuals and the society at large. Discourses on women are the ways in which language, ideas, and cultural practices construct and shape the understanding of women's roles, identities, and experiences. They have significant effects on their lives, even shaping their opportunities, relationships, and self-perception. The examination of the novel *The Invention of Wings* in the light of Foucault's concept of discourse, and the theory of power and knowledge, illuminates several power discourses operating through gender and racial hierarchies in the society which constrain women's rights from all aspects. Foucault's theory of power and knowledge provides a useful framework for understanding how power operates in the society and how it can be resisted and challenged. Sarah Grimké is denied formal education because of her gender, though she is highly intelligent and has an insatiable desire for knowledge. She is expected instead to adhere to particular societal norms and expectations as a woman, and is supposed to get married, have kids, and live her

life doing housework. Sarah surmounts these social barriers, and becomes an abolitionist for the rights of slaves, which is against the prevalent norms of the society casting women in a subordinate position to men. Sarah, while preaching abolition to people, along with her sister, Angelina, becomes more aware of her own limitations as a woman, and the struggle to end slavery also becomes a movement for women's equality. Handful, on the other hand, faces cruel treatment, as being both a slave and a woman. To resist her enslavement, she defies her master, but she is ultimately punished for her actions. She finds empowerment through her mother, Charlotte, who constantly stands up to the oppressive forces of slavery and refuses to be reduced to an object of ownership and exploitation. She provides Handful with an identity and self-awareness that helps to transcend her enslavement. This paper shows how discourses create gender and racial hierarchies supporting the positions of dominant groups. Women like Sarah are denied an education and pressured to adhere to gender norms, while Handful and other slaves are exposed to abuse and exploitation. The dominant discourse, which portrays gender inequality and slavery as natural and inevitable, is reflective of these power dynamics. However, the stories of Sarah, Handful and other women in the novel also demonstrate how power can be resisted and challenged.

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Tracing the Gastro-graphic Route towards Transculturality in
Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan's *A Tiger in the Kitchen: A Memoir of Food and Family*

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Abstract

In this article, I will read Chinese-Singaporean-American Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan's culinary memoir *A Tiger in the Kitchen: A Memoir of Food and Family* (2011) in order to examine how a conscious undertaking of learning how to prepare traditional home-cooked dishes can be transformed into a personal journey of self-discovery. Drawing from Rosalia Baena's concept of gastro-graphy I will explore how a gastro-graphic route can pave the way to embrace the fractures and fissures, the similarities and differences in transcultural predicaments. Consequently, I will attempt to argue that such transcultural culinary odysseys are not simply significant for conjuring up memories of home and belonging, but for being able to transmute the experience of cooking into an alternative perception of transculturality, which is liberating in its surrenderance and relinquishment.

Keywords: gastro-graphy, transculturality, culinary memoir, Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan, *A Tiger in the Kitchen*

The recent surge in popularity of food memoirs or culinary life writing, particularly by diasporic and transcultural individuals, highlight how mnemonic narratives of self and belonging can be constructed through sensory recollections of specific flavours or textures of certain food items. Food, the basic nourishing substance for a human being to survive, is not only responsible for sustenance and growth, but also symbolic of one's own perception of belongingness and self-understanding. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe: "food-laced memories feed readers' desire to redefine themselves by both imagining pleasures and cooking them up, as a way of enacting the life chronicled" (149). Hence, the act of cooking and eating itself can be distinguished as an embodied experience of the contemporary times which is increasingly signified by ever-expanding global migratory movements.

Given this context, in this article, I will read Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan's richly layered culinary memoir *A Tiger in the Kitchen: A Memoir of Food and Family* (2011) in order to examine how a conscious undertaking of learning how to prepare the traditional home-cooked dishes can be transformed into a personal journey of self-discovery. Tan, a New York based journalist and author, was born and brought up in Singapore, as a first-born child of a Teochew father and a Hokkien mother. Displaying legendary signs of rebelliousness as a child born in the Year of the Tiger (according to Chinese culture), she moved to the United States at the age of eighteen in pursuit of a professional career. After spending sixteen years, first as a tertiary student and then as a successful journalist in Illinois and New York respectively, Tan, who has

consciously steered clear of the expected roles of a traditional woman as a homemaker, admits: "the higher I climbed, the more I realized there was a gaping hole in my life … I realized that the missing piece was my connection with home and all that it represented" (ch. A Conversation). Referring to an article that appeared in *The New Yorker* in 2007, written by the journalist and author, Calvin Trillin, who writes on Singaporean cuisine and claims: "culinarily, they are among the most homesick people I have ever met" (Tan ch. 1), Tan, as a means of reconnecting with her roots, reveals:

> I started to think about home—which, to me, isn't just New York, or Singapore, or anywhere in between. Home, rather, is rooted in the kitchen and the foods of my Singaporean girlhood—the intoxicating fog of turmeric and lemongrass seeping into the air as bright orange slabs of *otak,* a curried fish mousse, steam on the stove, or the scent of sliced mackerel and minced ginger doused in white pepper drifting out of the kitchen, heralding a hearty breakfast of fish porridge (ch. Prologue).

A sudden restructuring due to the 2009 global economic downturn provides Tan with the opportunity of retracing her steps to the land of her birth to set about her year-long mission of learning-to-cook and finding-home-in-the-childhood-dishes. Her frequent sojourns at Singapore, from one Chinese New Year to the next, was resolutely spent in her grandmothers', aunties' and her own mother's kitchens, in an attempt to learn the secrets of her culinary heirloom. However, through reconnecting with her family and unearthing long-buried stories of the past during these learning-to-cook sessions, Tan not only discovers her own family's roots and histories, but also uncovers the lost, invisible, and fractured parts of her own self, that has been straddling multiple homes and multifarious cultures, to such an extent that she acknowledges: "I realized that the point hadn't truly ever been the food" (ch. 18). Therefore, as I read Tan's food-memoir I will refer to Rosalia Baena's concept of gastro-graphy in relation to life writing and explore how a gastro-graphic route can pave the way to accept and accommodate the fractures and fissures, the similarities and differences in transcultural predicaments.

Gastro-graphy in Transcultural Food Memoirs

In the course of her discussion of culinary memoirs, Rosalia Baena coins the term 'gastro-graphy' to highlight how the cultural significance of food could act as a multilayered trope and strategy in life writing. She emphasizes that the metaphor of food and the practice of preparing and consuming food "invites the reader to read beyond the possibly 'exotic' representation to more complex versions of positionality, affiliation, and selfhood" ("Gastro-graphy" 105). Baena also considers food and eating as one of the most important "ethnic signs that symbolize the processes of transition that characterize transcultural selves" ("Gastro-graphy" 106). Gastro-graphy, therefore, could be understood as an evolving process of self-conception and self-representation through the taste and smell of the foods one tends to consume.

However, Baena clarifies in the introduction to her edited volume, *Transculturing Auto/Biography* (2007), that she does not view transculture as a "fixed principle or static perspective", and regards the condition as a "renewed manner of engagement that arises from new forms of perceiving experience" (*Transculturing* viii). Transculturality is a fluid concept and hints at a transformative process where innovative forms of diversity gradually emerge. As Wolfgang Welsch rightly contends: "a new type of diversity takes shape: the diversity of different cultures and life-forms, each arising from transcultural permeations" (203). Baena also notes that "the dynamic nature of the resulting narratives stemming from the contact zones produced in the cross-cultural encounters" (*Transculturing* viii) is significant as it does not identify with any fixed circumstance, but signifies the constantly shifting and evolving nature, as experienced in the course of the said life's journey. Hence, as she rightly points out, gastro-graphic life writing is unique not simply because of its potential to represent one's cultural heritage and identity, but more importantly, because of its capacity of transubstantiation. She also notes that while food memories could be interlaced with different kinds of food politics, such as hunger, the suggestion of taste and smell and its associated memories can also "proffer a pacifying effect" ("Gastro-graphy" 114). This suggestion crucially leads to a different understanding and acceptance of one's own fractured self and belonging as it migrates through different cultural predicaments. Therefore, as Tan's narrative traverses apparently discordant spaces of Singapore, New York, Shantou and Hawaii, highlighting the pivotal functions performed by learning to cook traditional dishes, I will attempt to argue that such transcultural culinary odysseys are not simply significant for conjuring up memories of home and belonging, but for being able to transmute the experience of cooking into an alternative perception of transculturality, which is liberating in its surrenderance and relinquishment.

Tracing the Gastro-graphic Route of Tan's Culinary Odyssey

Born and brought up in the island city-state of Singapore, which was once a quiet fishing village before turning into one of the busiest port-cities of the world, Tan is already exposed to an international palate and her food tastes and habits are formed in a unique multicultural way right from her childhood. Singapore has rapidly developed its cosmopolitan culture particularly during the British colonization in the nineteenth century, which attracted settlers from different parts of India, China and Europe. Tan points out that one of significant consequences of colonization in Singapore has been revealed in the evolution of its cuisine, which cannot be identified with any stereotypically fixed, culture specific dishes. She states: "As the years passed, Chinese, Malay, Indian, and European cooks took cues from one another, stirring together methods and spices culled from distant homelands such as Gujarat, India, and Xiamen, China, while sprinkling in culinary touches brought over by British and Dutch traders and their families" (ch. 1). Thus, Singaporean cuisine attains its own distinctive nature, which Tan fails to find in traditional cookbooks or in

restaurant menus as they are not often considered "special enough" (Tan ch. Prologue). In addition, Tan's father's constant emphasis on appreciating one's own culture, heritage and family and not to forget where she came from, ignites her quest "to be a Tan woman" (Tan ch. 5), long after she has left her family and her land of birth. Particularly remembering her already deceased paternal grandmother, Tanglin Ah-Ma, who has been eternally admired for her cooking skills, in the family and among the relatives and neighbours, especially for her labour intensive traditional dishes, Tan is driven to learn "the cuisine of my people before the chance to learn disappeared" (Tan ch. 4). She acknowledges: "This had been a part of my culture, my heritage, my family, that I'd never known with any intimacy or clarity" (Tan ch. 4).

Tan's culinary adventure thus commences with learning how to make Tanglin Ah-Ma's famous pineapple tarts, a buttery shortbread base topped with a dense, sweet pineapple jam, a delicacy specially prepared for the occasion of the Chinese New Year from Tanglin Ah-Ma's daughter-in-law, Auntie Khar Imm. As Tan continues with her endeavour, she undertakes to learn other complicated family recipes, such as *bak zhang*, the pyramid-shaped glutinous rice dumplings filled with pork and mushrooms and wrapped in bamboo leaves, which are traditionally eaten in June during the Dumpling Festival or *Duan Wu Jie*, commemorating the death of the Chinese poet and patriot Qu Yuan. There is *giam chye ar tng* or salted vegetable and duck soup, one of the signature recipes of Tanglin Ah-Ma which is prepared on the eve of the Chinese New Year for the family reunion dinner. She proceeds with *beng gway* or pink rice cake, glutinous rice flour shells in the shape of teardrops filled with stir-fried pork belly with shallots, mushrooms, and dried prawns and peanuts, made during the Hungry Ghost Festival in August, and pandan-skin mooncakes, to be eaten on the occasion of the Mid-Autumn Festival. She also learns to make *kaya*, the sweet, eggy coconut jam from her maternal grandmother, Ah-Ma, Teochew braised duck or *lor ar*, and Hainanese chicken rice from Auntie Alice, *ngoh hiang*, "the rolls, crunchy on the outside from a little deep frying of the bean-curd skin wrapper yet soft on the inside and bursting with the complex taste of five spice powder, a combination of star anise, cinnamon, ground fennel seeds, cloves, and pepper" (Tan ch. 14), and popiah, spring rolls filled with a mixture of different ingredients like minced shrimp and jicama.

Tan also learns to make Malay delicacies such as *otak-otak*, a spicy mousse, usually made with mackerel, wrapped in banana leaves and then steamed or grilled, and *mee siam*, a rice vermicelli dish. These dishes have also become a part of their family repertoire as Tanglin Ah-Ma learnt them from an old, ailing Indonesian cook, whom she has given shelter. Her mother taught her how to make green bean soup, Tan's comfort food when she was young. It is lightly sweet and made with green mung beans and water and can be eaten either chilled or piping hot. However, as a transcultural individual, whose being and becoming are not confined to any specific geographical or cultural location, Tan's culinary exploits transcended the Singaporean shores and indulges in an online Bread Baker's Challenge. Tan, along with more than two hundred bakers, across the United States and beyond, from Berlin to Sri Lanka, have decided to bake the breads, from the apparently simple light wheat

bread to more complicated Italian ciabatta or casatiello, as instructed by Peter Reinhart, the leader in America's artisanal bread movement, in his seminal book, *The Bread Baker's Apprentice*. She even travels to Hawaii to meet her Korean American mother-in-law, Ai-Kyung Linster, to learn to cook her husband's favourite dishes—*kalbi*, grilled beef short ribs, and *mandoo*, pork and cabbage dumplings.

However, her continued search for being a Tan woman brings her not only to unravel the secrets of their family cuisine but also to unearth the secrets of her family too. Visiting their ancestral Emerald Hill Road house from a distance, where her father, her grandfather, and her great-grandfather lived, she learns how her great-grandfather left the impoverished village near Shantou for Singapore and eventually worked very hard to establish a trading company that thrived even during World War II. She also learns how her grandfather, Tanglin Ah-Ma's husband, had been "the shame of the family" (Tan ch. 14). He was an opium addict and an obsessive gambler, who got arrested in the early 1950s. Being forced to take in the neighbour's laundry and to manage even a gambling den in the house in order to run the household, Tanglin Ah-Ma eventually invented a dish called *pua kiao beng* or gambling rice, which can be served in a bowl and eaten using only one hand. As Tan eagerly learns to cook that simple dish of gambling rice from Auntie Khar-Imm, she rues how her own father suddenly leaves her mother and their thirty-two year old marriage for a Chinese girl who is even younger than Tan herself, rendering an invisible and unsurmountable strain between her paternal and the maternal sides. She ponders the efficacy of her laborious undertaking of learning to cook her family's traditional dishes: "I felt increasingly torn between the two sides of the family. I wasn't sure if I'd ever be able to bring them together, even over food" (Tan ch. 7). Her desire to mend the broken ties within the family in order to reconcile herself with her kinfolk leads her to visiting their ancestral village in Shantou, China, in hopes of "we would be going home" (Tan ch. 16). Her obsession to ascertain the exact causes and reasons behind the old family disputes which led to the loss of their family properties, draws her to Uncle Ah Tuang, who eventually dawns the fact in her that whatever happened in the past has already made them what they are and retracing the roots does not always lie in making sense of every miniscule details of the past but it can often be more internalised by letting go a little. Similarly, her visit to Shantou also ends with a silent thanks to her dead great-grandfather who had left China for Singapore as she realizes that "we may have come from there, but there certainly wasn't a place for us in that village anymore" (Tan ch. 16). Therefore, in the final section of my reading of Tan's memoir I will focus on how the gastro-graphic routes of her culinary odyssey, in the end, leads her towards an acceptance of surrenderance and relinquishment in the course of her lived experiences in transculturality.

A Gastro-graphic Transcultural Journey

Tan's year-long cooking lessons in Singapore, along with her online baking challenge expeditions, culminate in the final family dinner, cooked and served, all by

her. However, before focusing on the dinner which does not result in as it is expected to be, I will first turn to point out Tan's confusing, yet hilarious, encounters with her aunts' perennial practice of *agak agak* in their kitchens. *Agak agak* in colloquial Malay means to estimate or guess. Unlike the Western baking methods of having the exact measurement of the ingredients, most of the skilled cooks at home in Singapore and in South and Southeast Asia in general, practice *agak agak* as they have seen being done, and are doing by themselves for a number of times in their home kitchens. While learning how to make Tanglin Ah-Ma's pineapple tarts Tan observes Auntie Khar Imm continues sampling the tiniest spoonful of the boiling jam, as she stirs it on the stove, and then confidently pours sugar directly from a giant bag. Tan cries out in frustration:

> "Wait, wait," I sputtered, "how much are you putting in? How do you know how much to put in?" These questions, at first, confused Auntie Khar Imm, who immediately started laughing once she figured out what I was asking. "Aiyah—buyong measure lah!" she said. "Just taste, taste, taste and then agak-agak lor!…
>
> I had never done the "agak-agak" thing in my kitchen. How would I know if I was completely screwing up?…
>
> I was starting to get truly panicked. I had travelled from half a world away in order to learn my Tanglin Ah-Ma's pineapple tart recipe—but it was starting to look like I'd return to New York with vague instructions built on the nebulous foundation of agak-agak" (Tan ch. 2).

Evoking Rosalia Baena's idea of how transcultural gastro-graphic routes and practices contain the seeds of transubstantiation, Tan eventually acknowledges that Western precisions and the Singaporean *agak-agak* are not diametrically opposite but complementary skills, both in cooking and in felt experience. Even though her life in New York is strictly regimented and "consumed with minutiae" (Tan ch. 5), her learning to cook with her Singaporean aunties manifests an alternative sense of belonging. She muses: "Perhaps I needed to not focus so much on the specifics of time and quantities … Perhaps this had been the wrong approach to cooking all along. Perhaps it was time to start letting go" (ch. 5). She further perceives that the practice of *agak agak* in cooking can be transmuted into a philosophy of life which is constantly dynamic and evolving: "Recipes have a basis, yes, but they are supposed to be organic and can change over time. You just have to trust in yourself enough to wing it sometimes … You can't and shouldn't plan every single thing out. Sometimes you just have to let go a little and trust yourself" (ch. A Conversation). In the same vein, Tan's meticulously planned dinner which she has wished to cook before flying back to New York, to offer her gratitude to everyone in the family, who has taken great pains to pass the family heirloom recipes to her, might be regarded as a botched one in culinary terms, however, it scripts its success in a different way.

Tan's elaborate dinner plan include dishes of *otak otak*, braised duck, gambling rice, *ngoh hiang*, salted vegetable and duck soup, *chap chye*, a dish of mixed vegetables and tofu with clear noodles, *mandoo*, and also *bak kut teh,* a peppery

pork rib soup, which her father considers a signature Teochew dish. However, her *bak kut teh* turns out to be extremely salty, the skin of the one of the braised ducks is charred, chunks of mushy yellow bits of several disintegrated hard-boiled eggs float in the gravy because they have not been boiled long enough to get them peeled easily, and the gravy of the chicken curry becomes exceptionally thick, looking "a little like ectoplasm" (Tan ch. 18), as Tan has used the canned, concentrated coconut milk instead of squeezing the fresh ones. Yet, this dinner table brings together several branches of Tan's family, which have been fractured gradually, over not perfectly cooked dishes, from Malay, Chinese, and Korean cuisines, signals a symbolic transcendence from adhering to traditional recipes and authentic taste to proffering a sense of peace and reconciliation. Tan's mother, who has strictly avoided meeting with anyone from her husband's family following the divorce, enthusiastically enjoys the dinner with everyone. Tan finally admits: "Cooking wasn't a science; it wasn't meant to be perfect. It was simply a way to feed the people you loved" (ch. 3). Thus, Tan's gastro-graphic journey, in search of roots, eventually reinscribes a renewed engagement with her transcultural being, which no longer seeks cultural heritage and identity in uncovering and comprehending the complex minutiae of the past, but in embracing the brokenness and imperfections of the fractures and fissures, rendering a pacifying effect.

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Redemption through Individuation: A Study of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

Khaled Hosseini's debut novel, *The Kite Runner,* is a sweeping tale that emphasises the predominant theme of personal redemption and purports to uphold humanistic ideals on a universal scale. The novel depicts the protagonist's psychological and moral growth as he seeks redemption for his guilt-ridden past actions and reactions. Amir's quest for redemption, which stems from his guilt, makes up the heart of the novel. The present paper analyses the process of individuation of Amir, which occurs when he has to face the grim reality that forces him to return to Kabul to save Sohrab, the son of his friend, Hassan, who goes through child abuse by the Taliban. It explores the motivation behind Amir's individuation process, which enables him to redeem himself and attain the satisfaction of self-fulfilment. The paper also analyses the transformation of Amir from a coward, selfish, and escapist to someone courageous, selfless, and brave as a heroic character who performs moral and ethical duties towards friends, family, and humanity at large. The paper employs Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytic theory of individuation to analyse the issue.

Keywords: Redemption, individuation, persona, anima, shadow, self

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American novelist, is one of the most recognised and bestselling authors in the world, is best known for his novels like *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013), that have been published in over seventy countries and sold more than 40 million copies worldwide. These phenomenal books are set against the backdrop of the Afghan war and the protagonists' horrific experiences. Besides, he wrote *Sea Prayer* (2018), which was inspired by the Syrian refugee crisis and the death of Alan Kurdi. Hosseini is also a Goodwill Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the founder of The Khaled Hosseini Foundation, which provides humanitarian assistance to empower vulnerable groups in Afghanistan as women and children. In an interview with Razestha Sethna of *Newsline*, Hosseini acknowledged that his memories of Afghanistan are "untainted by the spectre of war, landmines, and famines" (Sethna 2003). After being transferred to Tehran, Iran, in 1970, Hosseini's father had to move back to Kabul due to upheavals in Iran, but after the invasion of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, they finally moved to the United States in 1980. But life was not easy in the United States either, as they had to start from scratch and struggle to learn a new language, adjust, and most importantly, earn a livelihood. Khaled Hosseini experienced the monarchy, the republican period, and the first few decades of Dud Khan's leadership that he depicted in his first novel, *The Kite*

Runner.

Isabel Allende, a writer from Chile, considers Hossein's *The Kite Runner* an "extraordinary" novel of love, honour, remorse, terror, and redemption. Set in Afghanistan and the United States, Hosseini's debut novel, *The Kite Runner,* is the tale of an unlikely friendship between Amir, who belonged to a privileged and dominant social community called "Pashtun" and Hassan, who belonged to Afghan society's most oppressed and marginalised group called "Hazara." It is a moving tale of friendship, betrayal, guilt, and redemption that depicts the horrific realities of war-torn Afghanistan. *The Kite Runner* depicts the plight of a country ravaged by war and the atrocities inflicted on its people, including the exodus of Afghan people to Pakistan and the United States as a result of the Soviet invasion and the killing of the oppressed and marginalised Hazara people under the tyrannical rule of the Taliban. *The Kite Runner* praised for its ethnographic and historical value, is a *Bildungsroman* that depicts the development process of the protagonist and includes many autobiographical elements that are rooted in the author's real-life experiences. As a *Bildungsroman*, the novel's focus is on the growth—both moral and psychological—of the protagonist (Amir) from childhood to adulthood. By foregrounding the themes of sin, guilt, and redemption, *The Kite Runner* underpins the return of humanity to the human world. The central conflict of *The Kite Runner* is Amir's attempt to atone for his guilty past. Through the story of Amir, the novel demonstrates the transition from a self-centred child to a self-righteous adult. This paper examines Amir's path to redemption by acquiring the strength of love, loyalty, responsibility, dignity, and courage. It also outlines the development of Amir's character from youth to maturity and from betrayal to salvation through the process of individuation. The setting and culture of Afghanistan, as depicted in *The Kite Runner*, serve as a backdrop for a "universal" story of redemption. The novel is remarkable for the way it humanises Afghanistan for non-Afghan readers. *The Kite Runner*, according to Mir Hekmutallah Sadat, represents Afghanistan's past and the need for national reconciliation. It enlightens non-Afghan readers about the country's history and culture (O'Rourke). As Hosseini himself declares, the novel is really about "finally putting a human face on the Afghans" (qtd. in Sadat).

Semiotics of Redemption and Individuation

Originating from the 14th-century Latin word *redimere*, redemption literally means "buying back". In the Judeo-Christian tradition, redemption is the offering or sacrifice—the price paid for a sin. Haught (2013), quoted in Merdekawati et al. (2017), defines redemption as the act or process by which change takes place. According to Saraswat (2014:171), redemption is the act of confessing or being saved from sin, error, or evil. There might be several factors causing redemption, like the sense of guilt in someone because of the mistake they made in the past or when it is constantly a burden in one's life that is brought to the present. Generally, redemption is associated with feelings of guilt and things that happened in the past. As in *The Kite*

Runner, the protagonist's past mistakes keep haunting him and making him guilt-ridden. Amir is tormented by a pang of all-consuming guilt throughout his life, emanating from the sins he committed in his childhood. In the *Handbook of Emotion*, Lewis mentions that a person with guilt will take "corrective action" in order to "repair the failure" (Lewis, Michael, and Jones, 2008). The same is true with Amir in Khaled Hossein's *The Kite Runner.* Amir's guilt over his previous cowardice treatment of Hassan, especially when he refused to help his friend Hassan while being raped and by planting incriminating evidence of theft against him, haunted Amir continuously as an adult. Instead of confessing his cowardly behaviour, Amir continued to make false allegations of theft against Hassan in his attempt to escape shame and guilt, forcing Hassan to leave his house. But as an adult, after learning about the true parentage of Hassan, Sohrab's (Hassan's son) entrapment in child abuse by the Taliban and Rahim Khan's words, "There is a way to be good again,*"* motivate Amir to correct his childhood mistakes by rescuing Sohrab from the clutches of Assef, risking his own life. Initially a coward and selfish, Amir's journey to redemption and his quest to "be good again" made him heroic. By rescuing Sohrab and returning him to America, Amir amends his earlier mistakes, redeems himself, and attains self-fulfilment. In a way, Amir redeems and relieves himself of the sin he committed through the process of individuation.

        The process of individuation through which Amir evolves as a heroic character, has a healing effect on him, both mentally and physically. Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who coined terms such as archetype, anima/animus, shadow, and collective unconsciousness, among others, is regarded as the founder of analytical psychology, or Jungian analysis. Jung believed that each person was unique and had a distinct destiny. The majority of Jungian psychology is centred on what Jung later referred to as the individuation process. Carl Jung used the term "individuation" extensively in his work on personality development. (2014) Carl Jung adopted and expanded the essence of Freudian psychoanalysis and even developed his own theories independently of Sigmund Freud. The concept of "individuation", as used by Carl Jung, offers a comprehensive account of the path people might take to develop a fully-fledged "personality" rather than simply acting out a mask or character. In his guide to exploring Carl Jung's individuation process and Jungian psychology, Scott Jeffrey viewed "the individuation process as Jung's way of explaining the path to optimal personal development for an individual." Carl Jung's concept of "individuation" has parallels with German psychiatrist, Kurt Goldstein's slightly similar concept of "self-actualization." The term self-actualization was coined by Goldstein for the motive to realise one's full potential: "…the tendency to actualize itself as fully as possible is the basic drive ... the drive of self-actualization." In his book, *The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man* (1939), Kurt Goldstein presents self-actualization as "the tendency to actualize, as much as possible, [the organism's] individual capacities" in the world. For Goldstein, "self-actualization" means something that is close to realising one's "essence," one's identity, or one's felt sense

of oneself, which may imply that a person is willing to risk his or her life in order to maintain "self-actualization," the realisation of one's "essence," of the person she or he feels she or he is. Many scholars see the Myers-Briggs typology as equivalent to and representative of the Jungian theory of individuation. Steve Myers opines that when discussing human development, individuation refers to the process of forming a stable personality. Carl Jung's theory of individuation provides an insight into the role unconscious aspects of character play in achieving fully-functioning maturity. Jung (1921, quoted in Jacoby 1990) defines individuation as a "process by which individual beings are being formed and differentiated… having as its goal the development of the individual personality" (94). The forces and processes involved in individuation are generally unconscious. According to the Notes of C. G. Jung's Seminars on Wolfgang Pauli's Dreams, "The individuation process, the normal process, naturally begins with the second part of life, because their consciousness begins to detach itself slightly, and then only are you able to understand" (267).

Individuation and Redemption in *The Kite Runner*

The main goal of individuation is to bring about wholeness in the individual. When we begin to participate consciously in this process of individuation, we often discover that our conscious, ego-based striving to be what we want to be, is not the same as being who we are (Jacoby 1990). Although individuation happens at all stages of life, it is most significant during the tween, adolescent, and young adult years. The goal of this process of individuation is to raise the person's consciousness. The purpose of this paper is to contemplate Amir's way to redeem and relieve himself of the sin he committed, through the process of individuation by employing Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytic theory as a foundation. Hosseini has portrayed Amir not as a hero but rather as an ordinary person with low self-esteem, struggling to overcome his cowardice and selfish nature to become loyal, responsible, and courageous enough to save a life. This journey of Amir's redemption through the process of individuation reflects not only the self-actualization of the protagonist but also the bright side of the humanity of a common person at large. One can consider individuation as self-realisation because, according to Jung, it involves being one's self. Jung in "Psychology of the Transference" says that "the Self is the total, timeless man...who stands for the mutual integration of conscious and unconscious" (Jung 1954, 311).

Individuation is the psychological process of becoming mature. Individuation allows a person to recognise and differentiate himself or herself from others (Jung, 1934, 288). The process of individuation relates to a series of archetypes, but the present paper focuses on what are regarded as the four major Jungian archetypes, viz., the Persona, the Anima/Animus, the Shadow, and the self. Jung believed that we inherit these archetypes just as we inherit instinctive patterns of behaviour. In order to explore Amir's individuation process, which finally results in redemption and absolves him of the sin he committed in the past, the paper will

analyse each of these archetypes.

According to Karl Jung, most of us have a mask that we wear in a society in which we try to show our best sides to the world, which he calls the conformity archetype,or the Persona. The persona is the mask one puts on in various situations. In essence, it conceals who we really are by portraying ourselves as someone else. It seeks to make an impression on others while concealing its true nature. In *The Kite Runner*, the persona archetype may be seen in the following excerpts:

> Of course, marrying a poet was one thing, but fathering a son who preferred burying his face in poetry books to hunting... well, that wasn't how Baba had envisioned it, I suppose. Real men didn't read poetry and God forbid they should ever write it! Real men, and real boys played soccer just as Baba had when he had been young. Now that was something to be passionate about (17).

It is evident from the above excerpt that Amir seeks to wear the mask of a true man in order to live up to his father's expectations of what a true man is—a man who plays soccer and goes hunting. Amir must assume these roles to hide his true self, which involves engaging in activities like reading and reciting poems. In a sense, Amir had to wear a mask to respond to his father's wishes.

In accordance with Jung's theory, a man's feminine archetype is referred to as anima, while a woman's masculine archetype is referred to as animus. Usually, tenderness, gentleness, patience, being close to nature, and being more forgiving are considered feminine traits in men, while a woman's tenacity and competitive spirit may be perceived as male traits. The following excerpt from *The Kite Runner* illustrates the anima archetype of Amir:

> I always wondered if he dreamed about her, about what she looked like, where she was. I wondered if he longed to meet her. Did he ache for her, the way I ached for the mother I had never met? ….. I reached across my seat, slung my arm around him, pulled him close. He rested his head on my shoulder. "He took you for someone else," I whispered. "He took you for someone else. (6-7).

In the above excerpt, Amir longs for his mother, who passed away after giving birth to him. In contrast, Hassan's mother abandoned him with the troupes a few days after giving birth. When Hassan cries in remembrance of his late mother, Amir stretches his arms out, hugs Hassan, and rests Hassan's head on his shoulder. This reveals the gentleness and tenderness of Amir's feminine side, anima. By fighting to preserve the brotherhood between himself and Hassan by rescuing Sohrab, Amir is also able to recognise his anima. The feminine aspect of Amir is also obvious when, in an effort to prevent Assef from imprisoning Sohrab, Amir manages to demonstrate his unending compassion.

According to Jungian psychology, the shadow archetype represents the animal instincts that humans have acquired along their evolution from lower to higher orders of existence and used to be mysterious, dark, and sometimes troublesome. It epitomises disorder and an untamed temperament. If shadow and ego can collaborate, the shadow's power may be redirected through more advantageous actions, and its effect will likewise be good. If not directed properly, the shadow can

become aggressive and have negative effects on others as shadow archetype in Amir is manifest in the following extract:

> I was eight by then. I remember the day before the orphanage opened, Baba took me to Ghargha Lake, a few miles north of Kabul. He asked me to fetch Hassan too, but I lied and told him Hassan had the runs. I wanted Baba all to myself. And besides, one time at Ghargha Lake, Hassan and I were skimming stones and Hassan made his stone skip eight times. The most I managed was five. Baba was there, watching, and he patted Hassan on the back. Even put his arm around his shoulder. (12)

The way Amir deceives his Baba, as mentioned in the foregoing lines, demonstrates Amir's animalistic nature. Amir lies to Baba and says that Hassan can't accompany them to Gargha Lake because he has work to do. By lying, Amir hopes that Hassan won't get more of Baba's attention. Additionally, Amir is envious of Hassan because Hassan makes his stone skip eight times while Amir can manage just five when skimming stones, and consequently, Baba hugs Hassan for his achievement. Amir frames Hassan for theft and forces him to leave his home in an effort to get away from the shame and remorse he feels for not protecting Hassan from being raped by Assef. Amir tries to present himself as a kind, courteous person who works hard to accomplish his objectives. Under the façade of kindness Amir harmed his best friend, Hassan, who devotes his life to him. Although it is hard to trace the reason for Amir's actions through his external persona, we can explore the characteristics of his "shadow' to explain his conduct.

The Kite Runner follows the development of the main character, Amir, as well as his quest for salvation and the return to humanity. It is a journey of self-discovery while accepting the past. According to Jung, the "self" is the core of one's personality. It is the totality of the conscious and unconscious. It motivates a person to work towards achieving wholeness and unity. Over time, the self transforms into the psyche's core, where all its elements are constellated around it. The "Self" directs a person towards individuation by means of self-realisation, as is witnessed in Amir's contemplation of his past:

> I sat on a park bench near a willow tree. I thought about something Rahim Khan said just before he hung up, almost as an afterthought. "There is a way to be good again". I looked up at those twin kites. I thought about Hassan. Thought about Baba. Ali. Kabul. I thought of the life I had lived until the winter of 1975 came along and changed everything. And made me what I am today. (2)

These lines reveal Amir's realisation of his past mistakes and his struggle to attain wholeness and unity, and "a way to be good again." This realisation induces a fervent desire in Amir to visit his childhood mentor, Rahim Khan, and start his expedition back to his homeland in Afghanistan to save Sohrab, Hassan's son, which spurns an adventure and makes him fully individuated, according to Jungian philosophy. Amir is determined to repay Hassan's loyalty and sacrifices by releasing Sohrab from the grip of Assef, the embodiment of all that is evil in Afghanistan. But this was not an easy task for Amir, who had never fought anyone and had thrown a punch in his entire

life. In his pursuit of redemption, Amir indulges in violent self-cleansing. He remembers vividly his fight with Assef:

> His brass knuckles flashing in the afternoon light…. Getting hurled against the wall, a nail where a framed picture may have hung once jabbing at my back…. Getting hurled against the wall. The knuckles shattering my jaw. Choking on my own teeth, swallowing them, thinking about all the countless hours I'd spent flossing and brushing. Getting hurled against the wall. Lying on the floor, blood from my split upper lip staining the mauve carpet, pain ripping through my belly, and wondering when I'd be able to breathe again. The sound of my ribs snapping like the tree branches Hassan and I used to break to swordfight like Sinbad in those old movies. Sohrab screaming. The side of my face slamming against the corner of the television stand. That snapping sound again, this time just under my left eye…. Biting down in pain, noticing how my teeth didn't align like they used to. Getting kicked. Sohrab screaming. I don't know at what point I started laughing, but I did. It hurt to laugh, hurt my jaws, my ribs, my throat. But I was laughing and laughing. And the harder I laughed, the harder he kicked me, punched me, scratched me….My body was broken—just how badly I wouldn't find out until later—but I felt healed. Healed at last. I laughed… for the first time since the winter of 1975, I felt at peace. (252-253).

Amir's laughter reflects that he has finally let go of the life long guilt for not intervening in Hassan's rape. In an attempt to save Sohrab and return his brother's kindness and sacrifices, Amir risks his life and eventually overcomes the obstacles, and escapes with Sohrab out of Kabul. Amir's kindness and sacrifices reflect his wholeness and unity as he seems to have achieved his selfhood and individuation:

> Individuation means becoming an "individual," and, in so far as "individuality" embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as "coming to selfhood (Jung 173).

Conclusion

Hosseini weaves the plot of *The Kite Runner* in tandem with the ideas of redemption and individuation. The purpose of individuation is to liberate the self from the illusory coverings of the persona and the other archetypes. The presence of persona, anima, shadow, and self in Amir's personality allows Amir to complete the individuation process and attain redemption. Amir grows from immaturity to maturity, from betrayal to salvation, on the path to redemption, and gains the ability to pursue love, loyalty, responsibility, dignity and courage. The present study analyses how Amir manages to complete the individuation process and eventually achieves the highest hierarchy in the centre of his psyche by successfully minimising the persona, realising his anima, balancing his shadow and enhancing himself.

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Governing of Women by Men 'Under His Eye'
Reading *The Handmaid's Tale* as a Tale of Gender Colonization

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Abstract

The Handmaid's Tale can be read as a futuristic survival text that dramatizes a dystopic world faced with the colonization of a whole gender by not only the Biblically inflected misogynists' regime of Gilead but also the gynocentric misogynists. In the area of gender studies, gender colonization and its representation through literature has always been a relevant area of research. *The Handmaid's Tale* can easily be read alongside any text coming from erstwhile or presently colonized nations lending weight to the presumption that post-colonialism and feminism are very loosely knit critical discourses. Both dwell on the issues of inequality, oppression, fundamentalism, ideological crises, and possible resistance to colonial subjugation. The dominance imposed upon the women in *The Handmaid's Tale* is akin to that of any colonized nation dominated by the imperialist colonizer. Therefore, Gilead, the setting of the novel is a colonized country and a microcosm of the postcolonial society. Judging by the postcolonial theoretical framework, this paper is a critical analysis of the different aspects of the novel that put it on the common ground with some classical postcolonial texts like *Things Fall Apart*, *Midnight's Children*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* and others.
Keywords: Feminism, Colonialism, Gender Disparity, Silence, Oppression, Resistance

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopic survival novel which presents a world faced with the crises of fertility, the panacea of which is seen in the domination and restriction of women on many levels. The freedom of women is restricted with Christian sanction when American neo-conservatives and the New Christian Right seize power giving place to an extremist Christian government with very extreme policies which Christopher Jones rightly calls as a "reinvigorated hatred of women and the explosive growth of religious (patriarchal) fundamentalism" (4) Women are reduced to mere tools of breeding in 'The Republic of Gilead' as it is called after the 'Christian Revolution.' Fertile women are inducted in schools to be 'trained' and later on posted as handmaids for different 'Commanders' and their wives to bear them children pushing them to a life of submissiveness and passivity. These women are subjected to persecution, abuse and cruelty at the hands of the indigenous hyper patriarchal ideology, a situation akin to that of the colonized subjects, particularly women, in previously or currently colonized countries. In many respects then Gilead is nothing less than a colonized country where the whole gender is held hostage by the totalitarian policies of the Government and that of the patriarchal dominion. Women like the colonized subjects are abused in roles such as Handmaids, Marthas, Aunts, Econowives, Unwomen and even as Wives in order to feed the ideology of the 'colonial' regime. "The Gilead regime" as Bouson indicates, "effectively robs women

of their individual identities through this imposition of a strict system of hierarchical classification and transforms them into replaceable objects in the phallocentric economy" (43).

Over the years, with an advancement and expansion in the field of gender and colonialism, it has been observed that gender and coloniality are driven by the same concerns and a similar theoretical trajectory that drive the older colonial fields in history; economic, political, labour, and military. Hence gender is as much a marginal category of analysis as any recognized category of imperialist history, both positing resistance towards a fundamentalist regime. Since gender colonialism replicates the inequalities and hierarchies of colonialism, drawing parallels and comparisons from imperialist colonization and gender colonization with their anti-colonial struggles becomes an effortless undertaking as both attempt to "uncover power structures, biases, and exclusions in the construction of knowledge" (Chew & Richards 121). This leads to the premise that colonialism is an ongoing socio-political process rather than a closed historical incident which takes us to the "coloniality of gender," a term coined by an Argentine feminist philosopher and activist, Maria Lugones who outlines gender as a colonial construct and the possible strategies of resistance that can eventually lead to its dismantling. She attributes construction of gender and its use as a tool of domination to the Western colonizer. She states that colonization is sustained by some binary oppositions and hierarchical social categories wherein a woman, in all categories, is only defined by her subordinate relation to men. Therefore, imperialist colonization is characterized by the domination of a whole indigenous race and gender colonization sees the domination of the indigenous woman irrespective of the race. In this context, Bill Ashcroft et al. comment:

> both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Hence the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled in a number of respects, and both feminist and postcolonial politics oppose such dominance. (83)

With regard to *The Handmaid's Tale*, the narrative presents to the reader a representation of a white woman as the marginalized colonial object suffering at the hands of a concrete colonial practice upheld and endorsed by the race to which these women belong and identify with as people powered by enough military, political and socio-economic backup. The struggle of these women for survival is in many respects similar to those of colonized nations. Much like the colonized nations, the women of Gilead in all roles are oppressed time and again in different ways with ideological defense, political excuse and religious patronage. Further these women are oppressed by their own kind as well; the Aunts and the Wives who think that they are agents of the Gilead regime but with a deeper analysis turn out to be victims of the same regime they contribute in establishing and sustaining. As Howells asserts in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, *The Handmaids Tale* is "centered on human rights abuses and particularly the oppression of women under a fundamentalist regime [and] is entirely social and political in its agenda" (163).

The sweeping impression of *The Handmaid's Tale* is that women are subjects of oppression and suffering in Gilead primarily because they are women who don't have a right to have a voice of their own and who, like objects and commodities, can be substituted while men continue to enjoy all the privileges and power as per their desires and interests with impunity. Simone de Beauvoir, the twentieth century feminist thinker, in her work *The Second Sex* also states that womanhood is not a simple biological category. Labelling woman as 'Other' and man as the 'Self,' she suggests that womanhood is a cultural entity, a means of cultural and social oppression. In her works, she proposes that biology is the main source for woman's oppression within a patriarchal set up. The novel is replete with instances where no woman is shown to have a status of permanence. In fact, the wife of a commander, an apparently superior woman in the hierarchy of Gileadean order but nevertheless a victim, is not allowed to live with the status of a widow permanently on the passing away of her husband. This again leads us to the situation of erstwhile colonized people who are deprived of basic human rights by a mighty colonizer.

In every colonized land, the colonizer is after a resource that is exploited to its extreme to satiate the hunger of the colonizer. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the resource is the handmaid who is the centre of Gileadean regime upon which its survival rests. Although the handmaids are very precious for the State, yet they are the most despised of the cast. The rationale behind the creation of Gilead lies in reversing the plummeting birthrate and it is the handmaid upon whom the onus of accomplishing the task lies. During the phase of transition, they are arrested and then converted into national treasure to be protected and used for the good of the nation since they are "holding the future in their hands" (Atwood 55).

The ideology and ideas of this rigid Christian government in the Republic of Gilead are presented to us through Offred's first-person narrative. Although one must be aware that the narrator has limitations too since a handmaid enjoys zero freedom and has no right to communication. Margaret Atwood presents a note of caution when she remarks:

> you're dealing with a character whose ability to move in the society was limited. By the nature of her situation, she was very circumscribed. She couldn't communicate well with people. It was too dangerous. How do you tell a narrative from the point of view of that person? The more limited and boxed in you are, the more important details become. (Foust 84)

Flashbacks also provide a picture of the society "before" Gilead and the period of transition that marks the unending saga of torture and servitude for the American women. For a start, female employees are dismissed from work places, reading and writing is banned for them, they are denied access to their bank accounts, their assets are seized, dress codes are imposed etc. Instead, they are trained to utter a handful of expressions on some designated occasions. Describing the Handmaids, Brooks Bouson comments: "because they are women with '*viable ovaries*' in a world of mass sterility, they are forcibly enlisted in the regime's project of reversing the precipitous

decline in the Caucasian birthrate" (44). Offred also describes them as "ladies in reduced circumstances. The circumstances have been reduced; for those of us who still have circumstances" (Atwood 13). The circumstances Offred is referring to here are the 'viable ovaries' Bousan refers to. As far as the infertile women are concerned, popularly called as *Unwomen*, they are seen as undeserving of a life in the Gilead and hence killed outright or are sent to *colonies* where they are subjected to the worst kind of treatment and left to die unattended. Another category of infertile women in the novel is that of the Marthas; domestic servants attending to the domestic needs of the high-rank families that include taking care of the children born of handmaids.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Indian literary theorist, stresses upon silencing the 'Other' as a very potent tool to perpetuate the hegemonic domination of the colonizer in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak." She talks about women being denied any voice or identity in the mainstream discourses and comments that, "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" (Morris 257). The voiceless handmaids in *The Handmaid's Tale* are true representation of a woman subaltern who, as per Parsons, "have been rendered silent, their natures devalued and their experiences underrated" because of "a deep seam of prejudice that is called sexism, and that is embedded in all kinds of institutions, known as patriarchal for their persistent division of humanity into two parts of unequal status and power" (117). When read as a novel with a dystopic vison, the world of Gilead comes across as a place of whispers, silences and lies.

The history of the imperialist colonization presents the account of a colonizer for whom Christianity is the first and the most potent means of advancing the colonial clasp. Besides, Christianity has stood the test of time and has been almost a foolproof tool of subjugation that is subtly employed by the colonizer to permeate and then validate a new ideology changing the values, beliefs, culture and finally the mind of the colonized people. Gilead, the erstwhile America in *The Handmaid's Tale* is no exception: using totalitarian theocracy to their full advantage, the leaders of Gilead present a Christian rationale to every 'reform' and the revolution as a whole and go on quoting verses from the Bible from time to time to justify their actions. Even the vocabulary used by the Government and their agents derives directly or indirectly from the Bible. For instance, Gilead, as the country is called after the establishment of absolute theocracy is a fertile and plentiful land in Palestine that finds a mention in the Bible. The Marthas can be traced to the Biblical figure Martha, Mary's sister who derives satisfaction and pleasure in serving Jesus. Besides, the public executions carried out by Gilead as punishments are also presented with Biblical sanctions. They are referred to as 'Salvagings.' All the same, Christianity is manipulated to serve the Gilead Government.

One significant aspect of Gileadean ideology and custom cloaked with Biblical rationale is the sexual *ceremony*, held every month, during ovulation, in which a handmaid loses control of her body while surrendering herself to the

Commander. She is made to sit in the lap of the mistress while her husband, the commander rapes her. The ceremony "synthesizes the institutionalized humiliation, objectification, and ownership of women in Gilead" (Cavalcanti 166).The ceremony has roots in the story of two sisters, Rachel and Leah, from The Old Testament, the strategy of Gilead to tackle fertility crises. The story goes back to the times when polygamy was in vogue. Two sisters, Rachel and Leah are married to Jacob. While Leah is fertile and easily able to give birth to children, Rachel suffers infertility although being loved more by Jacob. Leah convinces Jacob to impregnate Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid to give her children 'through' her. Bilhah gives birth to Rachel's two sons and it is noteworthy that she disappears from the Bible afterwards. In the novel, the monthly ceremony starts with the recitation of the Biblical verse from *Genesis* (30:1-3) which goes as:

> Give me children, or else I die. Am in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her (*King James Bible*).

Ironically, Offred describes the ceremony as:

> The Ceremony goes as usual … Above me, towards the head of the bed, Serena Joy is arranged, outspread … My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers … The rings of her left hand cut into my fingers. It may or may not be revenge … My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. (Atwood 77)

It is also an established fact that the colonizer works by the 'divide and rule policy' which constitutes unequal distribution of power, authority and status among the colonized elite leading to animosity amongst them. In the words of Atwood, "no empire imposed by force or otherwise has ever been without this feature: control of the indigenous by members of their own group" (308). The power equation of Gilead is in many respects a mirror to the disunity between women. By dividing women into different categories, the Gilead regime pits women against one another. For instance, the Wives are shown as inhuman and cruel; the Aunts are used to control and manipulate the handmaids into accepting that they have been divinely chosen to serve as "sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (109) to the state. The novel then presents the consequences of both traditional misogyny as well as a new form of misogyny fostered by hatred of women by women sustained by a matriarchal network, gynocentric misogyny. The Aunts and the Wives become the internal agents for the colonizer who justify and facilitate the process of colonization and prevent organized resistance to the oppression.

The rigid regime of Gilead makes use of a particular language and brutish practices to continue its colonial practices. They employ this language to build a discourse and use violence to perpetuate it as truth. One comes across two types of language in *The Handmaid's Tale*: narrator's language, always suggestive of nostalgia, craving and freedom and the Bible-inflected Gileadean language

suggestive of repression, dominance and force. Ironically, the later turns out to be a potent tool for the oppressor to give rise to a particular truth (knowledge) and maintain statuesque. Michael Foucalt states:

> Each society has its regime of truth. Its 'general politics' of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanism and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements. (131).

In case of Gilead, the truths are derived from Bible and used for the advantage of the state. For instance, in Gilead, the idea of equality is distorted; all men aren't born equal, some men are second class citizens and some women are third class citizens and some others are deprived of the status of a class. Besides, the truth behind the ideology and discourse upheld by Gilead cannot be challenged because none of its statements is false. The State twists and morphs the truth to feed its ideology. The truths of Gilead are presented to the reader through Offred's first person narrative who is an advocate of freedom and a harsh critic of the State policies. However, she is not completely able to narrate outside the language and subsequent discourse constructed by her colonizer. There are some instances in the novel where her idea of right and wrong juxtaposes with that of the oppressor. The oppressor succeeds in perpetuating a particular ideology because he is in control of the knowledge and truth which in turn grants him power.

However, Atwood presents to the reader a concrete reaction of the victim women in the form of their struggle for recapturing the lost female and national identity. Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. argue, "the texts of feminist theory and those of post-colonialism concur on many aspects of the theory of identity, of difference and of the interpellation of the subject by a dominant discourse, as well as offering to each other various strategies of resistance to such controls" (83). Against this backdrop, the response of Gileadean women to the constant cruelty and exploitation becomes very significant. The first response of these women is fear because every small gesture of resistance is met with severe punishment as severe as plucking out of eye, electric shocks, solitary confinement and death. However, survival is the key priority and they must upgrade their wits to escape punishment and still offer some kind of meaningful resistance. Women like Ofglen and Moira show some resistance and end up in colonies and the prostitution centers like Jezebel. Offred on the other hand decides to tell her story to the world, an equally daring act of resistance since women of Gilead are forbidden to read, write or communicate. She uses language and story-telling as a redemptive tool to regain her voice and recapture her female identity.

To conclude, *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as an apt colonial symbol teeming with instances of injustice, oppression, subjugation and resistance dealing with issues of power, domination, oppression, inequality, dependency, identity crisis, class, race, and sexuality. One can effortlessly draw parallels between it and any work from and about the third world countries with a bleak colonial past. In other words oppression is above and beyond race and gender. Similar to the "Third World Women," handmaids experience the oppression of "otherness, tokenism, stereotyping, … silence, the veil,

and negativity" (Schwarz 54–5). The novel also serves as a reminder to the oppressor as well as the oppressed regarding the recurrence of cruelty imposed by human beings on each other in one form or the other. Targets Moving's observation is particularly relevant here:

> in *The Handmaid's Tale*, nothing happens that the human race has not already done at some time in the past, or which it is not doing now, perhaps in other countries, or for which it has not yet developed the technology. We've done it, or we're doing it, or we could start doing it tomorrow (102–103).

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Facets of Male Gaze in a Male Dominated Society: A Reading of *Such a Long Journey*

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Abstract

Such a Long Journey has a subaltern depiction of the women characters but there is no subversion in the discourse. The stereotypical portrayal of the major and minor women characters is conspicuous throughout the novel which could be attributed to the use of male gaze. The male sense of masculinity and superiority relegates the women to a secondary status. Consequently, the journey of the women characters takes a back seat. The female characters including the ones who are active and aid in plot progression, Dilnawaz and Miss Kutpitia, are victims of male gaze. Women are seen as subservient, dependant, irrational and are easily objectified and sexualised. However, women are neither victimized nor subjected to bias because of their inferior status. Men behold women with love, care, criticism, sexualisation, admiration and so on. Hence this paper is an attempt to analyse the different facets of male gaze and how men conceptualize women in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: Male gaze, women objectification, sexualisation, secondary status, stereotypical portrayal, code of conduct.

Introduction

Ever since the beginning of human civilization, societies have specified different roles, responsibilities, behaviour, code of conduct and moral duties for men and women. The pre-defined gender roles have confined women mostly to the four walls of their house. Oscar Wilde in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* stated, "My dear boy, no woman is a genius. Women are a decorative sex. They never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly" (47). This idea has been echoed since ages and women as a result are relegated to a secondary position in society. Moreover, a woman's reputation is easily tainted if she breaks free from her secondary societal role. Pundir and Singh reiterate author Anita Nair's view on the ambivalence of women representation in literature. According to societal norms a 'good woman' is always rewarded with a happy life, which is finding her life's purpose in a man's companionship. Even a strong and feisty woman, such as Elizabeth Bennett (*Pride and Prejudice*), ultimately must find a suitable life partner, otherwise she is left to regret her life, as in the case of Scarlett O Hara (*Gone with the Wind*) (138). In addition to this, women no matter who they are or what status they hold in the society are constant victims of male gaze.

The idea of male gaze as usually discussed is too generic and narrow, and I wish to propose the complexity of male gaze through a reading of *Such a Long Journey*. Rohinton Mistry has given a subaltern depiction of the women characters but there is no subversion in his discourse. The stereotypical portrayal of the major and

minor women characters is apparent as he calls them 'doll like' or 'domestic vulture'. The journey of the women characters takes a back seat, as a result. Sherry B. Ortner (1974) says, "the secondary status of women in society is one of the true universals, a pan cultural fact" (5). This is true of the women as portrayed in *Such a Long Journey* too. The only two female characters who are active and aid in plot progression are Dilnawaz and Miss Kutpitia. Women are seen as subservient, dependant, irrational and are easily objectified and sexualised. However, women are neither victimized nor subjected to bias because of their inferior status and left at the mercy of men. They may not be always treated with respect, but they are admired by the men folk for various other reasons. Men behold women with love, care, criticism, sexualisation and admiration. Mistry has accentuated a realistic description of women from the society's purview, at a time, when women did live in the peripheral zone. This paper hence attempts to interpret the different facets of how men conceptualize women in a patriarchal society.

Hareshwar Roy in his online article 'Life and Works of Rohinton Mistry' analyses, "Mistry's writing is characteristically grounded in firm, sometimes glaringly harsh realities" (*Life and Works of Rohinton Mistry*). This fact is echoed by Mistry himself in many of his interviews. In an interview with Stacey Gibson for *The University of Toronto Magazine*, he states, "With [my] characters, I'm interested in what makes a human being, and I don't have any agenda that I start out with, that this person shall illustrate greed and this person shall illustrate the spirit of generosity" (Mistry). He vouches to extract his characters from real life, as he confesses in another interview with Angela Lambert that "Writers write best about what they know. In the broad sense, as a processing of everything one hears or witnesses, all fiction is autobiographical - imagination ground through the mill of memory. It's impossible to separate the two ingredients" (Mistry). He further asserts that his own mother was a housewife, and she was not only happy in that role but also performs her duties magically. This very representation could be identified in the portrayal of Dilnawaz who dominates the private realm with her nurturing attention and the hard labour through which the stability of the family is ensured.

Dilnawaz: Soft as a Woman; Feisty as a Mother

Dilnawaz is the wife of Gustad and mother of three children. She is meticulous in her duties which are restricted to everyday chores. Gustad is the provider who goes out to work, meets the outer world, faces struggles and consequently is moulded into a finer self. While Dilnawaz is the caretaker, is homebound, whose stretch is as much as to her next-door neighbours, whose struggles centre on her family's well-being and consequently remains a flat character with no transition to broach. She is depicted as a soft woman who easily gets perturbed because of the father-son quarrels and her daughter's ill health. She is mostly seen pacifying the father-son duo during their clashes over differing ideologies, however, doesn't have an opinion for herself. Cooking, cleaning, fetching milk, storing water, being a dutiful mother and loving

partner is what defines her the best until catastrophe strikes their family. Sohrab decamps after a heated argument with Gustad, Roshan's health deteriorates, and Gustad finds himself entangled in a mysterious scheme, hard to escape. Dilnawaz rises to the occasion and decides to rescue her family from its hardships.

Dilnawaz is a perfect partner to Gustad, supporting him in every walk of life. She is submissive only to the extent that it restores peace and harmony in her family. Even though having independent views, she usually agrees with her husband. In an instance we learn that Gustad had left the blackout papers, a consequence of the Indo-China war, on the doors and windows undisturbed for long after the war was over. "He said it helped the children to sleep better. Dilnawaz thought the idea was ridiculous, but she did not argue because his father had passed away recently… perhaps… he found the darkness soothing after death's recent visitation" (Mistry 11). This facet of Dilnawaz's personality could be attributed to her childhood training to show unconditional respect to the elders and this is what she often exhibits in her encounters with others too.

Dilnawaz and Gustad share a sweet bond, and their familial roles are unanimously agreed upon. Every morning while Dilnawaz fills water in the pots and drums and prepares the morning tea, Gustad reads out the newspaper aloud for her, adding his opinion on the matters too. Gustad is mostly seen disciplining the children but Dilnawaz too steps in when her interference becomes mandatory, specially whenever the boys retaliate to Gustad's scolding. "Don't raise your voice at Daddy" (Mistry 27) says Dilnawaz whenever Gustad and Sohrab's arguments become heated. Hence, Dilnawaz is observed as supportive towards her husband and her husband is caring towards her. Mistry's assertion about women being secondary to their men is evident through his depiction of Gustad – Dilnawaz companionship.

Dilnawaz as a mother, however, has more powers and is the protective force for her children, trying to shield them from hardships. On the night of Roshan's eighth birthday when Gustad becomes furious at Sohrab's insolent behaviour and hits him with his thick brown leather belt, Dilnawaz comes to her son's rescue. She toils hard to reform the souring father-son bond but remains unsuccessful since she fails to stop Sohrab from leaving home. "She started to weep. 'Your father wants the best for you, he is just upset right now. You cannot go away because of that.'" (Mistry 124). Gustad, however, hides his hurt and pretends to be unmoved, "What is it to me?" (Mistry 124). Her agony doesn't end with Sohrab, though. Their youngest child Roshan's frequent health issues are a matter of never-ending concerns. She goes on to blame Gustad for Roshan's recurring diarrhoea, since he always insisted on not boiling drinking water. Roshan is a delicate and sickly child who keeps falling ill every now and then. Their second child, Darius also adds on their trouble with his growing intimacy with Jasmine, Rabadi's daughter. When Rabadi comes to complain against Darius, Dilnawaz warns her son to avoid Jasmine's companionship.

It is interesting to observe that Dilnawaz plays a stronger role than Gustad in family matters. It is her and not Gustad who toils hard to maintain peace in her family and ensures everyone's welfare. Since Gustad is mostly occupied with his duties

towards the outside world, Dilnawaz takes control of the family wellbeing and in her agonised and confused state of mind turns towards superstitious practices to uproot the 'evil spell' which she believes is casted upon her family. She starts finding sense in Miss Kutpitia's verdict and explanation of the events occurring in her life and this paves way to the strong subplot that Mistry has created surrounding these two women characters.

Miss Kutpitia: Wise yet Superstitious

Miss Kutpitia nicknamed as 'daaken' or witch by the neighbourhood children is a misanthropic lady who is looked on by others with a jaundiced eye. She is introduced as a powerful and headstrong character who has wisdom of the unknown. She is much ahead of the other women of Khodadad building as she is independent and unlike the stereotypical Parsi women of her times. However, Mistry does not capitalise on this, and she is reduced to being an irrational character, who practices black magic. Her coalition with Dilnawaz to get rid of the latter's problems culminates into superstitious practices that appear absurd and moronic. However, one cannot deny those acts as unavailing since Dilnawaz seems to attain her long-awaited desires towards the end of the story, with Roshan regaining her health and Sohrab coming back home and his possible reconciliation with Gustad, only after she follows the practices meticulously.

Kutpitia is a wizened woman of seventy who lives alone in her mysterious apartment and because of her stiff bones she is never seen anywhere else apart from her home. The physical description given by Mistry reinforces her uncanny personality and that is symbolic of her aura that she creates for herself. She has no friends in Khodadad building and her only acquaintance is Dilnawaz. The other residents of Khodadad building, including Gustad, avoid her and mock her because they think she is distinct, ludicrous and dangerous. This could be because unlike other women Kutpitia breaks the societal norms, displays mental strength, has knowledge of sorcery and the universe, is independent and has an intimidating personality. Such a woman is often considered fractious and hence dangerous by the society. Witches have been popular in English Literature since the times of Shakespeare. "People accused of being witches tended to be old, poor, single women" ("About Shakespeare - Beliefs and Superstitions") and Kutpitia was no exception.   The narrative has changed slightly in the modern times; however, an independent woman is still viewed with an element of distrust. According to Ankita Shukla's online article on *The Times of India*, the same idea is echoed in writer Anita Nair's opinion "that a woman could live a fulfilled life on her own terms was a concept writers seemed unable to conceive or unwilling to explore. Sadly, very little has changed. Women in fiction may have shrugged some of the straight jacketed representation but anytime a woman character chooses to live life on her own terms, readers tend to get agitated".

Such a Long Journey too essays the character of Miss Kutpitia who chooses to diverge from the standard path as a black magic practitioner. Mistry's depiction of

"her fanciful, fantastical imagination could be entertaining at times" (4) clearly proves that he has portrayed her as an irrational character, primarily. However, Kutpitia is also rational and understands the medicinal properties of herbs and plants much better than the other residents that Gustad himself could not deny. She once stops Gustad from uprooting an herb from his tiny garden. "'That is a very rare *subjo*, very rare!' she shouted down. 'The fragrance controls high blood-pressure!' And the tiny two-lipped white flowers, growing in spikes, contained seeds which, soaked in water and ingested, cured numerous maladies of the stomach" (Mistry 16). Her knowledge of the magical herb spreads widely, and the residents soon start using it for curing their ailments. Unfortunately, the same residents still disregard her for being secretive and leading an unconventional life. Mistry has only elaborated her cognition towards witchcraft practice and throughout the novel she is utilised by Dilnawaz to cast and remove spells for the well-being of the latter's family.

Women at the Helm of an Engaging Sub-Plot

Dilnawaz-Kutpitia sub plot runs parallel to the main plot of the novel and occupies a significant space. The sub plot is dominated by superstition and preposterous practices, nevertheless, it contributes to the progress of the story by yielding results that the protagonists yearn for. M. Mani Meitei observes:

> The sub-plot woven around Kutpitia-Dilnawaz also reaffirms this conviction. This theme that seemingly goes out of proportion may look like something disjointed or mechanical in the total structure of the novel… But at a closer look its structural function cannot be ruled out because it is this thematic development by way of a sub-plot that integrates the novel's central disintegrating and conflicting human elements. It is Dilnawaz and not Gustad who tries to make Sohrab come to terms with his father (81).

The sub-plot is engaging and helps the story progress in its own course. It also aids in the development of the main plot and towards the end of the story mingles with the main plot. Though, this sub-plot is strong and important, the very representation of the women at the helm of it is indeed objectionable. Nilufer E. Bharucha comments, "Miss Kutpitia's spells and magic, her being a 'witch' is not at all in a positive feminist sense. Instead, her magic spells are reduced to being a mere manifestation of women's irrational nature" (51). Both Dilnawaz, a submissive woman, and Miss Kutpitia, an independent woman, are dependent alike on chance and magic to repel and correct the mishaps of life. Here, Mistry has not sexualised them, but his intent behind showcasing them in a certain light is undoubtedly questionable and raises concerns whether this is how the society looks at women's capabilities.

Other Women Characters: Minor yet Relevant

Mistry has introduced few other minor women characters that do not play significant roles in the story yet are important to analyse the stereotype and

objectification hurled at women in a patriarchal society such as India and patriarchal community such as Parsis. Roshan is treated with a lot of affection by her family members and outsiders such as Dinshawji and Jimmy Bilimoria. She is portrayed as a sickly and fragile child who is mostly confined to her bedroom owing to her frequent ill health. She is in direct contrast to her brothers Sohrab and Darius. She lacks the mental prowess of Sohrab as well as the physical robustness of Darius. Her only importance in the story is that she is partially responsible for eliciting a bold and determined side of her mother, Dilnawaz. Her constant ill health is a never-ending concern for her mother and this, along with other anxieties, leads a demure Dilnawaz to take extreme measures conspiratorially.

Alamai is Dinshawji's wife, and she is portrayed as a domineering character. Though Alamai's character is restricted to a few pages only, and she appears in the novel only after the death of her husband, we get to learn about her from Dinshawji's description of her, which is mostly offensive. We discern and disapprove her as a loud and dispassionate woman who seems to control her husband. Dinshawji meekly accepts his wife's domination and calls her 'domestic vulture'. In contrast to Dilnawaz, Alamai as a housewife is unvarying as she packs the same kind of lunch for Dinshawji signifying her dispassionate nature. Even after Dinshawji's death and during his funeral Alamai's behaviour is more or less impassive, which leads the readers to believe that more than being a strong woman she is brash and cocky.

Laurie Coutino is another character who works in the same bank as Gustad and Dinshawji and falls prey to male gaze. Unlike the other women characters, she is the only one who is financially independent. Being a Catholic girl, she is more modern than the Parsi women, in her thoughts and in her attire. Unfortunately, even after being professionally qualified, deserving and independent she is typecasted, sexualised and objectified by the male employees. "Laurie, Laurie, one day I must introduce you to my little *lorri*" (Mistry 146), Dinshawji would say to her and unbeknownst that '*lorri*' was a Parsi slang, she would smile and approve. Gustad feels sorry for her and is annoyed at Dinshawji's conduct but also secretly admires "her patience and her svelte figure" (Mistry 97). Mistry has also demonstrated the sexual gaze of men towards the prostitutes of House of Cages. Tehmul, the dimwit, sees them as objects for sexual pleasure and begs them to let him touch them once. His mental retardation and incapability of controlling his sexual urge is the reason that leads him to sexually assault and leave his stains on the 'female' doll that he steals from Roshan. Mistry's portrayal of the male gaze on women characters speaks volumes about how the society visualised and treated its women in the nineteen seventies, ironically, a time when the country was ruled by its first woman Prime Minister.

Conclusion

The novel at the core is biased in favour of the male characters, however, they are never seen dominating the female folk. Gustad is a considerate husband and a pampering father to his daughter. Dinshawji happily plays a second fiddle to his wife.

Most male residents of Khodadab building are intimidated by Miss Kutpitia. Even the prostitutes at the House of Cages are never forced by their male customers. This gesture of Mistry does point out on the fact that female characters are not weak or helpless but at the same time also reveals the depth of character of the men in the novel. Gustad's rationality is more impressive than Dilnawaz's superstition. Alamai might dominate Dinshawji, but Dinshawji's calm, his patience and his jovial masquerade to hide his terminal illness, is far more impressive and hence he automatically gets closer to the readers. "Women characters who are in Mistry's fiction, are defined by their relationships to men in which they develop their own identities while fulfilling their obligations as Parsi wives, mothers, and sisters" (57), observe Neelakandan and Shankar.

The 'male gaze' has not objectified and sexualised the female characters, rather observes Dilnawaz as dutiful, desperate and peace loving; Miss Kutpitia as intimidating, strong, cranky, irrational and scheming; Roshan as fragile, innocent and happy; Alamai as dominating, cocky and harsh; Laurie as polished, educated, financially independent, sexually attractive and approachable. Mistry has made a versatile use of male gaze by moving further from the sexual gaze of men to interpret these characteristics in the female characters. However, since these female characters are developed from a male perspective, after investigation they appear stereotypical. The male gaze is naturally associated with dominance and masculinity which pronounces the male characters' sense of superiority over female characters. This leads to the fact that Mistry has not attempted to explore the female characters as much as the male characters. The pathos underlying Miss Kutpitia's lonely life and her turn towards sorcery, Dilnawaz's response towards her domestic drudgery, or Alamai's indifference and inconsideration are not investigated. This hints at shades of antifeminism where the women characters remain flat as compared to their male counterparts.

The novel is titled as *Such a Long Journey*, but the female characters do not journey as much. Nevertheless, Mistry has artistically portrayed his women characters by neither suppressing them nor violating them, but this alone cannot provide a happy reading for the feminist readers. He has provided a realistic portrayal of women characters who had little scope to offer anything significant but has ignored exploring them and as a result they become secondary characters and lose their importance. The twenty first century female readers find it uneasy to see the limited space offered to women characters and their stereotypical display. They would certainly love to see the Dilnawazs, Miss Kutpitias, Alamais and Lauries not through the male gaze but as individuals playing more significant roles and rationally defending themselves in a patriarchal set up.

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Self, Body and Ageing: Compromised Autonomy and Adaptive Strategies in Dubravka Ugrešić's *Baba Yaga Laid an Egg*

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Abstract

Often considered synonymous with the frailty of health, ageing is much more than a matter of physicality. Old age not only comes with metabolic changes but also carries numerous mental, social, and cultural implications that, more often than not, get overlooked. This article aims to study the diverse experience of ageing and the difficulties older adults are confronted with by examining the representation of the same in Dubravka Ugrešić's novel *Baba Yaga Laid an Egg* (2007). Using the Slavic legend of Baba Yaga, the novel ties together the seemingly unrelated narratives to develop a larger picture that sheds light on the phenomenon of ageing as an individual as well as a collective experience. The article, through a multidisciplinary theoretical framework which is predominantly psychoanalytic and psychosocial, will attempt to study the relationship between ageing selves and ageing bodies, their adaptive strategies in response to compromised autonomy as well as the social and cultural implications of ageing.
Keywords: Ageing; Self; Body ; Autonomy; Adaptive strategies.

The world is ageing, in ways more than one, at a pace faster than ever. We are to anticipate, as per World Health Organisation report, a remarkable demographic shift by 2050 which will see older adults form the majority of the world population ("Ageing and Health"). Socio-economic advancements in the spheres of healthcare and lifestyle have increased human life expectancy, resulting in a steadily growing population of older adults. Human perseverance to postpone death, however, is at odds with their approach towards ageing. Given the perpetual human quest for ways to prolong life, it is highly ironic that the world is ill-equipped, socially, politically and economically, to meet and accommodate the needs that a progressively ageing society demands. Discourse on ageing often is marred by a negativity bias, where the limitations and challenges that the advanced age presents itself with are foregrounded and dreaded. It, instead of perpetuating a positive view of old age as the healthy and natural progression of life, bolsters a stereotyped conception to the point that it in actuality turns into a discourse on anti-ageing.

While most of the early research on ageing was medically oriented, the changing demographics, among other things, have given gerontology impetus to venture beyond the whys of ageing. Ageing, being a multidimensional phenomenon, warrants a multidisciplinary approach to understand and effectively address its complexities and varied nuances; research otherwise, assuming a closed, exclusive perspective could be found lacking, or even counterproductive. The increasingly permeable borders between various disciplines in the discourse on old age have precipitated a paradigm shift in gerontological research - an increased emphasis on and efforts to study the ontology of ageing, moving from traditional gerontology to humanistic gerontology. Humanistic investigations into ageing, as diverse as they are, all centre around one question - "What does it mean to grow old?" (Cole et al.

xvi), which is also the question this article seeks to explore.

      This article will attempt to understand rather than explain one's experience of growing old, study the prejudices and stereotypes that form the popular perception of ageing and aged by looking at the literary representation of the final, longest yet disregarded developmental stage of the lifespan in Dubravka Ugrešić's novel *Baba Yaga Laid an Egg* (2007). It seeks to study the dynamics between ageing bodies and selves by exploring how the self is constructed, restructured, maintained or even defended in old age. While the central question guiding this investigation is humanistic in quality, the study will not be exclusively humanistic in its perspective and methodology. It will also delve into the social, cultural, psychological and other variables that layer the ageing process. Such an integrated, interdisciplinary perspective will be used to highlight the heterogeneity of the experience by looking into the changes and challenges old age comes with and the varied individual responses of Ugrešić's older protagonists to their changing circumstances.

      Literature has always been preoccupied with the transient nature of life, its frailty and uncertainty. While old age as motif, metaphor and theme has found ample representation in literary musings since time immemorial, literary attitudes towards ageing have predominantly been negative. The bards lamented the approaching old age, mourned the loss of youth and beauty, and sang of regrets. The vigor, vision and heroics of the young dominated plots while the aged are relegated to the background, sometimes taking centre stage only to affirm the existing stereotypes. With the advent of literary gerontology, this misplaced, even detrimental attention on ageing in the literary arena took a turn, bringing in a new tradition, and Dubravka Ugrešić's novel is an exemplar.

      Dubravka Ugrešić', a prolific Yugoslavian-Croatian writer, in her transnational writings, explores varied themes of life and loss, home and exile, past and present in the context of political and cultural upheavals, integrating history, myth and personal experience. Ugrešić's *Baba Yaga Laid an Egg* is her statement on ageing women using the Slavic myth of Baba Yaga. The novel's unconventional take has an unconventional structure. It has three parts, each completely different from the others yet oddly similar to form a seamlessly coherent novel. Part one is an autobiographical snippet of a successful author, exploring her relationship with her ageing mother. The second part presents the adventures of three elderly women, Pupa, Beba and Kukla, on their visit to Grand Hotel and its Wellness Center in the Czech Republic. In the form of written correspondence between Dr. Aba Bagay, a folklore scholar and her potential editor, the final part explains the underlying connection between the legend of Baba Yaga and the previous parts.

      As the tangible, obvious site of the ageing, body is a factor central to all gerontological research and therefore, a recurring motif in Ugresic's stories. The novel unfolds the complicated relationship the protagonists have with their ageing bodies. The author's unnamed mother, after successfully battling breast cancer, struggles with the tumorous growth in her brain. The metastases, which she refers to as 'cobweb' slowly but steadily ravage her body. It "lurked in a dark, elusive cranny of the brain, and stayed. In time she made her peace, got used to it and adopted it like an unwelcome tenant "(Ugrešić 9). Her linguistic capacity also diminishes as old age sets in. Pupa, briefly introduced in the first part of the novel as the mother's half-blind friend who uses a walker, is wheelchair-bound in the second story. Oldest of the four

protagonists, Pupa slumbers away in most parts of the story. Beba describes her as "an ancient porcelain cup that had been shattered and stuck back together again repeatedly … 'used' as little as possible, in order to be kept whole" (101). Kukla, unlike others, has an "enviable physical state" (101), impressively erect, considering her advanced years. Beba, always in conflict with her body, does not relate to the image in the mirror and believes her body to be conspiring against her.

The novel's discussion on ageing bodies highlights the plurality of ageing as an experience where the protagonists all in the advanced stages of life have diverse concerns and relationships with their bodies. While the mother's struggle with her ageing body is mostly cognitive, Pupa confronts age-related physical infirmities. Beba's intolerance of her body stems from her negative body image, which young and old alike are prone to. Kukla, on the other hand, doesn't face either physical or cognitive decline.

Ageing is a period of changes - in the body, in roles and relationships- and therefore, of adaptations. With changes ranging from subtle and negligible to drastic and disruptive, adaptation becomes the need of the hour. Most people, as per the studies, show immense resilience as they age by successfully adapting to their changing circumstances (281, Niktin and Freund). Ugrešić's heroines are no different.

Continuity is an important adaptive strategy that older adults frequently adopt. The continuity theory, developed by Robert Atchley, holds that older adults "preserve and maintain existing psychological and social patterns by applying familiar knowledge, skills, and strategies" (5). The mother took her obsession with cleanliness to a dizzying height post-diagnosis. On the hospital bed, she dreams of sneaking back home to tidy up. During her psychiatric evaluation, she repeatedly gives her name as 'vacuum cleaner'. She has an "everyday rhythm" (77) that involves frequenting the same cafe and ordering the same things. She calls Pupa often and maintains their friendship as she can no longer visit. In an attempt to adapt to the upheavals of later adulthood, she tightly holds onto her habits, activities, roles and relationships.

Defining successful ageing as "an adaptive process" (1), Paul Baltes and Margaret Baltes theorise Selection, Optimisation and Compensation (SOC) as the key components of adaptation, i.e, minimising the losses and maximising the gains by optimising the strengths and compensating. The mother devoting all her energy towards cleaning and maintaining her apartment, keeping herself engaged is her way of selecting, optimising and compensating for the physical constraints that limit her. The mother and Pupa use a walker and wheelchair respectively to compensate for their impaired mobility. While they resort to compensation using assistive devices, their respective stories underline varied adaptive responses to similar functional loss. The mother, unable to travel, finds compensation for hampered mobility in her daughter. She actively plans and sends her to the place she longs to visit and lives vicariously through her: "Mum wound me up and set me moving in the direction of Varna; she guided me by remote control like a toy, dispatched me to a place she could no longer travel to on her own...I was my mother's bedel" (Ugresic 41). Pupa, on the other hand, despite being wheelchair-bound, plans and takes a journey to another country with her friends. While she takes pleasure from the first-hand experience of the adventures, she also derives vicarious pleasure through her friends, whom she constantly encourages to take part in everything the luxurious hotel and its wellness

centre offer.

Adaptive strategies are used in response to physical changes as well as changes in cognition and social function. The mother comes up with different ways to help herself when aphasia hampers her linguistic capacity. When the words elude her, she uses diminutives to buy time and gather the scattered words. A darker timbre, an imperious tenor, and a commanding tone are developed to offset her frequent loss of words. The mother's instant friendship and continued correspondence with Aba, the young Bulgarian scholar, could partly be engendered by the need to socialise and connect with Bulgaria, her birth country. Aba, here, becomes the compensation for her social losses and restricted mobility. These adaptive responses the protagonists adopt to cope with their changing circumstances are conscious and intentional in efforts and can be presumed as coping strategies, as opposed to defense mechanisms which are non-conscious and unintentional.

Defense mechanism, first defined by Sigmund Freud and later modified and expanded by Anna Freud and many more who came after, is an individual's unconscious defensive response to negative stimuli. The novel in focus illustrates the defensive stance the mind takes towards the challenges of older adulthood. The narrator's mother uses denial to keep at bay the uncomfortable truths and harsh realities her life has come to mean. Unable to accept her diminishing lexical-semantic access, the mother initially denies her altered word and later is enraged. The mother gets rid of everything that reminds her of the precarity of existence. She throws away her black clothes, replaces photographs of the dead with those of the young wanting the "company of the living" (Ugrešić 15). The mother's aggravation towards the invasion of starlings can be perceived as a displaced reaction to the tumour-invaded body. Displacement, originally discussed by Freud in relation to his theory of dream formation, is a common defense mechanism of redirection, where hostile feelings are transferred onto a less threatening object or situation (Rui Miguel Costa 1). The mother's body was invaded, leaving behind an unwelcome tenant, the metastases in her brain. She confronts her frustration and helplessness borne out of this personal invasion without actually confronting it.

The narrators spend a considerable amount of time detailing ageing bodies, its transformation, challenges and adaptive strategies. The novel, however, does not reduce ageing to the diminishing functionality of body systems, rather, its attention on the functional challenges of the body serves as a starting point for a wider conversation on the perception and socio-cultural construction of ageing.

The notion of self is inextricably entangled with the body. Theories of embodied cognition hold the physical body central in investigations into cognition, emphasising the mutual influence of body and mind (Shapiro 4). This fundamental integration of mind and body essentially situates the self in the body, moving it from the realm of abstraction to materiality. As the renowned psychologist Roy Baumeister states, "Everywhere in the world, self starts with body" (2) and the novel's contextualisation of body in the discussion on ageing inevitably provides insights into the protagonists' selfhood, how it is maintained or transformed, and into the concomitant concepts of identity, autonomy and self-esteem, all in the light of changing realities of later adulthood.

Personal autonomy, the ability to decide for and govern oneself, is invariably

connected to the idea of self as to be autonomous, one "has to decide and act, or, more broadly live in general, according to motives that can count as expressions of one's self" (Kuher and Jelinek x). Personal autonomy forms a significant concern in the study of ageing. The physical, cognitive and social losses that old age brings can challenge one's ability to handle a broad range of daily tasks, leading to a feeling of compromised autonomy. Ugrešić explores this concern in her novel. The author's ailing mother uses order and control to confront the challenges to her autonomy. When the reins of her own life slip, with dementia and impaired mobility, she tries to retain her agency through spatial autonomy. "Her home had always been her kingdom" (Ugrešić 36) and she refuses to give it up. The mother finds the cupboard the author brings home a territorial invasion, paints it with Aba's help and admits it into her house only after making it her own. Even when she loses the will and strength to cook, she refuses to abandon the kitchen, "the realm of her absolute authority" (38), "defending it with her last ounce of strength" (38). The apartment, thus, becomes the metaphor for her perceived autonomy.

Diminishing control over the body poses a serious threat to self-efficacy, possibly affecting one's self-esteem. The battle of wills the mother and Pupa engage in with their respective daughters is in response to this perceived threat. The mother rages, scowls and stomps when her linguistic capacity is compromised. The mother considers incontinence, her loss of control over her bladder "the worst insult her body had come up with for her" (71). Incontinence in old age often translated as incompetence, is a stigmatising condition that may violate a person's self-esteem. The mother obstinately refuses to wear incontinence pads which she sees as a slight to her bodily autonomy. She also rejects the orthopaedic shoes, yet another reminder of losing control over her body.

The conscious and unconscious strategies that the protagonists use to adapt to the functional limitations are motivated by the universal, psychological need for self-efficacy, "a broad and stable sense of personal competence to master a variety of stressful situations" (Warner et al. 4). Perceived self-efficacy is one's belief in one's agency and capabilities and is significant in the context of ageing. In his psychological theory of self-efficacy, Albert Bandura argues that the kinds of adaptation strategies an individual initiates in response to stressors are determined by his perceived self-efficacy (193). The mother's fixation on cleanliness as an adaptation strategy in the changing context of life is also closely linked to her sense of self. It is an act of self-assertion. The starling's invasion of the neighbourhood serves as the external manifestation of the invasion of the mother's body and her aggravation at this takeover; a displaced emotional response is directly linked to her autonomous ego.

Increased dependency on others that old age demands could also be detrimental to one's sense of autonomy, affecting one's self-concept and self-esteem. Pupa, who had spent her younger years living on the edge, initially grapples with the idea of dependency and sees it as an affront to her agency. She resists her daughter's help every step of the way. Her grievance towards death, which "simply wouldn't come" (Ugrešić 20), is borne out of her indignation at having to turn to others for even the most basic tasks.

Autonomy and independence, although closely related, are not absolute synonyms. Variation in their semantic relation becomes all the more significant in discussions pertaining to the self. The Theory of Self-determination, proposed by

Ryan and Deci, distinguishes between autonomy and independence; the former is the ability to self-govern and the latter is the state of not being dependent on others, removed from external influence, interference and control (1562). Autonomy does not mean being independent of others; rather, is a matter of choice, the ability to make decisions and live life on one's own terms. While vacationing in the Czech Republic, Pupa, in her wheelchair, is chauffeured around by her friends and, thus, is heavily dependent on them. Pupa, here, has not only come to accept her dependence, she moreover seems less bothered by it. Pupa's movement from resistance to acceptance of her dependency, while exercising her agency, emphasises the coexistence of the concepts of dependency and autonomy. By not treating them as mutually exclusive categories, the novel takes the position that a coherent account of autonomy needs to recognise and acknowledge the interdependence of people, that autonomy, characterised by free will "can be adaptive for the maintenance of autonomy in old age to delegate actions that are perceived to be unrealistic to perform on one's own" (Warner et al. 4).

Body image, which relates directly to self-esteem, is a fundamental part of self-perception. The body undergoes a series of changes and transformations, both functionally and physically, as it ages. Beba finds it difficult to come to terms with her altered body, and the attention and crude remarks on her large breasts she has to deal with do not help either. Beba, in turn, develops a negative body image which manifests as dissociation from her own body. Beba and her body share a "mutual hostility"(101) and "mutual intolerance"(117). She sees herself in a body that is "not her own"(118) and bears it as a "punishment" (118). Her body has "already taken control" (118) before she could realise it, exacting "cruel revenge"(119) and "nothing belonged to her any longer" (119). It continues to "conspire against her "(118). The narrator's choice of words to relate Beba's relationship with her body is particularly significant, as they reveal not only her dissociation from the body, but also the extent of that separation.

Beba's attempt to rectify the situation and maintain a 'normal' body highlights the social significance of age-related body changes. Insecure of her changing body, Beba goes out of her way to "improve the situation" (119) - she wears a minimizer corset, gaudy ornaments and makes striking sartorial choices to deflect attention from her body. The internalised body standards leave her feeling insecure, inadequate and uncomfortable in her own skin and body. In her efforts to pursue society's narrow notion of ideal physicality, Beba becomes everything she hates, " gradually turning into what she found repellent" (119).

While body image dissatisfaction is not gender-exclusive, older women are more afflicted by such insecurities than their male counterparts. With their social worth contingent on beauty and youth, women, as they age, are often devalued based on their physical appearance, inevitably leading them to develop a negative view of themselves (Rocha and Terra 258). Ugrešić comments on this gendered ageism through Beba's musings on the stereotypes of older women. Women are turned into "desexualised old hags"(Ugrešić 120), once they cross the threshold age, a whole another category of sex "a third sex, a sex without sex" (120).

Old age is often considered a period of decline and degeneration, loss and deterioration. Most literary representations construe old age similarly, seldom going beyond the atrophy and deprivation that ageing individuals may experience. *Baba*

Yaga Laid an Egg, however, takes a nuanced approach where the ageing bodies are situated in its context to provide insights into the experience of ageing. Ageing does not occur in isolation or in the abstract. A constant interface exists between this process and the society in which it occurs. Locating the ageing bodies in their socio-cultural contexts, the novel explores the self-images and self-concepts of older women, their changing attitudes, the uncertainty they undergo, their adaptation to physical dependency and changing social roles, and questions the stereotypes the aged, especially women, are often reduced to. Moreover, through varied accounts of older women, the novel showcases the plurality of ageing as an experience. While portraying the common predicaments of ageing, the narrative is cautious so as not to treat older people as a monolithic whole. The gerontological investigation Ugrešić undertakes underlines ageing as a diverse, subjective experience. Taking the body as its central motif, the novel integrates biological, psychological, social and humanistic approaches in its literary exploration of the subject to provide a coherent account of the complex phenomenon of ageing. Most importantly, Ugrešić's account shows the subversive medium literary narratives can be in challenging the prevailing stereotypes of ageing while sensitising the masses to the concerns of older adults.

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Literary Symbolism of Wolf and its Howl in Paulo Coelho's *The Devil* and *Miss Prym*

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Abstract

Paulo Coelho's works are known for their motivational qualities and the use of literary symbolism. His philosophical fiction *The Devil and Miss Prym* highlights the importance of 'choice' in a world struggling between good and evil. While Coelho narrated a story characterising the devil as a symbol of seduction, this paper closely analyses how the animal wolf and its howl is used as a symbol of the devil in *The Devil* and *Miss Prym*. The paper further explores how the wolf's howl impacts the novel's characters and narrative structure, probing the complexity of representing the wolf and its howl as literary symbols within the same context.
Keywords: fiction, novel, Paulo Coelho, symbol, wolf, howl, devil, evil

Introduction

A ferocious wild animal known for its grandeur, intelligence and howl, wolves have been considered literary symbols for many years in literature. In *Inferno* from his *Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri used wolves to represent greed and fraud. At the same time, Europeans in the Middle Ages called anything that made their lives more difficult "the wolf". In the past, wolf has also been a common topic in fables. Native American tribes called the full moon in January the "wolf moon" because they observed that wolves were active during the full and bright moon in January (Emspak). While wolves howl at night, whether they are howling at the moon is still unknown, though they are nocturnal and howl more frequently when the moon is visible. The same wild animals are known for confining themselves to their packs, setting strict boundaries to their roaming spaces within dense forests. Such characteristics envisaged symbolic, metaphoric, epithetic and idiomatic properties to wolves from religious and spiritual perspectives, both in positive and negative manners, continuing to be used today. Nowadays, wolves are understood as symbolic of courage, strength, loneliness and even of evil and horror. *The Secret History of the Mongols* states that Chinggis Khan was born from a blue wolf and a fallow doe, with the blue wolf symbolising the heavenly masculine spirituality, the Eternal Sky (Cassidy 135). While a symbol is an object or an action that means something more than its literal meaning (Chandel 31), a prominent Latin-American fiction that used the wolf and its howl as a symbol is Paulo Coelho de Souza's *The Devil and Miss Prym*.

The novel narrates the story of a small village named Viscos, seduced by the devil in the form of a stranger to sin together by murdering someone in exchange for

wealth. First published in 2000, it mainly revolves around three characters: A Stranger, Miss Chantal Prym and Bertha. As the novel is regarded as a tale of the fight between good and evil, it essentially asks whether people, in general, are good or evil. Though the devil accompanied the stranger, Viscos yielded to his demand, trying to kill an old woman Bertha in exchange for eleven gold bars. While Coelho has used multiple literary symbols in *The Devil and Miss Prym* and focuses on the deeds and demands of the stranger, the literary symbolism of the wolf and its howl stands apart in a few instances. This research paper is an analysis thereof.

The Wolf and its Howl

The novel begins with identifying the stranger as the devil, who walks down the village into its only hotel available for stay. The stranger confronts a hotel servant, Miss Chantal Prym and discloses his plan at the top of a mountain, simultaneously making Prym depressed. He wanted Viscos to sin by murdering any of its inhabitants in exchange for all his savings from his life's work, converted into eleven gold bars. The gold bars could give Viscos enough wealth to survive for generations and be an offer the villagers might not resist. The stranger's offer also makes Chantal anxious, and her anxiety does not let her sleep for almost three days, during which she suffers from a high fever and hears a wolf's howl. As Coelho writes:

> On the third night, then, she found herself in the presence of evil. And evil came to her in the form of extreme tiredness and a soaring fever, leaving her in a half-conscious state but incapable of sleep - while outside in the darkness, a wolf kept howling. Sometimes she thought she must be delirious, for it seemed the wolf had come into her room and was talking to her in a language she couldn't understand (39).

Thus, the author writes that Chantal's imagination made her hear a wolf's voice. However, when Chantal tried to get up and walk to the church, she realised she could not (Coelho 40). She felt ill and as if she would die on the spot if she tried to go to the church and wait for the priest to open its doors. But something had changed in her; she needed contact with the world before she went completely mad (Coelho 40). Later on, no one believed her words when Chantal told others she heard a wolf. While two others were confident that they did not hear a wolf, one doubted Chantal's delusions to be the howl of the "rogue wolf". Explaining the myth behind "rogue wolf", Chantal says:

> A man from Viscos - a blacksmith, to be precise - was out for a walk when, all of a sudden, he came face to face with a wolf and its young. The man was terrified, but he tore off a branch and made to attack the animal. Normally, the wolf would have run away but as it was with its young, it counter-attacked and bit the man on the leg. The blacksmith, a man whose job requires enormous strength, managed to deal the wolf such a blow that it finally ran back into the forest with its cubs and was never seen again; all anyone knew was that it had a white mark on its left ear. (Coelho 60).

Since the animal had already tasted blood, it may become dangerous, hunting for

more human blood. Viscos named the particular wolf "Rogue Wolf" to identify it quickly (Coelho 60).

Chantal later felt relieved when she went to the house of a woman named Bertha. An old woman considered useless to Viscos by its inhabitants, Bertha remembered she also heard the sound of a wolf howling the previous night (Coelho 47). Bertha associates the howl with the stranger, commenting on how Viscos has started changing since that man set foot. Chantal then heads towards the forest where the stranger hid his gold to steal it and run away, as the stranger had already mentioned its location to Miss Prym. She wanted to save her village from sinning by removing the gold and using it for her benefit so that her villagers would not commit any sins for wealth. Her way of thinking makes Coelho attribute Chantal to the devil, as she also starts thinking of evil with goodness as a mask. When Chantal hurried to dig up the gold bar from a 'Y-shaped mountain' near Viscos, she felt the presence of the rogue wolf behind her. The wolf stood a few metres apart, snarling and ready to attack, when the stranger appeared from nowhere to help. Together, they chased away the wild animal, but Chantal was sure what she experienced was real. Coelho then writes:

> She had met two wolves that day, one who could be scared off with fire and another who wasn't scared of anything anymore because he had already lost everything he valued and was now moving blindly forward, intent on destroying everything in his path (Coelho 130).

Symbolising Wolf

As seen in the above instances of the novel, Chantal Prym and Bertha are simultaneously afraid, anxious and disappointed concerning the future of Viscos as its inhabitants. Their anxiety did not let them sleep, affecting their mental health and destroying inner peace. Miss Prym and Bertha heard the wolf's howl at such a point when both women were at the peak of their anxiety. Studies in human psychology show that stress and anxiety are temporary reactions to potentially harmful situations (Seinfeld et al. 2006). Another set of studies finds verbal hallucinations often associated with pronounced anxiety, and anxiety somehow triggers them (Ratcliffe and Wilkinson 48). They attribute anxiety as not merely a consequence of verbal hallucinations but what triggers and shapes their content (48).

The reference to a voice 'confirming' one's feelings indicates that it not only expresses pre-formed feelings but also adds to them in some way. This is plausibly construed in terms of it giving them a more determinate content, one that is an object of anxious anticipation. Feelings of inadequacy and the like are at first indeterminate, but can take on a more determinate linguistic guise that 'confirms' the emotional appraisal it is congruent with and out of which it arises (Ratcliffe and Wilkinson 53). Comparing the instances of hearing the wolf howl in the fictional novel with the study results mentioned above, one could see how Miss Prym's and Bertha's fear and anxiety might have given them verbal hallucinations.

However, Miss Prym also encountered the wolf, fighting the animal with the

stranger's help. At that point in the novel, the wolf becomes symbolic, and the world of literary symbols gives the animal wolf infinitely complex symbolic meanings. As a result, they are endowed with positive and negative properties. Looking at the existing meanings of the wolf as a literary symbol in religions, cultures and traditions, the symbolism of the wolf would be regarded as positive because it can see in the dark (Chevalier et al. 1119).

The wolf becomes a symbol of light, the sun, the warrior and hero, and the mythic ancestor. In Europe, one of the wolf's recognised duties was that of conductor of souls. Evidence of this may be found in the words of a Romanian funerary song: 'the wolf knows the way through the forest and will bring you along a smooth path to the King's Son in Paradise' (Chevalier et al. 1121).

The Indians of the North American prairies seem to have attached wolves with the manifestation of the power of the light of Heaven (Alexander 189). The Chinese also had a celestial wolf (the star Sirius) and a watch person outside the Heavenly Palace (the Great Bear). Its polar character made them attribute the wolf to the north. It should be emphasised at that point that the guard's role has replaced the animal's ferocious aspects, and thus, in some areas of Japan, wolves are invoked to protect the people against other wild animals (Chevalier et al. 1120). In Kamchatka, at the yearly October festival, an image of a wolf is made from straw and kept for a whole year so that the wolf can 'marry' the young women in the village. A Samoyed legend is on record of a woman who lived in a cave with a wolf' (Roux 328-329). On the other hand, the wolf is associated with a devourer symbolism because of its mouth, the archetypal image of initiation, connected with the alterations of the day and night and life and death. In Scandinavian mythology, the wolf is explicitly described as 'devouring the stars' and compares with the wolf that ate the quail in the *Rig-Veda* (Durand 82).

Moreover, if Quail is the symbol of light, the wolf's mouth is night, the cavern, the underworld or the phase of cosmic "pralaya". Release from the wolf's jaw is dawn, the light of initiation which follows a descent into the underworld or "kalpa" (Durand 82). Wolves have also been given the role of the conductor of souls. An Algonquin myth shows the wolf in the guise of a brother of the Demiurge Menebuch, the great rabbit, ruling the kingdom of the dead in the west (Muller 253). Even in Europe, one of the wolf's recognised duties was that of conductor of souls. Evidence of the same may be found in the words of a Romanian funerary song: "*...the wolf knows the way through the forest and will bring you along a smooth path to the King's Son in Paradise*" (Chevalier et al. 1121).

However, contrary to the above-given connotations, the Bible regards the wolf as symbolic of enemies and evil leaders. According to the book of Ezekiel, "Your leaders are like wolves who tear apart their victims. They destroy people's lives for money" (*New Living Translation*, Ezek. 22.27). Similarly, the book of Zephaniah regards the judges of Jerusalem as "ravenous wolves" in the evening, who by dawn have left no trace of their prey (Zeph. 3.3). It is also the case with the book of Acts, where St Paul the apostle addresses the Ephesians, saying 'savage wolves' will come

among them without sparing the flock (Acts. 20.29). The New Testament witnesses Jesus Christ using the wolf as a symbol of the enemy, comparing his disciples to lambs sent amongst wolves (Luke 10.3). While both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible associated wolf with evil, it is not apparent whether the evil is people or their leaders. Anyhow, taking a closer look at the Bible's definition of evil highlights the fact that the word "evil" stands for none other than the devil. As put forward by St John, the apostle again in his letter, "The one who does what is sinful is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3.8).

The use of the wolf as a symbol of the devil by Paulo Coelho in *The Devil and Miss Prym* thus strongly links itself to the symbolic presence of the wolf in the Bible. The Bible symbolises the wolf as an enemy, Coelho associates the same animal with the devil, and the devil acts as an enemy within the novel's context. The wolf's howl, a characteristic feature of the animal, symbolises the wolf, thereby symbolising the devil. Thus, Coelho's use of the wolf as a symbol cannot be attributed to the idea of light, sun or hero but to the devil or the evil, who is an enemy, deriving inspiration from Biblical traditions. Bertha and Miss Prym were accustomed to the devil's presence, and they were the only two in Viscos to hear the howl of a wolf. Miss Prym and the stranger meet a wolf in the forests, escaping the animal only by luck, validating that the devil is present in the novel as a wolf.

Symbolising Wolf's Howl

The association of sound with specific imageries also elicit varied meanings according to different contexts. Universal conceptions of sounds across cultures are associated with everyday emotions, and sound becomes a meaningful symbol concerning the emotions they cause. In the novel, Coelho resorts to a universal sound called the wolf's howl to evoke a negative/mysterious emotion in the reader through Bertha and Miss Prym. According to Victor Zuckerkandl, sound becomes a symbol more powerful than a word through signification (68). He talks mainly about tones in music but says his ideas apply to all acoustic phenomena. For him,

> "Words lead away from themselves, but tones lead into themselves. Words only point toward what they mean, but, beyond that, leave it, so to speak, where it is: the nonmaterial 'being in' of the meaning in the word is a mere 'being signified'. On the other hand, Tones have completely absorbed their meaning into themselves and discharge it upon the hearer directly in their sound. Thus, Sound is a 'dynamic symbol' that immediately affects the hearer" (Zuckerkandl & Trask 68).

Several sounds are commonly used to elicit negative and positive emotions. The sounds associated with negative emotions include screams and howls, which are discordant and atonal. These universal conceptions of sound that produce negative emotions are seen best in horror movies, where sound plays a huge role in stimulating fear and a sense of the supernatural. Philip Hayward, speaking about the initial use of sounds in horror movies, says,

"Dramatic scenarios in horror movies were open for dramatic acting and voice performances. It allowed the (previously silent) representation to accompany its dramatic voice, creating an enduring feature of horror-film soundtracks. Along with it came a set of sound effects already established in theatrical performance, many of which are mysterious bird and animal noises, creaks, thunder and lightning" (Hayward 6).

Similar to what can be seen generally in the case of horror films, the sound of the wolf disseminated through its howl in the novel can be ascribed to have similar effects on the characters Bertha and Miss Prym. The devil's presence and the wolf's howling are two crucial instances that bring Bertha and Miss Prym into a relational space. The emotion of anxiety elicited through the mysterious connection of both instances is primarily cued by the wolf's howl. The howl becomes a sound symbol that produces a negative emotion of anxiety and attributes a mysterious feel to the narration. As a dynamic symbol, it leaves varied meanings in their effect on the characters and the readers, further ascertaining the symbolic meaning of the wolf as an animal representing evil.

Conclusion

Paulo Coelho incorporates biblical connotations of wolf symbolism throughout *The Devil and Miss Prym*, enriching the narrative with deep layers of meaning and inviting readers to explore spirituality and human nature. As a symbol, the wolf carries a weight of biblical significance in the novel. The author draws upon the biblical references to wolves, portraying them as agents of darkness and temptation, echoing the biblical imagery of wolves in sheep's clothing. Through such a lens, the wolf embodies the presence of evil and serves as a metaphorical representation of the devil himself, prowling amongst the villagers and tempting them to succumb to their darkest desires. Coelho utilises the biblical symbolism of the wolf to delve into the age-old struggle between good and evil, sin and redemption. The stranger's arrival in the isolated village catalyses a moral dilemma, placing the residents in a position of choice between righteousness and corruption. The wolf is then attributed to the stranger, who is also identified as the devil, making the animal assume the characteristics of the devil, who exposes the true nature of individuals and lays bare their moral character.

Furthermore, Coelho employs the wolf as a symbol of transformation and awakening. Throughout the novel, characters are confronted with their inner wolves, primal instincts and untamed desires. The encounters with the wolf become pivotal moments of self-realisation, prompting the characters to confront their demons and make choices that determine their spiritual fate. By infusing his narrative with biblical connotations of wolf symbolism, Coelho prompts readers to reflect on their spiritual journeys. The wolf represents the inherent struggle between sin and redemption, the constant temptation to yield to the darker aspects of human nature. Through the characters' encounters with the wolf, Coelho poses fundamental questions about free

will, morality, and the potential for spiritual transformation.

Coelho can also be seen employing the established notion of sound in *The Devil and Miss Prym* by using the mysterious animal sound to create an effect of suspicion and fear. Nevertheless, unlike in cinema, the symbolic value of the sound in this novel comes with its narrative association of the events and characters. Hence, while Coelho symbolises the wild animal wolf connecting it to the devil, he uses the possibility of using the wolf's howl as a sound symbol to achieve the desired effect of mystery and suspicion, playing with the reader's imagination.

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The Fever Comes and Goes: Encountering Ecohorror, Toxicity, and Dystopian Impulses in Samanta Schweblin's *Fever Dream*

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Abstract

Samanta Schweblin's novel *Fever Dream* could be identified as an "ecohorror"—a hybrid categorization that borders human fears and heightened eco-awareness. Fever Dream is about Amanda, who is slowly dying in a clinic, in company of David, a spectral character retracing the exact moment of their contact with "worms". Uncovering the toxic contamination of water bodies in Argentina and its subsequent connections with birth defects, neurological imbalances, and fertility problems, Schweblin contrives a tale of anthropogenic monstrosity—deformed beings, poisoned animals, and collapsing ecology. The climate fictions and eco-dystopias had long predicted the implications of industrialization, deforestation, increasing livestock farming, the adverse effects of deep-sea mining on ecological processes, and the rapid burning of fuels. Drawing on the implications of environmental wreckage and loss of habitats, these novels unveil varied responses of 'fabulated agencies' that had once been on the receiving end, as seeking revenge on the perpetrators. Looking at how ecohorror is developed in the novel, this paper argues that toxicity is a hyperobject that radically transforms how we look at anthropocentrism and ecology. The paper interrogates the possibilities of using ecohorror as a medium to instil environmental awareness—through the representation of the gothic, and the metamorphosed and likewise, exposing the fissures of 'anthropocentric' reality.
Keywords: Ecology, Toxicity, Ecohorror, Anthropocentrism, Gothic.

Introduction

In recent strands of ecohorror, nature and the natural world are transfigured into phobic landscapes and desolate territories that haunt, unsettle, disrupt, and attack, to 'reclaim' what was once 'verdant'. A broader approach to ecohorror includes those texts that represent human contamination of the environment, and where 'horrific' tropes and signifiers are used for the promotion of an ecological awareness or narratives that blur the distinctions between human and non-human agents (Rust and Soles). Argentinian author Samanta Schweblin is associated with writings that are particularly unsettling, disquieting, and uncanny. Her works are respondent with characters from the netherworlds, situations that defy rationality, and humans that act in the most unexpected ways. In forging such situations and actions that tilt readers towards the uncertain, Schweblin contrives stories that represent both ends of the spectrum: myriad dystopic possibilities and utopian alternatives from a long-repressed cultural history. *Fever Dream* in particular, captures the anxieties of rural poisoning that had been explored in length in *Silent Spring*. In the book, the dangers of DDT and other chemical pesticides were crystallised by Rachel Carson, in one of the

most significant publications of the 20th century which informed researchers about a number of unforeseen effects of chemical toxicity (Davis 1). Evoking sensations of "ecohorror" and "eco-dystopia", *Fever Dream* can be read as a novel about chemical toxicity and its abrasive transformation of both human and non-human life in the countryside of Argentina. The novel pervasively bears dystopian impulses, since it is about widespread toxic contamination in the rural community and the environment at large, as Andrea Meador Smith remarks that *Fever Dream* embodies, "a dystopian nightmare in which, I argue, maternal failure gives rise to monstrous children and ecological disaster" (Smith 112). Although, it must also be noted that the novel's ecological tone, depiction of shamanism through an "energy healer", and its magical elements provides space to rethink about alternative "utopian" possibilities that have been substituted and supressed by the intertwined forces of anthropocentrism and capitalism. As Tess Thackara observes,

> Shamanism and transcendental spiritual practices have roots outside of the West, in the cultures of indigenous peoples across the world—cultures, it bears reinforcing, that are no less modern. As indigenous rights groups like Survival International (SI) have long argued, these cultures offer just as much, perhaps even more, to learn from than their Western counterparts. (Thackara)

The novel reinforces the idea for a "utopic alternative" through the practise of shamanism and healing as a source of resistance, reincarnation, and rebuilding, against anthropocentric, scientific, and overtly industrial domination instigated by "a savage biocapitalism" (Heffes). Likewise, the ecocritical tone of the novel is spliced with supernaturalism to elicit sensations of fear—a phobic awakening that seeks to arouse urgency and ecological commitment. Quite often, the strategy of narrating a cautionary tale involves the inclusion of attributes that maybe graphic, horrific, and repulsive. The inclusion of children as characters undergoing pain and suffering builds on to the 'apprehensive' effect in the novel, as it is on a warning about a time to come—a future world contaminated to its extreme.

Schweblin's Ecohorror: Civility, Grotesque, and Anthropocentrism

Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles in their book *Fear and Nature* posits that we are living in ecohorrific times, wherein the wildfires are spreading across US, heat waves are affecting people's lives across Europe, India being affected by floods and droughts, Greenland is losing tons of ice where the number runs to billions, and the planet is facing its sixth mass extinction (Tidwell and Soles 1). According to them, although contemporary ecohorror narratives respond to environmental fears, the connection between horror and the Anthropocene is not a new phenomenon but dates to the period when the horror and fantasy narratives first emerged during the mid-18th century—a time which is also marked as the beginning of the Anthropocene. Since then, various forms of planetary crises have resulted in the evolution of the genre, bearing representations that seem to capture tensions and anxieties ranging from unrestrained science to untameable and vengeful animals, "placing such attacks in the

context of larger climate change–related issues" (Tidwell and Soles 2). Ecohorror narratives dissolve the anthropocentric bias which privilege the male figure as a 'master of all', conquering and vanquishing as he asserts dominion over the planet, its resources, and its inhabitants. Ecohorror narratives other than being critical of the strategies deployed in planetary control and the subsequent environmental crises, rouses the spectacle of ecological transformation that illustrates a dire futuristic situation. The transformation could be about mutative beings, unfamiliar territories and hostile environments which propels danger and risk, as contrasted to the prioritised notions of safety and comfort. In *Fever Dream*, the horror is often invoked through this transformative image, of humans and non-humans that impart the shock-value and likewise, the affective role of the text is instrumental in developing an awareness of chemical pollution.

Argentina is the third largest soy producer in the world and has been having problems of pesticide-based toxicity in its countryside—an issue that Schweblin problematises in the novel at many levels. According to an article on CBS News: "A government study there found alarming levels of agrochemical contamination in the soil and drinking water, and 80 percent of the children surveyed carried traces of pesticide in their blood" (AP). The article also states that, Dr. Maria del Carmen Seveso, who spent 33 years as an overseer became concerned when birth records from the area revealed a quadrupling of congenital defects, from 19.1 per 10,000 to 85.3 per 10,000, in the decade following the approval of genetically modified crops and their agrochemicals in Argentina (AP). Illnesses that Seveso said were previously rare, had been found in the survey, including birth deformities including misshapen brains, exposed spinal cords, blindness and deafness, neurological impairment, infertility, and other skin problems. *Fever Dream* uncovers the toxic contamination of water bodies in Argentina and its subsequent connections with birth defects, neurological imbalances, and fertility problems. It begins with Amanda dying in a clinic, as David, an uncanny figure is helping her recall the exact moment of encountering the poison or "when the worms come into being" (Schweblin 2). The worms signify the effect of the poison in the body, as they wriggle the organs inside, the pain coming and going: "And now there is something else in my body, sometimes that activates again or maybe it deactivates, something sharp and bright" (Schweblin 139). Like the environment, the body acts as a site of disorientation, a 'space' harbouring the anomaly, contaminated with worms, and gradually 'collapsing'.

The rendering of the inside within the outside—the body of the earth and the body of Amanda point to the morbid transformations and widespread chemical pollution affecting one another. This also alters the state of consciousness for Amanda, who in a condition of 'fever dream' frequently confuses whether she is seeing things as they are or hallucinating. The conversation between them is frequently interrupted by Amanda, who is unsure about what they are looking into: "Are you sure these kinds of comments are necessary? Do we have time for this?" (Schweblin 3). Amanda's state of perplexity about her surroundings is also shared by Carla and other residents, who have been nonchalant about the toxicity and its

severity. Carla blames her son David, calling him a monster and holding him responsible for many peculiarities witnessed around them, such as the death of multiple ducks and horses around their house. Meanwhile, the nurses are equally uninformed about the severe contamination in their village, as one of them prescribes a medicine for sunstroke rather than treating Amanda and her daughter for poisoning.

The cause for environmental degradation is rooted in human-based activities, and furthers to how capitalism and industrial work immediately affects the main characters of the novel. The biotechnological intervention in food processing helps sustain life, and in a way also disrupts it. Both the caregivers and care-receivers have been affected by contamination through a non-natural, industrialised process as contrasted to how maternal care and nutrition is based on naturally oriented tradition, accessed through the body of the caregiver (Francica 130).

In its current iteration, capitalism as an ecological regime is pushing against the limits of environmental sustainability, against the limits of nature with a capital "N" if you will, as it seeks continuous growth. Piovani's images highlight that in so doing, this regime also pushes against the limits of human biology. It produces toxic landscapes, toxic bodies and, by extension, spills into toxic discourse. (Pérez 25)

Falling back on the Anthropos, the novel depicts the 'slow violence' caused by chemical poisoning and the nonchalance of those who unload the poison in the fields: "it all happens slowly and pleasantly, the men are nice and they smile….when they finish unloading the drums, they wave the driver off" (Schweblin 70). Initially, Nina complains to her mother regarding the wetness induced by the toxic chemicals as the rescue distance is rendered useless. At this point of time—even with the meticulous and dedicated care that Amanda has for her daughter, she doesn't realise that something is wrong with Nina. The poison gradually starts to take its effect on both of them: "I feel the wet seat of my pants" and "bitter, bitter, yes. But it's so subtle," (Schweblin 76) followed later by Carla's comment, "It happens Amanda. We're in the country, there are sown fields all around us" (Schweblin 78).

In *Fever Dream*, the acts of civility and grotesque are brought in plain sight, by the actions of the characters. Both the mothers regulate their children's behaviour and good mannerisms are immediately rewarded with praise and acknowledgement. The children before the contamination are shown to be polite, responsive and a blessing to the parents, while after their contact with poisoning, the position on them reverses. David's transformation is looked upon as repulsive, an abomination that is both weird and uncanny. The girl at the store is another example of where civility and grotesque are brought head-to-head, where the mother tries to discipline her metamorphized daughter. The child is first, reduced to a less-than-human proportion by Amanda, who describes her cry as "high-pitched and clipped, like a bird imitating a child", then she describes her physical features as like that of a "monkey". The transfiguration of the child into a "human-animal" subject blurs the line between the human and the non-human, as Cynthia Francica observes "at a time of historic social and legal changes with respect to gender and sexuality rights in Argentina, which has witnessed urgent debates on the reconfiguration of familial bonds, kinship, and care, these literary

works propose a parallel reimagining and reinvention of those bodies and affects in flux" (Francica 145). In a discussion on sublime contagion, Sarah Perry states that the gothic undergoes limitless adaptability. She describes encounters with gothic as being "deliciously uneasy, repulsively thrilled, sublimely afraid. It gives licence to sensations that we feel but cannot admit, and at precisely the same time cloaks those sensations in such strangeness" (Perry). The reception of grotesque and uncanny in the gothic experience, is hence, termed "revelatory", as we encounter "primitive desires, taboos and secret urges" (Perry). The gothic tests the peripheries of civil society and exposes what "lies beyond the boundary of society and reason" (Perry).

Being far from the city, and amidst greenery, the sign of an alarming weather is invoked in the novel time and again as Amanda remarks about the rising temperature: "I leave the door open and roll the window down, because it's very hot" (Schweblin 5). The novel explicates ways in which ecological catastrophe is interlinked within the matrix of varied anthropocentric forces, that hamper normality and naturality: springs poisoning horses and endangering sustainability, children either born mutated or are physically and psychologically transformed, and supernatural forces that intervene in the destructive process. *Fever Dream* can be read as a novel about two mothers and their collapsing affective care, percolating over an expansive presence of toxic chemicals.

In the novel, Amanda is depicted as the caregiver and nurturer, contrasted to her husband who fails to recognise the spirit of their daughter Nina, reinforced in the bodily gestures of David. Similarly, many such motherly figures have been depicted as the ones losing on the safety of their children—for instance Carla's grieving narration about how she lost her old David, and the mother at the counter with her little girl described as: "one of her legs is very short, it barely goes past her knee, but still has a foot" and "secretly I think that if the girl were my daughter I wouldn't know what to do, it would be horrible" (Schweblin 42). The original title of the novel in Spanish, refers to the term "rescue distance" which is about the gap between the mother (Amanda) and her child (Nina): the distance a mother needs to cover for the immediate protection of her child. A hypothetical rope had been imagined by Amanda that bound her to Nina, as a sign of her maternal instinct that would warn her whenever the child was in danger. The loosening of the rope in the latter half of the novel attunes to the wide prevalence of environmental threat rather than the failure of mothers in securing their children. This point is strengthened through the description of how the non-human lives were equally threatened by the widespread contamination.

Toxicity as Hyperobject

"The hyperobject spells doom now, not at some future date" states Timothy Morton in the segment titled "The End of the World" (Morton 104). For Timothy Morton, a hyperobject is "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (Morton 1) where "one only sees pieces of a hyperobject at any one moment" (Morton 4). Hyperobjects enable us to reconsider our positions in the world, embracing a

double denial of human supremacy, grounded in what Morton calls, "humiliation" (Morton 17-19). Hyperobjects may be something intangible yet its presence can be felt or understood through its smaller constituent parts. For instance, global warming as a hyperobject is understood with rising temperatures and the melting of glaciers, or through unprecedented forest fires. Toxicity can be understood as pervasive and prevalent across places and cultures, spanning varieties of meaning. In *Fever Dream*, toxicity as a hyperobject is encountered through chemical contamination, in its varied forms. In the beginning of the novel, Carla's account revealed the contamination of the stream that had led to David's poisoning and the death of their prized stallion. Toxicity is at the heart of the novel, emerging time and again through different altercations and situations, unfolding its grotesque consequences—be it on the residents or on domesticated animals and stray birds that lay either dying or paralyzed. The poisoning leaves behind an intergenerational consequence on the residents: "Not all of them go through poisoning episodes. Some of them were born already poisoned, from something their mothers breathed in the air, or ate or touched" (Schweblin 124). The poison in that sense unleashes a butterfly effect, becoming a 'contagion', passing from mother to the offspring. The toxicity, chemical contamination and the transgenerational effects on the characters in the novel, is a 'horrific' activity that alarms us, and allows us to think ecologically:

> For Morton, this "thinking ecologically" will first require the "smashing" of the aesthetic bubble we call a world (page 127). The end of the world is like waking up inside something big (pages 118-19), which penetrates you to the cellular level and yet sticks to you and everything you know on Earth and everywhere: it is something like a wasp drowning in a jar of honey—the more you panic and resist it, the more stuck you become (page 30). And at the same time, you know that there are an endless succession of larger objects in which you are stuck: "we are always inside an object" (page 17). This is humiliating for humans, Morton tells us, and this is a good thing. (Daggett)

Morton argues that the discovery of Object-Oriented Ontology or OOO are the symptoms, and pointers towards the "shaking of being", a reorientation of how we consider the "Anthropos" or as he terms it, "quake-being" (Morton 19). Ana María Mutis argues that *Fever Dream* uses the conventions of "gothic" to address the difficulty of expressing agrochemical toxicity, while also criticising the propensity to prioritise the visible and immediate, which ignores the silent and hidden impact of a "hyperobject" and makes its "slow violence" simpler to ignore. The horrific effects of the abuse of pesticides become visible and evident, thanks to the capacity of Gothic fiction to give shape to a 'spectral menace' (Mutis 40). Gothic literature in particular, prioritised supernatural elements, sublime, absurdity and the unexplainable to counter the enlightenment's 'pretentious confidence' in using logic and reason to explain all phenomena (Mutis 40). In the gothic convention, time is warped and stretched, reality is blurred using dream sequences and nightmares open gaps in the psyche, as recalling and forgetting becomes frequent in advancing the narrative. We see that Amanda has problems in weaving a coherent understanding or joining the

dots together, which in one way is the poison taking effect.

What Shapiro calls the "chemical sublime" could be taken as a point of reference for understanding the horrors that unfold with David and later, with Amanda and Nina, as in the "indistinct and distributed harms are sublimated into an embodied apprehension of human vulnerability to and entanglements with ordinary toxicity" (Shapiro). The "chemical sublime" points to how ordinary life is intertwined with the late industrial period, the visible and invisible toxicities that are manifested alongside daily livelihood, marked by worsening climate change, social relations, economy, and infrastructural instability (Shapiro). Toxicity percolates through food, water, air, land, and other forms of contact as vulnerable bodies may be directly impacted, showing signs or "wounds" overtime. Óscar A. Pérez in his article, "Toxic Chemicals in Samanta Schweblin's *Distancia de Rescate (Fever Dream)*" argues that the chemical sublime could be useful as a concept, to understand what happens to the characters, extending over a longer period of time. For Óscar, the emphasis on human-centric subjectivities could be left out to understand how toxicity is portrayed as lively matter that interacts with living organisms at a fundamental level and modifies them in unpredictable and incomprehensible ways and additionally, harmful compounds can cause a variety of other processes that can be just as mysterious as the intricate interactions occurring at the molecular level (Pérez 150). Likewise, there are many other processes triggered by the compounds, which may be unintelligible, shaping what he terms as "tragic chemical consciousness"—as in an awareness of collective precariousness triggered by contamination. This argument once more iterates Morton's conception of hyperobjects and how global warming, pollution, and toxicity can be related to it.

Conclusion: Schweblin's Anti-Anthropocentric Stance

Ana María Mutis states that the novel bears a "traditional identification in Western culture of nature with motherhood by presenting both as victims of agrochemical pollution" and further, illustrates the maternal care and nurturing instinct of the mother to lend shape to the unfolding of ecological wreckage within a "maternal discourse" (Mutis 43). Like Amanda we fail to fathom the extent of ecological catastrophe and loss of species and are easily distracted into caring deeply about unimportant matters, rather than "'important for us all,' as David's more-than-human ethics of care would suggest" (Mackey 8).

Schweblin's stories reflect multiple strands of anti-anthropocentrism and ways of forming care in a hostile environment. The ecological critique levied by the stories of Schweblin shed off the burgeoning control explicated by human-centeredness toward a more inclusive kinship as propounded by Donna J. Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble.* The paper demonstrates how the novel delves into dystopian themes, depicting a community and environment plagued by widespread toxic contamination, while also presenting an ecological tone, incorporating shamanism and magical elements that allow the reader to rethink alternative utopian possibilities

suppressed by anthropocentrism.

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Forging National Identity through Iconic Landscapes:
Poetic Cartography of Edwin Thumboo

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Abstract

Landscapes, both natural and built, however timeless they may appear, like the evolving nature of identity, evolve, and even those few structures which are retained for heritage value are subject to periods of prominence in historical periods. As a practice in planning, design, management, and nurturing of the built and natural environment, landscape is closely connected to national identity. It is invested with cultural processes and is therefore, a discursive construct through mediations and meditations. It is not only a geographical but also an aesthetic concept produced through memories, visualizations, imaginations and myriad modalities such as painting, poetry, prose, photography and the like. Landscape becomes an affective bond between people and the land and is therefore, an icon of identity.

This paper investigates how the evolving landscape of the city-state of Singapore reflects the evolving national identity of Singapore from being a Third-World shipping and manufacturing centre to being a Global city of finance, knowledge and innovation, on into the cyber present. It investigates how the evolution is reflected in the poems of the Singaporean poet, Edwin Thumboo, an eye-witness poet-cartographer who has lived through the times and has witnessed the momentous changes in the city-state.

Keywords: National Identity, Landscape, Poetic Cartography, Memoryscape, Global Urbansim.

Introduction

Gaining independence from the colonial rule in 1959 and being ejected from the Malaysian Union in 1965 after a brief merger, Singapore had to stand alone, challenged with the task of forging a new nation and a new identity. The city-state was challenged with incorporating and assimilating diverse peoples and their cultures into its body-politics like all other culturally plural states. The geographical space of Singapore had to be foregrounded on the idea of a multiracial level playing field, right from the time of its inception.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the rapid urbanization of the natural landscape and by 1988, 49% of the land was built up to suit commerce and industrialization. At the same time, the Government made efforts to build parks and gardens by planting ornamental trees and plants to the extent that Singapore came to be known as a Garden-city.

The transformation is echoed in many of Edwin Thumboo's poems. The poet could not help writing about nature being born on a tropical island originally covered by rainforest and fringed with mangrove swamps, lagoons and estuaries. Some of his poems speak about the tropical landscape but many of his poems are based on the

places vivid in his memories, the remembered emotional heartlands, but now transformed by the modernizing forces. Some other poems are certainly nostalgic. Yet, some others reflect the cosmopolitan architecture of the city- state as a global city. If Thumboo has written a poem like 'Little India' and 'Arts House, Smith Street, Chinatown,' he has also written poems such as 'Ulysees by the Merlion' and the 'Double-Helix Promenade.' Tropical landscape, cosmopolitan and modern architecture, all reflect in his poetry.

Widely regarded as the unofficial poet laureate of Singapore, Edwin Thumboo has had a versatile professional profile. He worked in the civil service for nine years before he could join the National University of Singapore. From 1957 to 1961, he worked in the Income Tax Department and from 1961 to 1965, for the Central Provident Fund Board. From there, Thumboo moved on to serve in the Singapore Telephone Board where he remained till 1966.

His excellence in civil service is proven by the fact that he was awarded the *Bintang Bakti Masyarakat* (Public Service Star) in 1981 and the *Pingat Jasa Gemilang* (Meritorious Service Medal) in 2006. His excellence in Literature, Culture and Academics is proven by the fact that he bagged the National Book Development Council of Singapore Book Awards for Poetry in 1978, in 1980 and in 1994, the inaugural S.E.A. award in 1979, the first Cultural Medallion for Literature in the same year, the ASEAN Culture and Communication Award for Literature in 1987, the Raja Rao Award in 2002 and Yakir Tarbut Israel Award in 2006.

Thumboo is an Emeritus Professor at the National University of Singapore since 1998 and has the distinction of being the first and the longest- serving Dean of NUS (1980-1991). He was instrumental in the creation of a Singaporean literature in English. As one of the pioneers of English Literature in Singapore, he has been keenly involved in the literary development of the nation. He has compiled and edited some of the first anthologies of English poetry and fiction from Singapore. His own collection of poetry include *Rib of Earth* (1956), *Gods Can Die* (1977), *Ulysses by the Merlion* (1979), *A Third Map* (1993), *Still Travelling* (2008), *The Best of Edwin Thumboo* (2012), *A Gathering of Themes* (2018). Thumboo is also to be credited with conceptualizing the first National Poetry Festival for Singapore in 2015. He is veritably 'the *pater familias* of English poetry' (Patke 8).

While Singaporean literature is written in four official languagues, namely, English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil, the current paper addresses the Anglophone poetry of Singapore and its contribution towards the making of national literature especially in the wake of Singapore making English the main official working language and medium of education in 1979.

Thumboo can be said to belong to the first generation of Singaporean writers along with other poets such as Arthur Yap, Goh Poh Seng, Lee Tzu Pheng who wrote immediately after independence in 1965. The major concerns of the first generation of Anglophone poets was development of a national literature and capturing the process of nation formation. In so far as their poems reflected the history, polity and culture of

Singapore they created Singaporean literature albeit infusing English with the local idiom, a symptomatic feature of postcolonial literature. Poets belonging to the later generation are often self-reflexive focussing on cosmopolitism and transnationalism. Singapore has been travelling. In the words of Rajeev Patke,

> Singapore has travelled through the burgeoning legacies of Raffles, through the dark and tense years of Japanese Occupation, through the wrenching separation from the Malayan mainland, to the transformation of an island economy into a modern, muti-cultural nation treading the cautious path to modernity, ever changing as it participates in the circulation of global energies and economies, always still travelling (Patke 8).

Landscape and Memoryscape

As an eye-witness poet cartographer who has lived in the pre and post-independent days of Singapore, Thumboo records places of Singapore from the days of *kampongs* to the high-rise buildings. Many of his poems are documentaries of places, memoirs of the spirit of old Singapore. Thumboo's landscape poetry can be classified into those reflecting on the pre-developmental rural stage and the latter, reflecting on urbanized Singapore. With people's attachment and bonding, landscape assumes a definite meaning. It is this world of meaning that the poet engages with. Thumboo's poem 'The Road' is certainly representative of an iconic terrain: "A walk from parking lot to Dreanery:/The slope is pleasing, trees and shrubs/Look ruminate//Outside, bougainvilleae seek/Assuarance between red and pink" (lines 13-20). As an affective bond between people and the land, the poet has dedicated many a poem on the landscape of Singapore, giving it a distinctive character. Man and nature speak to each other in some of his poems. In 'Singapore River, 1962,' the river speaks to the poet: "You have seen me, time and again, in painting/sketch, and passing glance" (lines 1-2). The poem 'Yeo Landscape' addresses the landscape painter, Thomas Yeo: "For you, dear Thomas, colour/and shape are lyrical, discreet./ Nature's shifting calculi /Of skies accosting hills, echo/ Along receiving valleys, up/ Interlacing slopes, enriching/ The `nuance of a waterfall" (lines 1-7).

Probably, the poem 'Evening by Batok Town' maps an iconic landscape drawn from the poet's memory, having lived in the town and seeing its development from a mining quarry to the Bukit Bakot nature park which was redeveloped as Little Guilin. The poet feels nostalgic as his memory anoints earlier days. The town is invested with attachments from multiracial and multicultural peoples. Thumboo writes:

> *La Cha about to quantum*
> *Leap; a grey-gold dragon transmutes*
> *Receding blue into flared vermilion as*
> *Its claws etch the first stars. Further*
> *East, Krishna's chariot stands resplendent*
> *While Arjuna, cleansed of doubt, now arms,*
> *Reluctantly (lines 14-20).*

The changing landscape of Bukit Bakot witnessed by three generations   "These shifting runes/that touched my father, now my son"(lines 22-23),   to "Bukit Batok topped by radar; MRT accompanying Avenue 5; Four-point blocks, JC, food-centre" (lines 25-27), suggests modernizing of the region from green slopes of hills to "high-rise and high-way,/The new breed in search of /Gleaming jobs, the computer-mind"(lines 44-46).

The changing landscape is also suggestive of the changing character of the city-state, from being a Third World to being a First World city-state.

Landscape images are also thought of as one way in which the social history and distinctiveness of a group of people is objectified through references to the physical settings. The history of these landscape images, therefore, parallels the history of nation formations. Landscape visualization reinforces the link between history and the state, giving the state a definite historical materiality.

The identifying paradigmatic poet such as Edwin Thumboo, locates landscape as an icon, as a perceptual geography. Thumboo's evocation of geography is best seen in his poem 'Cough of Albuquerque.' The distinct durian-hot terrain is unmistakably recognizable.

> *No – just durian-hot,*
> *Lallang trimmed by fire.*
> *Iguana far from ooze*
> *Creepers loose their coil*
> *Merbak, mateless on the branch,*
> *Nonya bought her fan*
> *To milk the little shade (lines 65-71).*

However, the poem is not a mere romanticization of an idyllic landscape. It is invested with Singapore's colonial history and an affirmation of a new beginning for the city-state, free from imperial powers.

> *The cough of Albuquerque,*
> *Wind stiff with remorse:*
> *A new beginning touch my shoulder (lines 158-160).*

Place is invested with power as it is place wherein identity is constituted. In his long poem 'Bukit Panjang: Hill, Village, Town' Thumboo records the historical events of the nation that he experienced residing in Bukit Panjang. The national, regional and the personal coalesce. The poet witnessed the transition of Bukit Panjang from a hill to a village to a satellite town. The soul of the land and the soul of its peoples are intertwined.   Thumboo uses multi-lingual images to represent the multi-ethnic community comprising the Chinese, Malay, Tamil and Eurasian in 'Bukit Panjang: Hill, Village, Town III"

> *English bounces off the wall; Chinese via PRs;*
> *Tamil chanted between pealing temple bells.*
> *Days start with Majula Singapura, shared*
> *By long cherished neighbours: Kum*
> *Kit-Fatmah, Cecil-Thana, James-Lee Fah,*

And others on this walk with you, sub-city (lines 80-82)

Negotiating between multiple cultures, the poet taps the potential of multilingual images and symbols. Many key cultural forms and social practices that contribute to sense of identity are profoundly territorial-

> We locate ourselves with reference to a nation, region, city, neighborhood; we use concepts of class, race or ethnicity that imply certain correspondence between the members of groups and localities or points of origin…For a number of writers the dynamics of modernity and the processes of modernization (the two not necessarily coinciding) have led by the disruption and dislocation, but also to the reaffirmation, of such place-based identities (Negus and Velázquez 331).

A sense of disruption and dislocation coupled with a strong reaffirmation resonates in most of Thumboo's poetry, for the poet is aware that the change is not merely inevitable but essential. He had to yield to nature and nature had to yield to the sculpted topography. The pull between love for nature on one hand and dedication to its progress on the other, find a balance. His poems mirror this 'double –vision.' In 'Renovation' he writes: "I want to feel pure the wind/Glazed by dark narrating shadows/Among casuarinas tempered by sea-salt//To hold the village in my mouth" (lines 1-15). The sense of place is complex and linked with people's lived experiences, memories, histories, battles, political struggles, folklore, myths, cultural icons and all events that took place in the particular place.

Cultural Heritage Landscape

While late nineteenth and twentieth centuries valorized heritage as the mythical past, the shift in focus since 1980s has been more on heritage as a cultural practice. Post 1980s, witnessed a shift in understanding and using the past. Heritage began to include both the tangible and intangible aspects of a culture. It gained paramount significance in the construction of the cultural identity of a region and began to be seen as a dynamic design which entails a voyage into the past to see its continuity in the present. "Heritage is a new mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past" (Gimblett 369). It is a way of giving a second life to sites or ways of life. "Heritage is a cultural process which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present" (Smith 2). Heritage should be the subject of active public reflection, debate, and discussion. What is worth saving? What can we, or should we, forget? What memories can we enjoy, regret, or learn from? Who owns "The Past" and who is entitled to speak for past generations? Active public discussion about material and intangible heritage- of individuals, groups, communities, and nations is a valuable facet of public life in the multicultural world ("What is Heritage"). The process of protecting, of "adding value" speaks on and to the present, even if it does so in terms of past. (Gimblett 370). The business of heritage is to conserve and interpret the past for both, the sake of the present and the future. Bojan Djuric believes that the effect of the past on the present takes place in the field of archaeology discernible in the sphere of creating new

meanings, new knowledge, and new monuments explaining the past and renovating the present and therefore the demand to open archaeology to the public based on the right to know one's past (Djuric 26-27).

It is in such a cultural practice patented in its cultural icons and evidenced in its archaeology, architecture, historical sites, natural landscapes, practices of social value such as heritage art and folk practices, are conserved. Heritage interpretation is performed at historic sites, museums, art galleries, parks, botanical garden and the like, and its modalities may include guide walks, discourses, exhibits, heritage performances, art festivals all of which collectively transform a location into destination, most often for tourist attraction.

Most colonial administration fostered a system of heritage protection. The post 1980s shift in focus can be largely attributed to the rise of Postcolonialism and Postmodernity. As Marie Louise Sorensen and John Carman sum up,

> Postcolonialism made it possible to recognize new voice and increased appreciation of alternative claims about the past, including challenging controls over access and representations…post-structuralism and post-modernity inspired critique of knowledge claims and authority…Our relationship to and practice of 'heritage' shifted from being taken-for-granted field of meanings and practices to becoming an area of calling out for investigation and analysis aiming to understand how heritage becomes constituted, what it is and does, and how different groups engage with it (Sorenson and Carmen 17).

In 'Discourse of Heritage' Smith focuses on the discursive nature of heritage and asserts that it is not so much a 'thing' as a set of values and meanings. "Heritage" is therefore ultimately a cultural practice, involved in the construction and revaluation of a range of values and understanding (Smith 11).The discourse takes its clues from the grand narratives of nation-building. Smith links the origin of the dominant heritage discourse with development of nineteenth century nationalism and liberal modernity.

'Preserve the past, ensure the future' (line 33) asserts the poet in his poem 'The National Library, nr Dhoby Ghaut, Singapore.' While the National Museum of Singapore tells stories of Singapore dating back to 1849, the Asian Civilisation Museum showcases the cultural heritage of China, Southeast Asia, South Asia and West Asia. The Peranakan Museum showcases the Peranakan culture of mixed Chinese and Malay/Indonesian culture. Singapore Art Museum showcases contemporary visual arts. The intangible cultural heritage most notably the Hawker Culture which developed from Street Food Culture has been recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on Dec 16, 2020. The tropical Botanical Garden is The First World Heritage site of Singapore recognized by UNESCO in 2015. The Indian Heritage Centre, the National Gallery, Art Gallery and other centres recognized by the Heritage Board of Singapore resonate in Thumboo's poems which are memoirs of Singapore's cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. In poems like 'Little India' or 'Arts House, Smith Street, Chinatown,' Thumboo uses monuments to speak of the past and their relevance to the present. In 'National Library, nr Dhoby

Ghaut, Singapore' the poet speaks of the amalgamation of the west and the east in the city-state: "Who could have known/ this edifice, this heart,/humming with the voice of Western ages,/ Was there, waiting beyond our/ Father's hopes and Eastern dreams."(lines 1-5). Dragon, Krishna's gopis, Warring Alexander, Confucius, Buddha, Christ and Muhammed reflect a landscape which is a testament to multicultural co-existence.

> *La Cha irritates the Dragon*
> *King and a lesson*
> *While sporting softly with the gopis,*
> *Krishna makes a garden bloom*
> *Warring Alexander starts his Asian tour,*
> *Where Confucius, Buddha, Christ,*
> *Muhammed urge the betterment of Man (lines 23-29)*

The traditional architecture seen in Little India and China Town includes vernacular Malay houses, local hybrid shop houses and black and white bungalows, worship places of different ethnic and religious communities and the colonial, civic and commercial architecture in the European architectural styles, predominantly Neoclassical, Gothic and Palladian. "A/ geography infinitely more than meets the eye, testifying/ as icon-idea-text-axis-tourist label, / Assured by temple bells,/ rows of devout heads and rippling conch-held octaves, your /self-renewing heart is sanctified by spirits who maintain/ the rooted heritage" ("Little India" lines 2-7). The Hawker Food Culture which has being recognized by UNESCO as intangible heritage of Singapore further adds to the quintessence of Singaporean landscape. In the poem 'The Sneeze-Hock Lam st, by City Hall' Thumboo states: "That hawker there, / Selling *mee* and *kway-teow/* Is prosperous, round, /Quick moving" (lines 1-4).

A vivid picture of the confluence of traditional set-up with the shophouses, and the colonial style is vividly reflected in his poem 'Bras Basah.'

> *Where the first Rendezvous brooded*
> *By a row of old shophouses, since sadly slain,*
> *A special road began. A point of colonial*
> *Confluence: Dhoby Ghaut, the YWCA with*
> *Manicured tennis lawns for memsahibs who*
> *Then took tea and scones. Across a Shell kiosk*
> *Where Papa parked his Austin Seven, then off*
> *(lines 1-7)*

The black and white bungalows are reflected in Thumboo's poem, 'Quaters Monk Hill Terrace. Newton Singapore.' 'The National Gallery', 'The Victoria Concert Hall' are reminders of the city's colonial legacy.

Landscape Architecture and Global Urbanism

Landscape architecture certainly participates in the construction of national identity as collective identity is reflected through material culture and landscape

architecture is one such expressive medium. The city-state is famed for its spectacular high-rise buildings in international architectural styles while being equally famed as a garden-city.   The spectacularity of Singapore lies in its landscape architecture. Marina Bay Waterfront Promenade includes high-rise structures like the Merlion Hotel, Raffles Hotel, Marina Bay Sands Towers, Esplanade Theatres by the Bay, which are set alongside the Gardens by the Bay and the Merlion Park. The National Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum and the Lim Bo Seng Memorial, with its walkways and pedestrian zones, reveal its unique landscape architecture. If the Marina Bay Waterfront can be considered as a microcosmic representation of the macrocosm of Singapore, then the National Identity, reading from its landscape architecture, includes the postmodern spatial image of Singapore as a global financial hub alongside the quintessential local image that of a city garden built by a mélange of cultures; Chinese, Malay, Tamil and Eurasian.

The poetry of Edwin Thumboo reflects the architectural landscapes of Singapore to create its national identity that includes both; global urbanism and traditional architecture that includes the postmodern and the historical. The spectacular civic and public spaces of modern Singapore reflect the optimistic collective psyche of the island-state. Just how buoyant the nation felt is echoed in his poem, 'Ulysees by the Merlion.'

> *They hold the bright, the beautiful*
> *Good ancestral dreams*
> *Within new visions*
> *So shining, urgent,*
> *Full of what is now*
> *(lines 37-41).*

With gaining independence in 1965, Singapore had to create images about itself to project itself as a successful global city with ultra-modern architecture in international-styles.In 'Double Helix Promenade,' the poet speaks of the architectural feat; the double helix promenade. It is a   commentary on the highly modernized topography: 'So flying cars, people with propellers, some compute/Spread over a City in a Garden, Hands of the Nation/Transform circuits of a micro chip into a maze, and pulsate'(lines 17-19).

Michelle Heng, in her introduction to *The Singapore Word Maps: A Chapbook of Edwin Thumboo's New and Selected Place Poems*(2012) informs that the poet had to revise the titles of some of his place poems such as 'The Sneeze, Hock Lam St, By City Hall' which was originally titled 'The Sneeze.' The change in title was to 'remind readers of places which may no longer exist or have since assumed a look so different from their pre-urban-renewed identity (Heng 6). informs, Hock Lam Street, one of Singapore's best eating places, a bustling alley of century-old houses, has since gone down memory lane to make place for urban renewal.   Standing in its place is the Funan Digital Life Mall near City Mall MRT Station. Probably the 'before and now' is best represented in his twin poems 'The National Library, nr Dhoby Ghaut, Singapore' and 'National Library, 2007, Bugis.' Both poems speak about the National Library but

the atmosphere has changed from the first to the second. In the poem 'The National Library, nr Dhoby Ghaut, Singapore' teachers teach "As you uncoil the spirals of each mind, /Words become colour, image, question/To push the imagination, yet again" (lines 11-13) but in the poem 'National Library, 2007, Bugis' "endless knowledge besiege in giga bites. Galaxies, /Kingdoms, Affluent and Ultraman, a little finger click away" (lines 34-35). The transition is obvious. The consciousness has shifted. The gigantic external structure of the Library has affected the internal consciousness. However, the' internal' is conditioned by the 'external' which they have to conform to, resist or negotiate. *The Singapore Word Maps* carries photographs of places the poet talks about, before and after urbanization, amply illustrating the intent of the place poems.

While every landscape has its own identity with people's interaction and meaning that they attach to it, the city-state of Singapore has created a unique spatial identity that is unmistakably Singaporean, interweaving ethnic traditional, modern and cosmopolitan architecture that is a typical feature of multicultural postcolonial urbanism.

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Liberation War of Bangladesh: Silence as Resistance in Select Short Fiction

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Abstract

The paper will be an attempt to locate the use of silence as a literary device by the Bangladeshi writers Akhteruzzaman Elias, Humayun Ahmed and Rizia Rahman in their short narratives – *The Raincoat, Nineteen Seventy-One* and *What Price Honour*? respectively - to show the subtle act of subversion. In delineating the issue, a close reading of the texts will be playing the key role. The theoretical perspectives offered by Frank O'Connor about the short story as a genre of "the submerged population," Cheryl Glenn's take on silence as a rhetorical act and Charles I. Glicksberg's ideas on literature of silence will be used. The paper will attempt to discuss about the all-pervading role of rumour and gossip along with silence in the time of war as manifest in the select short stories.

Keywords: Silence, Liberation War, Alienation, Resistance, Identity, Submerged Population.

In common parlance, silence is considered as the absence of the spoken or written word and hence the complete absence of meaning. The concept of silence, in this ever pervading understanding, often fails to represent the vastness of underlying messages, the subtle presence of statement and the possibilities of meanings in silence. In rhetoric, the use of words and the playful absence of it, both play crucial and interdependent roles in conveying the intended meaning. The choice to discard words and incorporate silences in critical junctures of a narrative shows how the lack of speech helps in bringing deeper meanings in the text. Though silence is generally considered to be the opposite of speech, silence actually enables and complements speech. The use of silence as a form of rhetoric is not a new literary technique. Silence can be more effective and persuasive than speech if used in the appropriate manner. Cheryl Glenn in her groundbreaking study on silence, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence (2004)* says, "given how our language works, then, speech and silence are not mutually exclusive; they are inextricably linked and often interchangeably, simultaneously meaningful"(Parrott 377). Glenn continues, "neither speech nor silence is more successful, communicative, informative, revealing, or concealing than the other"(Parrott 380). Using Foucault's definition of the statement in *The Archeology of Knowledge(1969)*, that "statements do not exist in the same sense in which a language exists" Glenn posits that silence can be considered "a statement if it is used for a rhetorical purpose and not merely dead air"(Parrott 377). Silence can be multifaceted, it can offer hope and comfort, it can also offer anguish and seeping regret. Depending on collective cultural practices or individual choices, silence can be either intentional or unintentional. In both ways, silence in a narrative can offer multiple meanings and are open for interpretations. Choosing silence can also be considered as an act of subversion, an act to refute the power of the spoken, hence the power of the authority and to embrace silence as a form of resistance and

empowerment.

In the proposed study, an attempt will be made to locate the use of silence as a literary device in the select short narratives -- Akhteruzzaman Elias's *The Raincoat*, Humayun Ahmed's *Nineteen Seventy-One* and Rizia Rahman's *What Price Honour*? – against the backdrop of Liberation War of Bangladesh, to demonstrate the use of silence as an act of resistance during the times of political violence. The analysis will focus on three points: first, how silence as a literary device is used by the authors to express the characters' apparently mundane life and yet the inner turmoil and conflicts they experience; second, how the characters belong to the submerged population groups of the society, based on a theoretical concept offered by Frank O'Connor; and third, on how they finally find a sanctuary in silence while words and signs belittle their existence. In each of these stories, the backdrop is an interesting facet of the story. The time depicted is the time of the Liberation War that lasted for nine long months from March till mid-December, 1971, a war that originated from a conflict between two language groups. The protagonists' dilemma to choose between Urdu and Bangla and later deciding on refusing to use language at all, hence finding solace in their silence offer the significant attempt in emphasising the need of silence in our conflicted world.

In delineating the issue, a close reading of the texts will be playing a key role and the theoretical perspectives offered by Elizabeth Bowen and Frank O'Connor about the short story as a genre of the submerged population, Charles I. Glicksberg's ideas on literature of silence and Cheryl Glenn's take on silence as a rhetorical act will be used. The paper will also attempt to discuss about the all-pervading role of rumour and gossip along with silence in the time of war as manifest in the select short stories.

The protagonist of Akhteruzzaman Elias's short story *The Raincoat*, the lecturer of Chemistry in a government college, Nurul Huda is portrayed as a simpleminded, conflict free human being on earth, content with his small family of two young children and a meek and gentle wife, Asma. But the apparently peaceful life of Nurul is actually devastated with the rising terror of West Pakistan. More to his distress, his brother-in-law Mintu has joined the guerrilla forces and often visits his home in his absence. The narrative reaches its climax when the army officer and his convoy drag Nurul blindfolded without any prior notice from the collage to a place unknown. The afterwards is as imaginable: he is forced to accept that he is somehow connected to the miscreants who "have blown up the electric transformer. And while retreating, they hurled a grenade at the principal's house" (Zaman 122), those who have been trying to divide Pakistan apart and he must inform about those miscreants' whereabouts. The story ends with the protagonist accepting gladly that he is responsible for helping them but remaining silent to the question of their whereabouts. With the Liberation War in the backdrop, *The Raincoat* reiterates the helplessness of the intelligent bourgeoisie of East Pakistan:

> After realising the inevitability of the surrender, the paramilitary force Al-Badr
> (accused of supporting the Pakistan Army during the nine-month-long war and often
> referred to as a 'secret killing squad' of the religio-political party Jamaat-e-Islami)

went on a spree to hunt and kill professionals, writers and intellectuals…this was their last chance to silence them, to 'cripple the newly-born nation'. Dragged out of their homes, these Bengalis were repeatedly taken to different killing fields where they were tortured, killed and dumped. (Zachariah 18)

To show his state, the writer has taken refuge in the portrayal of the protagonist as a silent spectator of the war scenario. The subtle act of subversion towards the end has been initiated from the very beginning in the story, with the help of silence. In his essay "The Literature of Silence," Charles I. Glicksberg comments:

Language, the only medium open to the writer, is a delusion and a snare. It effects no change whatsoever in the human condition. Thus the literature of silence announces its own bankruptcy while at the same time lamenting its state of impotence. For this reason it voices a philosophy of defeat and despair. For the writers of this persuasion realise the suicidal character of their subversive movement. It is an impossible task they set themselves in their hostility to established forms and modes of expression. (167)

The story proceeds with bits and pieces of rumour as the only source to learn about the state's current scenario. Elias's protagonist knows that his voice and opinion would not help him anyway in the war. He realises soon the futility of his existence. Defeat and despair lie in every step of Nurul. His constant fear of being punished because of his connection with Mintu and his silence in discussions of the state of the nation show how he acknowledges the futility of language in a situation like this where a war is being fought for language itself. As a man doing a job under the government, belonging to the middle class, with the responsibility of a household, he cannot afford to be vocal about his political ideologies or personal interpretations of the war. The narrator explains, "his colleagues engaged in rumours…But he never showed any interest in these discussions. When his colleagues gossiped, he would leave the room silently and go to the principal's chamber" (Zaman 127). On the contrary, the Principal who is an ardent follower of the army and a stringent supporter of the united Pakistan, "prayed night and day for the safety of Pakistan" (Zaman 124). Another colleague of Nurul, the professor of Urdu, Akbar Sajid also appeared to be involved in spreading rumours about the state of the nation. Sajid and the principal, Dr. Ahmed would be indulging in conversations in Urdu, while Nurul stays distant and worried about the whereabouts of his brother-in-law Mintu. In a circle of colleagues like Dr. Ahmed, the rumour about Nurul Huda's brother-in-law is also whispered, shared and spread. In such moments, Elias's treatment of Nurul echoes the treatment of the anti hero in Beckett whose silence is a chosen path amidst the chaos of language, as pointed out by Glicksberg (171).

Nurul's silence in the story is in stark contrast with his wife Asma's reliability on sound and language. She cannot sleep without the sound of gunshots. Often in the narrative, Asma is seen referring to gunshots that she hears here and there. She constantly talks about her brother and boastfully tells her children that her brother is a freedom fighter. Mintu's heroism echoes throughout their household with the children singing aloud, "our younger uncle has gone to kill the Khan soldiers" (Zaman 125).

Nurul's extreme fear and annoyance at Asma's confidence in her brother is reflected in his own thoughts, "if Asma was so courageous, why didn't she accompany her brother? Of course he could not say these words, but his tongue almost itched to utter that" (125).

Elizabeth Bowen in her introduction to *The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories* (1937) writes how the emerging new literature of the twentieth century in the form of short story has found the right amount of influence in Chekhov and Maupassant. Bowen shows how Chekhov's characters for the short story were "'the sub-man' crystalizing frustration, inertia, malaise, vacancy, futile aspirations and sly or shy pretentiousness". His men were the typification of the suffering, intelligent and submissive bourgeois. Maupassant's men and women were again "doomed with lust, cruelty and helplessness" (Hanson 115). Bowen's discussion of Chekhov and Maupassant was later enhanced by Frank O'Connor in the "Introduction" to *The Lonely Voice* (1962):

> There is no character here with whom the reader can identify himself...what it has instead is a submerged population group...that submerged population group changes its character from writer to writer, from generation to generation. It may be Gogol's officials, Turgenev's serfs, Maupassant's prostitutes, Chekhov's doctors and teachers, Sherwood Anderson's provincials, always dreaming of escape. (12)

In the short story no relatable protagonist or hero can be found; rather "an intense awareness of human loneliness" (O'Connor 12) is echoed throughout. O'Connor gave the iconic example of Nikolai Gogol's copying clerk in *The Overcoat* who has an absurd name and an absurd job, who considers "insult piled on injury" (10) as reality and a warm overcoat as the metonym for justice. The short story gives refuge to the non entities like the copying clerk and acts as the sanctuary for the submerged, homeless, lonely characters (O'Connor 12).

Elias too treats his protagonist in the same manner as Gogol does to his protagonist Akaky Akakievich in *The Overcoat*. Just like Akaky, lonely Nurul prefers silence over conflict. Nurul's constant reminder to Asma that they have nobody is such an acute moment of loneliness. Their silences are steps towards a comparatively peaceful state of life. In deliberate attempts to convey the deeper messages, authors often take refuge in silence as a literary device. In this story too, Elias uses silence as a mode of representing societal oppression and injustice in the lives of men in urban spaces. The two short stories referred here, *The Overcoat* by Nikolai Gogol and *The Raincoat* by Akhteruzzaman Elias, as the titles themselves suggest, refer to the plight and unuttered suppression of the two protagonists, shown through the metonyms of an overcoat and a raincoat. In both stories, use of silence is seen through their regrets and shame, their choice of not disclosing the truth about themselves and the strength they imbibe from the decision to keep quiet.

Nurul while wearing the raincoat attains a different, stronger and more confident identity. He realises that in the bus the thugs, thieves and pickpockets are afraid of him and they soon get off the bus after seeing him. Even when the army is checking the vehicles, the soldier boards in their bus to examine and after having a

gaze, the soldier let the bus move forward when he notices Nurul in the raincoat. Here, the silence of Nurul is a kind of strategic silence. "Silence does not necessarily indicate weakness or a lack of power…strategically employed silence is a form of 'mute demonstration' which can be utilised to affirm or to protest about an issue" (Zachariah 101). When he learns that the army believes that he knows about the miscreants, he prefers to keep silent in honour of the battle in which his brother-in-law and other freedom fighters are engaged. At that moment of silence, the fear and suppression of Nurul vanish and his silence becomes an element of courage. He fights for the nation.

Humayun Ahmed's *Nineteen Seventy-One* also begins on the same note. The protagonist of the story is an apolitical, aloof and frightened man of forty, Azizur Rahman. Aziz is verbally abused by a Pakistani major in his own village, Nilganj of East Pakistan, when the inquiry session results in silence and resistance from Aziz's side. Aziz Master, the primary school teacher is the only person who can speak English in his village, and hence he is forced to meet the major and confirm that his village is not a shelter for hiding freedom fighters. Aziz is portrayed from the beginning as a passive observer of the war. He was blamed for being a timid man by his own mother and he "did not protest because it was true. He was a terrible coward. Ever since he had heard that the army had entered the village, he had frequently felt the need to piss" (Zaman 174). Yet when he is almost forcibly sent by the Nilganj village elders to face the military troop, he accepts it. Throughout their conversation, which eventually takes place in Bangla, Aziz mostly remain silent or lies. In his sharp and constant questionings like "Do you love Pakistanis?" and "Do you want this to become Bangladesh?" (Zaman 178), the major harasses Aziz to a point where he is asked to stand naked in front of the troop and speak the truth. After a while, the major, tired of this farce dismisses Aziz, asks him to put his clothes on and leave the place. And at this moment, Aziz Master in his strategical silent resistance, does something which is completely unexpected of him: "Aziz Master did not put his clothes on. He spat. The spittle fell on the right leg the major's trousers. The major lifted his eyes and stared. There was dead silence" (Zaman 178). The major, both humiliated and aghast with this action, orders his troop to leave the place and start their journey again, while "behind him stands a naked man, his head held high" (Zaman 178).

Aziz being nominated to be the representative of the village depends on his linguistic skills. He can speak English fluently along with his mother tongue Bangla. When the major arrives, it becomes clear that he is more skilled in language. He can speak in English and even Bangla, to Aziz's surprise and Aziz notices, he can speak another language too, probably Punjabi. In their conversation it becomes apparent that the major represents the authoritative, spoken word while Aziz represents silence or the void of spoken word. Eventually Aziz uses this silence as his weapon against the major. He makes it clear that his silence is not a sign of his obedience rather it is a concealed weapon to empower himself and to show his allegiance towards the new nation.

Both Nurul and Aziz keep quiet when the army officers torture them to death.

Their silence takes a subversive turn in the end when they feel delighted at the fact that the army has considered them to be a part of the quest for freedom. As Glickeberg comments:

> the hero however wearisomely and futilely… persists because there is nothing else he can do but seek and question and long for the beatitude of silence that will grant him the peace he cannot believe will ever be his. He is spiteful, blasphemous and rebellious, even if he is done for. Let the mysterious and malign powers do their utmost to punish him, he will not cry quits. He is nothing but he knows he is nothing, and that makes a tremendous difference. (171)

The stories end with a note that brings back the history of the war to the forefront. Thus, Elias and Ahmed capture the personal agony of the apparently passive men in the war torn landscape of the former East Pakistan where their silence too could invoke power and glory to the freedom fighters.

The third story of this study tells a different tale than the two already discussed. Rizia Rahman's *What Price Honour?* is the tale of the Biranagona, women "who had been raped by the Pakistani military in 1971" (Zaman xiii) and whose journey as a free citizen in the newly independent country was not the same with others who had tasted freedom. Though the Birangonas were honoured in the war-torn country, they were still subject of gossip and rumours. Halimun, the nineteen year old protagonist who once had the courage to refuge the Pakistani soldiers' demands and saved herself by jumping into the fire after witnessing her family being killed, is now helpless and hungry in the flood and famine. After the Liberation, Halimun was treated with respect and admiration for a while. After a point of time, poverty stricken Halimun started working in the village. This was the time when rumours also began to arise among the villagers regarding Halimun's truth. The people were sceptical whether Halimun was a survivor of that fire or she was actually raped by the Pakistani soldiers. Halimun "did not heed the whispers. She held her head high…It was true that the fire had rendered one leg shorter than the other, but the fire had not disfigured her soul, it had not distorted her mind" (Zaman 114). Though she had been approached for physical favours by a few men of her own community in the new country too, Halimun refuged to agree. Her strong stand against powerful hungry men did not remain a secret, she soon emerged as the source of gossip. The narrator says, "Halimun would merely smile and hold her head even higher" (Zaman 114). Halimun's difficult journey from honour to hunger and her complete refusal to speak about her trauma does not show weakness and regret, but her resistance to the spoken word, the word of the powerful. Halimun's silence is a way of keeping her memory and resistance intact. By speaking the word of the world, she does not want to blemish the truth she has been harbouring since the war. But she soon realises that starving to death is far more excruciating than living and guarding her past. Towards the end of the story, in her contest with Ramiz to attain the pot of chira, Halimun loses both her sari and the pot of chira in the ravaging flood. She is bullied by Ramiz, the young neighbour for losing the pot and is asked to die of drowning since now she neither has honour nor a means to relieve her hunger. But rather she decides to walk up naked to

Shamsher, the relief contractor's house, asking for food. Hungry Halimun, for the sake of her survival walks towards the men who are hungry for pleasure. She says at the end, "I will take up residence in the bazaar" (Zaman 120) referring to selling her body, now a probable choice of occupation. Halimun's story is a tale of strategy, the strategy to survive in a war-ravaged country. In her choice of silence as this strategy, she has journeyed from courage to shame, and again from shame to courage. Foucault's words, "silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions" (Parrot 380) and Glenn's "choosing silence can represent a location of empowerment" (Parrot 384) can be seen reiterated in Halimun's story, who refuses till the end to explain her story to the people and acts for her own survival. The traumatic experiences of women during such political violence and their refusal to speak about it presents silence as the easier way of solace. For Halimun, just like Nurul and Aziz, choosing silence is not weakness but a strong statement of opposition. Moreover, her stand for the unspoken is "not an absence, but instead a presence that expresses pain and strength, and resists erasure" (Riordan-Goncalves 132). Halimun's silence against the rumours and gossips which later becomes her strategy for survival is an embodiment of resistance in a gendered subaltern space such as hers.

It is observed that the three narratives end with the protagonists' in their stark nakedness: Nurul being beaten for accepting that he is an entente of the freedom fighters while he wonders where they have kept Mintu's raincoat, Aziz Master standing naked in front of the troop while they prepare to leave and Halimun walking towards the contractor's house without any piece of cloth on her body to ask for food and shelter. Each story at the end, with the protagonists in their starkness with heads held high, offers an image so vividly depicted that it reminds us of how in the world of spoken and written words, silence depicts the naked truth of the world more faithfully. In these stories too, the absence of words and the visual elements of their nakedness define the protagonists' relationship with the Liberation War. They represent the traumatic collective memories of the war, the dilemma of choosing language, the refutation of speech as the only form of expressing their resistance and their search for a sanctuary in silence. The protagonists' silences become testimonies to the Liberation war and its aftermath.

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War and Desecrated Environments: A Study of Sinan Antoon's *The Baghdad Eucharist* and *The Corpse Washer*

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Abstract

Wars not only disrupt the socioeconomic dimensions of the states involved but also assert disturbing impact on the ecology and biodiversity. The toxic residual material released from the weapons and ammunition can have implications for years and decades. Such an impact of war can be observed in the Middle Eastern region of Iraq as it witnessed continuous wars in three decades from 1980 to 2010: the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), Gulf war of 1991 and Iraq war of 2003. This research paper attempts to delineate on the ecological repercussions of these wars in Iraq. Ecocritical framework is applied to Sinan Antoon's novels *The Baghdad Eucharist* and *The Corpse Washer* to scrutinise the environmental damage in the region.
Keywords: Contamination, Ecology, Ecoterrorism, Violence, War.

Introduction

> "War can weaken the environment and upturn lives long after
> the guns have fallen silent." Igor Malgrati.

In 1962, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a book which documented the damage done to the environment by widespread use of pesticides. It sparked discussions about the harmful effects of chemicals, pesticides, and humans themselves on the natural world. Today, *Silent Spring* is widely considered to be the symbolic beginning of the interdisciplinary field of ecocriticism. Initially, the primary emphasis of discussion surrounding ecocriticism was on the representation of nature and its value through literature. Later in the 1990s, it became more of a mechanism to scrutinize and mitigate the ecological destruction rendered by anthropocentric approach. Delineating on the concept of ecocriticism Richard Kerridge writes:

> The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. (qtd. in Garrard 4)

Literature through nuanced engagement incorporates the interactions of humans and ecology, the interdependence of humans on ecology and the impact of this interdependence on environment. Ecocritical discourse, by combining environmental studies and literature, provides a methodology to explore the relationship of humans with ecology, necessity for ecological balance and

consequences of anthropocentricism. The radical shift observed in the second wave of the discourse is expressed by Anand Dampella in his article "An Urban Eco-critical reading of Kavery Nambisan's *The Story that Must Not Be Told*":

> Urban eco-criticism is a 'Second Wave' phenomenon which broadens the meaning of 'nature' to include urban locations and their complex ecosystems as opposed to the first wave conceptualizations on nature. The amalgamation of eco-criticism with urban ecology involves the study of an interplay of socio-political and political dimensions of a city … (1)

This shift has broadened the scope of the concept and paved way for introspection of environmental imbalance caused as a consequence of social, economic and political activities of human beings.

In this modern era of science and technology the adoption of modern warfare by states to deal with their respective geo-political conflicts has enormously damaged the ecological balance of the world. This harm induced through violence on the environment is denoted by the term ecoterrorism. Sean P. Eagan defines ecoterrorism in terms of:

> …use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally oriented subnational group for environmental-political reasons, aimed at an audience beyond the target, and often of a symbolic nature. (2)

The term however, according to Sean P. Eagan is contested because it "implies a degree of illegitimacy" and signifies a distorted meaning. He supports his argument through Richard E. Rubenstein's following explanation about the subject:

> To call an act of political violence terrorist is not merely to describe it but to judge it. . . . Descriptively, "terrorism" suggests violent action by individuals or small groups. Judgementally, it implies illegitimacy... To the defenders of a particular regime or social order, any politically motivated disobedience (even mass resistance) smacks of terrorism. . . . And on the other hand, a regime in power is considered terrorist by those who deny its legitimacy even if they are but a handful and their opponents legions. Nobody wants to be called a terrorist; terrorism is what the other side is up to. (qtd. in Eagan 1-2)

The discourse of ecoterrorism has a solid rationale despite the ambiguity in the coinage of the term as it highlights the impact of war and violence on the affected territory. Laura Edgerton traces the coinage of the term with the statement:

> …the aftermath of Iraq's occupation of and retreat from Kuwait was devastating; a 350 square mile oil slick in the Persian Gulf, thousands of dead or dying birds and other wildlife, and over 550 burning Kuwaiti oil wells were the legacy of Iraq's occupation. The attempt at wholesale destruction of Kuwait and the Persian Gulf led several commentators to coin the terms "ecocide" and "environmental terrorism" to describe Iraq's actions. (151)

Although the term originated from the west and it was intended to highlight Saddam's insensible and savage maltreatment of natural resources during his invasion of Kuwait, Lawrence Buell broadens the scope of this "epithet" by writing that the leftist

organisations adopt the term "in order to stigmatize authoritarian state and corporate mistreatment of environment and/or animals" and in a similar vein the rightist engage it to "stigmatize radical activists—and from the left" (156). The discourse of ecoterrorism, therefore, can be adopted in terms of "tactic to stop companies, institutions, organizations, and governments from damaging or altering the environment (Nilson and Burke 1). The discourse of ecofeminism superimposes the oppressing and harassment of women and nature, as Susan Dobscha writes:

"women and nature have traditionally been aligned in terms of symbols and terminology. The popular media has demonstrated this by popularizing the slogan "Love your mother earth." Other examples that engender nature are "raping the land," and "virgin resources.'"

The portrayal of this interrelation in the literary texts can also be engaged to reflect on the subject of ecoterrorism.

Iraq Wars and Ecological Crisis

Iraq has been dealing with violent conflicts for more than three decades on the trot. The region has witnessed Iraq-Iran war, the Gulf war and Iraq war of 2003 during this phase. The conflicts not only have drained and shattered Iraq economically, politically and socially but also have rendered enormous damage to the ecological balance of the state. The Gulf war of 1991 was set off as a response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait by United States and its allied nations. Nye Jr writes "The three most serious reasons for involvement were oil, order, and weapons proliferation" (57). The region was heavily bombarded during the warfare to curb Saddam Hussein's aggressive approach towards Kuwait. Daniel M. Schwartz chronicles that the US administration under the aegis of President George Bush accused Saddam Hussein of carrying out 'environmental terrorism' for his dreadful war tactics during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991, however, American response to Saddam's invasion through 'Operation Desert Storm' ironically rendered more damage to environment and natural resources. In 2003 United States started another war in Iraq as it charged the regime of the region of having possession of chemical weapons of mass destruction. The president of United States also assured the citizens of the Iraqi State of liberating them from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and eventually in March "U.S forces invaded Iraq…. When WMD intelligence proved illusory… a violent insurgency arose, the war lost public support" (Laub). Daniel Lieberfeld describes the intervention and occupation of Iraq as

> The 2003 invasion of Iraq has become the largest, longest, and most costly use of armed force by the United States since the Vietnam war. It is the first major post-Cold-war U.S. military action taken apart from an international organization and the first U.S. experience as an occupying power in a Middle Eastern country. (1)

The involvement of United States in the political matters of Iraq has come at deadly price. The weaponry put at exhibition by United States during warfare contained highly toxic depleted uranium which has had long-lasting adverse

implications on native human beings as well as on the environmental balance of the region.

> Depleted uranium (DU) is a heavy metal possessing chemotoxic and radiotoxic properties…. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) estimates that between 170 and 1700t of DU was deployed in Iraq by the US military since 2003, while other conservative estimates place the total amount of DU used by the US military in Iraq since 1991 at 440t. The UK has also reported firing 1.9t DU weapons in Iraq since 2003. More than 300 DU-contaminated sites in Iraq have been identified by the Iraqi Ministry of the Environment Radiation Protection Center (RPC). (Surdyk et al. 1,2)

Al-Ansari et al in their article "The Environmental Implications of Depleted Uranium in Iraq and the Principles of isolating it" chronicle the magnitude of violence experienced by the region during the two catastrophic wars:

> It was estimated that more than 1100 to 2200 tons of DU was used. This quantity is 400 to 800 more powerful than the ones used in the first Gulf war. According to Al-muqdadi every 800 tons of DU is equivalent to 83 nuclear bombs. Hence the equivalent of about 250 nuclear bombs was dropped in the 2003 war. (Al-Ansari et al. 368)

Devastation of the state's infrastructure due to warfare represents the secondary damage to the environment which affects it with the same intensity as it necessitates the reutilization of natural resources.

Narrating the Ecological Crisis: *The Corpse Washer* and *The Baghdad Eucharist*

Sinan Antoon is an Iraqi literary figure known for his contribution in the field of fiction, poetry and translation of Arabic literature into English. His fictional narratives *The Corpse Washer* (2013) and *The Baghdad Eucharist* (2017) deal with the subject of Iraq wars, dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, role of United States in internal affairs of Iraq and the impact of these atrocities on social, economic, political and environmental domains of the state.

During an event of the Gulf war, Maha in *The Baghdad Eucharist* is terrorised by the thundering sounds of bombing "as American jet fighters pounded Baghdad so hard that the earth shook" (18). The narrative conveys the cause and effect of the violence and the devastating impact borne by the earth through subtle images. Maha at this instance is too young and innocent to comprehend the terrible situation that she finds herself in. The innocent image of Maha amplifies the ecological damage when seen as a parallel to the bombings carried out by the Americans. The novel sketches America's counter action on Saddam's invasion; "It's just raining! It's raining really, really hard…. manmade cloudbursts that poured down Baghdad and other Iraqi cities for weeks on end" (19). The writer uses the ecological images of rain and cloudburst to articulate the damage taken by the environment during Gulf war airstrikes carried out by United States and its allied forces. *The Corpse Washer* in the same vein represents the ecological ramifications effectuated on Iraq during the Gulf War when

Jawad narrates his horrific experience:

> After weeks of bombing we woke up one morning to find the sky pitch black. The smoke from the torched oil wells in Kuwait had obliterated the sky. Black rain fell afterward, coloring everything with soot as if forecasting what would befall us later. (60)

Here again the novelist has utilized the imagery of "sky pitch black," "smoke" and "black rain" to enunciate the correlation of environmental harm with intense bombing carried out in the region by United States to overpower Saddam Hussein.

Sinan Antoon also incorporates the correspondence of women and environment in the narrative to underpin their collective suffering inflicted as a consequence of American violence in Iraq. The chemicals released from the weaponry used by America and its allied forces in Gulf war are shown to have had direct and long-lasting implications. Reem's physical and psychological being is shown to have taken a direct impact by the toxic chemicals in *The Corpse Washer*. She suffers breast cancer due to the presence of depleted uranium in the environment of Iraq.

> The doctor back in Baghdad said that cancer rates have quadrupled in recent years and it might be the depleted uranium used in the ordnance in 1991. I hate my body now and wish I could run away from it to a new body. I don't think I could live in peace with it. (114)

The narrative recounts how the toxic chemical had contaminated the ecological bodies of the region as well. The aforementioned narration voices the concern for Iraq's degraded environmental conditions by collating the suffering of women with contaminated ecological bodies. The connection between the ecological imbalance and its implications on the Iraqi civilians is chalked out by Al-Shammari in his research article with the argument that

> Sand particles in Iraq contain toxic substances, which date back to the pollution caused by military actions that disassemble the desert sands and turn it into light dust. This dust reach cities as dust storms that effect most Iraqi cities. Sand storms in Baghdad have been found to carry low levels of uranium that can have cumulative effects [8]. Metal contamination was recorded in heavily bombarded Iraqi cities like Basrah and Fallujah…Hydrocarbons are the major pollutant released to the air and are inhaled by the people causing serious diseases. (245-246)

The author in *The Corpse Washer* also highlights contamination of the aquatic life and disequilibrium created in the ecological food chain by the toxins released from the weaponry used by America. Uncle Sabri during his stay in Baghdad had disagreed with Jawad's idea of cooking the traditional fish cuisine at home because "he'd read that fish from the river would be tainted because all the rivers were polluted with depleted uranium and untreated sewage" (95). Al-Shammari also points out the poisonous effect on the food chain of Iraqi ecology by writing; "The presence of depleted uranium (DU) in the Iraqi food chain is documented by measuring the uranium in animals' organs in different Iraqi cities with the highest concentration in the south of Iraq" (245). Uncle Sabri in *The Corpse Washer* is used as a mouthpiece by

the novelist to address the problem of pollution of water bodies in Iraq.

The Baghdad Eucharist elucidates the importance of biodiversity and critiques the anthropocentric approach by describing the anatomical and psychological resemblance of a palm tree with human beings; "they are created male and female, humans resemble palm trees…. Like an infant, a palm sapling must be protected from the cold and the rain in order for it to grow strong" (66). Antoon depicts maltreatment of the palm trees by the American soldiers by stating "[d]o you know how many trees have been cut and burned so that the Americans can see the snipers and the snipers can see them? That is what it has come to. Ya haram, it's such a shame….perhaps the current occupants were just indifferent to the trees", which again denotes the environmental terrorism carried out by America in Iraq (66). The interdependence of humans and environment and significance of ecological biodiversity is delineated by author wherein human suffering under American occupation in Iraq is voiced through wounds of Palm trees.

> Iraqis and palm trees. Who resembles whom? There are millions of Iraqis and as many, or perhaps somewhat fewer, palm trees. Some have had their fronds burned. Some have been beheaded. Some have had their backs broken by time, but are still trying to stand. Some have dried bunches of dates. Some have been uprooted, mutilated and exiled from their orchards. Some have allowed invaders to lean on their trunk. Some are combing the winds with their fronds. Some stand in silence. Some have fallen. Some stand tall and raise their heads high despite everything in this vast orchard: Iraq. When will the orchard return to its owners? Not to those who carry axes. Not even to the attendant who assassinates palm trees, no matter what the color of his knife. (98)

The portrayal of the destruction of the palm trees is significant in the context of Iraq as it indicates the degree of environmental damage of the region. Sinan Antoon in an interview while speaking about the cultural and ecological importance of the palm trees in Iraq observes that:

> The palm tree is the quintessential Iraqi tree….it is an essential feature in the country's landscape, and of its past and rich heritage as well…. It is a symbol of fertility and prosperity. Being an essential component of Iraq's landscape, the fate of the palm tree is akin to the fate of Iraqis. The destruction brought about by wars and climate change has killed and uprooted so many. Others are still standing and resisting. (Wassmann)

International Committee of the Red Cross describes the colossal environmental damage wreaked in Iraq by recurring savage wars in a similar manner:

> What images come to mind when you think of war in Iraq? A city razed to the ground. A family in mourning. Soldiers patrolling streets.
>
> What about scores of dead palm trees? Or a barren marshland? Perhaps not what you would immediately associate with war.
>
> Yet they are indicative of the ruinous damage that conflict has inflicted upon the environment in southern Iraq. (International Committee of the Red Cross)

The Corpse Washer also projects the environmental damage in Iraq through imagery

of damaged palm trees. Uncle Sabri draws a contrast about the ecological and social circumstances of Iraq during the phases of Saddam Hussein and American occupation:

> I knew the embargo had destroyed the country, but it's different when you see it with your own eyes. It's shocking. The entire country and every one in it are tired. I mean even right here in Karrada. Wasn't this the most beautiful neighborhood? Look at it now. Then you have all this garbage, dust, barbed wires, and tanks. There aren't any women walking down the street anymore! This is not the Baghdad I'd imagined. Not just in terms of the people. Even the poor palm trees are tired and no one takes care of them. Believe me, these Americans, with their ignorance and racism, will make people long for Saddam's days. (97)

The novelist sketches the bleak landscape of the Karrada city to convey the savage impact of the American occupation on the environmental conditions. The personified images of the palm trees shown as tired, withered and ruined again emphasize the environmental damage carried out by the United States in Iraq.

Through The Corpse Washer and *The Baghdad Eucharist* Sinan Antoon besides reflecting on the social disharmony caused by the religious tensions of the region, voices concern for the environment and speaks out against the environmental atrocities carried out by the American forces. Both the novels are set in the same time frame depicting the excruciating period of warfare from 1990s till first decade of twenty first century. It is pertinent to mention here that the situation of political uncertainty arose in the region due to the sentiment of sectarianism. The writer addresses the issue of socio-political unrest through characters from two different religious backgrounds. The plot revolves around a Muslim Shiite community in *The Corpse Washer* and characters from Christian community represent the crisis in *The Baghdad Eucharist*. The novelist draws eco-feministic parallels in both the novels by comparing suffering of women with environmental degradation to highlight the ecological damage of the region during the two decades from 1990s till 2010.

Conclusion

The novelist has sketched the blatant contrast in actions and narratives of America with respect to Iraq. American interference in the region proved fatal not only for its socio-political space but also for its ecological balance. Both the territorial and aquatic habitats stand contaminated with poisonous chemicals. Human beings are exposed to threat of cancer due to presence of carcinogenic toxins in the air of Iraq as well as in their food chain. The region witnessed devastating climate changes in recent years. The article echoes the interdependence of human beings with ecology and voices the concerns of Iraqi civilians about the environment in general and war-engendered violence on the flora and fauna of the region. The article delineates the damage inflicted on ecology implicitly calls for global intervention in Iraq to restore the ecological balance.

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Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*: A Study of Lipstick Feminism

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Abstract

Beauty practice is a potential component of Third Wave Feminism. Among other Nigerian authors Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in particular opposes the ancient feminine attributes and welcomes the views of Lipstick feminism which is reflected in her novel *Purple Hibiscus*. She has remodeled the sociological interface of ideal femininity and configured the tenets of Lipstick feminism that end the ideals of second wave feminism. This paper, therefore, looks into the third wave feminists' view of lipstick as a symbol which articulates the transformative aspects of both beauty standards and women's rights. Farding like applying mascara, and lipstick, and wearing modern dress reveals women's transition of cultural standards. The paper also focuses on how the protagonist Kambili's transformation to self-grooming brings a drastic change in her life.
Keywords: Femininity, Beauty practice, Journey and Transformation.

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the most debated Igbo Nigerian literary figures of the 21st century. Speaking of her, the famous African author Chinua Achebe remarks: "We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers" (Nunziata). She writes proficiently in a variety of genres, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry and play and has even been acknowledged in a discography. She is a recognized activist and public speaker on varied subjects as feminism, race, politics and civil war. *Purple Hibiscus, Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* are her highly acclaimed literary works. She is frequently considered as a feminist icon by the majority of readers besides her role as a writer and her involvement in politics. To her, feminism is not something to be embarrassed of, but everyone ought to embrace it. In her opinion, being a feminist normalizes women's accomplishments and supports men to achieve more in life. In a new video for Dior, Adichie has shared her views on femininity and feminism; "Femininity and feminism actually do complement each other. Women should be allowed to have a broad range of what they can be, of who they can be, of how they can present themselves. I think femininity is one of those options and I love femininity" (Jessica Davis n.p.). She is a brave author who takes a stand for equality and justice. She affirms that practicing feminism will make the future societies affluent and inclusive.

Adichie has signed as an ambassador for the Boots No.7 cosmetics brand. She may further support her claim to personal identity by serving as the face of No.7 lipstick. Even though she lives in the United States, she expresses her pride in being a trendy and "Happy African Feminist" (Adichie, *We* 10). Discrimination based on skin

colour is the widely known identity of Nigerians. Ethnic inequity, slavery, and racism are still commonly faced by them. Besides all these, there is a mysterious note about Nigeria that is the home of the second largest film industry in the world and most notably the center of fashion, technology and creativity; and also nicknamed as 'Giant of Africa'. A person's appearance is said to be important because a dress is equivalent to half a man and obviously that person is judged mostly by the attire. According to the Oxford dictionary, "makeup is defined as cosmetics such as lipstick or powder applied to the face, used to enhance or alter the appearance."(qtd. in "What"). It is the black and white skin tone of people that still keeps one higher and another lower in a Racist society. Being fancy in Nigeria is more than just dressing in the outward sense. It denotes their identity and cultural heritage. Later on, gradually the imitation of Western ideologies, Civilization, and attraction toward modernity affected the traditional outlook. This paper delineates how fashion influences a person's personality and even one's identity to some extent through Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* using the concept of Lipstick feminism.

Lipstick Feminism

The 1990s are remarkable for the continuation of revolutionary feminism in the shape of the Third Wave Feminism, commonly referred to as modern feminism. Rebecca Walker, Naomi Wolf, Susan Faludi, Kimberle Crenshaw, Jennifer Baumgardner, Amy Richards, Eve Ensler, Kathleen Hanna, Roxane Gay, Carol Ann Duffy and Rupi Kaur are some of the pioneers of Third Wave Feminism. They often engaged in micro-politics and challenged the second wave paradigm as to what is good for women. It provides a space for women to define feminism for themselves. The diverse ideologies of third wave feminism offer women to ponder over the stereotypes of the previous era and they are able to come out of it to pursue their heart's instinct. They focused on the post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality together with reproductive rights that access to contraception and abortion, and concepts like glass ceiling, unfair maternity-leave policies, single motherhood welfare and respect for both working women as well as homemakers. The third wave depicts the generation of women who espouse more individualistic views against the collectivist viewpoints that characterized the feminist movement throughout the prior waves. According to third wave feminists, every problem related to women is considered important, no matter how trivial or substantial it may be in a given culture. It was born out of the perceived shortcomings of second wave feminism; since feminists have pointed out the changes accomplished by the first wave that has not permeated women's modern routine.

The Third wave feminists point out the drawbacks of second wave feminism and by claiming it, they exclusively spoke for upper-class white heterosexual women. At the same time, they ignore the needs of other groups of women, such as black women who are subjected to both racism and double standards of oppression. "Third wave feminism seeks to challenge and expand the common definitions of

gender and sexuality" (Shukla 11). Third wave feminists extol 'Lipstick feminism' and 'girlie culture' which imply that a woman should be allowed to do whatever marks her happy and satisfied about herself. They embrace popular culture's aesthetic, sense of style, and use of cosmetics, referring to it as 'Lipstick feminism.'

The movement of Third Wave Feminism known as 'Lipstick Feminism' promotes the notion of embracing femininity to assist women's liberation. Lipstick feminist echoes the phrase "taking charge of society's beauty standards and reclaiming what belongs to women"(Marchetti). They assert that dressing sexily and applying cosmetics do not detract from their feminist beliefs. Traditional feminism has a deeply ingrained distaste for femininity and discourages women from pursuing new roles that are traditionally viewed as feminine. This self-imposed restriction is seen to impede women's freedom and yet another kind of oppression against them. Lipstick feminism has come vigorously in fostering the ideas against the continuation of the patriarchal system and exploitation of the female physic. According to Lipstick feminism, the strength of femininity gives women the skills they need to be successful in their lives against the society that controls them. Being more attractive, sexier, and commanding is what people aspire to be to feel successful and confident.

Adichie, in her book-length essay titled *We Should All be Feminist* (2014), revealed how she intended to hide her sense of style to be considered to be formal when she traveled to teach her first writing programme in the United States. She said "I really wanted to wear my shiny lip gloss and my girly skirt but I decided not to, instead, I wore a very serious, very manly, and very ugly suit . . . Many of us think that the less feminine a woman appears, the more likely she is to be taken seriously. A man going to a business meeting doesn't wonder about being taken seriously based on what he is wearing – but a woman does" (Adichie 38-39). She, however, concluded that people should wear what makes them comfortable.

Historical Backdrop

The people from the early civilizations like the Sumerian and Indus Valley gave aesthetic prominence to the invention of lipstick and wore it about 5,000 years ago. They crushed the gemstones for the formulation of lipstick. Lakshmi Nayar, the digital content editor of Nykaa.com confronts "the red lipstick was invented in the historical region of Southern Mesopotamia by the Sumerians" (Nayar n.p). The German dictator Adolf Hitler disliked red lipstick, which he believed was a sign of patriotism and resilient femininity because makeup during the World War II hamstrung the power of masculinity.

To demonstrate the social standards of society and its strength, many women have worn red throughout history. Cleopatra, who was seen as the model for the femme fatale, is credited with its first recorded use. Crushing ants and beetles to obtain a rich carmine pigment was a practice used by the Queen of ancient Egypt to produce several colours of crimson. To give them a brilliant finish, she also added flowers and intriguing fish scales. In the 15th century Christian culture, wearing red

lipstick and any other cosmetics are believed to be associated with worshipping Satan. But the Queen Elizabeth I of 16th century made the contrast of vivid red lips and light complexion quite fashionable.

In the 19th century Queen Victoria considered the use of cosmetics as a disrespectful act and throughout her reign and so cosmetic use drastically decreased. Gradually, what was considered out of style came back into vogue, partly because of its significance in feminism in history. In 1920s, women wore red lipstick to represent their independent behaviour. Lipstick was regarded as the symbol of adult sexuality and womanhood. The Suffragette Movement of the early 20th century championed the women's right to vote by wearing red lipstick.

Manifestation of Lipstick Feminism in *Purple Hibiscus*

The novel *Purple Hibiscus* articulates the tradition-bound household of Eugene and how his family members suffered a lot under the umbrella of patriarchy. Eugene's daughter Kambili has been constantly denied the freedom of speech and individuality by her father which is represented by lipstick. During Christmas mass, Kambili met her Aunty Ifeoma and her daughter Amaka and observes their lips were coloured red. Then she starts to envision herself donning lipstick. "I watched their lips move as they spoke; Mama's bare lips were pale compared to Aunty Ifeoma's, covered in a shiny bronze lipstick." (74). The lipstick represents femininity and sexual awareness. Amaka and Aunty Ifeoma frequently have bright bronze lipstick on their lips throughout the story, whereas Kambili and Mama typically have chapped lips with peeled skin. In her Aunt Ifeoma's home lipstick indicates Kambili's journey toward self-realization. Her cousin Amaka looked taller and even more fearless in a red jacket and high heels. When she smiles, it appears as though her teeth are whiter than they are, for she used to wear lipstick regularly. During the Christmas service, Kambili anticipates that Amaka will be wearing the same vivid red lipstick just as her mother.

A Black fashion historian Shelby Ivey Christie denotes, "For me, red lipstick is about shifting the narrative around what red lipstick traditionally meant for Black women. There's a long history of hyper-sexualization that is amplified by caricatures of Black women with exaggerated red lips." (qtd. in Ware). The best lipstick colour to wear and want to feel in charge and powerful is red. It is a makeup mainstay for most women and a confidence booster since it is both elegant and edgy. Kambili says that the red lipstick distracts her from her focus on the Mass: "Although I tried to concentrate on Mass, I kept thinking of Amaka's lipstick, wondering what it felt like to run colour over your lips" (99).

"Vanity was a sin. Jaja and I looked in the mirror just long enough to make sure our buttons were done right." (174). The patriarchal rules of Papastopped exposing them to the outer world. He even wanted her to stop wearing makeup. When Kambili learns that the things she was prevented from doing because they were considered immoral or evil, helps Amaka to grow. Kambili started learning more favourable traits

about herself with each interaction with Amaka. She admires Amaka as a role model because of her self-confidence and flamboyance and she discerns the air of independence in the company of Amaka. To motivate Kambili and help her discover her latent skills, Amaka is shown as a self-assured and talented young woman.

Kambili proclaims,"Some just draped see-through black veils over their hair; others wore trousers, even jeans. Papa would be scandalized. A woman's hair must be covered in the house of God, and a woman must not wear a man's clothes, especially in the house of God, he would say."(240). Because Eugene strictly adheres to follow the traditional values and societal beliefs on femininity that trapped her for a lifetime. Adichie presents Kambili as a new sprout growing out of the difficulties who divulges the components of Lipstick feminism that represent her as a new woman. The core premise of Lipstick feminism is none other than traditional feminism which is firmly rooted in a disparaging attitude toward femininity and prevents women from pursuing activities that are traditionally viewed as feminine. This self-imposed deprivation is viewed as a barrier to women's freedom and as another instance of oppression against them. In *Purple Hibiscus,* Kambili tries to apply lipstick in Aunt Ifeoma's house.

> … I took Amaka's lipstick from the top of the dresser and ran it over my lips. It looked strange, not as glamorous as it did on Amaka; it did not even have the same bronze shimmer. I wiped it off. My lips looked pale, a dour brown. I ran the lipstick over my lips again, and my hands shook…. I wiped the lipstick away with the back of my hand and left the room. (174)

These fleeting and conflicted emotions show how Kambili views the changing world. She is unsure about what to make out of her newly acquired knowledge. If she wants to be an independent and admirable woman, she cannot simply sit back and obey her father's rules for the rest of her life.

Kambili perceived the beauty standards as follows, "The two girls said hello, and I smiled. They had hair as short as Amaka's, wore shiny lipstick and trousers so tight I knew they would walk differently if they were wearing something more comfortable." (141). The influence of modernity through its outfits lured her attention completely and so she was repellent to wear African traditional attires that was impelled by her father. Although she is far-flung from the modern world of fashion, she yearns for the attention of others through physical transformation. "Lipstick feminism displays femininity whilst aware of its patriarchal roots, emphasizing that femininity is a positive trait that can be celebrated, such as through one's self-expression with makeup and fashion." (qtd. in Gurrieri 3). The restriction being practiced at Kambili's home was remodeled by her Aunt Ifeoma. She is always outspoken and encourages Kambili as follows,

> "Kambili, I think you will be more comfortable in trousers," Aunty Ifeoma said as we walked to the car.
> "I'm fine, Aunty," I said. I wondered why I did not tell her that all my skirts stopped well past my knees, that I did not own any trousers because it was sinful for a woman to wear trousers. (80)

Kambili observes Amaka's striking, vibrant lipstick whenever she pays a visit to her

and her family during the holidays. Later, when Kambili travels to Aunty Ifeoma's residence in Nsukka to meet her family, she notices the lipstick for the second time sitting in Amaka's bedroom. "Amaka barely let her sides meet mine before she backed away. She was wearing lipstick, a different shade that was more red than brown," (116). And "The dust coating her eyelashes looked stylish, like cocoa-colored mascara" (190). Through Amaka, Kambili has learned about self-representation and self-grooming that revolve around one's personality in explicating them to the outer world. Long-established customs and practices within the country or geographical region have their own set of beliefs. This dogma turns into the attributes of the society and its inhabitants. Fashion, especially in Nigeria, has never simply been about dressing for the external appearance; it has always conveyed a sense of everything that the people believe in, such as their cultural heritage, their experiences, and ultimately their identity. Najla Kaddour, the celebrity make-up artist and beauty blogger in an article, "African Tribal Make-up: What's Behind the Face Paint?" mentions

> Africa has an estimated total of 3000 tribes, all of which vary incredibly in terms of language, culture and traditions…. Tribal make-up plays a key role in many of the various groups. The make-up, often in the form of face paint, is used for many different reasons and can signify many different things such as hunting, religious and traditional reasons, military purposes or to scare an enemy. It also functions as social markers, distinguishing boys from men, men from older men, men from women and members of the tribe from outsiders. Face painting indicates status and they convey a strong cultural meaning. (Kaddour n.p)

Laura Hurd Clarke and Andrea Bundon in their research article entitled "From 'The Thing to do' to 'Defying the Ravages of Age': Older Women Reflect on the Use of Lipstick." confront, "although a seemingly trivial act, wearing lipstick is a powerful example of how the personal is political." (212). In *Purple Hibiscus* lipstick is considered a sinful material by Kambili's father Eugene whereas it is appreciated and projected as a symbol of confidence by the Nigerian priest Amadi. He welcomes the transformation of Kambili and encourages her self-grooming.

> "Do you wear lipstick? Have you ever worn lipstick?"
>
> "No," I said. Then I felt the smile start to creep over my face, stretching my lips and cheeks, an embarrassed and amused smile. He knew I had tried to wear lipstick for the first time today. I smiled. I smiled again. (177)

The happiness on Kambili's face shows her acceptance of her new transformation. "Beauty products and practices are a common focus of this debate in feminist theory, with lipstick being particularly symbolic. For some, the choice to engage in beauty practices is the legacy of feminism and emblematic of women's independence." (qtd. in Gurrieri 3).

Conclusion

One of the key tenets of third wave feminism is to embrace and support

women's preferences and decisions; lipstick feminism too serves the same cause. Adichie believes that wearing makeup, dressing up, and adhering to feminist beliefs must be accepted and encouraged by everyone, irrespective of the gender. Self-grooming would boost women to be strong and attractive, and the act of doing it inspires other women as Amaka's inspirational persona motivates Kambili to become a powerful woman in the patriarchal society. The transition of Kambili from timidity to confidence, fear to boldness and isolation to accessibility, reveals the course of her self-realization. Lipstick serves as a metaphor for Kambili's self-actualization. In brief, Adichie through *Purple Hibiscus* endorses and propagates the concept of "girlie feminism."

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Revisiting Environmental Crisis: A Study of Select Petro-fiction

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Abstract

Now is the time to contemplate seriously about human activities which are causing irreparable damage to the Nature, mother earth, and indirectly, to mankind. Climate is behaving strangely and unexpectedly with sudden and untimely changes in weather conditions. It is high time to reconsider the alarmingly disturbing developmental acts of production and consumption. Like many other depleting natural resources, oil and gas exhaustion is engaging the creative writers. As literature has always been a continuous means of representing all aspects of life, contemporary writers have taken the charge of writing seminal speculative fiction as well as non-fiction. This paper aims at an explorative analysis of Upton Sinclair's *Oil* (1926), Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* (1994), Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010), and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014). These works bring together traditions of science fiction, postcolonial studies, Afrofuturism, and of course, environmental studies, more particularly Petro-fiction. These writers indulge in an ecological debate aiming at bringing to the forefront the damage being caused by the never ending pollution, more particularly the issues related to petroleum industry. The purpose in the paper is to communicate environmental crisis in the current global world.

Keywords: Africa, science fiction, petro-culture, literature, environment, crisis

> 'Like oil itself, oil literature has significant global transportation
> routes, value changes, and multiple and uniform forms'
> -- Graeme Macdonald. 'Oil and World Literature'

Petro-fiction is a genre of literature formed on the role of petroleum in society. It can also be defined as the "literature that addresses the production, consumption, or consequences of petroleum-based energy [but also] literature that works, mostly within realism, to envision a post-petro future" (Wikipedia). This genre proliferated at the turn of twenty-first century, as a consequence of increasing attention towards the degrading condition of environment. Petro-fiction is a rapidly expanding area catching attention of eminent Indian writer Amitav Ghosh. In an article, "Abdelrahman Munif and the Uses of Oil," Theroux writes what Munif once told him at a family lunch, "Oil is our one and only chance to build a future, and the regimes are ruining it" (2012). This statement shows the concerns Munif has in his mind for the depletable resource of energy that is oil. While reading Munif's *Cities of Salt* in 1992, Ghosh coined the term 'petro-fiction,' which he thought was a kind of literature about the petroleum industry and its impact on society. Ghosh in his seminal essay, "Petro-fiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel" confesses lack of literature dealing with oil and 'oil encounter.' He writes, 'The oil encounter, on the other hand, has produced scarcely a single work of note.' Probably, he gives reason for this,

> As one of the few people who have tried to write about the floating world of oil, I can
> bear witness to its slipperiness, to the ways in which it tends to trip fiction into

incoherence. In the end, perhaps, it is the craft of writing itself—or rather writing as we know it today—that is responsible for the muteness of the Oil Encounter. The experiences that oil has generated run counter to many of the historical imperatives that have shaped writing over the last couple of centuries and given it its distinctive forms. (Petrofiction, 29-34) (Quoted in Chambers, 2006)

Likewise, an acclaimed critic, Szeman states that "we look to literature to help us grasp how oil and its by-products generate the expectations and desires of the modern world [...] we find it represented far less than we might expect" (2017: 284). Graeme Macdonald writes, "Most oil fiction, for example, contains certain thematic preoccupations: volatile labor, relations and ethnic tensions, war and violence, ecological despoliation, and political corruption" and further adds, "Petrofiction is also usually a narrative of uneasy and uneven encounters" (Oil and World Literature 7). One of the consequences of the boom of oil industry was the increase of desertification which directly contributed to global warming and disturbance of the biodiversity, bringing about an ecocidal effect on the water and terrestrial ecosystems and creatures.

Upton Sinclair's *Oil* (1926), Abdelrahman Munif's *The Cities of Salt* (1987), Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* (1994), Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010), and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014), are some of the select exemplary writings of this genre that deal with the environmental degradation. Sinclair's *Oil* is based on his experiences of witnessing the greed, the desperation seen in the property owners, to buy his wife's land on which oil was discovered in Los Angeles. Ghosh's debut novel *The Circle of Reason* is about the life of an orphan, Alu, who reaches al-Ghazira, a town rich in oil. Habila's *Oil On Water* (2010) is an important text on the subject of oil encounter in literature depicting the conditions of the most severely affected Niger delta and the violence which the country has to undergo. African writers, especially, Helon Habila, like Nnedi Okorafor, strongly believe that "the issue of environment and its preservation are not an exclusive preserve of the Whites or those in the sciences" (2017: 43). Okorafor's *Lagoon*, depicts similar problems of the Niger Delta region, but here human and non-human entities come together for the rescue of the environment.

The present paper is an exploratory study of select literary texts by American, Indian and African writers -- Upton Sinclair's *Oil,* Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water,* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* -- which delve into the monumental problems and devastating consequences of the exploration and exploitation that oil brings with it. Sinclair's *Oil* is basically about the emergence of oil culture, companies, and oil drilling in the 1920s. Sinclair portrays through his characters, Bunny Ross, his father J. Arnold Ross and Paul Watkins, the nefarious practices of men of the oil company men, the land lease scandal and their indulgence in political activities against the fundamentalists. Bunny unravels his father's involvement in land swindling and numerous unethical activities rampant in the oil producing countries, and along with Paul prepares to fight against injustice in America during the industrialization. The narrative unfolds the unscrupulous oil company owners whose avarice for profits blinds them to their accountability to their workers who are not paid adequate wages. The oil lobby works for overthrowing the government of President Wilson who "wasn't making [the world] safe for oil operators" (*Oil* 247). In brief, the novel is about America's ever increasing interest in

oil as manifest in the emergence of U.S. oil companies in the early twentieth century and their expansionist business designs internationally.

The development of oil industries in Saudi Arabia between 1930s to 1980s is the subject of Abdelrahman Munif's famous writing *The Cities of Salt* (1987). The darker side of oil industry is a prominent theme in this novel. One of the characters in the novel states, "The Americans came and the demons came with them" (371). Munif fictionalizes the saga of emergence of oil business and related issues. Not surprisingly, like many other writers, his writings in Arabic were also banned in his country. He is one who has brought to light the genre of oil fiction or petrofiction or hydrocarbon genre, documenting the fictional and factual accounts of oil. His work, *The Cities of Salt* was first published in 1984 in Arabic, and translated in English in 1987. It is a narrative of the transformation in the economic, social and political trends of the society during the 1930s; the impact of coming of Americans with the desperate greed to extract oil; tempting and trapping the Arabians with proposed modernization. Human sustenance was the primary aim. Likewise, Ghosh's *The Cities of Salt* is a monumental five-part cycle of novels dealing with the history of oil. The 1970's Mexican oil rush is in sharp focus in Carlos Fuentes' 1978 novel, *The Hydra Head*. Such activities of desperation by oil driven modernity invites resistance too as evident in Patrick Chamoiseau's 1992 novel, *Texaco*, wherein Martinique's local islanders resist the oil culture.

These works of fiction represent the emerging power of America during the early 20th century with big oil dynasties trying to intervene and disturb the ecological, social and economic setups of the territories they entered. Macdonald in his essay 'Oil and World Literature' compares oil with literature: "As a world resource, however unevenly distributed, oil, like world literature, has an unequal movement and an uneven development because of the hierarchy of nation-states in the world system that consumes and produces it in varying levels" (31).

The emergence of oil brought with it international power struggle. Ghosh feels sad that "a 'Great American Oil Novel' is yet to be written" (8). So, he tries to fill the gap through *The Circle of Reason*. Basically, a journey from Lalpukur to Calcutta, Kerala, the Middle East, and finally, Algeria, Ghosh's debut novel *The Circle of Reason,* published in 1986, deals with the life and adventures of Alu, a Bengali orphan. Ghosh uses the techniques of oral stories, multiple-voice narratives, elements of memory, repeated flashback, etc. Alu and Jyoti Das are the only two characters which connect the whole plot.

The second section of *The Circle of Reason* is set in al-Ghazira, a country in the Middle East, depending on western technological knowledge and modernization for its economic existence. Being charged for a murder, Alu has to seek refuge in Kerala and then in al-Ghazira. Running away from the misery and apathy caused by Bangladesh war, Alu reaches al-Ghazira, where he, like other displaced migrant workers, does not find many job opportunities, but yes, lack of legal rights and lots of problems. Ghosh provides insights into the intensely hostile working environment in the oil companies:

> those ghosts behind the fence were not men, they were tools — helpless, picked for   their poverty. In those days when al-Ghazira was still a real country they were   brought here to slip between its men and their work, like the first whiffs of an opium dream; they were brought as weapons, to divide the Ghaziris from themselves

and the world of sanity; to turn them into buffoons for the world to laugh at. (261)

The workers or migrants from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan were considered "cheaper and more pliable" (Findlay 107). The number of migrants is so much that it creates competition for the job opportunities. Sometimes, they have to work even on lesser wages just to get the job. A character, Zindi, an Egyptian lady, in *The Circle of Reason*, says, "[t]here are hundreds, thousands of chhokren [boys] […] begging; begging for jobs" (180). Even those who are able to find jobs have to face lots of problems, humiliation, molestation, and mis-treatment, who had been once tempted for getting "employment opportunities, consumer goods, freedom, 'houses and cars and multi-storeyed buildings'" (177). Further, they face 'litany of calamities' (201). In his article, 'Oil and Labor in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and the Oil Boon', Peter N. Woodward writes about the unhealthy and hazardous working conditions, lack of employment related rights, mal-treatment from the local people, and untimely and long working hours of the undocumented workers in the Oil Companies.

One of the Nigerian writers, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* explores the exploitation in the form of governmental oppression following the discovery of oil fields in Niger-Delta region. As the title suggests, the oil becomes superior setting itself on the surface of water; making a thick black coating, not getting mixed up with it; over-powering the life-giving qualities of water; making it polluted; becoming an indispensable part of modern life; degrading the environment with its waste products, and no doubt sometimes, forcing man to regret for discovering it; and his unavoidable reliance on it. The region's oil wealth camouflages its poverty, desperation, exploitation, tears, unwanted activities borne by the natives of the place and the labour class. All this finds a place in *Oil on Water*. This text unfolds life of oil workers, owners of Oil Companies, role played by the government. Edebor writes about 'mass deaths, dislocations, sickness, avoidable accidents, serious violence' (2017: 45) due to the unmindful exploration and total exploitation of the region for the crude oil. Habila "had to write a novel on it, [he] had to tell the story of the ordinary person in the Delta who bears the brunt of the injustices of the oil extraction industry" (2015). It involves a journey by a Nigerian reporter, Rufus, to the swamps of the Niger Delta in search of a kidnapped English woman, Isabel Floode, wife of an oil company owner. It's an insightful journey into the most exploited, polluted, devastated, oil extraction witnessed by Rufus who encounters the sufferings of the inhabitants and environmental politics of the Niger Delta. Rufus and Zaq, another journalist, are on a journey in search of a kidnapped white man's wife, unveiling the suicidal circumstances in the region. Fortunately, Rufuz narrowly escapes death but Zaq loses his life due to unfavorable circumstances, political, social as well as medical. The condition of the deteriorating quality of water is evident in the observations of Doctor Dagogo-Mark:

> … A year later, when the livestock began to die, and the plants began to wither on their stalks, I took samples of the drinking water and in my lab I measured the level of toxins in it. It was rising, steadily. In one year it had grown to almost twice the safe level… when I confronted the oil workers, they offered me money and a job. The manager, an Italian guy, wrote me a cheque and said I was now on their payroll. He told me to continue doing what I was doing, but this time I was to come to him only with my results. I thought they would do something with my results, but they didn't. (92)

This shows the unmindful and callous attitude of the money obsessed oil companies

towards the environment and health of the natives. Obviously, Zapf calls this book, "an ecological cultural force" (2016: 142).

Capriciously vanishing wetland of Nigar Delta finds similar concerns in Nnedi Okorafor's speculative science fiction *Lagoon* (2014). An Afro-futuristic novel *Lagoon* is purely an environmental critique, focusing on the issue of pollution in Niger Delta, which largely depends on oil for its economic survival, disturbing and affecting maliciously the flora, fauna, inhabitants, and the minority living there. The three main characters in this novel, Adaora, Agu and Anthony, are aiming to create a utopian place free from pollution, especially, in the Niger Delta.

Lagos has been depending on oil. The novel opens with anger or concern of the author, which she expresses through a 'great sword fish'. She writes,

> She slices through the water… She is on a mission. She is angry. She will success and then they will leave for good. They brought the stench of dryness, then they brought the noise and made the world bleed black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water's surface … Inhaling them stings and burns her gills. (*Lagoon* 3)

'They' here are the unconcerned human beings, especially the oil people, who are destroying the nature in their rush to maintain the fast pace of life of modernization and are responsible for the ecological catastrophe. The sword fish, further, feels nostalgic about the old original form of its grey blue skin which is 'now impenetrable' (5). 'Everything is changing', (6) writes Okorafor.

The narrative further unfolds that Ayodele, an extra-terrestrial creature who understands the language of sea creatures, conveys the concern, "it's the people of the waters … They are tired of boats and human beings' (240). The sea creatures have successfully destroyed the oil structures in the water in their act of rebellion. All the offshore drilling facilities would be destroyed by the people of the water … oil could no longer be Nigeria's top commodity" (273). The irony of the situation is that even the aliens, like Ayodele, have come to earth to rescue the environment of Lagos, to cleanse the water. They "do not want to rule, colonize, conquer or take" (220). They are very clear about their aim. Due to their collective efforts,

> … ocean water just outside Lagos, Nigeria, is now so clean that a cup of its salty-sweet goodness will heal the worst human illnesses and cause a hundred more illnesses not yet known to humankind. It is more alive than it has been in centuries and it is teeming with aliens and monster. (6)

They have created a utopian place free from pollution and dirt.

The foregoing discussion underlines that "the sea always takes more than it gives" (228) and "the cure for anything is salt water –sweat, tears, or the sea.' Even Adaora keeps repeating the phrase "*aman iman*" (12), which means water is life. Adaora has a fascination for the city and its waters, 'Lagos was riddled with corruption but she couldn't imagine living anywhere else. And its ocean life was fascinating. And problematic. It needed her' (64). Like Adaora, Ayodele, Agu, Anthony, the President of Lagos, the inhabitants, it's incumbent upon all the sane persons to feel concerned about the environment,,contribute to the repair and positive maintenance of the water bodies and economical use of other natural resources. *Lagoon* brings together, whatever it takes, to save the environment, bringing together human and non-human creatures, aliens, animals, spiritual deities from African and Nigerian folklore. These writings are not only exemplary texts of the genre of Petrofiction but seminal texts that guide the readers about how literature can help in generating awareness for saving the

environment, curbing reckless plundering of ecology and its boons, and bringing man and environment closer in the era of modernization and technology. The grave signals emanating from the select literary texts put in sharp focus the urgency to halt human intrusions into the territory of other creatures and ensure safety of biodiversity and ecological balance. On daily basis the human consciousness is assaulted frequently with disturbing tidings of man-induced or natural disasters, floods on the Australian east coast, sudden bushfires and marine heat waves that caused mass coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef in recent years, oil spills in Niger Delta region, eruption of volcanoes, forest fires in America, Australia and Canada. Loss of biodiversity, air, land, noise, and water pollution have become pervasive. It is time for introspection, time to rise from the slumber to save earth, thereby save posterity.

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Exploring the Dichotomy of the Self and the Non-self: A Vedāntic Study of Raja Rao's *The Serpent and The Rope*

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Abstract

The present research article critically analyses Raja Rao's novel *The Serpent and the Rope* in the light of Advaita Vedānta, a non-dualistic sub-school of Vedānta in the Hindu philosophical tradition, which insists that the transient individual self is identical to the eternal Absolute self which, in turn, is the essence of existence. The true nature of existence is *sat-chit-ānanda* or truth, consciousness and bliss. *The Serpent and the Rope*, published in 1960, narrates the story of Ramaswamy, a young South Indian Brahmin who pursues his doctoral studies in France on the history of the Albigensian heresy. While in France, Ramaswamy marries Madeleine Roussellin, a French lecturer specialising in history. However, the marriage falls apart due to Ramaswamy's infidelity and a lack of understanding between the two. The cause of their incompatibility is not solely the presence of psychological disparities but rather their diametrically opposite cultural sensibilities. The narrative reveals multiple meanings as the reader is left reflecting and introspecting. This research article contributes to the existing scholarship on Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* by contextualising the novel within the philosophical framework of the Advaita Vedānta, a school of ancient Indian philosophy. By doing so, this study illuminates how the novel comments on complex philosophical ideas such as the nature of reality and the nature of self, alongside re-evaluating societal norms that perpetuate differences within the culture. The research also attempts a nuanced, comprehensive understanding of the novel's significance as a work of literature as well as philosophical treatise.

Keywords: individual, non-dualism, self-knowledge, reality, consciousness.

The Indian knowledge system comprises an exhaustive collection of the ancient Indian *śāstras*: Vedas, *Purānas*, *Itihāsas*, and *Brahmasūtras.* Vedas comprise *Ṛig Veda*, *Sāma Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda.* Each of the Vedas is further divided into three segments, of which the first is the ritualistic portion comprising prose commentaries that provide procedures, justifications, and clarifications. The second part consists of the Āraṇyakās and the third the Upaniṣads. Vedānta primarily refers to the last part of the Vedas, as suggested by its name (Ved+anta: *'anta'* is translated as 'the end'). Scholars and critics have regarded Vedānta as the 'essence' or the 'cream' of the Vedas. This ancient school of Indian philosophy is predominantly concerned with the knowledge of the self, the idea of supreme importance throughout the literature of *sanātana dharma*. K. Kathirasan, in his book *The Advaita Vedānta of Śiva Saṁhitā*, explains the significance of acquiring the knowledge contained in Vedānta: "In Vedanta, knowledge refers to the reality that makes any knowledge possible" (12).

The *Prasthānatrāya* act as the three points of departure of Vedānta: The

Upaniṣads (*Śruti-prasthana*), the *Brahmasūtras* (*Nyāya-prasthāna*), and the *Bhagavad Gita* (*Sruti-prasthāna*). Adi Shankaracharya wrote commentaries on these texts around the eighth century BC when the Vedic religious order was being questioned by society. In his book, *The Advaita Tradition in Indian Philosophy,* Chandradhar Sharma informs that the term 'Vedānta' entails "all the vast literature written by way of commentary or gloss on the basic texts or any independent treatise or any system of philosophy claiming to be based on the Upaniṣads" (119). Its foremost intention was to shift the attention of practical religion from the outward performance of rituals and sacrifices to an internal spiritual pilgrimage. The Advaita Vedānta of Adi Shankaracharya claims the "transcendent non-dual nature of Reality, insisting at the same time on its immanence in the phenomenal world of plurality which is only its appearance" (121). The most systematic corpus of Vedānta consists of the *Brahmasūtra* by Badarayana, "also known as Sage Veda Vyasa" (Saraswati 55). The *Brahmasūtra* "contains the aphorisms that sum up and systematise the philosophical teachings of different Vedic works, chiefly the Upaniṣads, and also briefly mention and answer actual and possible objections to these views" (Chatterjee and Datta 10).

According to the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta, Brahman is the only reality. It is one without a second. The visible world is merely a false appearance reflected in the universal consciousness or the self. The individual self or the *Ātman* falsely appears as a separate entity with individual characteristics until one has realised the oneness of the individual self with the Absolute self. Once the knowledge of the nature of the self dawns, one can discern that the all-pervasive and all-encompassing *Ātman* transcends the mind, feeling, intellect, will, and senses. This transcendence extends beyond mere perceptual and cognitive capacities, encompassing the interpretation and understanding of experiences.

In the history of the Indian novel in English, Raja Rao enjoys a distinct and prominent position. Wilson Harris comments that Raja Rao is "quintessentially … an Indian novelist, perhaps the most remarkable and disturbing of his generation" (587). Richard R. Guzman appreciates the writing style of Raja Rao thus: "Of the few writers who have managed to synthesise forms and idioms out of the clash of the native and Western, one certainly thinks of Raja Rao, whom many consider the most brilliant Indian ever to write fiction in English." Rao was interested in the universal metaphysical issues facing the human condition and directly confronted in his writing the problems of the encounter between the East and the West during colonisation. For him, the individual human psyche was significant in framing the collective consciousness of a nation. An investigation into the metaphysical and ontological themes of the novel highlights the dichotomies between not only the 'self' and the 'non-self' but also the notions of 'being' and 'becoming', 'doubt' and 'faith', 'asceticism' and 'spirituality', 'abstract' and 'concrete', 'the real' and 'the unreal', 'unity' and 'plurality', and 'duality' and 'non-duality', in addition to the concept of Indianness.

On the surface, *The Serpent and the Rope* might appear to be a mere "tragic story of a marriage of minds which drift apart" (Naik, *Raja Rao* 79), depicting the life

and travails of Ramaswamy, an Indian man, unhappily married to Madeleine, a French woman. However, probing into the deeper layers of meaning reveals that the story is written in the form of a framed narrative, which has the predominant and overarching narrative as the colonisation of India by Europe in the nineteenth century. Interestingly, in this novel, the psychological ramifications resulting from colonisation assume precedence over the physical and geographical dimensions. Through the intense philosophical discourse, Raja Rao endeavours to unveil the essence of being born and raised in India, offering incisive revelations into several aspects of Indian sensibility and cultural ethos. He illuminates the contrasting paradigms between the East and the West through his highly sophisticated use of language. M. K. Naik rightly points out: "Considering the plane on which the whole story moves, far more is involved here than merely the question of marital inconstancy" (Naik, *Raja Rao* 83), as there was "an unbridgeable gulf between two kinds of cultural ethos" (Naik, *Raja Rao* 83).

Rao's intention was not just to extol the virtues of Indian culture and tradition but also to demonstrate the true meaning of frequently misunderstood terms within India and beyond its borders. The opening line is particularly thought-provoking: "I was born a Brahmin—that is devoted to Truth and all that" (Rao, *Serpent* 1). The phrase "and all that" humorously alludes to the complex connotation of the term 'Brahmin' in the Indian cultural context. As a critical insider, Rao set himself the challenge of portraying a truthful picture of India to the world, one that could help redefine 'Indianness.' Ramaswamy functions as a Brahmin only within the socio-political context of the novel's setting. Rao explains that a Brahmin is one who 'knows' the truth. He acknowledges that not every person who has inherited the identity of a 'Brahmin' through ancestry might be assumed to possess genuine knowledge of the Absolute self. By means of Ramaswamy's voice, Rao demonstrates how his mastery of Sanskrit grammar and understanding of the *śāstras* had caused the predetermined identity of a "good" Brahmin to be thrust upon him by society. Both 'good' and 'bad' are moral judgments, and such labels become meaningless when one has realised the self. Therefore, the novel questions the socio-cultural practices and value structures based on the interpretation of the words used in the Indian classical texts.

The idea of consciousness in understood distinctly in Advaita Vedānta and Western psychology. While Western psychology considers consciousness to be a faculty of the mind, Advaita emphasises that the world is subsumed within the non-dual consciousness. The novel's epigraph, a quote by Raja Rao's spiritual teacher, Sri Atmananda Guru: "Waves are nothing but water. So is the sea," subtly refers to this idea. 'Wave' and 'water' connote water's outward and inward manifestations. Both 'waves' and 'water' are essentially the same. Neither is part of the other. Similarly, the world that appears to the individual self is consciousness, the larger reality or the Absolute self that it appears to be a part of is consciousness too. At their depths, both the "world" and the "individual self" are the same consciousness, the underlying essence of everything, and the illusory distinction between them arises out of spiritual ignorance or *avidyā* and due to the creative power of *māyā*. Water is the essence that

underlies both the waves and the sea. The apparent substratum, which appears in the process of self-enquiry as the *antaḥkaraṇa*, composed of the mind and the intellect, is also understood as a manifestation of consciousness that pervades everything when one gradually moves from sense-perception to higher states of awareness. This implies the most significant purport of Advaita Vedānta that nothing apart from the non-dual self or consciousness is real, and everything in the world is permeated by it. Existence is consciousness; nothing apart from consciousness exists.

In the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, the idea of death is approached in a distinct manner, rooted in its understanding of the nature of reality and consciousness. Advaita Vedānta does not treat death as the obliteration of the self. Rather, it emphasises that the true nature of the self is eternal, unaffected by the illusory cycle of birth and death. Advaita Vedānta teaches the disidentification of the self with the body and mind. The existential theme of death recurs prominently in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Ramaswamy speaks about the death of his mother and how he was left parentless: "I was born an orphan, and have remained one. I have wandered the world and sobbed in hotel rooms and on trains, looked at the cold mountains and sobbed, for I had no mother" (Rao, *Serpent* 1-2). Though it appears that Ramaswamy refers to himself as an orphan. However, his statement that he was born an orphan is inconsistent with the information that his mother died when he was young, and his father was still alive. Here, it is important to note that in Ramaswamy's quest for truth lies the narrative of India's quest for self-realisation. Ramaswamy acts as a metaphor for ancient India, and his wife, Madeleine, is a symbol of France, which brought modernisation during colonisation. The encounter between India and Europe during colonisation could be considered a forced marriage between the two. Therefore, Ramaswamy's discourse transcends his individual condition at this juncture and foregrounds a pertinent socio-political situation that affects the psyche of millions.

Advaita Vedānta views the nature of the self or universal consciousness as continuous and eternal. Rao writes about his ancestors' death: "But when they died—for indeed they did 'die'—they too must have been burnt by tank or grove or meeting of two rivers, and they too must have known they did not die. I can feel them in me, and know they knew they did not die. Who is it that tells me they did not die? Who but me" (Rao, *Serpent* 1). Even though the physical bodies of Ramaswamy's ancestors were to be discarded after death, it was not the end of their consciousness. The self was eternal and continued to exist. This knowledge was not borrowed, but 'direct' knowledge that Ramaswamy had gained from intuitive experience. "I know my mother, my mother Gauri, is not dead" (Rao, *Serpent* 5).

Rao's commentary on dying elucidates how, in Advaita Vedānta, the body's death is not the final death of the being and hence not to be mourned. The true non-dual self is immortal and eternal. He clearly states his intellectual position: "For I must first believe that there is death. And that is the central fact—I do not believe that death is. So, for whom shall I repent?" (Rao, *Serpent* 5) Later, he puts forth the idea that self-knowledge cannot be borrowed. One acquires it through direct experience, and no one can enjoy eternal life in the form of the gross body.

Ramaswamy acknowledges that death is an inevitable reality for all and sundry—even those who have "seen God face to face and built temples" (Rao, *Serpent* 1), and "horses die too" (Rao, *Serpent* 3). While contemplating the death of Grandfather Kittanna's horse Sundar, Ramaswamy acknowledges that even animals like horses, who are reckoned strong and powerful, are ultimately mortal. Ramaswamy poses a thought-provoking rhetorical question to those who might deny the inevitability of death: "Where indeed did they go?" (Rao, *Serpent* 2).

Consciousness, in Advaita, is compared to a mirror that reflects the whole world in it. Ramaswamy talks about Benares as an eternal place where "the dead do not die nor the living live" (Rao, *Serpent* 20). Through the Indian city of Benares, Rao tries to define the concept of *māyā.* The entire world with human beings and animals, plants and concrete buildings, happiness and sadness, love and hate, ecstasy and trauma, light and darkness, is but an ephemeral appearance—a short-lived 'play' of Brahman: "The dead come down to play on the banks of the Ganges, and the living who move about, and even offer rice-balls to the manes, live in the illusion of a vast night and a bright city" (Rao, *Serpent* 20) Comparing the unreal and the real, Ramaswamy says:

> The road to the infinite is luminous if you see it as a city lit in a mirror. If you want to live in it you break the glass. The unreal is possible because the real is. But if you want to go from the unreal to the real, it would be like a man trying to walk into a road that he sees in a hall of mirrors. (Rao, *Serpent* 20)

In the realm of truth, there is absolute oneness. The self and the non-self cannot exist at the same time. However, one might look upon self-realisation as a miraculous event from a delusional standpoint, where the true nature of the self is irretrievable. So long as it is obscured by ignorance, a multitude of objects are wrongly superimposed on the self, owing to the creative power of *māyā*.

The world is either unreal or real—the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between-the-two—and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood. You might go on saying all the time, "No, no, it's the rope," and stand in the serpent. And looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradise, saints, avataras, gods, heroes, universes. For wheresoever you go, you see only with the serpent's eyes. (Rao, *Serpent* 373)

Merely verbalising that the world is unreal does not mean that one has the knowledge that the world is merely an appearance in pure consciousness. self-realisation is a transformative experience which leads one to realise the true nature.

Whether you call it duality or modified duality, you invent a belvedere to heaven, you look at the rope from the posture of the serpent, you feel you are the serpent—you are—the rope is. But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent. You gave your own eyes to the falling evening and cried, "Ayyo! Oh! It's the serpent!" You run and roll and lament, and have compassion for fear of pain, others', or your own. You see the serpent and in fear you feel you are it, the serpent, the saint. (Rao, *Serpent* 373)

Believing that one needs to feel love, compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude to attain self-realisation is also a delusion. One may 'want' to realise the self like a saint, but what eludes the intellect is that one does not 'need' to as one is through and

through the self. There is no 'becoming,' only 'being.' Merely dropping the identification with the false self is required.

The difference between the ideas of 'being' and 'becoming' is another significant concern that Raja Rao raises in the context of Savithri. Madeline is Ramaswamy's wife, and with Savithri, he has an extramarital affair. He interprets the distance from Savithri using a statement from Vedānta:

> 'To him,' says the Upanishads, 'who is earnest, to the Atman comes the Atman.' It was not land and rivers that separated us, it was Time itself. It was myself. When the becoming was stopped I would wed Savithri. If the becoming stopped would there be a wedding? Where would the pandal be, where Uncle Seetharamu and the elephant? (Rao, *Serpent* 324)

Here, Rao accomplishes the task of practically defining the self. He comments that, Savithri was not spatially far away. Rather it was 'time' or his own perception that separated them. He means that ignorance made him appear separate from Savithri while he at once united with her. He was the oneness in which the entire world was subsumed. Savithri and Ramaswamy were mere waves on the ocean of existence. However, ignorance had made him 'become' and not 'be.'

In another instance, when Ramaswamy discusses with Madeleine why their marriage was wrecked, he explains about how one could never 'become' an Indian but could only 'be' one:

> "What is it that separated us, Rama?"
> "India."
> "India? But I am a Buddhist."
> "That is why Buddhism left India. India is *impitoyable*."
> "But one can become a Buddhist?"
> "Yes, and a Christian and Muslim as well."
> "Then?"
> "One can never be converted to Hinduism."
> "You mean one can only be born a Brahmin?"
> "That is—an Indian," I added, as an explanation of India. (Rao, *Serpent* 368-369)

Rao wants to make it clear that one could only be born an Indian. Therefore, no matter how strictly Madeleine followed the religion of Buddhism, thus trying to assimilate the culture of India, it was almost impossible to do so. Indian sensibility and cultural ethos could not be gathered by learning.

Ramaswamy considers Savithri his spiritual *guru* before he has met Atmananda. The character's name is symbolic of the "ancient Hindu legend" (Naik, *History* 177) of Savitri and Satyavan, where Savitri, the devoted wife, saved her husband Satyavan from the lord of death. This metaphorically signifies how consciousness transports human beings from death to immortality or ignorance to knowledge. In the novel, Savithri, who embodies the eternal Feminine Principle, causes Ramaswamy to introspect and realise his true purpose in life–attaining self-knowledge. When Savithri tells Ramaswamy that she will come to him when he will

no longer need her and can live without her, unlike his current state of sadness, she indicates that he will have grown in emotional intelligence, becoming detached. He will no longer seek pleasure and security in material possessions and relationships and will have progressed to a higher plane of consciousness. Ramaswamy says: "I knew the absolute meaning of it, the exactitude, for Savithri, could never whisper, never utter but the whole of truth, even in a joke. But it was always like a sacred text, a cryptogram, with different meanings at different hierarchies of awareness" (Rao, *Serpent* 235).

Interestingly, even while describing the beauty of Savithri, Ramaswamy takes up a Vedāntic standpoint. He does not describe Savithri like a man would describe a woman or another man. Instead, he talks about her as though he is verily discussing the characteristics of the Absolute self:

> That is the beauty of Savithri. She is whole and simple wherever she is; for her there is only one world, one spot, one person even—and that is he who is before her. From her distant perch of the impersonal she offers him a spoon of sugar or a glass of whisky, as though her only concern were his joy. No one can be near her—except perhaps me, I told myself—for she is everywhere, and you had to be her to be by her. (Rao, *Serpent* 320)

The attributes of completeness, simplicity, impersonality, compassion, detachment, and omnipresence describe the self or a self-realised being. In saying, "you had to be her to be by her," Rao seems to be pointing at the constant urge of the individual self to unite with the universal self, which was possible only by knowing that one was at once that universal self, immanent in all.

In a language that is neither his mother tongue nor native to his land, Rao has tried to seize the "rhythms of Indian life and the traditional qualities of Sanskrit" (Ray 411). The complex portrayal of the characters' lives gives an insightful view of the Indian way of living and thinking. The entire novel is a tapestry of intricate metaphors, analogies, and allusions. It has kaleidoscopic dimensions in that the reader's perspective shifts with each angle, causing different layers of meanings to appear. M. K. Naik calls it a "modern Indian Mahapurana in miniature" (Mani 23). In a personal letter to Naik, Rao has admitted that the novel intends to re-create storytelling in a *purānic* style. It is "a unique blend of history, literature, philosophy and religion—an encyclopaedic representation of the totality of human existence" (Naik, *Raja Rao* 106). The language has an unmistakable rhythm, and the meditative deliberations linger in the reader's mind, inviting reflection and introspection. Truly, the endeavour of reading this philosophically complex work, while fully appreciating its depth and nuances in a single sitting, is nearly impossible. The words and sentences demand to be read repeatedly as one locates them in the context of Indian sense and sensibility, particularly the philosophical underpinnings of Advaita Vedānta, to absorb the novel's sublime grace. (Naik, *History* 177). In her article "Caught between Cultures," Rumina Sethi poses a pertinent rhetorical question about the deftness of this marvel: "Before Rao, who wrote about India with such force and aplomb? And after Rao, who would represent her in the same way?" (173).

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The Dialectical Conflict of Negation and Preservation: Analysing Balram Halwai from Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* as a Sublated Being

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's 2008 Man Booker novel, *The White Tiger* caused quite a mayhem in literary circles around the world upon its publication due to its unconventional approach to social themes in contemporary Indian society. The purpose of this paper is to examine Balram Halwai, the protagonist of *The White Tiger*, as an individual who embodies G.W.F. Hegel's notion of *Aufhebung*, or sublation. The character of Balram Halwai combines both positive and negative characteristics. He represents the ideal synthesis of the capitalist thesis and the proletarian antithesis. This study seeks to contextualise Hegel's idea of sublation through the analysis of Balram Halwai in order to answer the question, "How can a working-class man overcome the obstacles and conundrums created by capitalist society and achieve freedom?" This study accomplishes its objective by applying the theories of Hegel and his followers concerning the notion of sublation to the novel *The White Tiger*.

Keywords: antithesis, aufhebung, capitalism, proletarian, sublation

Introduction

Despite being the central philosophical apparatus of Hegelian thought, sublation still remains one of Hegel's most labyrinthine concepts. When we look at the existing discourses on this concept, we come across a multitude of contradictory ideas by scholars, each depicting a new perspective. The absence of a generally accepted translation of the German term aufhebung, which is the original word used by Hegel in his works, is one of the prominent reasons behind this ambiguity. In German, the term aufhebung is a mundane one; people use it in their everyday conversations to denote "cancelling" or "to cancel," but when Hegel used this term in his philosophical treatises, it no longer remained an everyday German word; it became one of the most ambiguous terms, incorporating multiple meanings. When it came to translating this term into English, the problem persisted; each translator who came up with his own version of Hegel used a different word. Terry Pinkard, one of the notable philosophers and translators of Hegel, remarks, "To render "aufheben" into English, Hegel's translators in the nineteenth century opted to revive an older term in English, "sublate", which for all practical purposes had died out of English usage by the middle of the nineteenth century" (XI).

Along with this particular reason related to the ambiguity in translations, scholars also disagree with each other on the ground of the function of this concept in the Hegelian system of thought. Some scholars consider it a term denoting 'negation'

of something; some other scholars regard it as a term denoting 'preservation', but the fact that sublation carries the essence of both preservation and negation has been overlooked. It has a twofold meaning. Ryaan Krahn comments:

> This concept should not be understood to function simply as a mere negation of negation, where that would mean an assimilatory determinate negation of a prior moment of abstract negation. Instead, it is argued that both abstract and determinate negation function at the level of sublation as such and the concept should thereby be understood not only as a synthesis that combines a term with its antithesis, i.e., a unifying third term, but also as a fourth that treats these terms in their difference, holding them apart as oppositional (I).

Krahn's take on sublation amplifies the fact that the function of sublation is just not to assimilate the thesis and the antithesis by combining their similarities; it also works as a preserver of their differences. That is how sublation always carries with it a constant dialectical conflict. Therefore, Krahn considers it "the motor of all dialectical logic, the fundamental determination of its movement" (7). Hegel and his successors predominantly used the concept of sublation in the context of the master-slave dialectic. In the dialectic of the master and the slave, the term 'master' represents a dominant consciousness, and 'slave' depicts a subordinate consciousness. So, when a conflict occurs between them, a third type of consciousness comes up. This third type is a sublation of the dominant and subordinate consciousnesses. It is the negation and preservation of both dominant and subordinate consciousness simultaneously. This sublated consciousness negates some attributes of the dominant consciousness and preserves some others. The same goes with the subordinate one. Hegel, in his Phenomenology of Spirit, makes a very interesting remark on this interplay of master and slave consciousness and the way they get sublated:

> Self-consciousness is in and for itself, while as a result of its being in and for itself, it is only a recognized being. The concept of its unity in doubling of infinity, realizing itself in self-consciousness, is that of a multi-sided and multi-meaning intertwining, such that, on the one hand, the moments within this intertwining are strictly kept apart from each other, and on the other, they are also taken and cognized at the same time as not distinguished, or taken and cognized in their opposed meanings. This twofold sense of what is distinguished lies in the essence of self-consciousness, which is infinitely or immediately the opposite of the determinateness in which it is posited. The elaboration of the concept of this spiritual unity in its doubling presents us with the movement of recognizing. For self-consciousness, there is another self-consciousness; one which is outside of itself. This has a twofold meaning. First, it has lost itself, for it is to be found as another essence. Second, it has thereby sublated that other, for it also does not see the other as the essence but rather sees itself in the other. It must sublate its otherness. This is the sublation of that first two-sided ambiguity. First, it must set out to sublate the other self-sufficient essence in order to become certain of itself. Second, it must set out to sublate itself, for this other is itself. (108-109)

Hegel's observation of the dialectical clash between the two modes of self-

consciousness highlights the significance of sublation in negating their differences while preserving their essential nature. Furthermore, Hegel illustrates the connection between sublation and becoming.

The process of becoming is the central idea of Aravind Adiga's magnum opus, *The White Tiger*. Through the character of Balram Halwai, the protagonist, we get to observe the dialectical journey of a man from immaturity, naivety, and slavery to absolute knowledge and freedom. The process through which the character of Halwai achieves redemption from the rooster coop of life is a sublated one. Through sublation, he transforms his naive being into a being that possesses self-consciousness. Growing up as a poor kid, struggling for food in the dark, shady village of Laxmangarh, to becoming an entrepreneur and the owner of a taxi service, Balram Halwai goes through quite an expedition. There are significant similarities between the journey of Balram Halwai and the journey of the absolute spirit, or the Geist, the subject of Hegel's philosophy. Both start as unconscious beings. During their journeys, they both realise that they are not only the objects of history but also the subjects. Georg Lukacs, a prominent Hegelian, made this famous connection between the absolute spirit and the proletarian class. Lukacs declared the proletariat the subject-object of history, the ontological creators and epistemological knowers of social relations. Balram Halwai, a member of the universal class of the proletariat, embodies the absolute spirit in this context.

Now, the questions arise: how does Balram Halwai realize that he is not only the object but also the subject? How can a working-class man like him overcome the conundrums of capitalism and achieve freedom? All these questions lead us to a single answer: Through negation and preservation.

Discussion

The White Tiger tells the narrative of Balram Halwai, a self-proclaimed, "self-made entrepreneur" and the son of a rickshaw driver, who worked his way up from being a chauffeur to being a successful businessman in India. In an effort to teach the visiting Chinese politician, Premier Wen Jiabao, about business in India, Balram writes him a letter detailing his life. During his journey towards becoming a successful entrepreneur, Balram encounters slavery, and he goes through a period of dialectical conflict with his masters, particularly with Mr. Ashok. During this period, he discovers a way to free his consciousness from subordination. The process of coming out of subordination includes a conflict between negation and preservation. By consciously negating some attributes or characteristics of Mr. Ashok, Balram learns how not to become a man like him, while simultaneously preserving some characteristics of his master and becoming a man like him. So, in the character of Mr. Halwai, we can find a unique farrago of both a capitalist and a proletariat. When addressing Mr. Premier of China, long after murdering his master, Mr. Ashok, Balram writes in retrospection, "See, sometimes I think I will never get caught. I think the Rooster Coop needs people like me to break out of it. It needs masters like Mr Ashok,

who for all his numerous virtues, was not of a master" (Adiga 193). This is not the naive and immature Balram Halwai speaking whom we met in the beginning of the novel, but this is a sublated being speaking who knows and identifies in himself both the qualities of a master and a slave. At this point, Halwai has sublated his being by negating and preserving the contradictory attributes of both the master and the slave. There were mutually exclusive forces that existed outside Balram, but when they got sublated and became a part of the whole, they no longer remained forces that were mutually exclusive. Now, let us take a look at how the forces of negation and preservation function simultaneously in the character of Halwai.

The first attribute of the proletarian class negated by the protagonist is a naive sense of morality, which according to him is the biggest obstacle preventing the proles from achieving freedom. Halwai consciously distances himself from being entrapped in the whirlpool of morality in order to become liberated. He distances himself to such an extent that, at one point in time, some of his actions and decisions seem categorically immoral and insensitive. Despite knowing that Ashok's family would destroy all his family, he makes a choice and murders his master in cold blood. "For Balram, to reach at the top, it was necessary for him to kill his master, and he argues that every powerful person who brings change in the world has killed one or another to reach their target" (Parmar 160). Parmar's remarks on the actions of Halwai point out his ambitious nature. This particular sense of pursuing one's ambition by sacrificing morality is an attribute that Balram preserves from his master. He has driven his master numerous times to the bungalows of ministers, where he has seen him bribing them to get his work done. He still remembers the incident when Ashok and his family were ready to send him to jail for the crime committed by Pinky Madam. But while Balram negates the morality of the proletarian class, he does not forget to preserve their sense of justice and compassion. His love for the poor and downtrodden gets reflected when he says at the end, "After three or four years in real estate, I think I might sell everything, take the money, and start a school—an English-language school—for poor children in Bangalore. A school where you won't be allowed to corrupt anyone's head with prayers and stories about God or Gandhi—nothing but the facts of life for these kids" (Adiga 267). This particular compassionate nature saves Halwai from becoming Nietzsche's Übermensch. An Übermensch has no compassion or sense of justice. There is simply no sublation in Übermensch.

The imagery of the rooster coop, which is an important element of the novel, points towards the second pair of attributes that Balram negates and preserves during his journey towards freedom. These attributes are subordination and dominance. In Hegel's philosophy, the idea of subordination is always associated with consciousness; it is the consciousness, not the person, that gets subordinated. Hegel's perspective on the subordination of consciousness is an interesting one. He identifies two types of consciousness: a dominant one and a subordinate one. According to him, in this conflict of consciousness, dominant consciousness takes on the role of self-consciousness, and as such, it aims to either coerce or deceive the reality that stands in contradiction to it. It always endeavours to enslave the other consciousness by

subordinating it (Hegel 269). The rooster coop imagery masterfully depicts this subordinated and enslaved consciousness of the proletarian class. Adiga's description of the rooster coop gives us a clear-cut idea of how this subordination works: Countless white hens and brightly coloured roosters crammed into wire-mesh cages, squished like worms in a belly, pecking and shitting on each other, straining for breathing space, the whole cage emitting a vile odour: the odour of terrified, feathered flesh. A young butcher is sitting atop this coop, beaming as he displays the just-butchered chicken on a wooden desk. The fowl is still oleaginous and coated in dark blood. The roosters can detect blood on the wind from up above. They look around and discover their brothers' organs scattered throughout. They anticipate becoming next. But they don't seem to be resisting. They just keep waiting for their turn (Adiga 144-145). A subordinated consciousness loses all its power to revolt; it becomes cold and numb. Therefore, Halwai consciously decides to negate this particular subordination of the working class and preserve domination, which is an attribute of capitalist consciousness. The moment Halwai rammed the broken bottle of Johnny Walker Black down his master's throat, he got released from the rooster coop and also from the subordination of the capitalist consciousness. Interestingly, the consciousness that provoked him to carry out such an audacious act belongs to the capitalist class itself, but Halwai, by preserving the attribute of domination and negating subordination, sublated himself to a point where his consciousness no longer subscribes to a particular class. He becomes an absolute spirit, the subject-object of history.

Conclusion

The White Tiger is a series of negations and preservations. Taking into account the above arguments, we can conclude that the notion of sublation plays a vital role in the life of the protagonist. He elevates himself by identifying the real essence of his existence. The true nature of a human being is grey matter. A man is neither good nor bad, but a perfect amalgamation of both positive and negative traits. The concept of sublation masterfully explains how an individual can derive attributes from these positive and negative traits and inculcate them into his being through negation and preservation. Apart from Balram, there are a few other characters in this novel, who show the tendencies of a sublated being. Vijay, the son of a goatherd who became a renowned politician, is one of the prime examples. Balram considers him one of his idols.

Hegel, in his The Phenomenology of Spirit, considers absolute knowledge as the final stage of the journey of the Geist. The stage of absolute knowing is characterised by the realisation that whatever we already know or have learned is conditioned by the dominant consciousness. The construction of traditional morality is nothing but a cunning creation of the capitalists; they themselves do not follow the moral path, but they condition the proletariat in such a manner that the proletariat ends up making it their path to heaven. Balram Halwai, the symbolic representation of the Hegelian absolute spirit, breaks this rooster coop of illusion and embraces the truth.

Freedom is the only truth, which can only be achieved through the dialectical conflict of negation and preservation.

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Martin Seligman's ABCDE Technique – An Evaluation of Preeti Shenoy's *Life is What You Make it*

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Abstract

An instinctive optimist fundamentally grasps the potential, aptitude and capability to retort and respond to every sole unanticipated and unimagined hostile condition that life casts, via affirmative and constructive angles, while an instinctive pessimist weakens as an outcome of the supremacy of negative thoughts, views and perspectives. Optimism generates courage and confidence to tackle adverse and painful situations positively, hence the urgency to foster an optimistic attitude for a sustained and quality life. This paper examines the learned optimistic attitude of Preeti Shenoy, a protagonist in Ankita Sharma's novel *Life is What You Make it* based on a congenial concept called learned optimism proposed by the optimistic American psychologist Martin Seligman concerning his ABCDE (Adversity, Belief, Consequence, Disputation and Distraction, Energisation) technique. Ankita Sharma afflicted with bipolar disorder resolves to renounce her life as she lacks sufficient audacity to combat it. But, learning, acquiring and finding the dexterity to handle her misfortune affirmatively and progressively, generates her hopefulness and faith to challenge her disorder efficaciously.
Keywords: Optimist, positive, constructive, optimism, attitude, adversity, hopefulness

Introduction

Learned optimism is a wing of positive psychology. This conception of learned optimism is key for those who are confined in the room of pessimism, which fails to provide the cheer to climb the steps of life. Numerous individuals grieve under detrimental pessimistic contemplations, mentalities and actions that do not equip them with courage, confidence and resolution to antagonise contrary and uncooperative circumstances. To help those, Martin Seligman, an American Psychologist, offers a solution through his idea called "Learned Optimism" (which is, optimistic values, beliefs, behaviours, characteristics, and perspectives can be learned) in which he voices the positive note of learning optimistic values by conveying that "The good news is that pessimists can learn the skills of optimism and permanently improve the quality of their lives" (Seligman 207). To live a fulfilling, bouncing, reasonable and happy life, acquiring or cultivating an affirmative mind-set and approach becomes fundamental, and these qualities confirm a person's ability to preserve stability in both physical and mental health. It fosters confidence, which is necessary to venture through all the hardships, miseries, and torments that occur in one's life. Seligman splits the approaches to dealing with arduous predicaments into two: learned optimism and learned helplessness. "Learned helplessness" (Maier and

Seligman), a credence propounded by Martin Seligman and Steven F. Maier in 1967, serves to be an antithesis of learned optimism.

Preeti Shenoy (1971), an eminent Indian writer, is well-known for her fame as a national bestseller and has been constantly recognised in the "Forbes long list of 100 most influential celebrities" (Sharma) since 2013. Shenoy, being a trendy novelist aspires to inculcate optimism in her readers by addressing everyday issues and bestowing possible solutions for them through her writings (Banan). She strengthens her passion for writing from a young age through her sincere contributions to school and college newsletters and cultivates her creative thinking progressively. She launched her writing career as a blogger in the year 2006, in order to "get over the grief of her father's death" (Harishkrishnan) by posting her views on various minutes of life. Besides, she wrote for *The Times of India*, *Reader's Digest*, *Cosmopolitan*, *BBC World*, *The Hindu* (Dagar 100) and other publications to expand her readership. Later, she published her debut book, *34 Bubblegums and Candies* (2008), which is a collection of true incidents, establishing herself as a full-time writer. With the achievement of a wider readership, she wrote her debut novel *Life is What You Make it* (2011) and this novel explores the life of a dynamic character, Ankita Sharma, a full-grown adult (Preface xi), who faces crucial challenges due to the affliction of bipolar disorder. As Shenoy says in an interview, "I chanced upon the real life Ankita's story. When I heard it, I was moved and completely blown away. I felt it had to be written. Also it is a very taboo subject in India and I felt the stigma associated behind mental illness had to be removed" (Kamat). Shenoy faced many refusals by various publishers to give life to her novel, *Life is What You Make it* as they were reluctant on trying untried theme like bipolar disorder. But she "pressed on despite the discouraging response – 'my poor Ankita her story needs to be told' – and it was finally accepted by one" (Chowdhury). Therefore, Shenoy has explored an unexplored subject of the time, which emphasises the prominence of acquiring an optimistic and constructive mind-set in challenging mental ailments.

Ankita Sharma is a striking, clever and aspiring adult who leads an active life until she finds variance in her habitual undertakings due to a mental disorder. A deadly ailment lures her to undergo two suicidal attempts, but her providential survival, even after her attitude of giving up her life, directs her to a hospice for further reclamation. Her state of helplessness, solidarity and depression that rose from the mental disorder is agonising and inescapable, as Shenoy mentions that "Frustration, rage, tears and helplessness welled up inside me" (Shenoy 133). Ankita conquers her adversities through the cultivation of sanguine skills as "will power and determination help her to overcome over her fear" (Kumari and Krishan). Therefore, she learns to steer her disorder and stabilises her mind for complete recuperation with constant hope. This paper's hypothesis is that Ankita Sharma has learned to cultivate optimistic standpoints and beliefs, which ameliorate her to cultivate the capacity and power to cope with her depression and tackle her disorder and then she becomes a jubilant learned optimist to escape the arduous phase of bipolar disorder; at last, she sets sail towards her abandoned aspirations. This hypothesis statement will be tested by

Seligman's theory of learned optimism through his ABCDE procedure.

The Concept: Learned Optimism

The present study inspects the learned optimistic attitude of the character Ankita Sharma, found in Preeti Shenoy's debut novel, *Life is What You Make it* based on the speculation of "Learned Optimism" (Seligman1990) conjectured by Martin Seligman (1942), an American author and positive psychologist in his book *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. Learned optimism, an effective brainwave, insists on the necessity of developing the ability to perceive all adverse and unfavourable situations through an optimistic and constructive attitude, which boosts human well-being and rejects pessimistic negotiations, thoughts, feelings, perspectives and actions that lead to a fruitless and frustrating life. Seligman says about learned optimism that "you can learn a set of skills that free you from the tyranny of pessimism and allow you to use optimism when you choose" (Seligman 6). By including the prefix "learned" in the term "learned optimism," Seligman conveys the uplifting message that optimistic values and attitudes can be taught and instilled in impoverished people. It is not necessary to always be a born optimist. Even born pessimists can absorb and nurture optimistic values by gauging their bygone inimical conditions and their repercussions, as well as their reactions and responses towards them. To accentuate the value of optimism above talent and desire, Seligman postulates, "When failure occurs, it is because either talent or desire is missing. But failure also can occur when talent and desire are present in abundance but optimism is missing" (Seligman 13). The welfare of optimism with the comparison of the effects of pessimism is elucidated by Seligman as

> LIFE INFLICTS the same setbacks and tragedies on the optimist as on the pessimist, but the optimist weathers them better. As we have seen, the optimist bounces back from defeat, and, with his life somewhat poorer, he picks up and starts again. The pessimist gives up and falls into depression. Because of his resilience, the optimist achieves more at work, at school, and on the playing field. The optimist has better physical health and may even live longer. (Seligman 207)

This paper proceeds with the theory of learned optimism for scrutinising the character Ankita Sharma who is lamentably deteriorated on account of a mental disorder which plunders her ambition. Her condition of helplessness has culminated in her acquisition of optimism and her refurbishments are conveyed through the enactment of Seligman's ABCDE Model.

Application of the ABCDE Model on Ankita Sharma

Seligman has made use of the ABC model of Albert Ellis' (Seligman 259) to assist in studying the thinking process and reaction and response levels of an individual in a particular distressful, painful and problematic situation. He then recommends the ideal model of learned optimism with its ABCDE procedure to pick

up optimism to crack the obstacles in order to derive the right track for a prosperous and peaceful life. This ABCDE is pertinent to the case of Ankita Sharma as she has undergone innumerable tough conditions in the course of her adolescent period. Ankita Sharma is taken for examination to uncover her strength in conquering her mental ailment following her cultivation of the skills of optimism, i.e., courage, an optimistic mind-set, faith, self-confidence and willpower. In the beginning, she fails to bounce back from the vulnerability of manic misery, but when she is taught to approach everything positively by her doctor, Madhusudan, who assists in moulding her mind-set to manage the ebb and flow of her energy level, she also learns to curb the disputes of several negative voices heard by her due to the disorder, which also enlarges her optimistic attitude. The process lets her come out of the setback constructively. This study bestows the essential application of the ABCDE technique to Ankita Sharma as follows.

Adversity

According to Seligman, in the ABCDE drill, "A" stances adversity, which encompasses entirely major and minor hitches and setbacks that steal the happiness of an individual, such as health issues, goal-oriented complications, unemployment, relationship disputes, domestic difficulties, identity predicaments, financial issues, depression, alienation, peer pressure, natural disasters, etc. that one confronts in diurnal doings. Excruciating and distressing tribulations strike and shatter one's thoughts sensitively and generate firm assumptions in the mind and these assumptions create certain beliefs which set the stage for constructive or destructive actions and outcomes as Seligman affirms that "When we encounter adversity, we react by thinking about it. Our thoughts rapidly congeal into beliefs. . . . The beliefs are the direct causes of what we feel and what we do next" (211). Ankita Sharma is debilitated by the adversity called bipolar disorder, "a serious brain disorder that causes dramatic shifts in moods, energy levels, attitudes and ability to carry out everyday tasks" (Shenoy 206). Ankita Sharma's normal existence alters into the abnormal due to the precipitous death of her boyfriend, Abhishek and his reminiscences haunt her horribly. The manifestation of deranged levels of emotions like enthusiasm versus boredom, serenity versus bustle, delight versus despondency, triumph versus loss, endurance versus annoyance, and assertion versus trepidation in Ankita drags her to abandon her control over her psychological and corporeal deeds. She dances like a drunkard, runs like a drug-consumed person, and studies like a photographic machine (Shenoy 101) and her creative competence is mindboggling, resulting from the manic disorder. Her extreme stamina and extensive past reminiscence drive her to seek variation in her appearance and force her to endure sleepless nights and foodless days. Sluggishly, her power, stamina and energy diminish; she cannot read, remember, or understand words and sentences, and she has no hope of conflicting with her incapability. The difference in behaviour, appearance, mood, and actions caused by acute depression fills her mind full of defencelessness.

Thus, Ankita's life is completely trapped by this adverse manic disorder.

Belief

As said by Seligman, the comprehensive observation or interpretation of an adverse condition is known as a belief (Seligman 213). In this conjecture, an individual who is subjected to facing harmful hindrances makes countless assessments and judgments that pave the way for various appropriate or erroneous actions that have consequences. Seligman observes that affirmative belief and action have a more approving influence on alleviating predicaments than negative undertakings. In this step, Seligman incorporates three explanatory styles: permanent, pervasive and personal (Seligman 222). The permanent explanatory style, an approach desperately accustomed to pessimists, signifies the fact of considering adversity as a fixed and long-lasting one. Pervasive indicates the negative mind-set of a person who continuously perceives a complicated issue as a termination of life. The explanatory style named "personal" specifies the attitude of abandoning hope and blaming oneself for the quandaries. Ankita Sharma is hardly found without the influence of these three explanatory styles. She blames herself, considers the disorder as a pervasive negative event, and regards it as permanent and unchanging. She reprimands herself for all the negativities that happened in her life, like the death of her boyfriend, betraying her parents, lying to her friends, and remorse for her uncontrolled mind and body, as she says, "Almost immediately I was filled with a deep sense of shame, regret, guilt and hollowness. I felt sick" (Shenoy 118). Her pessimistic beliefs block all the positive ways for retrieval and she is completely struck with endless frailties like fear, pain, and depression and fails to bounce back. She stumbles in this feeble situation due to her pessimistic approach during the repetitive adverse circumstances.

Consequences

> When our explanatory beliefs take the form of personal, permanent, and pervasive factors ("It's my fault ... it's always going to be like this ... it's going to affect everything I do"), we give up and become paralyzed. When our explanations take the opposite form, we become energized. The consequences of our beliefs are not just actions but feelings as well (Seligman 259).

The corollaries are contingent upon the standpoints and reactions generated by the character or person in an adverse situation. This stage indicates the consequences of the belief encountered by the character in step two. In the case of Ankita Sharma, the novel's prologue proclaims the appalling state of locating her in a locus called a mental asylum, where she is left unaccompanied and subjected to observing the medications properly for her recuperation. In addition, Shenoy the novelist, presents a flashback of Ankita's life in which she can reminisce about her good days, which manifested with tons of dreams and aspirations, as well as sick days that daunted her into the abyss. Consequent turmoil and depression exhaust Ankita, and the light of her

heart slowly reduces its brightness. The severity of the illness will not give her adequate space to contemplate positivity. Her pessimistic explanations and beliefs in her mind let her take the brave negative decision of suicide:

> I began avoiding all human contact. I did not want to run into anybody from my residential complex. I did not want to make conversation with anybody or explain why I was not going to college anymore to anymore. I lived in constant terror of meeting people and facing people; I did not want anyone to see me in this state. I was overweight, ugly and drab. I was no longer what I used to be and could not stand myself. My sense of humour and my quick wit had vanished completely. I could not even make small conversation anymore. I was a burden not only on my parents but also on my own self. My existence was completely pointless. There was only one way out of this mess and that was to end my own life. (Shenoy 151-152)

Here, the consequences of Ankita's adversity are exposed through her position of inability in heading her life over her illness and her frailty, which paves an improper way of giving up her life. Even though there is a hidden way for recovery, it is vanished by the mind-set of helplessness, and the repeated occurrence of various setbacks pulls her to the fuss and, at last, she is found in the mental asylum following her suicidal attempts. As Shenoy mentions, "The ever popular, much adored, outgoing, smart, bright, promising young star of St. Agnes was now a patient in a mental hospital" (Shenoy 161). As Seligman has mentioned, the consequences of a belief are closely connected with one's feelings. Ankita Sharma's pessimistic explanatory styles have led her to confront several survival trials in her life.

Disputation and Distraction

According to Seligman, "disputation and distraction" is the stage at which one has the opportunity to reassess adversities, beliefs and their consequences. Acquiring the knowledge of the mistakes aids in acquiring a new mentality so that the retrieval becomes feasible. Unceasing negotiations and disputations on the wrong assumptions and judgments concerning adversity beget a suitable vision which leads to rehabilitation. Many individuals act without knowledge of the accuracy and practicality of the circumstance, and they make wrong decisions and act accordingly, as Seligman says, "By effectively disputing the beliefs that follow adversity, you can change your customary reaction from dejection, and giving up to activity and good cheer." (Seligman 218). Distraction performs a vital part in altering the mentality of a person, and it distances a person from the negative impacts of setbacks. Seligman informs that "It is essential to stand back and suspend belief for a moment, to distance yourself from our pessimistic explanations at least long enough to verify their accuracy" (Seligman 220). Avoiding pessimistic talk and thoughts lets a person work on the new arrival of energetic thoughts and events. This stage suits Ankita Sharma and serves as a stepping stone for her recovery. In the mental asylum, even though she hatreds her condition of solidarity, as in her words, "I was filled with a deep sense of rage, helplessness, frustration, anger and a sinking feeling of abandonment" (Shenoy

159), slowly she obtains sufficient time to dispute her past beliefs and trials. With the help of Doctor Madhusudan, she realises the intensity of her problem, for which she is not responsible, and she also acquires the sureness of getting out of it. She distances herself from all the occurrences. Then, she begins to debate her previous pessimistic views, beliefs and consequences. Her reworking of the three explanatory styles (personal, pervasive and permanent) from pessimistic thinking and belief to optimistic thoughts serves to be an acceptable way for her recovery. With the assurance of her doctor, she considers her disorder as a temporary one and also removes her guilty feelings from her heart so that she gets the chance of setting her future actions and responses filled with optimistic views and faith as she says, "It was the first time that I was being assured that I need not feel guilty for something that was out of my control" (Shenoy 164). She obtains clarification of the accuracy of her adverse actions as a result of her reassessment. Her early judgments, suppositions and deeds regarding her manic disorder are now substantiated as inappropriate reactions, and it is verified that these reactions have brought only unbearable consequences.

Energisation

Energisation is the final step or process in Seligman's ABCDE technique, in which one can find the indication for the reclamation. Passing through the stage of deliberation and distraction aids in gaining clarity of previous critical situations and provides a clear view for successful revival; it also increases energy to redirect the pathway for facing challenges and achieving deserted dreams from a giving up attitude. This phase confirms the fruitful resurgence of Ankita Sharma through her empowerment of positive energetic beliefs, which gives her a kind of fighting spirit for shaping her abandoned wishes and broken life. The recognition of the emergence of the energetic talk of Ankita can be traced through her words:

> The realisation was like an epiphany. It gave me a jolt. I was in fact 'normal'! If I pretended to be 'normal' and behaved just like everybody else, if I masked my emotions and I smiled a lot, even if I felt disconsolate, nobody would be able to tell. I made up my mind right then, that if that was all it took to be termed 'normal', that was how it would be from now on. No matter what I felt, I would never show it. I would pretend everything was fine. I no longer felt as suicidal as I had done earlier. Maybe it was the lithium or maybe it was the O.T routine. But I knew I was feeling definitely better than before. (Shenoy 176)

Ankita Sharma gets entirely transformed into a cheerful individual. She is highly strong-willed and strives to battle against her disorder, and her level of hopefulness boosts her recuperation slowly. Her acquisition of new self-assurance lets her set a constant optimistic mind-set of never giving up, which makes her tackle her undesirable negotiations and thoughts and also drives her to stay energetic and strong-minded to face challenges.

Conclusion

William Shakespeare, in his play Hamlet Act II, Scene 2 beautifully said that, "There is nothing either good or bad, thinking makes it so" (Shakespeare 99). This line exemplifies the importance of an individual's thoughts and perceptions. The approaching perspectives on setbacks are multifarious for everyone; their performance via their actions, thoughts, characteristics, behaviours and approaches to certain situations either optimistic or pessimistic provides the upshots accordingly. Negative responses complicate the occurring issues even more and obstruct the solutions spread in front, while positive perceptions attempt to afford possible positive outcomes for setbacks and also help to uphold sustainable mental and physical health as Moore quoting Solberg Nes and Segerstrom, mentions "optimistic people are more inclined to seek practical support, cognitively restructure, or reinterpret the situation positively" (Moore 2019). This study proves that Ankita Sharma is not a born optimist, but when she had to encounter life-threatening adversity, she becomes a flourishing learned optimist by re-examining her past erroneous beliefs and activities and also by absorbing the practicality of the circumstances through the assistance of her doctor. This hypothesis is productively verified through the implementation of Seligman's theory of learned optimism based on his ABCDE technique. Thus, Ankita Sharma is successfully transmuted into a learned optimist through the attainment of positive values which aid her to revive positively from her manic disorder, and foster buoyancy for her further survival.

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Performing Queerness: A Stylistic Study of Shikhandi in Devdutt Pattnaik's *Shikhandi: And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You*

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Abstract

The Mahabharata is one of the earliest mythological/religious texts to include liminal gender identities in its discourses. While a plethora of studies have attempted to thematically analyse the epic's treatment of the queer along with its symbolic significance in the narrative, very few have endeavoured to linguistically explore the gender of such characters in the epic or in its retellings. The present paper, drawing from Butler's notion of 'performativity,' traces the discursive construction of Shikhandi's gender in Pattanaik's book *Shikhandi: And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You (2014)* through a stylistic study of the text.
Keywords*: The Mahabharata,* Shikhandi, queer, performativity, stylistics

Queer in the *Mahabharata*

A scrutiny into ancient Indian literature would hold enough testimony to the fact that not only did several texts integrate queer characters and relationships into their narratives, but also, albeit not necessarily espousing, they attempted to acknowledge their deviant existence. According to Sinha and Bhattacharya, the epic "revels in the liminality that is apparent in the narratives of gender-queer people who are an integral part of its cultural space" (21). The portrayal of gender, argue Brodbeck and Black, mirrors the historical ages that the epic is set in, and also it serves an aesthetic purpose. This provides the writer with a scope to exploit them as symbolic means of representation. Also, the discourses of gender in the epic are multilayered and multifaceted, and invite multiple interpretations rather than suggesting any fixed reading (14).

The *Mahabharata* may, in general, include male and female characters that would adhere to the norms of society surrounding gender. Characters like Savitri and Gandhari are widely accepted as the epitome of devotion and loyalty to their husbands, thereby portrayed as the ideal women. On the other hand, the epic offers an array of exceptions to the normative representation of womanhood, and also characters that cannot be defined by the heteronormativity of gender. Custodi mentions many such examples from the epic that not only include human characters but also deities such as Shiva, Agni and Krishna. The fluidity of gender in the case of human characters, however, bears ominous indications of the disruption of order, or even the decline of 'dharma.' She, thus, comments that a transgression from the gender binary in a human character in the epic, as in the case of Brhannada (i.e. Arjuna during their Ajnyatavasa) or Shikhandi, would serve a symbolic purpose in envisaging the 'dharmic' status of the concerned time or situation (209-211).

The understanding of femininity and masculinity in the *Mahabharata* may not necessarily be polar. However, the notion of being a 'man' is quite different from that of being a 'woman.' Custodi (210) argues that 'manhood' is more susceptible to infringement, which renders it more fragile. One's manhood is often linked to the

presence/absence of one's phallus, referring to one's ability/inability to reproduce – which, in many instances, is employed as a metaphor for qualities like, bravery, righteousness, resilience, defending honour, and many more. Taylor also argues along the same line while alluding to Puranic texts that portray male bodies as representative of the "high-value social attributes of martial and sacerdotal hierarchies . . . namely, physical strength, manliness, physique, beauty and desirability, but also fertility and ascetic energy, or *tejas*" (155). Such attributes are upheld as the epitome of masculinity. The notion of 'womanhood,' on the other hand, has no such counterparts. It could therefore also be conjectured that the indeterminate status of gender identities of the characters like Brhannada and Shikhandi complies with the epic's style to symbolically represent intricate characteristic details (Custodi 210-211). Arjuna's disguise as the effeminate transvestite is one of many such examples. Brhannada, as Hiltebeitel observes, is symbolic of the feminine facet of an otherwise virile Arjuna, throwing light on his androgynous nature (155-157).

Pattanaik notes, "Hindu mythology makes constant reference to queerness, the idea that questions notions of maleness and femaleness" (12). The existence of queer characters in Indian classical literature such as Shikhandi, Brhannada, Yuvanashwa, and deities such as Shiva, Krishna and Agni has been reaffirmed through several instances from the literature. The gender construction of such characters that oscillated between the hegemonized male and female identities effectively underlines the fragility of gender binaries and subverts the institutionalized subject. Male-to-female transformation has abundant instances in the epic as well as in other Puranic texts, like the cases of Arjuna, King Bhangasvana, Ila or the case of the temporary gender-transformation of the Trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva in their quest to visit the Goddess in her garden where only women are allowed entry. Female-to-male transformation, on the other hand, as in the case of Shikhandi, is rare. Goldman is of the view that Shikhandi's metamorphosis, albeit more complicated, underlines, like the rest, the quandary of every queer existence – the struggle to find a place in a culture that is defined by stringent norms (380-381).

'Performing' Queer

The term 'queer,' in general, encompasses any gender or sexual identity standing at odds with heterosexual males and females. Rather than having a universally accepted definition, the question of what constitutes 'queer' has been approached from diverse perspectives by queer theorists. While some see 'queer' as a positionality, rather than an identity (Halperin 62), others see it as something indefinable and inexorably contingent. The roots of queer theory are found in poststructuralism that sought to challenge the hitherto established heteronormativity of gender (Barry 138). Poststructuralist theorists refute the very normalisation of heterosexuality as something universal in the first place. For example, Foucault rejects the concepts of universality and objectivity and emphasizes how "particular form of knowledge, and the ways of being that they engender, become 'naturalised,, in culturally and historically specific ways" (Sullivan 39). Judith Butler is also critical of the legitimization of particular gendered identities, relationships and customs stemming from normalized heterosexuality. Both Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality (1978)* and Butler, in *Gender Trouble (1990)*, eschewing the

homogenization of gender and sexual identity altogether, argue for their discursive construction and evolution in culture-specific ways. Therefore 'queer,' according to the poststructuralists, is a way of 'doing,' rather than a way of 'being.' The concept of 'doing' gender is foregrounded in Butler's theory of 'performativity' in her seminal work *Gender Trouble (1990)*. Alluding to Beauvoir's phenomenological assertion that one is not 'born' as a woman, but 'becomes' one, Butler, in her essay titled *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory (1988)*, argues against the concept of gender as something fixed and given. According to her, gender is fluid, performative and discursively constructed, and "instituted through the stylization of the body" (519).

Critical Stylistics

The purpose of Lesley Jeffries' model of critical stylistics is twofold – firstly, to analyse the language of the texts syntactically and semantically, and secondly, through linguistic analysis, to offer a detailed understanding of the perspective of the writer, and also that of the ideologies that the language of the writer engenders. The linguistic tools in *Critical Stylistics: The Power of English (2010)* by Jeffries are derived from various models of stylistics and critical discourse analysis. The following tools have been employed in the analysis:

i.   Choice of Nouns: A writer's attitude towards someone/something can be understood from their choice of nouns. A noun can be used in either a positive sense or a negative sense.

ii. Nominalization: Nominalization refers to the process whereby the action/event is not mentioned using a verb, but through its noun form or a noun phrase, for example, 'the destruction of monuments by the Vandals' instead of 'the Vandals destroyed the monuments'. Such structure renders the verb less susceptible to challenge as it presents the action as 'presupposed.'

iii. Transitivity: The transitivity model identifies the lexical verbs into the following categories – MAI or material action intentional (e.g. 'She silenced the journalists'), MAS or material action supervention (e.g. 'The child fell from his crib') and MAE or material action events (e.g. 'The car stopped suddenly'). The model also distinguishes the following types of clauses/sentences – verbalization process (an animate subject speaks about something or performs actions through words), mental process (presents human thoughts) and relational process (represents static relations).

iv. Prioritizing: Prioritizing refers to the process of emphasizing a particular part of a sentence. It can be done either through intonation, or through 'fronting,' whereby the prioritized part is brought to the beginning of the sentence, or through 'clefting,' whereby the emphasis is shown through structures like 'It was her daughter who supported her' where the focus is on 'her daughter.'

v.   Contrasting: Contrasts or oppositions can be denoted through multiple tools like complementaries, gradable antonymy, converses and syntactic triggers for negated opposition, transitional opposition, parallelism etc.

vi. Presupposition: It is when a sense is already understood in a sentence or utterance as 'common ground' or as shared information. There are multiple

triggers for understanding presupposition viz. verbs describing a change of state like 'stop', 'resume' etc., factive verbs like 'understand,' 'realize,' cleft sentences, iterative words like 'no more,' 'revisit' and comparative structures like 'She is as smart as her sister.'

vii. Implicature: It refers to the implied meaning of a statement that is not explicitly said. According to Jeffries, any violation of the Gricean maxims namely maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner would generate implicature.

viii. Negating: Negation is understood through the following – negative particles in verb phrases, negative pronouns like 'nobody,' 'never,' and through words like 'lack,' 'fail,' 'scarce' etc.

ix. Modality: The auxiliary verbs indicate modality. They are broadly categorized into two types – epistemic modals, denoting the 'likelihood' of an action (e.g. 'may,' 'can,' 'will' etc.) and deontic modals, denoting the 'desirability' of an action (e.g. 'shall,' 'should,' 'might,' 'must' etc.).

x. Deixis: Deixis is a reference word that refers to a particular thing, for example, 'he', 'you,' 'I,' 'there,' 'this,' 'that' etc are deictic words. The writer's attitude towards the person/referred to can be understood from the use of deixis.

Point of View

Simpson, in his model for 'point of view in narrative fiction' as discussed in his book *Language, Ideology and Point of View (1993)*, differentiates between two modes of psychological point of view in narrative fiction, viz. narration in the first person and narration in the third person. The latter is further divided into the 'narrational mode,' i.e. narration from an omniscient perspective and the 'reflector mode', i.e. narration from a perspective confined to the consciousness of one or more internal characters (50-51).

Analysis

Pattanaik, in *Shikhandi and other Tales They Don't Tell You About (2014)*, broadly employs the 'narrational mode' of the third person point of view in his text, thereby assigning an omniscient gaze into the story. Here, the focus is not on a particular character's psyche, but on the overall discourse of queerness and how it is perceived. This mode, by virtue of not being confined to a single character, renders the most objective viewpoint among the rest, as it is devoid of any subjective bias. The 'tale' follows a simple chronology, starting from Shikhandi's previous life as princess Amba and her self-immolation, his/her rebirth as the princess of Panchala, and his/her eventual biological transformation into a man. Pattanaik sketches out how Shikhandi, who is born as a girl, is socialized as a man through his/her gendered performances:

> She was reborn as Drupada's daughter. But Drupada wanted a son and had been promised one by Shiva. Convinced that Shiva would not lie to him, Drupada claimed his daughter was actually a son and ordered her to be raised as one. (41)

The sentence "She was reborn as Drupada's daughter" can be qualified as an MAS

(i.e. material action supervention), referring to his/her biological sex, over which one has no control. The clause "Drupada claimed…raised as one", which is an MAI (i.e. material action intentional), contrasts the verb 'raise' with the verb 'born' in the previous sentence, thus emphasizing the difference between sex and gender – he/she was born with female genitalia, and yet his/her father socialized or raised him/her as a man.

This incongruity between his/her gender and sex is further highlighted in the following sentences as well:

> The girl, named Shikhandi, was taught all the skills reserved for men. She grew up believing she was a warrior. She was even given a wife. (41)

The common noun 'girl' is juxtaposed with the proper noun 'Shikhandi'. While the former refers to his/her biological sex, the latter, to his/her socially-constructed, gendered identity as a prince. The following two sentences elaborate on his/her socialization as a man. The sentence "The girl . . . for men," in passive voice, does not give Shikhandi the agency to choose his/her gender but shows how he/she was assigned masculinity through gendered practices. The next sentence "She grew . . . a warrior" interestingly uses the noun 'warrior,' and not 'man.' This, once again, emphasizes the performative aspects of gender, something that is derived from practices. He/she associates his/her gender as a man with performing activities that are considered stereotypically masculine. Also, the sentence uses 'believe' as a gerund, and makes 'grow' the main verb, thereby placing 'believing' as given. Not making it the focus of the proposition goes on to show how his/her gendered identity was casually interpellated as a man. The next sentence "She was . . . a wife" is also in passive voice. Marriage, as a social institution, is a convenient means of affirming one's gender and sexual orientation. Not giving his/her the agency to choose his/her partner demonstrates the fact that he/she was unaware of his/her sexuality.

However, with his/her wife's discovery of Shikhandi's biological sex on their wedding night, not only does Drupada's attempt to hide Shikhandi's biological sex fail, but his status as the king of Panchala is jeopardized since the father of Shikhandi's wife declares to invade his kingdom. He realizes:

> Drupada knew the only way to save his kingdom was to prove that his 'son' was truly a man. He also knew that this was impossible. (42)

The noun 'man' carries significant connotations. As Custodi mentions, one's masculinity is often seen metaphorically in the epic – not only does it refer to one's biological status, but it also stands for qualities like gallantry, righteousness, defending one's honour etc. (209-211). Shikhandi is a man in the metaphorical sense, but not in the literal sense, hence the adverb 'truly.' In other words, although he/she is gendered as a man, the absence of phallus, and therefore, the inability to procreate, renders his/her 'manhood' incomplete. The use of this adverb 'truly' denotes that being a 'man' (or a 'woman') is not binary. Gender is a spectrum; someone can be less of a man, while someone can be more. This is the perception of a person who denied his daughter's biological sex, and gendered him/her as a man, as the sentences can be qualified as NRT (i.e. narrator's review of thought) and the author brings us closer to Drupada's cognition (denoted by the verb 'knew'). The use of the word 'truly' flouts the Gricean maxim of quality – if man and woman were binaries, 'truly' would have been redundant. Therefore, it implies that even Drupada sees 'being a man' as a matter of degree.

Pattanaik also provides a closer view into Shikhandi's distressed mind through the reflector mode of the third person point of view:

> Confronted with her femininity for the first time in her life, Shikhandi felt responsible for this calamity. Resolving to kill herself, she went to the forest. (42)

Here, the noun 'femininity' refers to the social perception of gender that sees it directly associated with one's sex – a notion which Shikhandi was unaware of. The clause "Shikhandi felt…calamity" is an MR (i.e. mental reaction), denoted by the verb 'felt,' which brings out the mental trauma that he/she is going through owing to this discovery. The next sentence, in the reflector mode, once again, highlights the plight of his/her queer existence. He/she performed as a man throughout his/her life, and when he/she was confronted with this gender dysphoria, he/she faced an existential crisis.

He/she was, however, saved by a yaksha named Sthuna from ending her life. Pattanaik now represents how society perceives queer people through the yaksha's reaction:

> Was it a man that he saved or a woman? For the girl thought like a man and felt like a man and had always been treated as a man. But that body of hers was certainly not a man's. (42)

The metaphorical question "Was it a man that he saved or a woman" is the crux of the existence of all transgender/transsexual people. The deixis 'it' is usually used for inanimate objects or animals. Such a way of representation resonates with people's dogmatic view that human beings are either male or female, and those failing to conform to either of the categories, have no place in society. The pair of words 'man' and 'woman,' as complementaries, presents the world in binaries. On one hand, the verbs 'thought', 'felt' and 'treated' refer to Shikhandi's gender performance, and on the other hand, the sentence "But that bodya . . . man's", showing contrast with the previous sentence as denoted by 'but,' refers to her sex.

The yaksha, having heard Shikhandi's plight, offers his manhood to him/her. Shikhandi, with his/her newly-gained male body, becomes capable to consummate the marriage:

> Thus equipped, Shikhandi could prove his masculinity to anyone who cared to test it. (42)

The sentence uses the epistemic modal 'could' which shows Shikhandi's ability, thereby giving him/her the agency to actively perform masculine. The adjective 'equipped' is also in keeping with the epic's tendency to associate the presence of the male genitalia, as well as the ability to defend honour, with masculinity (Taylor 155). Not only does Shikhandi physically become a man, but also he/she is now able to perform his/her duty of defending honour as demanded by the then society in order to be considered a 'man.'

However, Shikhandi once again fails to find his/her place in the eyes of his/her father even after this transformation:

> Drupada wanted a son who would kill Drona and a daughter who would divide the Kuru household that had supported Drona. Shikhandi could be neither one nor the other. (43)

The sentence "Drupada wanted…supported Drona" precisely stands for how the world demarcates roles for men and women. The nouns 'son' and 'daughter' are paired with the verb phrases 'kill Drona' and 'divide the Kuru household' respectively. The

act of killing is stereotypically considered masculine, while anything related to the household is seen as a woman's job. But Shikhandi can do neither.

Although Shikhandi was a warrior and would eventually be the cause of Bhishma's death, her/his father discarded his/her masculinity as futile since having concretized her/his destiny to finally annihilate the practically immortal Kuru patriarch, he/she was no longer eligible to kill Drona, which exactly was the motive behind Drupada raising her/him as a man. Shikhandi fulfils her/his destiny by being the cause of Bhishma's death. But it is not her/him who slaughtered him. Bhishma, with a rather essentialist remark "Born a woman you are always a woman" (Pattanaik 45), dismissed Shikhandi as a warrior on the battlefield.

Conclusion

The construction of Shikhandi's gender is nuanced. Pattanaik initially shows how Shikhandi performs his/her gender in accordance with the way his/her father demanded. He/she did not identify with her biological sex either. Eventually, upon the discovery of his/her sexuality, he/she goes through a physiological transformation. Although it was not forceful, he/she was nonetheless driven by societal pressure to perform his/her 'husbandly duties'. The fact that Shikhandi chooses to satisfy his/her wife sexually is another act that demonstrates Shikhandi's gender performativity. However, even after he/she goes through the transformation and gains male genitalia, Bhishma refuses to accept him/her as a man. His/her gender, thus, remains indefinable, thereby underlining her/his queerness.

Shikhandi's incongruous status is contextual indeed, but as Custodi (209) and Hiltebeitel (150) have observed, liminality and queerness are invested with symbolic meanings. Shikhandi's nearly ostracised status could be, thus, figurative in purpose. Keeping aside the edified motive within the limits of the narrative, the rejection that Shikhandi faced resembles the impasse of queer existence even in today's day and age.

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Neo-Avatar of Sita in Mythic Fiction: Asseverating Feminist Nationalism in Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*

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Abstract

Amish Tripathi, through the medium of mythic fiction, redefines the working of a nation and its politics in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. Advocacy of nationalism through the lens of feminist interest becomes a prominent agenda in his work. The protagonist Sita is a representative of feminist nationalism which is exhibited through her warrior image which is altruistic as well. Under her mother's influence, Sita represents a new culture of feminist nationalism where she creates a political space in the masculine narrative. Amish Tripathi's Sita succeeds in deconstructing gendered political identities in the light of feminist analysis. The paper tries to prove that in contrast to mythology, the genre of mythic fiction takes up the challenge of suggesting how a woman's political identity is shaped and why it is equally relevant in building a nation.

Keywords: Mythic fiction, Feminist nationalism, Sita-Sunaina relationship, Psychoanalytical feminism, Anima, Animus.

Introduction

Myths of yore are archetypal stories full of metaphors and symbols. These metaphors and symbols become archaic and imperceptible with time when they fail to connect with contemporary readers. The myths have universal appeal but they can become redundant records if not re-invented to suit modern reading. The theoretical framework of myths was set by Euro–American critics like Jung, Frye, and Frazer where Plato was the first to use the word 'mythologia' concerning collecting, making, and studying myths in a culture. The rational study of myth was favoured by Enlightenment philosophy in the West in the 18th century. A mythology is a collection of myths or a bunch of myths related to one another. "Myth functions as a narrative which possesses credibility and authority and whose charters are manipulated to elicit sentiments which, in turn, construct social formations or legitimize changed social and political conditions. A myth can be restructured to activate "latent" symbolic meanings that play upon the sentiments of affinity to effect political reform" (Figueira 3). So, essentially myths play upon the emotions and sentiments to modify the social and cultural sensibilities of people. James Frazer revisits mythology and religion in *The Golden Bough* and identifies a relationship between myths and rituals. He lays stress on recurrent themes like death, birth, rebirth and growth which are found in cultures all around the world. According to Robert A. Segal in *Theorizing about Myth*, "For Frazer, the chief myths of all religions describe the death and rebirth of vegetation, a process symbolized by the myth of the death and rebirth of the god of vegetation" (67). Thus, he gives the concept of commonality within diversity. On the

other hand, "For Jung, myth and religion have traditionally worked in tandem. Religion has preserved myth, and myth has sustained religion. The heart of religion for Jung is neither belief nor practice but experience, and myth provides the best entrée to the experience of God, which means the unconscious" (Segal 90). So, Jung propounds that myths are encrypted and used as symbols that are an indirect medium for conveying archetypes. For Northrop Frye, mythology is the underlying structure present in a text. He differs from Jung on the concept of an archetype because for him it is a recurring pattern and he does not emphasize the collective unconscious. Northop Frye also defines 'ideology' as a 'structure of social authority' which imposes its version of traditional mythology. Dobson quotes Frye to say, "An ideology starts by providing its own version to form and enforce a social contract. An ideology is thus applied mythology, and its adaptation of myths are ones that, when we are inside an ideological structure, we must believe, or say we believe" (Dobson 3). Ideology refers to acceptable choices only while other perspectives are denounced as unacceptable. However, in modern times, myths are rarely acknowledged in their original form; instead, they are interpreted, re-interpreted, de-codified, and modified to become acceptable to modern readers in the form of mythic fiction. Mythic fiction is literature that is inspired by or rooted in the themes and symbols of myth. In the Indian context, myths lie in the substratum of its society. Romila Thapar in *Interpreting Early India* says, "Myth functions as the self-image of a given culture, the medium through which its social assumptions are expressed" (140). Thapar finds a connection between myth, culture and society. However, these myths, of the past, have found a new facade through Indian mythic fiction where the ancient myths are under an umbrella of a spectrum of studies that encompass even the unheard women characters of the past.

In this context, Indian mythic fiction plays a vital role because it fuses mythological and modern settings to intrigue the imagination of the reader and soils his imagination in the contemporary milieu. Irrespective of cultural, social, class and caste differences, Indian mythic fiction has found stupendous identification with the growth of English-speaking readers and writers. In the twentieth century, both Indian male and female writers used myths with the reinterpretation of ancient texts. In this period, the earliest writings that dwell upon mythology came from   R. K. Narayan's *The Ramayana* (1972) and Irawati Karve's *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch* (1968). The tradition was later enriched by Shashi Tharoor's work *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) along with the recent addition of *The Puffin Mahabharta* by Namita Gokhale in 2009. Works of Ashok K. Banker, Devdutt Pattanaik, Nilanjan Choudhuri, Anand Neelkantan, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Volga and Malashri Lal evolve a new discourse in Indian mythic fiction. In the trajectory of such works, a prominent writer who stands out is Amish Tripathi. He rose to prominence with his Shiva Trilogy followed by the Ram Chandra series comprising *Scion of Ikshvaku* (2015), *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017), and *Ravan: The Enemy of Aryavarta* (2019). In his works, Amish Tripathi galvanizes his readers about the cultural past and jostles them to think about the same old text with a contemporary perspective as well. The present paper

studies *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* which depicts an atypical portrayal of Sita by augmenting the issue of female identity. Unlike the mythological representation of women characters, Amish Tripathi advocates the cause of women's empowerment by chiselling a warrior image of Sita, which is a true representation of feminist nationalism. Amish Tripathi confesses that for such a depiction he takes inspiration from the *Adbhut Ramayan* by Valmiki and the *Gond Ramayani*. In an interview, Amish Tripathi draws attention to the fact that the tribal versions of the Ramayana, especially the *Gond Ramayani*, enchant him towards a warrior Sita and he also confesses, "There's another version of the Ramayana called '*Adbhuta Ramayana*' in which there are two Ravanas and the main Ravana, the elder Ravana was not killed by Lord Ram but was killed by Sita when she took a form of Maha Kali. There's another version of the Ramayana called the '*Gond Ramayani*' where she was a warrior. I am inspired by that version. So, in my book, she's a warrior" (Das). So, Amish Tripathi portrays a warrior image of Sita, which is more of a Kali-roop, unlike her docile canonical version, which in a way is a representation of feminist nationalism in a modern context.

Feminist nationalism is a combination of two terms that have an independent meaning of their own. "Nationalism- a political expression of the desire among people who believe they have a common ancestry and a common destiny to govern themselves in a place peculiarly identified with their history and its fulfilment-…" (Wiebe 81). So, nationalism represents a struggle for identity and it denotes 'imagined communities' which rest on an idea of superiority. Nationalism rests on the pedestal of superiority which does not gel with the framework of equality in feminism. The term feminist nationalism seems an oxymoronic expression because feminism rests on equality while nationalism rests on superiority. In the context of the Indian national struggle, "… Third World male nationalists always considered feminist agendas secondary, deferring their implementation until the success of national struggle…, and feminist agendas were abandoned in the end" (Herr 135). So, some feminists consider nationalism as detrimental to their feminist agendas because nationalism under patriarchy exhibits an aggressive male warrior image as central to nationalism and transports a nation back to its traditional practices which may not align with modern feminist goals. Hence, there is a need to reconceptualise nationalism to cater to feminist agendas as well.

This is where mythic fiction comes into the forefront to salvage the subjugated image of mythological women who find no mention in the history of a nation. Amish Tripathi constructs a warrior Sita who is a true representative of feminist nationalism bringing in a fine balance of physical dexterity and emotional empathy in administering her kingdom. As a feminist, she does not discard nationalism but engages in dialogue with androcentric nationalism.

The cover page of the novel, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, displays a lean, well-built woman who is ready to attack when she is surrounded by several men. The woman is wearing no jewels except for a few beads, anklets and a dhoti which is very unlikely for a princess. Her alertness and dexterity are easily visible when she springs

up in the air and is ready to batter her enemies with a lathi in hand. Her muscular build and braided hair augment her warrior persona. Her unrevealed face leaves room for the readers to strongly see for them what they would like to cherish in her; a fighter, a princess, a wife or a woman? The faceless warrior seems to be defending Dharma like an avatar whose countenance remains concealed from the world and gets revealed only at the right time.

Amish Tripathi's Sita is a born warrior as is depicted through her salvation from a near-death experience at birth. After the death of her mother, she embraces the role of the Prime Minister of Mithila to bring back the kingdom to the road of prosperity. She consolidates her kingdom, strengthens the law and order, builds better roads for good trade, constructs houses for the slum dwellers, provides jobs to the jobless, and makes Mithila self-reliant in agriculture and medicine. As a sixteen-year-old, she becomes the Prime Minister of the kingdom to consolidate her territory by putting her trust in Samichi, the chief of police. As a pragmatic administrator, Sita demolishes slums and builds homes for the homeless, promotes agriculture through scientific means, makes Mithila self-reliant on essential items, rejects the caste system and works for the upliftment of the poor. She is an advocate of freedom but also suggests that "Too much of it is a recipe for disaster. That's why the path I prefer is that of Balance. Balance between the masculine and the feminine" (Tripathi 280). This balance demands equality which is the foremost belief of feminist Sita. For her, a fine balance of *Purush* and *Prakriti* is the right philosophy of life. These are the qualities of a true warrior who not only wins land but wins over the hearts of subjects as well. Sita believes that there should be a balance in society and an imbalance is created when "people are not free to live a life that is in alignment with their innate *guna*" (81). Like an altruistic nationalist, she believes in setting up an equitable society as well. To understand her feminist stance, one will have to decipher the substructure of her disposition.

Mother-child Relationship: A Substructure of Sita's Warrior Image

Indian civilization was initially matrilineal if we look back and claim that the natives shared great kinship with the mother goddess. In Indian culture, "Patriarchy was established via Brahmanization/Sanskritization, wherein most of the spiritual disciplines were ascetic and life-denying. It relegated the female to the position of a devotee. It used mythological weaponry and religious licence to transform culture and induce a societal and sexual shift away from the strong position that women had originally occupied" (Imhasly-Gandhy 71). This substantiates the matrilineal kinship of Sunaina with the subjects of her kingdom as depicted by Amish Tripathi. Sunaina was not a compliant wife of Janak but a controlling matriarch and a strong influence on Sita. Sita derives her potency from her mother and thus she rises in the form of a feminist power in the novel who works beyond the realms of patriarchal dictates.

The rise of Sita as an able administrator of Mithila, especially after her mother's death, can be construed under the ideas of Nancy Chodorow, a

psychoanalytic feminist. Nancy Chodorow, in her essay "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," highlights the idea that in terms of socialization, a mother-son relationship is referred to implicitly. In this context, she believes that a mother-daughter relationship remains withdrawn because the father plays an important role in contrast to a mother in the Freudian world. She critiques the Freudian concept of 'penis envy' and 'castration complex' as misogynist in nature because it makes men psychologically superior to women as a woman lacks a penis. Chodorow believes that a mother has a most important relationship with her daughter because she recognizes her daughter as herself based on gender. So, a mother is more likely to identify herself with a daughter than with her son. The mother does not consider her daughter as a separate entity but as a 'narcissist extension' of herself. Daughters become physical vehicles for their mothers' achievement of 'auto erotic gratification'. This attachment to the mother shapes the psyche of a daughter who in turn wants to emulate her mother. "Women's universal mothering role has effects both on the development of masculine and feminine personality and on the relative status of the sexes" (Chodorow 66). Therefore, the masculine traits of Sita can also be identified with the mothering role of Sunaina. Sunaina, an efficient administrator, strategist and ruler, shaped the psyche of Sita so that she could emulate her. In the text, Sunaina is a stronger ruler than the complacent and philosophical Janak, hence her character is an inversion of the pacifist mother archetype. However, motherhood is a feminine experience and we tend to associate a pacifist and nurturing mother archetype as the only acceptable mode of the mother archetype. This is because maternal commitments do not get along with martial endeavours as a mother cannot aspire to be fierce or warrior-like according to social structures. But at times, when violence is the only solution to salvage her child or family from a crisis, the passive mother turns into a protector and an avenger. In "Challenging the Pacifist Mother Archetype" Shannon French elaborates, "The warrior-mother in the role of instigator does not want to see her children butchered. Rather, she hopes that they will reveal their superior nature, conquer the children of lesser mothers, and claim the rewards of victory to which she has believed them entitled since birth" (60). So, one cannot deny the warrior-mother archetype because the intuitive instinct of a mother goes out to naturally protect her child. This warrior-mother archetype is exhibited through Sunaina because in the absence of an authoritative king when the kingdom is under threat from neighbouring kingdoms, she steps out to save her child and her kingdom. Such mothers live through their children so that they can anticipate the success they once dreamt of. In such a matriarchal setup, "Finally, a daughter's identification with her mother in this kind of setting is with a strong woman with clear control over important spheres of life, whose sense of self-esteem can reflect this. Acceptance of her gender identity involves positive valuation of herself, and not an admission of inferiority" (Chodorow 63). Sita who grew up in a matriarchal setting, rejects the frail feminine order and takes control of the situation just like her mother. She has no inferiority complex as she is nurtured by a strong mother. So, Sita's mother-like qualities help her step into the shoes of Sunaina.

Taking a second view, in the Sita-Sunaina relationship, one can try to decode the cause of masculine traits in Sita from an additional point of view as well. For ages, men have been depicted as warriors who march on the battlefields to guard the honour of their kingdoms while women are those disarmers who march to protect the peace. However, some feminist theorists reject the identification of the biological determination of aggression and pacifism between the two sexes. On the other hand, they identify human traits with nurturing. In the view of thinkers like Chodorow, women are more empathetic due to their maternal instincts. Though the maternal instinct lies buried in both sexes still a majority of women choose to take responsibility for maternal thinking and most men desist from this task. If we apply the same hypothesis to the Sita-Sunaina relationship then actually we can determine a new facet to their relationship which ultimately determines the fierce masculine attributes of Sita. At the beginning of the novel, the readers are made aware of the fact that Sita was not the biological child of Sunaina. She found an abandoned child bundled up under the protection of a vulture. So, Sita was the adopted child of Janak and Sunaina. After some years, Sunaina becomes a mother to Urmila whom she bore out of her womb. Therefore, Sita is the adopted child and Urmila is the biological child of Sunaina. This is what determines different modes of nurturing for the two. Urmila has fair skin, a baby face, large eyes, and childlike innocence which contrasts with the athletically built Sita. Urmila illustrates a stereotypical woman by wearing fashionable clothes, rings and bracelets to decorate herself. Urmila cries easily, keeps her voice low, gets easily convinced about her marriage, and "She could not imagine life without her nurturer and protector" (Tripathi 186). But why was Sita never taught to behave in the same way by her mother? Maybe Sunaina lacked that tenderness in rearing a child which was not born out of her womb. Pamela Johnston Conover in "Gender, Feminist Consciousness and War" writes that "In its simple form, this hypothesis posits that women who are mothers will be less militaristic than men and women who are not mothers" (1082). So, Sunaina, not the biological mother of Sita, was more emphatic and masculine in her dealing with Sita. These qualities are imbibed by Sita because, until that point in her life, Sunaina has not understood tender maternal thinking. It was only when she gives birth to Urmila; that Sunaina becomes pacifist and tolerant in dealing with her child. So, she passes on the fierce and aggressive traits to Sita while she turns Urmila into a more complacent lady.

Need for a Warrior Image

It is also pertinent to understand why the warrior image of Sita is essential to the text. Sita, in her androgynous entity, tries to disclose a hidden human nature. This can be correlated with the concept of 'animus' as defined by Carl Jung. As a part of the theory of the collective unconscious, Carl Jung defines 'anima' and 'animus'. He purported that the human psyche is essentially androgynous where animus is the unconscious masculine side of a woman and anima is the unconscious feminine side of a man. The human psyche is an amalgamation of both feminine and masculine and

is androgynous irrespective of the gender of the person. Both anima and animus are an innate part of human psychology. Animus refers to the mind, mental power, assertiveness, vitality, desire for achievement and courage in a woman while Anima refers to a man's irrational or emotional functions. But, if a woman disregards her masculine side, then she will be possessed by the animus and hence will become aggressive, ruthless, argumentative, brutish, insensitive and destructive. So, in a woman, an overwhelmed or displaced animus exhibits her loud, forceful and controlling behaviour. However, due to cultural, social, political or parental pressures, the animus remains suppressed. Carl Jung believed that bringing these repressed memories to the conscious can help positively define the personality. "The animus in fact is extremely important in the psychological development of women, enabling her to extend her consciousness, and through the capacity for objective, independent thought, allowing her to reclaim territories of her psyche previously unconscious and in the possession of extrinsic authority" (Baratharajan 234-35). This process of self-realization is termed by Jung as 'individuation.' Individuation is an achievement of self-development by integrating the conscious and the unconscious. When unconscious elements are brought into the light of consciousness then it structures our character. The process begins with self-acceptance and ends with self-actualization. So, in the text under study, one can decipher that the warrior strength of Sita is a symbol of her animus which helps in defining her character more conspicuously. She epitomizes an amalgamation of the conscious and the unconscious leading to a completely self-developed personality. Sita seems to have attained all the levels of her animus development. She is physically strong, takes righteous decisions to save her kingdom, can influence her subjects through her oratorial skills, and above all believes in the upliftment of her subjects irrespective of caste. Sita's exceptional traits, under the influence of animus growth, encompass her spiritual and physical development. Her achievements are a testament to her unwavering fortitude. Therefore, the warrior traits of Sita are justifiable not only from a feminist but also from a psychological point of view which gives a humane touch to her warrior aggression. So, Sita is humanized when we understand that she is not a supernatural being but a woman whose animus is depicted in her warrior traits.

Conclusion

Indeed, the resolute and unyielding spirit of Sita is portrayed by Amish Tripathi to exhibit a counter-stereotype that contradicts the conventional cohesion between masculinity and valour. This sets up a new discourse to evaluate gender roles in society both in the past and present. In the text under study, Amish Tripathi uses the warrior image of Sita to symbolize feminist empowerment. With the advent of feminism even male writers, through the medium of mythic fiction, start to challenge the androcentric representation of women. Though an outsider to the woman's heart, Amish Tripathi tries to break mythological female stereotypes through the feminist

portrayal of Sita in his mythic fiction. Reading about a strong female character who has roots in the past surely generates a counter-narrative to the existing patriarchal discourse. Simultaneously, reading a narrative about powerful women boosts the confidence of modern readers, especially women, who then are more likely to accept themselves with more self-love and honour.

The aim to revive the mythological age through mythic fiction is a kind of reaction to the Western ideology that perceives Indian woman as a figure of mistreatment and a devout wife who needs emancipation. In the present times, Indian mythic fiction comes to salvage the image of Indian women by drawing its strength from mythology and reinventing the archetypes. The ancient mythology needed reconstruction as women portrayed in them were still marked by patriarchal maxims. Indian mythic fiction writers like Amish Tripathi re-invent the stereotypical image of women to suit the sensibilities of the modern world. We find that the text under study is a *bildungsroman* text that mirrors the character of Sita. A *bildungsroman* text explores the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist through a physical or metaphorical journey to reach a point of enlightenment. Amish Tripathi makes sure that the title of the text features the name Sita so that *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* reflects a 'novel of formation' of the life of Sita. Hence, the writer convincingly represents Sita as a major character and a warrior to counter the Western discourse of Indian women as weak, docile and timid auxiliary characters in literature.

Feminist perspectives in writings emphasize appropriate the images that were previously demonstrated through canonical texts. As a feminist, Sita rejects essentialism and embraces the differences. Sita seems to take a new avatar of a superhero/superwoman who displays her combat actions, wages wars and intimidates her enemies. She is tender-hearted towards her loved one and a warrior of Mithila for her enemies. This fluidity of character makes Sita masculine and feminine, tender and volatile, and *Purush* and *Prakriti*. It makes Sita a complete human. In postmodern literature, feminism destabilizes the patriarchal notions of gender inequality. So, Sita in her neo-avatar also rejects essentialism. Thus, the genre of mythic fiction stands for the rejection of conventions and follows the principles of feminism to carve its female characters. So, in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila,* the titular character corresponds to that radical feminist spirit that negates patriarchal values and victimization to set up a kingdom based on altruism.

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Taming Wetlands of Kuttanad: Probing the Complexity of Human-Nature Relations in S. Hareesh's *Moustache*

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Abstract

Human-Nature relations are a conceptually complex and ambiguous notion that compel contextual exploration to discover varied perspectives. The paper situates the research in the biodiverse wetlands of Kuttanad to explore shifting landscapes in relation to the changing human-nature relations of the land. It analyses the novel, *Moustache* by S. Hareesh, a multilayered narrative that interweaves myths, legends, and folk stories that reveal the biocultural diversity of the land. The paper is not limited to exploring unilateral human-nature relations but also identifies nature's changing relation with man. The paper explores notions of anthropocentrism and ecophobia that seeps within the community, which disrupts natural harmony. Kuttanad is not only a geographically fixed space but a culturally and spiritually infused place grounded in interconnected and interdependent relationships.

Keywords: biocultures, ecocriticism, anthropomorphism, Kerala, environmental degradation

Kuttanad, a picturesque region in Kerala, stands out due to its unique wetland ecosystem that arose from the deltaic formations of river systems. A land reputedly featured in the writings of Thakazhi S. Pillai, Ayyappa Panicker, and Paul Chirakkarode became a space encapsulated within the complex socio-cultural dynamics of the community. Kuttanad consists of fertile wetlands that allows rice to be cultivated below sea level, popularly referred to as the 'Rice Bowl of Kerala.' Once hailed as a land of prosperity, the region consists of backwaters, swampy land, and intersecting canals with loosely defined boundaries that compose three districts (Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta). S. Hareesh's debut Malayalam novel *Meesa* (2018), translated as *Moustache* (2020) by Jayshree Kalathil, becomes a modern narration of legends and myths intricately woven into the magical land of Kuttanad. Hareesh is an established and versatile literary figure in Malayalam literature, renowned for his profound exploration of the human condition and the socio-cultural nuances of Kerala. The novel's setting, Kuttanad has an intriguing feature as it is predominantly a space constructed by human beings by dredging waters and raising the land for habitation. If God created Kerala, man created Kuttanad. The constructed nature of the land has defined the culture and social dynamics of the Kuttanad community which is highlighted in *Moustache*.

> For hundreds of years, in every season of hunger, people have been adding to it, building bunds to claim arable land from the swamps and the lake, creating a featureless, indistinguishable expanse of fields that turned out to be traps they could not escape. An expanse that only had a beginning, and no end. (73)

The excerpt refers to the extensive land reclamations that were central to paddy cultivation in Kuttanad, a land formed out of human hands. The notion of land is not only an easily delineated physical space upon which people make their lives; it becomes a space culturally imbued with layers of meaning and encompasses the

entanglements of both human and non-human beings, both the living and their ancestors (Salmo 1327). The paper embodies this complex understanding of the land to comprehend the relations the community forms with their environment. Historical and anthropological research points to how Kuttanad's swampy lands were initially occupied by the aboriginal community living off the naturally formed landmass in these sites. With the extensive land reclamations, paddy cultivation was made possible, which Hareesh perceives created the indistinguishable and endless expanse of fields. K. T. Rammohan's well-researched work, *Tales of Rice Kuttanad* (2006)*, affirms that Kuttanad's backwaters were vast and deep with strong winds and sea-like tides, making reclamation an impossible task. He argues that today's paddy fields are miracles owing to the reclamation technology developed by the Pulayan community as opposed to common knowledge that attributes its success to the Nayar and Syrian Christian members (24). Although Hareesh positions his work in the 20th century primarily agrarian Kuttanad, he critically acknowledges the taming of the wetlands to sustain the growing population. This act transformed the ecology and biodiversity of the region, which he describes as 'traps' from which the community was unable to break free. As Robert argues, gatherers can be mainly distinguished from farming communities by the exploitation of domesticated plants and animals that decisively changed humans relations with nature (5). Kuttanad's trap becomes apparent, contrasting the current state of modern Kuttanad, that heavily bears the brunt of climate change that has even led to environmental migration. The intrusion of modern human activities into these systems and cultural alterations have severely distorted systems naturally embedded in these wetlands.

Human–nature relationship has been an ambiguously contrasting concept with modern views ranging from anthropocentrism to biocentrism and egocentrism. In local communities, Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) specific to the land dictates a human-nature relationship and shapes "ways of life, worldviews, and sense of place, serving material as well as psychological and spiritual needs" (Maffi 4). The knowledge remains alive through constant innovation and repetition that maintains a close link through the community's direct dependence on the local environment. By resurrecting folk tales, myths, and legends of the land that form a part of the communal memory, Hareesh opens a window into the biocultural diversity and TEK of Kuttanad. The paper aims to explore the changing landscape of Kuttanad interrelated with shifting human-nature relations as depicted in the novel *Moustache.* The complexly interwoven narrative creates an interesting space to explore the ways humans connect and reconnect with nature. It also opens avenues to explore how nature reciprocates this relationship. Nature is alive and characterized in the text, attributing power that co-constructs the culture and community of Kuttanad.

The novel *Moustache,* primarily set in the agrarian region of Kuttanad, narrates the lives of multiple characters who are compellingly intertwined that give a sense of the community and the land. It centres around the life of Vavachan, who hails from the Pulaya Dalit community of landless labourers in Kuttanad. Vavachan grows out a moustache to act in a play where he portrays a terrifying police officer. However, the terror he causes with that frightening persona lingers as he refuses to shave his moustache. The moustache, a marker of upper caste identity and masculinity, becomes a symbol of transgression in the stringent social hierarchical structure of the

land. The fear towards the moustache leads the community to concoct mythical tales and wild stories that embeds him into a legendary figure of the land. Though Moustache's quests serve as a base plot line, Hareesh's multi-layered narrative interweaves the landscape, biodiversity, and regional history into the socio-cultural fabric of the community. In the Translator's Note, Kalathil points out, "what emerges forcefully in this tale of magic, myth and metaphor is how the story of human being's relationship with the land has been fundamentally defined in terms of caste and gender" (xviii). The text has been mainly studied for the controversial socio-religious and gender concerns that it propounded. This research focuses on the untold story of Kuttanad's physical landscape as the author gives voices to the bullfrogs, birds, and even extinct species like the crocodiles that had at once infested these wetlands. The stories roll out parallel to the ecological changes experienced in the region that influence relations with the community and land. The non-linear narrative imbued with magical realist elements becomes significant in understanding the environmental shifts as the characters move from an agrarian to modern Kuttanad and back to an ancient untouched swampy land.

Changing Landscapes

Although the text primarily focuses on an agrarian community's relationship with the environment, the novel attempts to reimagine a time before the space was changed to cultivable lands. The character Moustache travels back in time when nature existed freely untouched by humanity; there were no paddy fields that were dug out of the water, only endless swamps and water. A land where diverse beings coexist and adapt to the natural environment. The text portrays the entrance of humanity in Kuttanad with the aboriginal community consisting primarily of the Purayan and Pulayan castes and describes their relations with the wetlands as follows:

> The crocodiles had ignored the black-skinned humans when they first began to appear along the ragged slivers of land that stuck out of the swamp and water, aboriginals – Pulayans and Parayans – who had put up huts and hovels. The sludge came rising up from the bottom of the lake, offering foundations for their dwellings. They sowed just enough seeds for their meals in the patches of land where the water receded, caught the abundant fish that jumped out of the water straight into their hands. (261)

As a primarily foraging community, they are portrayed as living in consonance and harmony with their natural surroundings. It reiterates an indigenous holistic view where humans are seen as an integral part of nature and not apart from it. The excerpt depicts the sustainable coexistence of man and nature as the sludge naturally rises out of the water, providing habitation, or they adapted by finding places they could reside on. The crocodiles did not harm them, and the fish jumped into their hands, portraying a harmonious relationship with the ancestors of the land. The shift to a predominantly agrarian community that was made possible through extensive land reclamations indefinitely changed the landscape of Kuttanad. Anthropological research points to how in comparison to foragers, farming communities did not live in balance with their environments as it reorganised ways of living and understanding of nature. Nature had to be tamed and domesticated by draining the waters and raising the lands to

support the community's growing needs. In *Moustache,* this significant shift in human-nature relations is portrayed as follows:

> The sludge stopped rising voluntarily out of the water, and they had to dig it up to make solid ground. The early Pulayan lands became Mundadithara, Pottanthara, Pavuthara, Naarakathara, and Kalathara. They dredged up the oozy mud and stomped it into fields. Mud had an innate truth – in the fields where it was wet, it held on to the moisture and let the paddy soar, and on the bunds where it was dry, it held firm and refused to let moisture in. The rightful area of the crocodiles' existence shrank rapidly…. (262)

Land that was free to be occupied by any was divided into fields evolving into private property owned by the upper castes that marginalised the aboriginal community to the frontiers. In this radical shift socio-cultural structures also underwent a dynamic reorganisation that undeniably changed the community's understanding of themselves and the land. These anthropogenic shifts entailed the power of man to control and modify the environments without taking into account the repercussion of these changes on the land and other non-human beings. It vastly affected the habitation of other living beings, which led to an unsustainable coexistence with Nature. The complexity of Nature's relation with human beings is depicted as the land stops naturally rising out of the waters but simultaneously aids to sustain human existence by letting the paddy grow. Human greed becomes a central theme portrayed in the novel as he describes how in the earlier days, the coconut trees would bend their heads, and paddy would hold dried and ready-to-pound grains for the community. Nature changed these ways as the Chovan, who traditionally belonged to the toddy-tapping community, scolded the tree: "Why can't you have this cut open for me?" and the Pulayan woman asked a paddy plant: "Why can't you hold rice on your stalks instead of paddy?" (256). Since then, they had to climb trees to pluck coconuts, and the women had to boil and pound the paddy to get rice. The state of nature, on one side, is depicted as benevolent and harmonious, but it also inspires fear in humans, who have to respect and fight it to survive. These retelling of stories transmitted among the community reiterates the complex and shifting human-nature relations due to growing human greed.

The novel's narration also moves into contemporary Kuttanad, further highlighting the shifts the landscape has undergone with modernity. The character Moustache comments on the landscape, "You know the bus road by the side of the canal near your house? That used to be a skinny little ditch.... And the pond – it used to be thrice its size. I used to catch snakeheads in it" (21). The wetland ecosystems of Kuttanad are undergoing significant transformations as a result of intrusive development activities. These changes in the landscape have resulted in the loss of biodiversity and created conditions that are conducive to environmental disasters. In an agrarian community, the complete dependence on the land for their survival is integral to the relations they form with nature. This situation has changed in contemporary Kuttanad as humans have further distanced themselves from their land, which is also addressed in the novel. As the narrator exclaims,

> In those days, the Vembanad Kayal was four times bigger than it was now, turbulent with big waves, and fish that swam in with the surging sea water and defied ordinary nets. When the water was clear, one could see huge rays with fan-like wings prowling the bottom, tiger prawns that could bite off a man's balls… (213)

A once densely occupied biodiverse region now exists only in the imagination and cultural memory of the community. The incredible flora and fauna that defined the land have disappeared with drastic environmental changes. The landscape conceives new meanings as Hareesh uses anthropomorphism as a technique to narrate stories about the land and other living beings, giving their perspectives on these shifts. On the complexity of forming relations with Nature, Duncan argues, "Our relation to nature, while profound, can never be adequately expressed. Nature remains dumb, and we must always return to mere conversation with other persons" (24). Through complexly interwoven narrations, literary imagination can rewrite this understanding as it offers a place to foreground non-human voices. In *Moustache*, coconut trees speak of generational memories, tortoises criticise social systems, and fishes emote being caught by Kuttanad's anglers. The different dimensions of human interactions and relations with nature are given a better perspective as nature is given a literal voice in the text. The ancestral and sacred associations with nature are also highlighted, like the ceremonial stone returning from the lake's depths, looking for its old abode under the manjadi tree. Vavachan's dead sibling is reborn as a mushroom sheltering and warning him against the battering rain. The community's TEK in the form of folk stories and myths embeds the community within the landscape forming close interrelations that venerate the land. The chapter 'The Last Crocodile' represents these shifting relations by narrating the stories of crocodiles, a native species wiped out from the wetlands by human intrusion.

> In the long history of the crocodiles that went back thousands and thousands of years, human beings were the last creatures they had encountered…The crocodiles were spoiled for choice too between the fish and the otters, and the birds that entered willingly into their open mouths as they lay sunning themselves on the banks. The taste of human meat, unfamiliar in their cultural memory. (261)

As one of the earliest species that had inhabited the wetlands, the crocodiles are portrayed as living in harmony and coexisting with the land without causing harm to human life. Hareesh also brings out instances where they have come to the aid of the community, as Paviyan, Vavachan's father, is given a ride on the crocodile's back, a reciprocal act for saving its life. In this interaction, they reconnect as they realise their lives are interlinked in multiple ways. The story of the crocodile brothers Chemban and Irumban, who helped transport a family to safety by holding the boat steady through the stormy waters, rewrites the narrative for these reptiles. The community and creatures are depicted as living harmoniously, their lives intrinsically interlinked as they cohabited the wetlands that provided for all. A distinct shift is observed with the intervention of colonial figures into the landscape as he introduces the character of Baker Saheb, who makes it his life mission to exterminate these creatures from the land. He also becomes a representation of the influence of the Judeo-Christian anthropocentric ideology on indigenous knowledge systems. Saheb initially had a liking for crocodile meat and skin, which eventually turned into an obsession to eradicate them. The author characterises this transition as ". . . it came to be that as man ate crocodile, crocodile began to eat man too" (265). For years the people of Kuttanad had peacefully coexisted with the diverse amphibious life of the wetlands, but things changed with the entry of the white man and further permeation of an anthropocentric ideology.

> The arrival of the white man had changed many of the thousands-of-years-old traditions of the land. Perhaps he felt that it was only with the total eradication of the crocodiles, primordial dwellers of the land, that the white man's presence could be stamped indelibly on its surface. (267)

The white man's understanding of nature contrasted with how the local community understood and formed relations with their lands. The eradication of the crocodiles was inherent in the Judeo-Christian ideology of 'God created living beings for man and man for God' and the colonial mindset of 'taming and civilising the savage' that was imposed on the community. Stories of friendship and harmonious cohabitation embedded within the land's cultural memory changed. People began to fear the water as images of crocodiles resting peacefully on the embankments were replaced by those that charged at children and swiftly lashed with their tails. The shift in these viewpoints led the community to join the white man in annihilating these creatures who were once their companions or brethren sharing the land. In the story of the last crocodile, Hareesh gives a novel perspective of the crocodile's sorrow and anger in accepting that he is about to go extinct with no more of his kind left. The story-telling animal is an expedient conceit employed to force us to confront the pain and suffering of the non-human species (Lee 147). The end is not a mere battle between the hero Moustache and a wild savage animal but carries an emotional gravitas. Hareesh's layered characterisation of the last crocodile makes it a revengeful emotional narrative, avenging humans for the loss of his family. These shifts in human-nature relations point to aspects of ecophobia sown in the community where there exists an "irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world or aspects of it" (Estok 18). Nature that once lived in harmonious coexistence with humans becomes threatened as a shift in the understanding of the land occurs with changing socio-cultural dynamics and external ideological influences. Anthropocentrism and colonialism are complexly intertwined within the historical, ideological, and socio-cultural dynamics of Kuttanad. While anthropocentrism predates colonialism, as seen in transforming the wetlands for agrarian purposes, colonial powers significantly amplified and perpetuated its influence through their policies, institutions, and cultural norms.

Moustache's layered narrative traces the socio-cultural transitions of the land that are complexly interrelated with shifts in human-nature relations. The paper is not limited to the community's understanding of the natural world around them but moves beyond to address nature's changing relations with humans. The analysis shows how the shift to an agrarian community and further development entailed radically changing the landscape and the socio-cultural dynamics community that had implications on human-nature relations. Indigenous TEK that supports coexistence and veneration of Nature was replaced by human's urge to dominate nature. As the novel states, "The lake had surrendered completely…There was nothing that would not eventually surrender to the triumph-seeking, ruthless man" (Moustache 290). The initial conversions of land for human sustenance and habitation shifted as human greed grew, viewing the land as a resource for extraction. The gradual development of an anthropocentric ideology coupled with ecophobia induced by colonial influences have transformed the wetlands of Kuttanad and further led to the annihilation of species from their rightful homelands. The inclusion of non-human voices in the text brings a varied perspective to the shifting human-nature relations. The study also stresses on how the climate issue we face today is also a cultural issue as it influences

behaviour and viewpoints of human beings who act on Nature. The way communities understand and form relations with their lands are inadvertently connected to their changing landscapes and rapid environmental shifts. The declining biocultural diversity and distancing of humans from their lands has aggravated the environmental crisis as observed in eco-sensitive regions like Kuttanad today. The relationship between man and nature must be reconsidered, as without human recognition of their role in the complexities of life in a place, life suffers and loses its sustainability.

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Narrating the Agony of Partition Refugees in Fikr Taunsvi's *The Sixth River*

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Abstract

India's Partition in 1947 created an orgy of ethnic violence in which humanity surrendered before debauchery. In an unadulterated display of bestiality, people ethnically cleansed the other community in the name of religion. Ergo, millions succumbed to loot, arson and sexual violence. Having torn the masses from their safe havens, Partition inflicted undreamed-of barbarity wreaking immense agony on them. The objective here is to probe into the tragic fate of Partition victims, by illuminating the inhumane living conditions of the refugees. The proposed paper lends voice to the personal experiences of refugees by remembering and retelling their testimonies through Fikr Taunsvi's Partition memoir, *The Sixth River*.
Keywords: Partition, Refugees, Violence, Memoir, Retelling, Exile

Introduction

India's Partition dislocated and exiled millions, creating refugees whose lives became unpredictable and volatile. It was the aftermath of the British policy of Divide and Rule which was supported by certain communal leaders of the time. It intensified the pre-existing fissures between Muslims and non-Muslims beginning the saga of religious polarization and ethnic violence in the subcontinent. By "sharply demarcat[ing] the boundaries between "'us' and 'them,'" the foundations of the" newly sovereign "Indian dominion and that of Pakistan were laid in hatred" (Ravikant and Saint, "Introduction" XX; Taunsvi 143). This hatred gave birth to the genocidal communal ideology which uprooted countless individuals. Several literary works illustrate this humanitarian catastrophe however, Fikr Taunsvi's *The Sixth River: A Journal from the Partition of India* occupies a special status. This work was originally titled as *Chhata Darya* and was translated from Urdu to English by Maaz Bin Bilal. Fikr Taunsvi was the pen name used by Ram Lal Bhatia, the writer of this work, who was a well-known columnist in Lahore's Urdu Daily *Milap.* His satirical columns made him a popular figure particularly due to his wit and humor. In Bilal's words, "the main reason that the newspaper was bought by the bulk of its readership, comprising of students and teachers, doctors and rickshaw-pullers" was Taunsvi's column "'Pyaz ke Chhilke', or 'Onion Skins'" (Taunsvi 15). This was the stature of Taunsvi in Lahore. True to the translator's words, the writer presents Partition's dark side by employing his satirical techniques so as to delineate the social realities of the time.

Taunsvi's *The Sixth River* is selected as the primary text because it delineates the actual happenings in Lahore amidst the communal turbulence from August to November 1947. It is the first person account of the anarchy and annihilation that people underwent during the time. It vividly recounts the appalling persecution and

traumatic violence witnessed by the refugees in Lahore's post-Partition situation demonstrating the psychological as well as social upheavals endured by them. Uncovering various layers of tragedy, this eye-witness account documents the macabre happenings around the writer that can never be found in the official historical narratives. Taunsvi's memoir objectifies the predicaments and anguish of refugees which he experienced first-hand, exhibiting the truly horrendous conditions which exiles were forced to live in during 1947.

Discussion

Taunsvi presents this other side of Partition that is far removed from the political maneuverings of its leaders, painting the true picture of the past. It unearths the adversities of the populace during and after the event of country's dismemberment. Urvashi Butalia voices the significance of this side of the history saying that, "[t]he ghosts of Partition … haunt us" time and "again … perhaps to alert us" regarding "the need to more closely examine the many aspects of its history" ("Return" xii). The tendency to overlook this aspect of history is because "historians are selective," in the sense that they emphasize on the "general" trends of the age (Carr, *What is History?* 12, 63). They are "not really interested in the unique" aspects of the history and are "committ[ed]" only "to generalization[s]" (63). Consequently, the "unbelievable violence" during Partition is "declared" as "non-narratable" by treating it "as a freak occurrence, like a natural calamity, which requires no historical explanation [since] ('these things happen')" (Pandey, *Remembering Partition* 45-46). Perhaps for this reason historians employ the famous "rubric" of "'the cost of progress' or 'the price of revolution'" so as to bypass the bloodstained details of the past (Carr 79). However, this trend of turning a blind eye to the melancholy of millions needs to be undone. The "multiple narratives of" the "history" need to be "discover[ed]" since the "historians" are "now much less reluctant to admit the importance of" this other side of history (Butalia xxxii). It is thus consequential to lay bare the experiences of the countless refugees during Partition because "'[v]ictimization is the other side of history that no cunning of reason can ever justify'" (Ricouer qtd. in Pandey 45).

Existence of a Refugee

The onset of a refugee's wretched existence is marked by his acquaintance with nothingness. Being stripped off his home and wealth, he is forced into a despicable life where he is dependent on strangers for even the most basic human necessities. His fate becomes the saga of want, pity and abeyance which he has to endure in silence. Taunsvi aptly describes their hardship as follows:

> [The refugees] were hungry, naked, dragging their feet through the dust on the streets. With their beddings spread underneath some tree or the other, they were waiting for the great magic charm … A storm was dying down. But its footprints were still

quivering and were looking at a new storm rising in the depths of their chests. (146)
This misery of expatriates was the offshoot of the human perversion facilitated by religious polarization that could not tolerate the presence of religious minorities and encouraged their annihilation. The evil passion of enemy's annihilation was "incredibly frightening" for the minorities which is why they fled towards the other side of the Radcliffe Line, becoming refugees in the process (48). Taunsvi was one among these pitiable individuals. Sitting in the Khalsa College Refugee Camp of Amritsar, he mentions:

> There is a mass of women, children, the old and the young spreading all around me for two to two-and-a-half miles…But [these refugees] have created a tumult. They cannot sit quietly … There is no peace or quiet in their hearts. Their homes have been destroyed. Their beloved neighbours have been turned into enemies and taken from them. Their crops lie waste. Their children have bitten the dust and rolled in blood…. The heads of their wives, mothers and old fathers have been removed from their bodies. The novel of their life has been taken to its climax and then turned tragic. And they are restless and agitated. (168)

These exiles were a witness to the terror of communally frenzied crowds aiming to exterminate them. Many of them had seen their loved ones being butchered, while a few were forced to save themselves abandoning their family members. Some had seen the razing of their homes by the looting violent mobs; a home which was put together piece by piece with love, compassion and emotion. A few ill-fated individuals had the misfortune of seeing their houses set ablaze, their only fault was that were on the wrong side of the newly demarcated Radcliffe Line.

Partition in this sense became the narrative of unsettlement, solitude and exile for the refugees who were under compulsion to flee for their lives, abandoning their entire world behind. The citadel of refuge which they sought, in a new place, brought them nothing more than ordeals. Their flight from their homes did guarantee them physical safety but at the cost of impoverishment. This security of their lives was accompanied by the angst of a lifetime.

Understanding the Agony of Refugees

In order to grasp the true meaning of being a refugee it is significant to understand the cause of their suffering. In this regard, Jasbir Jain notes that, "migration is a tearing away" of an individual's "inner being" from his place of refuge (24-5). After being torn away from his roots, the refugee is forced to "carry" his "body," his "language," his "beliefs" and "desires," his "habits" and "affections" to unrecognizable" and unknown lands (Young 12). The very idea of being uprooted from a known home is disastrously agonizing for him because it is quite difficult to leave the place where one has lived, a place that holds his memories (Jain 24). This experience of uprooting is an emotional burden that he carries within himself forever. Robert J. C. Young's views are crucial in deciphering the essence of exile for an uprooted being:

Refugee: you are unsettled, uprooted…. [Y]our links with the land [have been] broke[n]… You have been forcibly moved off, or you have fled war…. You are mobile, mobilized, stumbling along your line of flight. But nothing flows. In moving your life has come to a halt. Your life has been fractured, your family fragmented. The lovely dull stabilities of ordinary everyday life and local social existence that you have known have passed. Compressed into a brief moment, you have experienced the violent disruptions [and] the end of the comforts of the commonplace. (*Postcolonialism* 11-12)

The uprooting and unsettling of a refugee has implications far beyond mere physical displacement, its intense emotional impact on the individual scars all his beautiful past memories. Inevitably, their past becomes the embodiment of excruciating pain. This torment is the result of one violent moment of disruption that has thrown his life in chaos, the trauma thus generated will accompany him till his last breath. Resultantly, a refugee has no stability or peace in life. No amount of happiness can undo this pain; no sorrow will ever be able to impact him to this extent.

Such unsettled beings have "no prospect of ever returning" to their "home[s]"; these "unknown men and women have spent years of miserable loneliness," carrying the burden of their past into their present (Said 176). No matter where they go, they "encounter a new world" with "a new culture" which they "have to adapt … while trying to preserve" their "own recognizable forms of identity" (Young 12). "Putting the two together is an experience of pain" for these unfortunate exiles; for them "[l]ife has become too fragile, too uncertain" (12). They "can" now, "count on nothing" (12). These banished people are "pushed into the margins of the society" (Lahiri 1). Having gone through an "exile" the esse of refugees is "*ou-topos* or nowhere" (12). For them "dislocation" has "entailed loss of identity and a cultural disorientation, coupled with yearning for one's homeland" (2). The "émigré[s]" have "to face myriad challenges like economic survival, fear of persecution and social discrimination" (2). These issues en masse "leav[e] the exile[s] with a feeling of not belonging to any particular land to call [their] own" (9). This awareness of the past belonging and present un-belonging is the cause of all their tribulations.

Living Conditions of the Refugees

Undergoing exile, the refugees lose their enthusiasm towards life. Their uprooting has disrupted their present, by breaking their links with the past. Thence, their future is lost in the blur of uncertainty. This has destroyed their dreams, happiness, and peace, leaving them discontented forever. This state of deprivation and grief is vividly brought out as follows:

Exile is a condition that damages the spirit, draining away the content of social and ritual life. The void that remains in its place … may never be filled. Neither sloganeering nor communal/nationalist rhetoric can make up for this loss. (Ravikant and Saint, "Introduction" XXII).

This drained spirit of refugees is the outcome of the sudden violent casualty of

everything that they held dear, and this hopelessness is an imprisonment to which they are condemned for a lifetime. This violent uprooting has brought with it an actuality of despair and conjecture, where nothing is certain apart from despondence. Taunsvi's words bring to light the situation of refugees after living through the vehement unsettlement of Partition violence:

> Every day I see trucks full of Hindu and Sikh refugees … I feel as if they are all pulled towards the graveyard in the terrible shade of the night. I do not see a ray of life on anyone's face. These burnt-out, sad and depressed faces carrying a meagre vision of their futures in their hearts are piling into the trucks. (151-2)

Compelled to abandon their homes, these refugees have no choice but to live in narrow spaces inside the temporary structures called tents. It is a sorry excuse for a refuge. Deprived of even the most basic requirements of sanitation, it is an open invitation to dirt, disease, and death. Taunsvi pens down the living conditions inside the refugee camps as:

> A storm of filth, rot and stink had arisen around the camp. Thousands of men, women and children were finding nourishment in this rot. Here and there, filth was piled up in stacks. One couldn't breathe in the stink…. The rot and the stink of the camp had caused two young ones … to be swallowed by death. (163-4)

This self-evident truth of wretchedness is the destiny of refugees. Living in excruciation of homelessness, they are cursed to be burdened beneath this catastrophe. These people are mobbed by the darkness of Partition's communal derangement that catalyzed the decentering of millions of innocent individuals. This calamity was the result of:

> Straddling [of] two warring states and two politically incompatible worlds [that] caused them deep anguish. That which essentially was a human problem, and needed an imaginative and sensitive treatment, was sought to be solved by a single stroke dividing the land. The greatest mistake the Indian leaders committed while agreeing to division, was to think of the land only in terms of geographical territory and moveable property. How could one divide the heart and the memory? (Asaduddin, "Against Forgetting" 124)

One mistake on the part of our leaders, thereby converted this land of cultural diversity and religious tolerance into an arena of unhindered massacre, resulting in the "largest forced migration of population in human history" (124). For these dislocated beings "[t]here is no escape from memories." They are never able to cope up with this "catastroph[ic] … loss and displacement" because:

> Exile is an ontological condition to be grappled with on a daily basis. For the exiles it is impossible to exorcise the past. Even those who cannot remember accurately because of the suddenness of events and the attendant shock, are still haunted by the lost places, abandoned photographs and other recollections. (Asaduddin 124)

The memory of a happy and secure past in comparison with the nothingness of the present generates a scathing pain. The reminiscence of cultural diversity and communal harmony of the times passed in contrast with the contemporary religious frenzy brings tears of helplessness to these exiled beings. Having lived in a wonderful

and stable environment they are now consumed by gloom, due to the uncertainties generated by the socio-political and economic instability in their lives. It is this paradox of a wonderful past and appalling present which proved to be a purgatory they were forced to live in. In this regard, the personal memoirs on India's Partition are a brilliant medium of examining this cataclysmic historical moment, particularly for the people who lived it. Uncovering the religious intolerance, Taunsvi's testimony of his uprooting brings to the fore the moral depravity that occurred in 1947. And it is crucial that these personal histories on Partition are remembered and retold because "the official historical discourse (whether in India or Pakistan)" pushes "to the margins" the tragedies people underwent (Saint, "Exorcising the Ghosts of Times Past" 73).

The need to revisit Partition's History

This human dimension of Partition, carrying the cries of its victims, is an aspect rarely discussed by the historians. It is disregarded with the objective of accommodating the success, failures, and roles of political figures in the subcontinent's history. By undoing the "earlier silences in mainstream historiography," the individual adversity and personal agonies of the people are emphasized so that the "catastrophic aftereffects" of Partition can be comprehended (Saint 74). Besides mourning the cost of Partition paid by the people of the subcontinent, these personal memoirs feature the "absurdity" of the decision of our leaders (83). In this regard, Taunsvi's narrative is "an atypical … testimony … registering" the general "grief" at the collective downfall of humanity (84).

These uncanny experiences of Partition refugees foreground the narrative of a time when all our civilizational values rendered meaningless and ethnic violence became the accepted norm. It was a time when morality and humanity were lamenting over the madness that had gripped a few thousands who orchestrated to eradicate the existence of millions. The memory of this horrible history periodically intrudes in the present reminding us that the denial and repression of the past is no longer a possibility. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, people who fail to learn from their history are cursed to relive it. Therefore, "Partition" after seven decades, can no longer "be dismissed as an aberration, and the responsibility of owing up to its ugly reality, denied" (Ravikant and Saint XVI). The presence of these personal narratives on India's Partition remind us, time and again, to revisit our past so as to understand the varied nuances of human experiences pertaining to this historical moment. "Bearing witness" to such historical testimonies is essential because it "asserts that 'this history concerns us all'" (Felman qtd. in Whitlock 169).

Conclusion

As discussed above, the experience of dislocation, displacement, and exile

has attained unprecedented intensity in Partition literature. Ethnic cleansing and economic deprivation as a result of becoming a refugee reinforces this notion that estrangement from one's roots is an enduring experience. This feeling of estrangement goes hand in hand with angst and nostalgia diminishing the victim's chances of gaining roots in the present. This disintegration, accordingly, becomes a part of the refugee's identity forcing him into a state of limbo. Ergo, he is forever suspended into a space somewhere between the past and the present. Hence, becoming a refugee is that watershed event which leads an individual to decades of yearning and silent suffering. Human misery has multiple dimensions but the event of Partition in 1947 was laid on the foundation of Religion, which continues to dominate the geopolitics of our subcontinent. It is for this reason that the study of the personal memoirs on India's Partition is of the essence. It reminds us of the disastrous impact of the intermingling of religion and politics. It is a reminder of the outcome of overlooking other aspects of identity such as: culture, and language. This paper explores that history which led to the creation of millions of refugees in a matter of mere months. Showcasing the agony of the refugees, the focus is to recognize the manner in which their world was suddenly turned upside down. Foregrounding the torture and cataclysm that became the fate of these uprooted individuals, this work portrays the true picture of Partition days through the eyes of a man who himself was a refugee. Thereupon, the muted history of Partition survivors is unveiled to undo the historical bias done to them because true history lies behind the historical facts. True history lies in the struggle of its people, in the tears of their anguish. And this history is waiting to be uncovered, in its entirety, even after seventy five years of the creation of separate sovereign states of India and Pakistan.

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Mutation of Identity: Navigating Postcolonial Distortions in Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*

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Abstract

Identities form an indispensable part of human culture and civilization. It is the outcome of the traditions and rituals followed, myths and folk stories transmitted and the way a community lives and perceives itself or wants to be perceived in relation to the world. With the advent of colonial activities, there came a significant change in the age-old traditions and rituals followed by the indigenous communities residing in the colonized nations. With the change in the traditions came a gradual shift in the way these communities perceived themselves. This ultimately led to the 'mutation' of identities either because of the influence or resistance. The present paper aims to project this gradual mutation of identities undergone by the Adi and Mishmee tribes of the Northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh through the novel *The Black Hill* by Mamang Dai- an ex-civil servant belonging to the Adi tribe. The author thereby exposes the documented chronicles in the novel which appear to be dissimilar from the folk tales of the narrated history prevalent in the region.

Keywords: Folk-stories, Identity, Indigenous, Mutation, Northeast, Postcolonialism

Introduction

"We leave something of ourselves behind when we leave a place, we stay there, even though we go away. And there are things in us that we can find again only by going back there" – Mercier 207.

Identity, is an inseparable part of the human behavior which plays a crucial role in social as well as empirical psychology (Burke 63). It accounts to the overall formation of the human identity and validates our cultural association to a specific community, tribe or a geographical area. Cultural identities are based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behavior or ways of acting (Yep 61). The formation of this cultural identity does not take place all at once. But, with the passage of time, slowly and gradually it comes into the daily practice and seeps into the mindset of a tribe. The ways of being and the social expectations for behavior within cultural identities do change over time, but what separates them from most social identities is their historical roots (Collier 318). At times, identities are also attributed by 'other' to someone based on certain conventional idea which gives birth to ascribed identities. The interference into these cultural identities by the 'other' leads to intermingling of different types of identities, ultimately leading to the mutation of the actual original identity. The gradual loss of cultural forms and the adoption of new cultural identities pose a threat to the existing

ones. There's "an intense sense of cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiation of 'other' cultures" (Misra xiii) in the writings of the Northeastern region of India.

The NE region of India is very special and unique as it is the home to about 145 tribes with 26 alone in Arunachal Pradesh, is the seat housing one of the largest bastions of the tribal world. On February 20, 1987, the erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) came to be known as Arunachal Pradesh and became a full-fledged state. Literature coming from Arunachal along with the other sister states in the last few decades, have been used as a vital tool by the writers, critics and scholars to react/to respond towards the changes undergone by the communities by purposely featuring their native tribes. With the superimposition of foreign cultural values by the colonizers, the environment as well as the cultural identity of the region has been mutated to a great extent. Taking into account *The Black Hill* by Mamang Dai, the present paper focuses on how the clash of the old versus new culture has resulted in different forms of resistance in order to protect the cultural identity as well as appropriations in the Adi and Mishmi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Also, how the xenophobic fear of an outsider caused the communities and their traditions to mutate has been elaborately discussed through the selected work. The central character of the novel is Kajinsha, a tribal chief, on whose identity this paper primarily focuses on. He was later accused of murdering French missionaries. But first let's have a look at his identity.

> Kajinsha had been born in a village beyond the Dau River in the Mishmee Hills. The village was no longer in existence and even back then it was a nameless settlement not recorded on any map. What was a village in those days but a house of one or two, a family- father, mother, children and a few clan members? If they moved, it was the end of the village (Dai 6).

When there comes an isolated settlement like this, it becomes relatively easy to erase its existence or at least mutate its identity. This paper therefore aims to draw the world's attention towards the intense sense of mutation of cultural identity and its subsequent feeling of restoration that came with the negotiation of 'other' cultures through the writings of Mamang Dai. Mamang Dai is a renowned author hailing from Northeast India. Born and raised in the beautiful state of Arunachal Pradesh. Her works often explore themes of identity, belonging, and the intricate relationship between humans and their environment. Through her vivid descriptions and compelling narratives, she captures the essence of the Northeast, shedding light on its lesser-known aspects and showcasing the region's unique traditions, folklore, and social dynamics. It is through her characters that the author here in this novel recreates the history. By sewing the threads and joining the bits and pieces which were once manipulated by the people in power, she manages to showcase the undocumented history of her tribe. This paper is also a subtle attempt towards tracing the gradual erosion and the eventual loss of the ethnicity, culture, tradition and the values that the tribes carried along with them through the selected work. Before we move on to the discussion let's have a quick glimpse at who these Adi and Mishmi tribes are which

will be a part of our further discussion.

> Adi: They are indigenous communities in the northeastern region of India, primarily Arunachal Pradesh. Their distinctive customs, traditions, and craftsmanship distinguish them from others. The Adi tribes are often depicted as guardians of nature in novels from this area.
>
> Mishmi: Native to the northeastern states of India, especially Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, Mishmi tribes have a rich cultural heritage, a distinct language, and distinct customs. Subgroups of the Mishmi tribes include Idu, Digaru, Miju, and Taraon, each with their own distinctive characteristics.

The Adi tribe of Arunachal was known as the Abor and is concentrated in and around the Siang district while the Mishmi tribe is settled mostly in the Lohit district of the state. These tribes follow and practice a form of religion, termed as Magico-religious beliefs and practices. Interestingly, each tribe is distinct from each other, in sub-clans all tracing their history from a single ancestral clan. The sense of belongingness is usually identical among the indigenous communities but Mishmi tribes are an exception. The Mishmi community in *The Black Hill* as well as the historical texts is likely to stay in isolation. It is believed that they don't like to live in groups like other tribal communities in NE. The protagonist of Dai's novel also likes to stay alone. Why so? This is indeed a matter of introspection. From where can we know the truth? Foucault says:

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault 131).

Discussion

There is something remarkable about the novel *The Black Hill* by Dai, who is of the Adi tribe herself. In this novel, she depicts both the past and present life of these people. A vivid retelling of the colonial and missionary encounters with the Adi and Mishmee tribes of the 19th century, *The Black Hill* is Dai's historical fiction set in the pre-Independent India of the 19th century. By using the colonial chronicles in her narrative, she uncovers and recasts an actual event that occurred in the 1800s.

The two priests, Fathers Nicolas Michael Krick and Augustin-Etienne Bourry, belonging to France's Societe des Missions Etrangeres de Paris (MEP) or the Society of the Paris Foreign Missions, sowed the first seeds of Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh, and Tibet was one of their important goals. Back then, the only way to Tibet was through what is Arunachal Pradesh today. It was on their way while halting at Somme, a Mishmi tribal village bordering China, that they were killed by its chief, Kaisha, on 2 August 1854 (Gomes 1).

This historical narrative revolves around a young girl Gimur and her lover

Kajinsha (actually 'Kaisha' in the historical documents) who find themselves in a difficult situation. Dai demonstrates the multilayered nature of imposition of a new culture and the simultaneous yet distinctly describes feeling of anonymity felt by Kajinsha, who could not name the tribe to which he belonged.

However, the people of Mishmee country called themselves the Kmaan, Taraon and Idu people

and the term 'Mishmee' was an alien word to them. If anyone had asked Kajinsha who he was he would have said he was Kmaan, distinct from the Taraon whom the Kmaan knew as Tah-wrah or Chimmu, and the Idu clans whom they called Mindow and who occupied the territories further south and northwest (Dai 9).

This sense of anonymity in relation to the outsiders and the retaliation is described not only as the abstract quality of Kajinsha but as something that materially shaped him every day, mentally as well as physically. A number of Indian authors from the Northeastern region of the country have expressed their views in this regard in the form of their writing. Temsula Ao- an Indian English writer from Nagaland puts forward this sentiment in her poem, *For Christ and All*:

<div align="center">

We are now a lost people
Groping for new selves
And frantic for new frontiers
Even as occasional rhetorics for peace
Dissipate in the universal angst
Plaguing a befuddled race. (Ao 12)

</div>

Dai has also vividly described this situation in the novel in order to make her readers feel the pain of being treated with anonymity in one's own land. All this starts from the undeniable fact that the northeastern states of India at large suffered huge cultural shifts right from the very beginning because of the cultural dispersions that were time and again wrought on these sister states. Homi K. Bhabha succinctly and accurately states:

The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity (Bhabha 34-35).

Oral narratives remained the source of information about these tribes specially in Arunachal Pradesh for many years. Since, oral narratives form a major part of the lives of these tribes talking specifically with reference to the Adi and the Mishmi tribes, the tradition, cultures, myths, legends, etc. are passed onto them in the oral form. This leads to the emergence of various versions of a single story. The origin remains the same yet diverts into numerous tributaries with respect to the people, mood, situations, festivities, etc. The dialogic conversation within the community, while a person is telling a story leads to yet another chain of stories, the essence of which dies when jotted down with ink. This also instills the sense of one community; one tradition in the people. But, history is replete with examples where the folk stories of a region vary from the documented history. The theory of coherence of truth states

that "the truth of a said proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions" (Young)   Therefore, it suggests that in this view of truth, the relationship between two different sentences is considered irrelevant. It is only a connection between theoretical ideas, stories, statements, myths or folklore that is considered, but it is not the relationship between language and the natural world. In this view, a story is considered true when it does not require confirmation and it does not contradict other stories, but rather forms a coherent and compatible metanarrative when it comes to other stories as a whole. There are problems when multiple competing meta-narratives come into play at the same time, resulting in an incompatible picture. It is in these cases that you have the perfect opportunity to question whether the stories are authentic. It is important to note that there are several stories about the common people or the wars within communities that are fought primarily to save their culture, but have ended up eradicating their entire community as a result. Mahasweta Devi in interview to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, alludes to the history of Munda Tribes:

> Tribal History is not seen as continuity in Indian historiography. (I use the word tribal, not indigenous people or aborigine, because it is appropriate to the Indian context). Yet it is still continuing, the tribals are still being evicted from their land. Indeed, Birsa Munda comes late. His movement was from 1895 to 1900. Before that there were many tribal rebellions (Spivak ix).

They can follow the oral tradition where the spoken word, song and the emotions attached are taken into account, while the other can be through the art and dance forms. For every sense there are numerous forms of expression. There almost seems no limit to how various stories can be interpreted and changed with the course of time. But this change leads to the destruction and an eventual disappearance of the story. The construction and the further reconstruction of stories at any point of time do not happen mechanically, in the case of oral narratives by the orients, the case is still worse. The outcome of which oral narrative will eventually be the basis for a conviction or an acquittal that, in turn, will go unrecorded in history depends greatly on how the stories are told and how they are reconstructed. As far as the history of the tribe chief in the novel is concerned, the chances are extremely small if at all, that they will even be mentioned in the history of their own region, if not anywhere else. In many cases, they will not even be mentioned in the history of their own region. Dai mentions revealing events from the past of region in the novel, *The Black Hill*. One such story as discussed above is of Father Krick, the missionary from Paris who died and Kajinsha was held responsible for his murder by the Britishers. She writes:

> I came upon Father Krick's name when I was working on my first book. He had visited 'Mimbo' (Mebo), just across the river Siang from my hometown of Pasighat, and had left a written record of his observations of the place and its inhabitants, with the closing line: 'They seem to possess much of the child's simplicity, and Mimbo is undoubtedly less corrupt than Paris…' I wanted to know more. But in Mebo they tell me there is no one who remembers the visit of the priest, *it was such a long time ago, how can we remember father Krick…who…?* (Dai 291).

When the cultures and the traditions change, they take away a part of the original traditions and the stories with them. Constant erasure of the stories across generations leads to the birth of new cultures, replacing the older ones. But in this continuous process of formation and destruction, a significant part of stories is lost or is neglected which leads to the disappearance of a number of the vital characters who played an important part in the history. Often in these stories, if preserved by the men in power, a number of events with problematic descriptions lead these stories towards an unfavorable and manipulated ending.

> The records are also unclear about whether the condemned man killed one or two prison guards while awaiting his sentence. The ravages of time, flood, fire, have destroyed many important government documents of the time, especially those that were housed in Sadiya and Dibrugarh. The great earthquake of Rima tore through the Mishmi and Abor hills, gorged out mountains, changed courses of river, destroyed towns in Assam and buried the famous town of Sadiya forever (Dai 288).

The present cultural identity of the state, its process of creation and existence years ago led to the mutation in the Eco-psycho-socio development of the Indigenous people of the region who, generation after generation, faced multiple forms of resistance and insensitivities.

It is widely believed that, good stories seem to speak of stories across language, culture, tradition, geography, time and even space, and convey their messages and morals in some universal language. In fact, what actually makes a story good and relevant is its universality. Is it the language of the people in power which glorifies the hunter as the lion is not able enough to speak? Therefore, it is necessary to mind what the people of the place feel, not the voices of the ruling elite and preserve the story originating from the native culture, ecology, race, ethnicity etc. "'Tell them about us,' Kajinsha had said to her that night in the jail. 'Tell them we were good. Tell them we also had some things to say. But we cannot read and write. So, we tell stories'" (Dai 288). *The Black Hill,* thus is a novel which brings us closer to an existing but unacknowledged tribal history. The way in which the main protagonist of the novel was misrepresented, still remains a history. With the passage of time, even the natives of the region didn't care to remember what the actual story was or what was wrong with the stories that were chronicled in the annals of history. The novelist explains in the Author's note how the representation or even the misrepresentation of a story all depends on the historian of the region. "There is no restitution here. Perhaps some stories will always elude the historian. Perhaps some things are better left unexplained" (Dai 293).

This tradition of storytelling is dying with the death of the storytellers and, is being replaced by documentation of the folk stories by the natives themselves. The storytellers are the ones who are privy to the truth and preserve the truth, and this must be archived.. The story in the context of Arunachal Pradesh is not just a story but a lived reality which had actually been passed from one generation to the other. Unfortunately, the written history about the region does not match with the lived history. Since antiquity, it has been the trait of the powerful rulers to distort the facts

and offer a garbled version of an event/incident, thus engendering a lot of confusion for the posterity. The popular narrative about the region is distinct from the unchronicled oral narratives. Hence the historical narratives in public domain about the North East region may not be the legitimate histories by the people of the region. Edward Said's observations are quite pertinent: "The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer" (Said 272).

Conclusion

Through the process of sifting of facts from fiction, one begins to understand the events of history, gain new and fresh insights informed by objectivity and truth to overturn the spurious assumptions about the cultural life of the people of the region. It drills a sense of pride and belonging among the natives about the richness of their cultural moorings. Therefore, history, should not be only the mere collection of facts but rather a compilation of accurate information backed up by the universally accepted scientific tools in order to rid the history of heavily manipulated political, cultural and ideological agendas. The recent creative spurt emanating from the North East region of India is a broad articulation of the richness and diversity of the region shrouded in colonial and post-colonial trappings. Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*, apart from subtly articulating the traditions, rituals, myths and folk stories intertwined with the cultural mores of her tribal community, showcases the undocumented history of Adi tribe whose members negotiate the mutations of identity in the face of gradual erosion and the eventual loss of the ethnicity, culture, tradition and the values.

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The Diseased Body and the Pain-Altered Mind: A Study of G.V. Kakkanadan's *Vasoori*

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Dr. A. Poongodi**

Abstract

The human body is significantly explored in the arenas of contemporary politics. The alterations in the human body play a vital role in the social, cultural, and political transformations of society. This paper analyses the portrayal of the diseased body and the interpretations of the speckles on the human skin as a reflection of a decaying society in the smallpox narrative, *Vasoori,* written by G. V. Kakkanadan. The narrative depicts the life of a community during the smallpox pandemic in a small village in Kerala. The study focuses on the multiple interpretations of skin disfiguration caused by the disease with cross-references to the idea of skin as a bearer and container of meanings pointed out by Steven Connor in his book, *The Book of Skin.* The paper discusses the varied elucidations associated with the scarred skin of the victims and survivors of smallpox and its implications on the social, moral, and cultural facets of society. In *Vasoori*, Kakkanadan portrays the strange musings of the villagers when the deadly disease of smallpox descends on them and their physical and psychological transformations when gripped by the fear of death. The discernable alterations on the skin meddle with their stable pretense and set the raw human tendencies free, uninhibited by the chains of pseudo-morality.
Keywords: scarification, diseased body, disfiguration, monstrosity, pseudo-morality

Introduction

Medical humanities integrates the disciplines of humanities like philosophy, ethics, social sciences, literature, and arts into the curriculum of medical schools. The school of medical humanities designs the concept of 'human' in the broad spectrum of medical industry and health care. The discipline explores the political, social, historical, ethical, and cultural implications of disease in society. Thus, the human body forms a significant unit of study in the field. Body, with its diverse categorizations of the healthy body, diseased body, dead body, and various others, occupies a major spectrum of research in the medical humanities. The human body is invariably linked to the idea of 'social image' in the modern society. The image of the body is a social construct. The varied facets of the human body chiefly dwell upon the notions of good health and ill health perceived by the social system. From the earlier days, there have been different signs that signify a healthy body or a diseased body. Mostly, the implications of scarred or disease-marked skin are sickness or ill health. In many cases, the marks, and scars on the surface of the skin is directly linked to physical pain. Hence, the combination of physical pain and the psychological impact makes alterations in the person's conscience. In addition to this, the frame of mind of the society, while perceiving a diseased person with a different body, is discrete. The paper explores this outlook of the social system upon the sufferers of smallpox in a village in Kerala and the painful inferences of pox pustules upon their bodies and in turn, psychological selves in G V Kakkanadan's novel, *Vasoori*.

Lisa Olstein, in her theoretical work, *Pain Studies*, has described the diverse threads of pain and its implications. For example, ordinarily, pain accompanying periods for women is perceived as a pain signifying a healthy body. The social significance of the period cramps branches out to wider meanings like signs of womanhood, socially constructed narratives of symbolic strength and endurance for a woman, and the condition of impending reproductive function prescribed for the female. This instance showcases the meanings associated with period pain.

Vasoori is a Malayalam narrative written in 1968 by George Varghese Kakkanadan, commonly known as Kakkanadan, and regarded as one of the harbingers of modernism in the genres of Malayalam novels and short stories. Kakkanadan was a rebel, both in life and literature; the streaks of rebellion are manifest in his selection of themes in his *oeuvre*. Each of his works is an act of rebellion against accepted elitist social mores and codes. *Vasoori* dwells upon the story of a small village in Kerala, where the virus of smallpox spreads and causes casualties on a large scale. Kakkanadan showcases the ardent fear in the minds of the villagers who witness their friends and family succumb to the disease after a painful ordeal that leaves them scarred for life, the loosening of the pseudo morality chains griping the various relationships and most importantly, how the disease allows a mirroring of humanity in a few socially ostracized humans.

The paper explores the different realms of bodily pain arising out of the large boils and pus-filled pustules from the smallpox disease, infecting the body of the patient along with the trauma that the person involuntarily slips into, based on the sights of their own or close ones' disfigured body. Certain diseases leave temporary or permanent marks on the surface of the skin as an indicator of their occurrence, while others do not bequeath any visible signs of the contagion. Smallpox leaves spots and scratches even after the disease leaves the body while the pain and the itch induced by it, vanishes with time.

While the interpretations regarding health and sickness are varied, one of the mysterious characteristics of the smallpox disease is that the visible spots on the skin are markers of the familiarity of a character. As mentioned by Stephen Connor in his book, *The Book of Skin* (2004)*,* the skin is the only organ that one can perceive in others, what one can see immediately and know of others and ourselves. (Connor 11) The narrative itself explores multiple interpretations of the scars as well as the pain it induces, which are revealed through different characters in the story. As the narrative unfolds, one of the characters, Mathayi Mappila, voices a prevalent belief about the disease of smallpox. He says that the disease enters the bodies of all those who have wronged God as His curse. They believe the mythical stories that narrate how Mother Mary prevented the virus from getting into their village. While the Christian community believes this way, the Hindu section bestows their faith on Goddess Bhadrakali to save them from the dangerous contagion. Another related belief is that the people who suffer are the ones who have committed sins in one way or the other. For example, the scar, perceived as the sins and suffering one had to endure in a different juncture, appears to another as a symbol of courage and 'affirms the skin's successful defense against puncturing or laceration' (Connor 51). These marks on the skin further the process of exposition of the raw human nature. A patient of small pox suffers from a scarred body in addition to the pain of social alienation. While the scars allude to physical pain, the alienation affects the psychological setup. There is an

excerpt in *Vasoori* where the protagonist, Radha, reflects on the truths told by a madman in the neighborhood. He proclaims that in the face of a deadly pandemic, people are forced to, or they choose to abandon their loved ones and save themselves. Radha is traumatized by these events and undergoes mental agony while she witnesses the villagers abandoning all their pretense of sensitivity.

The study describes the social impact of a pandemic on a pseudo-moralistic society of Kerala, the perception and social stigma related to a diseased body, and the assertions of their suffering-struck, pain-altered mind in eccentric manners of human behavior within the social system.

Ripped Skin and Abrupt Insights

The contemporary studies on the human body and the voluntary or accidental transitions they undergo, focus on the existing social notions and cognitive belief systems about beauty, health, and so on. One of the most common beliefs about any pain the body endures, including a scar or the pain of a migraine, is that intense physical pain signifies a 'fine' or a punishment for the sins committed by the victim or the sufferer. The idea and the absurdity professed by it have been put forth by Lisa Olstein in her work *Pain Studies.* (Olstein 37) A comparable conception of pain being the punishment for the sins committed by the human can be vividly observed in the novel when Elikutty, a conventional Christian housewife who sported a sexual desire for her son-in-law, Thomachan, gets infected with the virus.

> Innocence is unthinkable without the thought of unmarked skin. Since human beings have their skin on display, and since their skins display so openly and copiously the signs of their health or disease, it is no surprise that there are strong negative as well as positive feelings attached to the visible condition of the skin. (Connor 95)

Elikutty finds herself fantasizing about the dark, forbidden desires of incest once she hears that the pandemic's spread is rampant and inevitable. All the conventional social chains are abandoned; she acts on her desire the day after she visits her friend Marykutty's daughter's funeral. Marykutty's daughter succumbs to the disease with hideous spots all over her body, painfully wailing her last few days of existence. The funeral has no visitor other than Elikutty, who regretted showing up once she knew that none of the other villagers had come due to the threat of contagion. The social alienation faced by the sufferers, in addition to the bodily trauma and disfigurations, is explicitly portrayed in the narrative. Elikutty finds herself imagining that Christ has punished her for pursuing her sexual desires forgetting that she is a married woman (John 128-135). She attributes all the other aching symptoms of the disease to this recognition of the moral truth while her husband, who sported the same 'sin' of an illicit affair, remains non-guilty and unaffected.

It is also evident through the character Radha, the daughter of a school headmaster and one of the most beautiful girls in the village, when she contracts the disease. In a particular instance in the story, she laments about the spreading pandemic that has infected her grandmother too. She then goes on to silently choose death over the infection with smallpox as she perceives death is far better than having to live with scars disfiguring her beautiful body as reminders of the painful endeavor. Radha is quite sure that blemished beauty will not stand a chance for a socially respectable position in society. In the case of diseases like bubonic plague, smallpox,

syphilis, and the like, the skin displayed the first signs of serious illness (Connor 95). The pustules on the surface of the skin, apart from being branded as a fine or punishment, is also viewed as a sign of disgust and contamination as the smallpox infection was religiously misconstrued as a way of showing the Goddess' wrath upon the human. The mute and blatant marks left on the body of the sufferer seem to indicate that the silence they profess screams out beastly things about themselves with a thousand tongues (Connor 96). Hence, the sufferer and the survivor are left with little choice when comparing the terrors of the disease to the terrible truths lining their survival in society. The rips in the skin indicate greater rips in character and gashes in the beauty of a woman, according to the village folk.

Another example from the novel of dwindling pseudo-morality, is the character named Rajagopalan Nair, a colleague of Radha, insidiously exhibiting marriage desires for her. He displays a sincere and serious affection for Radha until she gets infected with smallpox. Once the disease afflicts her, he abandons all his pretense and scarpers as he does not want an association with a 'scarred or spotted girl'. As Elikutty too contracts the virus and loses her mental stability due to the intensity of the aches from boils and the scars covering her body, Mathayi Mappila is unable to withstand the sight of his wife's body covered in boils. The marking of the disease makes it particularly hard for the victims and the witnesses to generate any hope of returning to normalcy.

> Skin markings, especially when they are associated with a disease, have the flagrancy of the blatant; they blurt out what the tongue might prefer to keep decently veiled. They are shameful and disgusting, not only because they inspire fear but also because they are shameless. (Connor 96)

The social stigma associated with the people suffering from the disease as well as the survivors who have an unaffected life ahead of them, has been lucidly depicted by the author. The empty funerals and isolated deaths of the sufferers, the uncertainty and vulnerability of their relatives, and the people associated with them together add up to a deadly pandemic era.

The Metaphors of Pain and Shattered Language

Goethe describes 'pain as a peculiar and almost indescribable effect on the eye... a stimulating negation' (Olstein 2020). Elikutty's friend Rukmini enquires about her health to Elikutty's husband, Mathayi Mappila. He says that she has regained consciousness, but all she can manage to do is scream out loud in pain. He also comments on the monstrosity of Elikutty's diseased skin. The silence between the words and sounds produced by a person most often refers to the language of pain. The language of pain is characterized in such a way that the actual expression of the pain in a particular language cannot be rendered in another language. There is an unfathomable depth in a particular linguistic system that cannot be linked to another (Olstein 2020). It is an identified fact that the language of pain does not draw any parallels with any other form of human language. They are mostly categorized as pre-language as physical pain is not characterized by voice; it is expressed through more of a groan or a moan. Pain is an 'extra language' outside the order and meaning of the dominant mode of language (Olstein 66).

As the protagonist, Krishnankutty takes a walk across the smallpox-rampaged

village, he listens to the screams and yelps of Elikutty in pain. She screams out garbled sentences with no meaning or significance, just as an explication of her bodily discomfiture. Her yells are punctuated through the dark night, with groans getting feebler every day, as she nears death.

> Let a sufferer try to describe pain in his head to a doctor, and language at once runs dry… He is forced to coin words for himself and take his pain in one hand and a lump of pure sound in another … so as to crush them together so that a brand-new word, in the end, drops out… (qtd. in Olstein 67)

Virginia Woolf's take on the incapacity of language while expressing pain has been put forward in Olstein's work. As the narrative unfolds Krishnankutty visits Radha's family when she and her grandmother are afflicted with the contagion. The physical pain arising out of the pustules and disfigurations of the skin punctuates the grandmother's wails while, at the same time, there is a perceived mental agony visible in Krishnankutty. Here, the physical and mental realms of pain are seen to collide within which the normal human mode of language is challenged.

Among the three dimensions of physical pain elucidated by Scarry put forth by Olstein, the thermal dimension alludes to the pain suffered by a smallpox patient from his or her pustules and large boils filled with pus (Olstein 66). It includes the burning, hot, scalding, and searing pain of the skin. The first patient introduced in the novel is the wife of Luko Mappila, who lives among six family members, more than half of which is children. She is left to die amidst excruciating pain in the warehouse in her own backyard for fear of contagion to the rest of the family and because of the visibly wounded and mutilated body ravaged by disease. However, the misconceptions and the fear of the virus infection forces the husband refer to her as a 'thing.' Olstein talks about a certain autonomy of the people in pain. The people suffering from physical pain due to a disease are thrust into a new world along with wastes, deserts, precipices, and beautiful sceneries where all day and all night, their body intervenes and forces isolation due to this monstrous pain they endure (Olstein 67).

The illness-altered world is such that the shattering of the person's psyche is perceived through the inanimate sounds made by the people in pain. The disturbance caused by the pain disrupts the normative modes of the body and mind. There is psychological turbulence shaking the innards of the sense of morality, the ordinary and the typical. Kakkanadan curiously follows two best friends, Divakaran Channar and Mathayi Mappila, while they let go of their restraints to fulfill their lustful longings. They are joined by a lot of other villagers who share the same notion that once they are nearing their death, no shackles of morality should condition their right to a life of pleasure.

Connor describes the skin as an organ of the human body which is considered the bearer and container of meanings (Connor 45). This is chiefly because the skin is the most visible part of our body, and, as stated earlier, in some cases the signs of ill health make their appearance first on the skin. In the novel, skin is indeed considered the bearer and container of meanings as the character's actions in their lives are validated against the infection of the virus and, thereby, the marks it leaves on the body. Also, for people like Elikutty and Mathayi Mappila, the reverberations of their sin are found etched onto the marks on the skin in their psychological domain. They are constantly disturbed by it and live their lives fearing the intensity of its consequences.

The Realm of the Ill and its Irreversibility

Bodily memory through skin impression is another explored area in literature. Theorists like Quillet, Charleton, and Gassendi have explored the very curious characteristic of image retention by the human skin. Here, a very ingenious characteristic of human skin comes to play where it is said to retain the memory of the events that happen to it and even send a direct signal of recognition to the brain. It is observed that among the characters in *Vasoori* who had a major psychological fallout based on their recklessness during the pandemic period, it is the skin memory that instigates the wave of turbulence over them. For example, while Elikutty believes that the contagion affected her due to her act of incest, Gopalapilla feels fearful of death by smallpox, due to his momentary sexual desires towards Radha, his daughter. Olstein describes Woolf's take on the tarnished world of the ill which is presumed and depicted vividly by the author in the novel. Husbands leave their wives, children are taken away from their mothers, and lovers drift apart without the privilege of a final goodbye. Krishnankutty departs without fulfilling his desire to marry the woman he loves because he is the sole helper for all the patients infected with smallpox in the village. The only two coping mechanisms sported by the ill are either denial or compartmentalization. The social alienation and the inhuman insensitivity are a result of the policy of compartmentalization followed by the social system.

The human body is designed in a peculiar custom such that out of all the body functions, only a few are mappable, and that too, to a limited extent. The rest of it fades to black and occupies the unknown facets of human discovery. A healthy body represents its impenetrability of itself, while a sick body is always vulnerable to the world around it and, in this case, the viral transitions inside it (Olstein 40). The normative mode of living devoid of the disease seems very far and almost unreal to the sufferers of the disease. In the realm of the sick, where they have their own system of broken language and the miracle of pain to disrupt their ordinary, the roles or the situations of the patients are not reversible. The author portrays the sick community and the aftermath of long drawn out sickness on their psyche. They are completely stripped of their charisma, their principles, and their character. All that remains is their diseased body, their pain, and their impending death. Thus, the irreversibility of death and the illness-oriented life after the infection remains the residue at the end of the novel.

Conclusion

The rise and reign of a pandemic in a village mirroring a state, in turn, a country, has parallels with the present time Covid-19 phase the world has been through. The narrative of G V Kakkanadan delves into the dark secrets and unexplored arenas of the human mind with the portrayal massive human toll as the psyche is twisted and warped by fear. The Covid-19 pandemic exerted the fear of uncertainty and constant vulnerability on the world as it is struggling to get back to normalcy. *Vasoori* written in 1986 narrates the story of a disease taking hold of a community in a completely different era. There was no known cure for it then. Hence, this was one of the reasons for the total abandonment of the victims and patients. They were forced to

watch helplessly as their loved ones writhed and died in pain without having their close ones near, reminiscent of the pandemic of Covid-19 and the isolation wards where people met their ends. One of the most disturbing characteristics of the smallpox disease is the skin disfigurations and the painful boil swellings observed with disgust by the people around. It messes with the already disturbed psyche of the patients into choosing death over a scarred existence, thus focusing on pejorative social thinking about the flawless skin standing for a healthy body or beauty.

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The Female Voice in *Kurunthogai* - A Critique

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Abstract

Tamil society has contributed immensely to world civilisation through its language and literature. Tamilagam was civilised and sophisticated enough to sanctify space for women to express their most private and intimate thoughts without fear of censure. The "Ahatinai" poems are a proof to her self-asserting individuality, unbridled imagination, and commendable intellect. This paper analyses the poems written by women in *Kurunthogai* from a feminist perspective. It evaluates the female sexuality, the agony of separation, outpouring of suppressed ardour and the celebration of the female body as detailed in the 71 poems by women in *Kurunthogai*. The paper ponders over the "tale of herself": her pining and longing and moaning and sighing. It substantiates that though Cangam period women were well read and possessed literary craftsmanship, their artistic freedom was restrained. The article concludes that the intensity, depth and formidable vibrancy as expressed by these women poets were but circumscribed by patriarchy.

Keywords: Aham, Cangam, kalavu, karpu, Thalaivan, Thalaivi, tinai

Introduction

Kurunthogai, a collection of short lyrics, is a classical Tamil masterpiece, the most ancient in the *Ettuthogai* (*The Eight Anthologies*) collection. It has 401 poems written by 205 poets. Among these, 21 women poets have written 71 poems (Aravanan, 45).[1] Tamil scholars are of the opinion that these poems must have been written between 200 BC and AD 200 and the anthology compiled by Poorikko sometime before the ninth century. The poems in this compilation are set against the backdrop of Tamil landscapes (*tinai*), namely *Kurinji* (hilly area), *Mullai* (forest and associated land), *Marudham* (agricultural fields), *Neidhal* (seashore) and *Palai* (dry land). In the 71 poems taken up for study, certain thematic features are predominant. They are: Love, Female Sexuality, Female Body, Nature. The present paper discusses these *leitmotifs* in detail, against the backdrop of feminist theory. Specifically, it examines the writing practices associated with *écriture féminine*.

Discussing women's authorship, French feminist theorist and critic Hélène Cixous writes in the essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1996): "Woman must write about her self; woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement" (875). The very act of writing is a form of protest for equality. Taking *écriture féminine* to the next level, Gayathri Spivak uses the concept of "writing independence and writing for independence" (quoted in Senft, 277). She opines that the only way "to move women from a position of objectified servitude to a position of full subjectivity is for women to write the truth of their bodies" (277). She

is entitled to claim the "power of the pen" by inscribing women's psychic and physiological lives. This paper establishes that by voicing the nuances of the "Dark Continent" (Freud's allusion to feminine sexuality), by "affecting" nostalgia and love, Cangam women poets have attempted to regain the legitimate status as speaking subjects.

Background Study

Cangam age poetry is divided into two types: *aham* and *puram*. The former deals with home, the inner aspect, and the latter community and social life, the outer aspect. The very categorisation symbolises the slow disintegration of matriarchal society by the Cangam period which inevitably paved the way for patriarchy to take over. People, so far living as clans in specific territories, started expanding their region and preferred to have kings; the chieftains were willing to live under a single superior and mightier king. On account of war and to garner wealth, men undertook journeys covering long distances. All this proves that while men took care of communal life, it befell upon women to beget children and ensure a pleasant and peaceful domestic life.

During the Cangam era, domesticity was the axis on which women's world revolved; unquestioning submission to the fiancé/husband and performing regular domestic functions willingly were but taken for granted. Trade, war and journeys that involved dealing with the outside world were accomplished by the male. On the contrary, the woman had to stay indoors: waiting for her man in anticipation seems to have engrossed her completely, and getting anxious about his safety and carrying on with the daily activity with a careworn attitude till her man got back to the domicile were but normal. She was forbidden to beautify herself. Her beauty and youth were supposed to be only for her man. Hence, in his absence, it will be uncouth to decorate herself. She should look deprived and depraved. She had to beautify herself less, be confined at home, avoid eyeing another man with desire. The purpose of her very being was presumed to be satisfying the physical wants and the domestic comforts of "her" man. The poems analysed in this paper show the woman in a helpless condition: her subordinate status and the pains of being the inert female principle find expression "though mildly" here.

Tholkappiyam – the ancient grammar of Tamil language, literature and life – states that pride (*perumai*), charity (*kodai*) and valour (*veeram*) are male attributes (Sutra 1044) while fear (*acham*), naivety (*madam*), reserve (*naanam*) and modesty (*payirpu*) are female characteristics (Sutra 1045). It is remarkable that in such a man-centric environment, so many women poets had produced poems of quality and aesthetic ecstasy. This article proves that in spite of the commendable literary output by the Cangam age women, they had been bound by a thin, restricting cord unbeknownst to the outside world. The imagery as well as the subject matter of the poems bring to light the controlled scenario under which they have lived. The strategy of speaking through concentrated metaphors, making their language as poetic as possible, whetting their poetry with many an image and thereby creating "a dense web

of signifiers" (Cixous, 215) are an attempt to introduce a new type of text that documents their protesting voice for the progeny to come.

Love

It's a truth universally acknowledged that love is the common theme of any literature in any language. It is the most delicate of all human emotions. Though poets of all times in all countries have treated all aspects of love, it has not lost its freshness for artistic creation. As long as there are human beings, love will be subjected to poetic treatment with new vigour. Any aspect of normal love will be enough for a genius to explore new beauty and reveal its thrilling secrets. "The unity of the family is the bed-rock of the unity of the Tamil world. The achievement of that conjugal unity depends upon the satisfaction of the sexual congress between the rightful lovers in youth" (Manickam, 9). *Kurunthogai* poems by women celebrate this love in various phases: union, separation, patience, suffering and sulking. It brings to light in hundreds of ways the masculine and feminine sexual characteristics.

The lovers fall in love at first sight; they start meeting and enjoying each other's company with the help of their confidantes; they fear for each other's safety; they can't afford to be separate after their souls and body have become one; they want to stay united through marriage; however, they happen to separate from one another because of war, journey for education/wealth, visiting the concubine or karma; the woman undergoes anguish during the wait for Thalaivan's (the hero) return; her anxiety grows along with the passage of the seasons.

Look my friend!
Past rains have produced new millet in
the field ...
My man has not returned from his
wealth-seeking trip even at this evening
time when bees swarm the jasmine
*flowers. (**Okkur Masathiyar, Kurunthogai, 220)**[2]*

The poem belongs to *Mullai tinai*, where "waiting in patience" is the theme; the natural surroundings excite Thalaivi (the heroine) and aggregate her need for her husband. The lush of the season is a symbol for her latent libido. Her long wait seems to be endless; she doesn't have patience anymore. The onset of the new season is but a reminder of the impending arrival of her fiancé. Without him, the welcome change is of no use and she doesn't have the slightest inclination to enjoy it.

The physical and psychological changes that the Thalaivi undergoes when her sweetheart/husband is away from her are brought out clearly in these lines as well:

My eyes saw my lover and my ears
heard his words.
I attain great beauty when he is with
me. My thick, delicate arms become
thin when he is away.

> *How strange is this, my friend!*
> *(Venmanipoothiyar, **Kurunthogai**, 299)*

When her fiancé is near, Thalaivi's beauty is enhanced, but she is forlorn when he is away; she is worried that the outward changes in her physique will betray her to her kinsmen and neighbours. Hence she wants to inform Thalaivan, who is within her hearing, that he should marry her soon so that they are never separate and hence will be no meat for village scandal. These poems are evidence to de-silencing the morphology of the body, especially the buoyant, yearning body, and thereby an invite to engage with the language of the feminine experience.

Female Sexuality

Intense desire, memory of previous physical union, agony over parting from her lover/husband on account of war or under the spell of the concubine, the unsatiated libido, the physical manifestation of the inner anguish in the form of *pasalai* (pallor) on different parts of the body, the unconscious existence to the passage of day/night and seasons, moaning and mourning over the untended and wasted away beauty of the young and lush body, emaciated arms leading to bangles slipping away and lacklustre eyes and withered waist are persistent recurrences in *Kurunthogai* poems. Reading these poems makes clear the point that for Thalaivi, her man is her universe and spells of separation are next to death. Hence this obsession with female sexuality.

However, these primary emotions cannot be expressed as experienced by the lady or imagined in her mindscape. *Tholkappiyam* (Sutra 1054) ordains how the feminine quality in the woman should represent this:

> *Bashfulness and credulity*
> *Bring ingrained in feminine nature,*
> *The passion of love of the heroine*
> *Will find expression*
> *Through suggestive modes*
> *And through the context of the situation,*
> *And not through explicit utterance.*
> *(Translation by A.V. Murugan, 434)*

During the furtive courtship phase, as she proves to be an embodiment of reserve and naivety, she can express her feelings only by indicative gestures – obsequious expression of her passion will be considered obnoxious. Against this backdrop, the psychological impulses of a woman poet have to be understood. Through discreet and muted body language alone she can express her suppressed libido. Here's a poem of pure passion cast in fine poetry in Alloor Nanmullaiyaar's (*Kurunthogai*, 157) words.

> *Coo,*
> *crowed the rooster and my*
> *pure heart pounded in fear,*
> *since dawn struck*
> *like a sword to separate me*

from the embraces of my lover.

In this poem, a dramatic scene is played out. After a long separation, Thalaivan and Thalaivi enjoy sexual congress. However, this happiness is short-lived, because in no time it has dawned. The dawn is indicated by the cawing of the rooster. They have been forced to part each other's company. Hence she calls the dawn as the sword that has severed her fiancé/husband from her shoulders. The longing and the pain of separation from her Thalaivan, about whom the society is yet to know or husband to be with whom again she has to wait till night, shows the depth of the passionate love she shares.

Women's sexual freedom in the patriarchal society has been narrowed down to *karpu*, while for man it is love, *kalavu,* and visiting the concubine. This is another strategy to push women to secondary status. Many poems talk about separation from the lover/husband. When Thalaivan goes out, the woman has to wait, in anxiety, for his safe return. She doesn't know when he will return. During the separation, we can find her dejection as well as melancholy. The safety of Thalaivan is in question because of the fearful jungle, intimidating desert, fearsome wild animals, all of which create an instability in the mind of the lover/wife and she is bound to be sad, sorrowful and anxious.

The cold wind which makes her long for her man's nearness and reminds her of his embrace naturally brings pain, and it's not just a "simple pain"; it's excruciating pain, the pain of death:

> *Rainy season has come … causing me pain.*
> *Cold winds … come toward me like Kootruvan.*
> *I am afraid, being away from my lover.*
> *What can we do, O friend?*
> *(Kachippettu Nannagayar, **Kurunthogai**, 197)*

After the rainy season, the winter has set in. Thalaivan is not home yet. Hence Thalaivi calls the chilly weather which is a signifier for the impending physical union between lovers as *Kootruvan*, Yama, the god of death in Hindu mythology. She has to be satisfied with the feeling that he will return after his work is complete and till then she has to control her wants:

> *Does he think about you, O friend?*
> *Even if he thinks, will be able to*
> *come back until he's finished with*
> *what he has set out to do*
> *. . . .. . .*
> *Yes. He will return on time!*
> *(Uun Pithaiyar, **Kurunthogai,** 232)*

Nothing but the comforting shoulders of the lover is the medication that can cure Thalaivi of her ails. For a man, the love finds its centre point in physical union; but for a woman, it's the nearness, touch, sight, closeness and lounging on the shoulders of the man of her choice that matters.

> *For the harshness of this cold, early*

> *dew season*
> . . . . .
> *there is no other medicine*
> *but his chest that embraced me.*
> *(Alloor Nanmullaiyaar,* **Kurunthogai,** *68)*

Till he returns, she will not beautify herself: beauty becomes an extravagance without her lover to "exploit" it. Repression of the sexual drive is unhealthy. Women writers free themselves through writing since "writing the body has the potential to be a site of power and change" (Vachhani, 5).

Female Body

"Continental feminists argue that the only way to move women from a position of objectified servitude to a position of full subjectivity is for women to write the truth of their bodies" (Senft, 284). The personal, deeply felt "feminine" writing, in one's true voice, is a call for independence. These Cangam women writers "write the body"; they celebrate it; female desire certainly cannot be brought out by male imagination. Whatever has been written about her is only a "second hand" tale. It needs to find its own voice through the writing of women. Description of female body in vivid details lacks written history in Western literature. However, Tamil Cangam poems have given ample space for such descriptions. *Kurunthogai* women poets do not hesitate to portray the various physical parts of the woman which bear the direct impact because of the lack of the embrace of her man.

Velliveethiyar is open about her body being wasted away without her husband to lust on her beauty and youth.

> *My dark beauty and the spots*
> *on my loins will do me no good,*
> *nor will they benefit my lover,*
> *since pallor has ruined them.*
> *It is like a fine cow's sweet milk*
> *being wasted on the ground*
> *without feeding its calf or being*
> *milked into a pail. (Velliveethiyar,* **Kurunthogai,** *27)*

This is one of the much discussed poems in Cangam literature; the imagery used here has explicit sexual references, which is anathema to Tamil society. Thalaivi openly says "her loins" (*alkul*) or "mound of love" is being wasted away without her man to savour it. She laments that her youth is of use neither to her man nor to her. Vivid descriptions about female body parts, starting from her breasts to her reproductive organ, find place in these women poets. Of course, she is expected to be discreet; yet sometimes she is helpless and in unrepressed anger, she is overt about her emotions. This is a challenge to the male society; love and lust find expression involuntarily; hence her sexual energy is brought out in the words used for female body parts.

One common theme manifest in these poems is the voice of remonstration –

protest against patriarchal shackles. Her recourse to descriptions about female sexuality and the female body is her signature revolt against the suffocating chauvinistic atmosphere. Thalaivan goes to the concubine; Thalaivi has no control over his action; she can only fight with him, to which he pays no heed; he can lust after any woman he wants; yet she has to be tolerant and accept him within the framework of family. This is expressed in the form of self-pity in Auvaiyyar's poem (*Kurunthogai*, 28):

> *Will I hit them? Will I attack them?*
> *Will I scream "Ah" and "Oi" citing*
> *some reason?*
> *. . . .*
> *I do not know what to do!*

One could see, in poems like these, indications for today's feministic themes. She is angry that the world is sleeping peacefully unaware of the excruciating pain she is experiencing because of the wants of her body. In that excessive outrage, she starts cursing. She wonders whether she should attack, scream, or holler to make them realise the pangs of her heart and soul. This reminds one of Sandra Gilbert's "ferocious sopranos … that mark the explosive return of woman" (quoted in Vachhani, 23). In a highly traditional country like India, many societal as well as patriarchal atrocities are camouflaged in the name of culture. As we are in the twenty-first century, campaigning to "share the load" (#Ariel's commercial), touch the pickle during "the polluting days" (#Whisper's commercial), and boast of a change of perception, let us not get carried away. Awareness and understanding of the emotional conditions under which women have been living since the Cangam age is the first step in the effort to liberate them. The restrained outrage painted in these Cangam poems kindles in us that sensibility, which is the only path to survival, let alone recover.

Nature

Nature serves as the interlinking feature in Cangam poems, which explains their uniqueness. Typically, in nature poetry, nature stands alone, bearing silent witness to the life around. However, in these women poets, nature is not a mere onlooker. In these natural settings are interwoven the various moods and phases of the romantic lovers. "Each *akam* poem is a microcosmic view of cosmic patterns, and an individual's life finds a corresponding beat in the cosmic rhythm" (Balakrishnan, xi). The women writers make the *dramatis personae* of their poems live close to nature. In their every movement can be sensed nature's pied delicacy, delight and fragrance; nature is the repository in which their countless metaphors and other poetic sensibilities are rooted. "The stillness of the night, the darkness that broods over land and water, the unceasing murmur of the innumerable mountain rills, the moan of the distant seas, the rumble of the gathering clouds, the ceaseless patter of the rains, the quick play of the forked lightning and the shifting pageant of colours among evening skies have an appeal to them" (Desikan, quoted in Subramanian, xiv).

Landscape is classified into five eco-regions and has a strong presence in these poems. The similes, metaphors and leitmotifs are related to the flora and fauna of the particular eco-region. The sensitive employment of *Ullurai* (something like Hopkins' inscape) and *Iraicchi* (images implying the overall temperament) lend subtle aesthetic finesse to these poems. The reader will notice that the Thalaivi's inner turmoil, longing, yearning, lusty and gusty and gutsy body are all brought out through descriptions of nature and natural objects. Here are a few examples:

He left you, crossing the wasteland,
. . . . . where a tall, bamboo stands
. . . . . dry, like the parched spaces
. . . . . between nodes of sugarcanes
. . . . . that were broken by the leader
. . . . . of a herd of big elephants with
. . . . . wide feet with large nails that
. . . . .   resembled the teeth of ghouls,
. . . . . causing the beautiful pallor spots on
your loins to fade.
Did he earn the wealth he sought in the
country he went? He will return soon.
(Kachippettu Nannagayar, **Kurunthogai,** *180)*

Since Thalaivan is away, Thalaivi is melancholic. She imagines the place her man must have crossed in pursuit of wealth. The aridity of the region is a constant worry for her. By using the imagery of the elephant (which is a symbol for wealth and excessiveness), she contrasts and highlights her unfathomable anguish.

In yet another poem, Thalaivi wants to underscore the loneliness she has been subjected to waiting for her man. In order to describe the spring season, she uses quite a number of images from her natural surroundings:

O friend! How can I stay
without crying
...
In this early spring season,
when a black kuyil with sweet
glittery feathers that appear
like touchstone on which gold
is rubbed, sits on a mango tree
branch and pecks the fragrant
flower pollen,
I will massage my hair that has
not been adorned since he has
come. (Kachippettu Nannagayar, **Kurunthogai,** *192)*

She cannot assuage her passion. The mango tree with its seasonal shoot, the golden pollen, the cuckoo with its shining feathers are all but a reminder of the new season which necessitates the presence of her man. The indelible presence of nature in these writings makes one wonder whether this is a form of ecofeminism. The feminine

erotic drives seem to be incorporated subtly into the texture of writing (Senft, 283).

Conclusion

In a country which was considered by the West as primeval, barbaric and exotic, women had freedom for creative expression and penned songs of exquisite beauty and finesse. It is not an exaggeration to say that the literary output of the Cangam era women poets continues to mesmerise the modern reader beyond imagination. They have expressed the intensity of their passion in a language that asserts not only their presence but also their dominance in the literary scene. Only in the last century women were granted suffrage and this was celebrated as a milestone victory in the West. Virginia Woolf, one of the foremost modernist literary figures and critical theorist, opines that woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write (48). Against this background, if one were to set Cangam Age women poets, one cannot but be awestruck by the social milieu that offered women an imposing seat on the literary pedestal. Like men, women too have contributed to the corpus of world literature, writing about war, state administration, peace, and most importantly love, the most refined of human passions.

Yet, their writing is a conditioned reflex: Thalaivan's nearness is the stimulus for Thalaivi's bliss. If the husband is away, she is benumbed with grief. In all the poems quoted in the article, women curse the lot that has befallen them after Thalaivan's separation. She wallows in luxurious sadness in these poems. Their lamentations resemble that of Adonais. The only cure for this inexplicable aching of the spirit seems to be the nearness of the fiancé/husband. Their existence seems to take on significance only when they are with their Thalaivan. Through the imagery they have employed in these poems, they imply that a woman is dependent on the male to lead a normal or happy life; every minute that she is forced to live alone is burdensome for her; it heralds excruciating pain; from time immemorial, she has been so conditioned to believe that her joyousness is inextricable from that of her male partner. Though in Cangam age women were courageous enough to express their emotions, especially their physical wants, they were restrained in conveying it. The poems taken up for study prove that their literary freedom was circumscribed by the male principle; it was tethered to the patriarch.

The only pacifying tidings are that these women were literate: they had proficiency to give shape to their creative impulse; they could wield pen to suit their purpose. In spite of the suffocating domestic atmosphere, they took to literary pursuits and proved their mettle with amazing resilience and fortitude, as the theorists of *écriture féminine* advocate. This is a historical rarity and Tamil society can boast of it grandiosely.

Notes

[1] The number of poems and the gender of the poets are based on the research by Thayammal Aravanan in *Magaduvoo Munnilai*.

[2] All the translations of *Kurunthogai* poems are by Vaidehi Herbert.

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Rooted to Land and Culture: Kokborok Poetry in Translation from Tripura

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Abstract

This article examines the literary tradition of the Boroks/Tripuris, an indigenous tribe in northeastern India, and the ways in which their contemporary poets depict the everyday lives of common people who have developed an intrinsic relationship with their surrounding environment and cultural life. The paper critiques the *Rajmala*, the royal chronicle, which has been appropriated into Hindu mythology, for failing to acknowledge the indigenous peoples' lived experiences and for functioning as an instrument of cultural erasure. The article shows how contemporary Borok writers attempt to recover their oral traditions and emphasize their rootedness and cultural identity that is strongly rooted in the local landscape. The article contextualizes the Boroks' search for identity and cultural traditions within the long history of Bengal's close proximity, the marginalization of their culture by Bengali influence, and colonial-era refugee migration. The paper infers that these little narratives of the Boroks emerging from below oppose the grand narrative offered by the *Rajmala* and allied literary culture, making conscious efforts to reclaim their identity and culture.
Keywords: Borok, rootedness, Northeast India, land, identity, Kokborok.

Introduction

The literature that sprang out of the state of Tripura has some unique characteristics. In this small state of northeastern India, a diversity of languages has been cultivated, among which the Bengali, Manipuri, and Kokborok traditions constitute three of the most prominent literary streams that have, until recently, remained largely separated (Chaudhuri 18). Most writers in Tripura are bilingual or multilingual, and the past few decades have witnessed the emergence of numerous translation works in this region. Nonetheless, the written corpus of Kokborok literature is relatively new, with organized literary works estimated to have emerged only around the mid-1940s. While there may be lacunae in the written corpus, the rich oral traditions of the region more than compensate for this (Chaudhuri 19). In the context of Tripura, the state has witnessed an unending influx of refugees, and a gradual assimilation of its indigenous culture and tradition into the Bengali mainstream. The literary voices of Borok writers, who constitute a minority in their own land, strive to articulate their experiences and cultural values through their native language, "Kokborok." Kokborok literature is a testament to the incessant sufferings of its people amidst various socio-economic and political problems. The Boroks are forced to negotiate the violence inflicted by militant groups and the government's counter-insurgency forces. The Borok writers' emphasis on rootedness and their awareness of cultural loss resulting from their contact with other cultures undergirds their writings. Their attempts at cultural recovery and the retrieval of their oral

traditions and myths form a pervasive theme. Through their literary representations, the Borok writers display a consciousness of their roots in orality, culture, and memory, which also reflect the economic and social life of their community.

The late arrival of written literature among the Boroks of Tripura (in the mid-1940s) is attributed to the Tripuri King's fascination with the Bengali language, leading to the loss of the original Kokborok version of the *Rajmal*a, the historical account of the royal family of Tripura. This unfortunate event has prompted Kokborok writer Chandrakanta Murasingh to express his angst in his essay "Her People and Her Past:"

> Since the near-naked hill people of the princely state, who practiced jhumming (shifting cultivation), and the poor subjects of the state spoke in the Kokborok language, the Maharajas of the state, sitting on the octangular throne held up by a lion, felt ashamed of speaking in the same language. (178)

In this historical moment, the binary divide between the king and the common people intensifies, deepening their mutual "othering". The king, with his authority and selfish ideology, fosters a separatist ethos, excluding the concerns of the common people. The exclusivity of the *Rajmala* text reinforces this division, marginalizing the common people and making them invisible or absent from any historical narrative. According to Tilottoma Misra, the loss of native culture is the result of negotiations with "other" cultures, furthered by domestic and foreign political and cultural forces that have shaped the region's history over time (Misra xiii).

The *Rajmala*, also known as the "Garland of Kings" or "Chronicles of Tripura," provides a detailed account of 179 kings from antiquity to Krishna Kishore Manikya (1830-1850), rendering it the oldest recorded history of ancient Tripura (Sandys 8). As N.C. Nath has written in the "Preface" of his translated version of the *Rajmala,* Maharaja Dharma-Manikya (C. 1431-1462), the 102nd *rajah* has "entrusted the task [of writing the royal chronicle] to Durlabhendra Cantai, the High priest, and the Court-poets, Banesvar Deva Sarman and Sukresvar Deva Sarman" (5). The *Rajmala* offers extensive details on the lives and affairs of the rulers and their engagements with foreign territories. The Brahmin authors of the *Rajmala*, patronized by the royal household, construct a genealogy that fabricates a false lineage for the Borok monarchs, locating them as descendants of Druhyu, and providing a *Kshatriya* ancestry for the royal family. The document also highlights the critical role played by Hinduism in the development of Tripura's cultural identity. Nevertheless, certain scholars, like James Long (2008), have expressed concern regarding the validity of the book as a complete history of ancient Tripura. For instance, Long notes the absence of Buddhism in the book, despite its former prominence in Bengal (31). Long also suggests that the Brahmans exerted a similar level of influence over the Borok chieftains as the Druids did over the customs of the Celtic ancestors: "The Brahmans exercised as arbitrary away over the minds of the hill chieftains as ever did Druid on the customs of our Celtic ancestors" (1-2).

In this way, the *Rajmala* may be viewed as a mechanism of effacement: a tool

employed by the Brahmins to falsify the Borok history by fabricating a spurious lineage and erasing their history. Similar practices of erasure can be observed in Manipur during the early eighteenth century. However, the postcolonial awakening and Western education in the late twentieth century sparked skepticism, questioning the authenticity of these narratives and challenging the Borok's recorded history. Contemporary Borok writers in the 21st century grapple with these issues of identity through their literary creations, driven by heightened awareness and skepticism. While subtly eschewing direct reference to the factual accounts of the *Rajmala,* they have forged an entirely new narrative that is completely disconnected from the grand narrative. Their literary voices may be seen as an attempt to historicize their lived experiences and unveil a reality oft-dismissed by the grand tapestry of history. Their creative endeavor becomes a profound act of self-depiction, one that seeks to reclaim and amplify their neglected cultural identity, thus disrupting established historical narratives. This is evident in the depiction of their intimate communion with nature and deep-rootedness to their land, which reverberates as potent formative factors in shaping their identity. Their awareness of cultural loss and their tendency to retrieve their cultural identity are evident in their literary expressions. This act of self-depiction may be understood as an act of writing back to the royal discourse, to challenge and subvert the dominant discourse that has completely excluded their history and culture from the overarching grand historical narrative. These writers assert their agency and negotiate the interstices between their own subjectivities and the dominant discursive structures that attempt to suppress their existence. In this act of writing back, they create spaces for alternative narratives and perspectives that challenge the prevailing hegemonic order. Through their literary expressions, these marginalized voices seek to reclaim their histories, assert their cultural identities, and redefine the boundaries of representation, offering counter-narratives that disrupt and destabilize the homogenizing forces of the dominant discourse.

The present-day [kokborok] writers in all the branches suffer from the acute awareness of the reality around [them]. In this respect, they are 'brethren of the quill.' Except [for] language, they speak almost in the same manner, on the same matter. (Chaudhuri 19)

Thus, the Kokborok writers demonstrate an awareness of the reality shaped by their historical context. Their works carry a sense of the past, acknowledging the intricate and disputed history that has brought them to this point. Academic research on Kokborok literature is growing, offering hope for addressing the socio-cultural challenges faced by the Boroks of Tripura. It is crucial to support and recognize these works for their potential impact.

A Poetry of Place: Emerging Poetry from Tripura

It is stereotypical to assume literature from Northeast India as solely revolving around ethnic conflict, insurgency, and trauma. Instead, the region's poems and

stories reveal the people's deep connection to their land and natural surroundings. Renowned poets like Nandakumar Debbarma, Mamang Dai, Kynpham S. Nongkynrih, and Temsula Ao among others, exemplify this bond with their homeland and profound respect for the natural world. For instance, Mamang Dai's poem "In an Obscure Place" acknowledges the mountains as all-knowing entities embodying the history and future of the hill people. These poets transcend mainstream representations, infusing the everyday with poetic sensibility and offering an alternative voice that resonates with the diverse cultural and political contexts of Northeast India.

In the context of Tripura, the motif of land and nature emerges as a prominent thematic feature in the Kokborok literary tradition. The Borok poets, who predominantly compose verses in their native Kokborok tongue, exhibit a profound attachment to their place of origin. The Borok people's deep reverence for their land, hills, and rivers is often celebrated through the medium of poetry. For example, in an expressly romantic Kokborok lyric, "A House by the Riverside", Nandakumar Debbarma has subtly expressed the contrast between human proneness to death and the rivers' perennial flow with a delicate wail:

> *Because the poet is a man, he dies.*
> *Often he will be murdered. Then Hwangho, Mekong and*
> *Gomatee will gush a collective wail,*
> *Causing a new river island to grow for human habitation. (101)*

This subtly suggests that the shared experiences of suffering and hardship, transgenerationally remembered and transmitted, can be harnessed as a new marker of identity for future generations. This underscores the notion that memories of collective trauma and historical struggles, such as death and murder, hold the potential to shape people's sense of self. The rivers, deeply intertwined with the Boroks' land and culture, symbolize their distinct identity. In this vein, Homi K. Bhabha posits that the study of world literature ought to be informed by an engagement with the latent, unarticulated histories and pasts that continue to haunt and inform the present, enabling us to glean new insights into the complexities and nuances of the historical experience – "a focus on . . . the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical past" (12).

In this poem, Debbarma also endeavors to capture the deep-rooted connection between the Borok people and their natural environment. Through this, he invokes the imagery of rivers such as the *Hwangho*, *Mekong*, and *Gomatee*, imbuing them with symbolic significance that extends beyond their geographical boundaries. These rivers come to represent the very essence of the landscape that has shaped the identity of his people. Debbarma lilts thus:

> *When the time is ripe for these places*
> *not me – but someone in my likeness, one who in secret*
> *loves life will walk ahead.*
> *I know there will be friends and fellow travelers*
> *along the banks of the Hwangho and the Mekong*

> *singing with sunrise the songs of dispelling mists*
> *as the eastern windows open up in the Longtorai Hills. (100)*

For him, the rivers and hills hold life's secrets that he wishes to pass on to the next generation. These natural elements become repositories of his memories, inseparable from his being, evoking his past experiences. This profound attachment to the natural world resonates in his poetry, evident in works like "Rain after the Drought," "A Dream Baffling the Whirlwind," and "Myself beside Me." Whirlwinds, droughts, rainfall, clouds, the sun, and skies are personified, adorned with beauty, and used as metaphors to convey his creative imagination. For instance, Rain is portrayed as "stitching the ruptured land," ("Rain After" 101) while the sun is envisioned as a "child wielding a sword of light" ("A Dream Baffling" 102). In essence, his depiction of nature and physical entities exposes his intimate connection to them. In this connection, Stuart Hall argues that the interplay between land and identity is deeply rooted in power dynamics, politics, and human subjectivity. Exploring these factors deepens our understanding of how territoriality shapes our perceptions of self and others: "Our sense of place is really part of our cultural systems of meaning" (186). The term 'land' extends beyond its materiality, evoking emotions, discourses, imaginaries, nationalisms, and identities. It encompasses cognitions, experiences, and significances that interface with discourses on landscape, place, dwelling, region, nation, and territory (Berberich et al. 19). For Jackson, landscape, inseparable from the concept of land, is a human construct influenced by social, religious, and aesthetic values (156). This constructed nature emphasizes the role of social and cultural factors in shaping the meanings and interpretations associated with the land.

Rooted in Borok culture, Nandakumar Debbarma and fellow Borok poets establish a deep bond with nature, integral to the hill people's way of life. As forest dwellers, their existence intertwines with the rhythms of the natural world, influencing their folk tales, songs, contemporary stories, and poetry. Nature not only sustains them but also shapes their identity. Debbarma's poem "Jungle" beautifully reveals his profound connection to nature and highlights the forest's pivotal role in the Boroks' lives. The symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment, portrayed in his work, holds immense significance:

> *You cannot abandon her,*
> *She is embedded in your heart. . .*
> *You too cannot wipe her out,*
> *she is wrapped in your emotions. (23)*

Scholar Mike Crang emphasizes that landscapes reflect the beliefs, practices, and technologies of societies at large, highlighting their dynamic and evolving nature shaped by cultural and social processes (15). The intertwined relationship between land and identity, particularly ethnic identity, is a subjective and open-ended formation. Our sense of self is anchored to the ever-changing, hybrid spatialities we inhabit. Postmodern thinkers like Lefebvre and Soja argue that space encompasses more than the physical, incorporating subjective, practical, and experiential

dimensions. It is a space we both produce and perceive, constantly reshaping our understanding (Lefebvre 12). Landscape serves as a meeting ground where culture, place, and space intersect, where identities are exchanged, performed, and constructed. However, according to Berberich et al., the coupling of land and identity has often led to ethnic solidarity and territorial nationalism with devastating consequences (21).

In his poem "A Dream Baffling the Whirlwind," Debbarma bemoans the fracturing of his identity, which he portrays through the imagery of a tuft of thread slipping from a loom, fragmented songs, and the withering flowers he once tucked in his hair as he descended from the dream hill:

With a tuft of thread off the loom,
some fragments of songs
I come down the slope of the dream hill
and tuck some dry flowers in the bun of my hair. (102)

The vivid imagery of slipping threads, fragmented songs, and withered flowers in Debbarma's poem represents the dissolution of cultural and identity-forming elements that once anchored the Borok people. This unraveling signifies a loss of coherence and the disintegration of essential elements that defined their sense of self. Debbarma's poem explores the delicate interplay between cultural identity, its material and symbolic foundations, and the fragility of identity in times of rapid change.

Similarly, Sudhanya Tripura, another Borok poet, skillfully reflects the life and experiences of the Borok people, especially the jhumias, in poems like "Woo-Wang" and "Mad Piper." These poems vividly depict the natural environment, capturing the jhum fields and stilt houses in intricate detail. They also convey the rhythms of daily life, such as the "Mad Piper" playing his flute by the river. In "The Displaced Heart," Tripura employs powerful symbolism to convey the yearning and loss experienced by the Borok people in their struggle to preserve their identity and culture:

In the scorched jhum fields,
in a bamboo stilt-house
the heart of Puslati Tripura
is sunken in loneliness.
The house built with his ribs
burns in the flames of terror.
The vultures fly with their ancient craze. (302)

The forest and jhum field symbolize the indigenous Borok identity, as reflected in the shattered mind of Puslati Tripura, representing the devastation caused by the fire in his fields. Tripura's poetry poignantly comments on the fragility of cultural identity amidst relentless change and displacement, highlighting the complexities of the Borok people's struggle to assert their presence and preserve their heritage.

The Borok poets express a profound longing to preserve their cultural heritage through their poetry, which consistently emphasizes their rootedness to their land and

past experiences. They also exhibit a keen awareness of how mainstream literature has historically misrepresented and distorted their ethnic identity. Furthermore, they confront the contemporary socio-economic factors that contribute to their ongoing marginalization and everyday struggles. For instance, Shefali Debbarma, in her evocative poem "Lamination," laments the pigeonholing of the indigenous Borok identity through the constraints of a scheduled tribe card, which serves to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and further exacerbate their precarious socio-economic status:

> *The Scheduled Tribe certificate card*
> *Was issued under seal and signature*
> *Of the Sub-Divisional Officer,*
> *In the year I was born. (107)*

Shefali Debbarma's adept use of symbols like "risa" and "pachhra" in her poem challenges the reductionist identity imposed by mainstream culture. By juxtaposing the fluid nature of cultural identity with the rigid categorizations enforced by hegemonic forces, she exposes the constant struggle of subaltern subjects against homogenizing pressures. The poem offers a sharp critique of dominant cultural discourses that erase the multifaceted identities of marginalized communities, urging a renewed commitment to recognizing and preserving diverse cultural traditions:

> *Lest the valuable paper gets soiled*
> *Mother kept it in the folds of risa and pachhra,*
> *Within the khuturuk. (Debbarma 107)*

The juxtaposition of Borok's traditional dress and the laminated identity card holds great significance. The *risa* and *pachhra* symbolize Borok culture and tradition, while the government paper represents a fixed identity imposed by mainstream discourse. The outcome of these two things being placed together inside the *khuturuk* after a century years is also highly significant:

> *The favourite dress of risa and pachhra*
> *Has worn out, turning into shreds.*
> *The white ants have eaten up the khuturuk;*
> *But only the S. T. Card still remains bright and crisp,*
> *Laminated and framed. (108)*

The final two stanzas serve as a poignant reminder of the fragility of subaltern cultures in the face of dominant cultural forces. As the traditional Borok dress slowly wears away and the khuturuk succumbs to the relentless onslaught of white ants, the laminated and neatly framed S. T. Card remains intact, a testament to the enduring power of dominant cultural norms to shape and define subaltern identities.

Today, the rewriting of ethnic history among indigenous tribes in northeastern India has become more urgent due to their sense of being denied fair representation in Indian civilizational and nationalist discourses. The impact of globalization, mass culture, and the intrusion of an alien culture has forced indigenous people to abandon elements of their own culture. This issue is particularly sensitive for contemporary Borok writers. The *Rajmala'*s metanarrative has assimilated the Boroks into the Hindu mainstream, neglecting the experiences and social life of the indigenous

people. Indigenous poets aim to depict the everyday lives of common people and their intrinsic relationship with nature and cultural life. So, what arises is the perceived difference between the Boroks and the *Rajmala*-centric history of Tripura. For such Borok people, who have developed a psychological bond with the landscape they have inhabited for thousands of years, cultural identity remains a psychological creation that is strongly rooted in the local landscape and natural environment.

The present situation also witnessed the continuing struggle of the indigenous people demanding their separate homeland. Contemporary Borok writers, too, express their grievances and rootedness in their literary pieces to challenge all kinds of stereotypes and misrepresentations of their cultural identity and also their deprived condition at present times.

Through his poem "As I Am," Chandrakanta Murasingh brings to light the ironic juxtaposition between traditional Borok values and modern values. With artful poetics, Murasingh describes in the first stanza how singing and dancing align with his sensibilities, whereas performances done for financial gain hold no worth for him:

> *You have asked me to sing,*
> *Well, I can...*
> *But don't ask for money*
> *To organize a dance troupe.*
> *I need the money to buy a horse,*
> *Me and horse, the pair of us, shall jump, shall fight,*
> *Will go to places where your car cannot. (185)*

The horse, as a symbol of traditional transportation, represents the indigenous Borok culture, while the car, being a symbol of modernity and globalization, represents the new culture that has evolved over time. The poem portrays the poet's enduring attachment to Borok values and traditions, despite the influence of modern culture. It highlights the struggle to reconcile traditional and modern cultural worlds that often clash with each other.

Conclusion

Kokborok literature from Tripura is thus far from being reducible to a monolithic narrative of conflict and violence. Rather, it is a complex tapestry of themes, a patchwork of stories and experiences that speak to the multi-layered realities of the Borok world. To speak of Kokborok literature in purely reductionist terms would be to do a great disservice to the Borok writers, who have labored to explore the diverse terrains of their lives. Central to this literature is the Borok poets' close relationship with nature, which they depict with vivid and imaginative brushstrokes. As Robin S. Ngangom and Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih have suggested, the poetry of northeast India is grounded in a powerful sense of rootedness, an attachment to the past, and the traditions of the people (xii). The contemporary Borok poets share this commitment, weaving the roots of their culture and their history into the fabric of their work. Their poetry functions as a site of memory, a way

of reconstructing and redefining the Borok identity in the face of ongoing challenges. Indeed, the narratives that emerge from the Borok folk tales, songs, and fiction are a vital chronicle of the Borok people's history and lived experiences. These narratives provide a counter-narrative to dominant historical discourses, a means of reclaiming the lost stories and perspectives that have been neglected for too long. They are a reminder of the rich and diverse cultural heritage that continues to shape the Borok world and a testament to the resilience and creativity of a people whose voice deserves to be heard.

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"Deconstructing Historiography" and Convergence of Multiple Perspectives– A Study of Srividya Natarajan and S Anand's Graphic Novel, *Bhimayana*

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Abstract

The appropriation of radical political consciousness to graphic narrative is highly unconventional and challenging. *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability*, co-authored by Srividya Natarajan, S Anand, Durgabai Vyam and Subash Vyam visualizes the historical injustices normalized as traditional myths in the contemporary Indian scenario. The exceptional caricatures in the text demolish the Brahminical ideologies and delegitimize the arguments made by the major proponents of modern democracy. Rather than producing a text that is readily identified as a graphic novel, the authors are trying to destabilize and deconstruct the genre of historical fiction. Through formal experimentation, it registers an alternative subaltern aesthetics that is revolutionary in presenting the historiography. It is a scathing attack on the illusory promotion of egalitarian agendas in the post-colonial Indian society. The present paper critically evaluates the nuances produced by such an unconventional style of writing by the authors to narrate historical events. It is an attempt to evaluate the way in which the text documents subaltern historiography by employing the methodology of deconstructive narration.
Keywords: Deconstruction, historiography, narrative strategy, subaltern, Dalit, graphic novel.

Introduction

As the great philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has once noted, "All concepts in which an entire process is comprehended withdraws itself from definition; only that which has no history is definable" (qtd. in Spivak 207). History is an empirical discipline that interprets politically and socially important events based on the available evidence regarding the past. Historical consciousness is constituted itself on a "semiotic- chain" (207) that bears various cultural implications. Therefore it is desirable to question the credibility of historical objectivity and historical truth. The plurality of historical truth as well as its non-uniformity manifests itself into an 'aporia' of relative meanings. As the Edward Hallett Carr[1] suggests, historical knowledge has been "processed" (Carr 7) as it must have come down through one or more human minds. Hence it is impossible to represent history as a single unified narrative. Carr's belief in the non-existence of objectivity in constructing the historical truth is, thus, significant. The constituents of historical truth should be deconstructed from multiple perspectives. The nature and sources of different agencies that contribute to the historical narrative should be investigated. Moreover the impact of colonization has contributed to the emergence of "indigenous elites" (205) who further legitimized the

authority over Indian nationalist historiography. The emergence of subaltern historiography led to the re-investigation of the established historical narratives from a different perspective.

Subaltern historiography re-examines the politics behind the constitution of history and the representation of agencies that contribute to the production of historical discourses. Supposedly inauthentic, these writings accompany the question of 'literariness' and are non-traditional. It is located at the meeting point of convergence where two disciplines of literature and history interact and complement with each other. The failure of elitist historiography to explicitly communicate the ideologies of "feudal authority" (Spivak 205) marks the need to displace such discourses. Subaltern historiography deconstructs these discourses and argues for a "discursive displacement" (205) which in turn promotes the politicization of subaltern identities on a different plane. The evolution of such politicized subaltern identities, challenges the creation of 'epistemological other'. Subsequently, it argues for the subversion of social constructs and re-formulation of knowledge through critical interrogation of the traditional certainties of meaning.

Bhimayana as a Historical Fiction Narrating Subaltern Historiography

Carr defines history as "a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the past and the present." He observes historian as an individual who is politically conditioned by the society to which he belongs. Likewise, elitist historiographers determine the subsequent production and distribution of ideologies in different spheres of social and political life. Historical narratives express their determined perspectives over past through the careful selection and arrangement of "historical facts". While traditional archival discourses dismiss these rhetorical questions, subaltern historiography begins the process of re-interpretation of the same from that position where it ended the investigation. The decade-old graphic novel, *Bhimayana; Experiences of Untouchability* (2011), explores such re-examinations of the age-old casteist ideological practices in India. The plot occupies the experiences of untouchability faced by Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar along with newspaper reportages describing instances of untouchability in current Indian context. The incidents narrated in the novel are taken from the autobiographical writings of Ambedkar, *Waiting for Visa*. The publisher, S. Anand has admitted that, certain incidents that happened in Ambedkar's life, but not mentioned in his autobiographical writings are additionally included in the novel to make the narrative come alive. For instance, the quote from Mahad speech made by Ambedkar in 1927 is not a part of *Waiting for Visa*, but has been included in the work, considering the greatness of his thoughts. The work got published in six languages including Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Marathi in 2012. By presenting a narrative collage, the authors invite multiple interpretations. Combining the simultaneous documentation of current situation through reportages and the life experiences of Ambedkar, the authors emphasize the

complexity and continuation of untouchability in India in the past and present. The text examines the network of exchanges between people in a highly caste-ridden Indian society. Such close analyses, in turn 'de-centre' the historical truth.

The idea of starting Navayana Publishing House went through Anand's mind while he was working for *The Hindu*. Initially, he planned to publish three graphical life narratives of Jyotirao Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar. Unfortunately, the need for heavy investment for the publication of such graphic narratives forced him to drop the idea. Therefore the series ended with *Bhimayana* and *A Gardener in the Wasteland*. In a conference at University of Hyderabad, Anand admitted the hardships he faced while trying to raise funds for the production and distribution of this work. Most of the famous funding institutes refused him because of the subject matter and the narrative style of the work *Bhimayana*.

Co-authored by Anand, Srividya Natarajan, Durgabai Vyam and Subash Vyam, *Bhimayana* narrates incidents from the life of the Dalit leader in the most beautiful and challenging manner. Rather than creating a text that is readily identified as a graphic novel, the authors are trying to destabilize the genre of historical fiction. The multi-modal narration becomes the deconstructive methodology that haunts the profession of history writing. By re-visiting the historical portraits of a popular Dalit leader, authors present the events on a post-modern platform. This allows the deconstruction of the conventional mode of historiography and demands the direct involvement of readers in understanding the questions of caste politics. The "dichotomy of facts and its interpretation" propounded by Carr is revoked here. Withdrawing from the authoritarian power of constructing history by the careful selection of facts, authors are presenting a panorama of various episodes evoking divergent meanings in the work. Hence readers' interpretations displace the autonomy of the historian over the "processing" of facts.

> This book offers a prophetic answer and it is this: replace the stage of History with the Body of community. A body with a long past, a present of many voices, and a vision of the future. Reading the book and following its story, we enter this body, its bloodstream, its organs, its members. (Berger, *Bhimayana*, Foreword 10)

The Deconstructive Narrative Strategy

Ideologies of caste hierarchy have gained momentum in India in the post-independent era, through the 'discourses of rejection'. The denial of the existence of untouchability by the upper caste population in India normalizes the decades-old enslavement of a section of the society. *Bhimayana* vehemently opposes such movements by including newspaper reports stating caste issues. These reports stand as evidence substantiating that untouchability is not an outdated concept in India. The beginning of the text depicting some fictional characters at a bus stop discussing the reservation system in India is interesting. The urban setting in the background and the educated, modern, young students represent the mainstream casteist population. These characters function as 'chorus' of the classical theatre stating the theme of the

text at the beginning. Their negligence of the persisting 'doctrine of inequality' that every religion upholds in Indian society is doubtful. The newspaper reports provided after the discussion emphasize the essentiality of reservation, a form of positive discrimination, in a representative democracy. Moreover, the beginning scene initiates the discussion on the practice of untouchability and highlights its essentiality in the current context.

Traditionally, Pradhan tribes, who mainly occupy the villages of Patangarh and Garkhamatta in Madhya Pradesh, consider Gond art as a marker of their ethnic identity. Their way of life is closely linked to these paintings. The art form stands at the centre of their socio-political and economic life. The paintings are located in their immediate cultural and environmental context. Therefore it is difficult to interpret the different layers of meaning that each painting reflects without an adequate understanding of the tribal cultural codes. Even the whole of their village life is projected through the art form. Majority of the house walls in these villages are decorated with beautiful Gond paintings. Besides being aesthetically appealing, the paintings are considered as highly optimistic that have power to determine their destiny. The vibrant patterns of village flora and fauna show the community's close association with nature. They worship nature as their protector and celebrate its beauty through these depictions.

> The function of art for them isn't just restricted to practical and aesthetic pleasure; it also ensures a continuum between the past and the present, and in this sense the very act of painting is considered spiritual: an act of prayer. The paintings are not only an offering in worship of nature, but are also a mode of seeking protection and warding off evil. (Bharadwaj 2)

The use of Gond art to visualize the events described in the novel is one of its major peculiarities. Durgabai Vyam and Subash Vyam are talented Pradhan Gond artists who follow the legacy of Jangarh Singh Shyam, who popularized the commercialized version of Gond art. He transferred Gond art to canvas and now it occupies considerable space in several galleries within and outside of, India. The opening image of *Bhimayana* depicting the image of a human being, with both hands occupied with painting brushes, a huge trunk consisting of a variety of fauna represents the graphic interpretation of the hardships faced by Syam as an artist in the modern world. He is symbolically represented as the sky that shelters the whole community of Pradhan artists, who took up painting as their career. The present image clearly shows the uniqueness of the visual language in which the Gond artists speak.

The visual rhetoric of the Gond art makes it the appropriate one to discuss the evil system of caste in Indian context. Anand justifies his choice of tribal art instead of Dalit art as the suitable one for the work as he does not want the book to be labelled as an exclusive 'Dalit text'. Moreover, he affirms that the subject of casteism should be discussed among people from different walks of life. The whole work is the result of an association between great talents. It is an attack on the highly patriarchal and casteist stereotypical illustrations commonly presented in the conventional Amar Chitra Kathas. Artistic illustrations in Bhimayana do not normalize the stereotypes;

rather it allows readers to read in between the graphic idioms.

> This mythic world naturally rejects the different physiognomies, or the need to differentiate between Brahmin and Dalit on the basis of skin colour, skull size, relative flatness of the nose, and so on....By drawing equivalence between disparate body parts, which are shown to be swimming in a non-symmetrical frame, the hierarchy is smashed. (Chandra 23)

Generally, popular Western graphic novels follow geometrically regular movement of the plot with close-up images of the characters shown from proper angular dimensions. Amar Chitra Kathas were also following the same kind of template. It is the replica of Western sequential graphic storytelling. As Anand had remarked, the juxtaposition of the absence of the standardized rectangular frames and 'unilinear' flow of time with the images of separated body parts and half-human figures, seems subversive. It is a narrative strategy employed by the writers to raise strong criticism against the 'hinduisation' of Ambedkar as an iconic figure represented in the popular Amar Chitra Katha of Ambedkar by Dilip Kadam. In his opinion, the traditional standard templates and images in the book mythicize Ambedkar's birth, life and goal in such a way that it equates him to a traditional Hindu saint. However, in *Bhimayana*, Ambedkar is presented as an ordinary individual belonging to Dalit community. He is not projected as an individual with particular features, but as 'type'. He is one among the community questioning the conformist ideologies through his pointing finger. The absence of the iconic figure of Ambedkar with peculiar features contradicts the expectations of a traditional narrative and signifies the ambiguous identity of Dalits. The politicization of Dalit identity is enhanced through this powerful representation. It displaces the discourses that created the iconic figure of Ambedkar and presents various possibilities for modification. The other Dalit characterizations are also instable while not conforming to the ideology of the uniform 'other'. It is hard to physically differentiate between the Dalit and non-Dalit characters portrayed through the paintings. This non-conformist mode of expression displaces the popular construct of Dalit physique in Indian context.

Deviating away from the Amar Chitra Kathas, *Bhimayana's* innovative stylistic narrative exhibits postcolonial modernity and fosters readers' critical literacy. It is not easy to scroll through the pages of the book without paying attention to the minute illustrations provided. The concurrent process of re-reading and re-writing deconstructs the idea of 'historical truth'. Images are scattered onto the pages without any margins where speech bubbles occupy the spaces in between the figures.

> The Vyams refused to be influenced by the suffocating boxed art of the graphic novels that Anand had brought along. They needed their characters to breathe in khula open space and so they devised undulating digna patterns for marking panels. (Chandra 22)

The betrayal of a unilinear progressive narrative through the unconventional graphic language is an "interventionist strategy" (Spivak 216) used by the authors. The newspaper cuttings and contemporary discussions on reservation policies by fictional characters interrupt the Western unilinear narrative mode. It also denounces the victim story-telling tradition followed by post-colonial historiography. Accordingly, authors

recreate the events of untouchability in Ambedkar's life without establishing the perpetrator-victim binary. There is no attempt to subvert the power relation between Dalits and upper castes, as re-establishing another hierarchy is "affirmative deconstruction" (216). As Spivak notes,

> the restoration of the subaltern's subject-position in history is seen by the historian as the establishment of an inalienable and final truth of things, then any emphasis on sovereignty, consistency, and logic will, as I have suggested above, inevitably objectify the subaltern and be caught in the game of knowledge as power (216).

The non-European model of dystopian aesthetic presented by *Bhimayana* portrays casteism as a painful present-day reality, necessitating reformation. It leads the readers to a "semiotic chain" (Spivak 207), challenging the hierarchy of meanings and rhetoric of order reinforced by the "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida 226). The symbolic use of water imagery throughout the novel is an example. Symbolically, it represents equality that will quench the thirst of untouchables in India. Further, it emphasizes that the meanings represented by the "heterosemiotic" (El Refaie 21) text are floating over the pages like the floating water and are permeable, unstoppable and deconstructive, going beyond the fixed definitions. The deconstructive power of water is visible in the slogan,

> THE HEART OF WATER IS GENEROUS AND REACHES THE VERY ROOTS, ITS HEALING TOUCH MAKES THE SCABS OF A THOUSAND SORROWS FALL, WHAT WALLS, HOW MANY WALLS CAN BUILD AROUND WATER, HOW WILL YOU SHACKLE THE RUSHING FORM OF WATER? (*Bhimayana* 22)

A Small History of Subaltern Studies by Dipesh Chakrabarty, critically analyses the history of Subaltern Studies as a discipline. In this work, he says, "history itself is simply a record of different ways of 'being in the world' of capitalism, and all relations of power are rendered opaque by power itself" (qtd in Navarro 89). It is this interplay of power relations that the Gond artists attempt to visualize in *Bhimayana*. One whole page in the novel is dedicated to the close-up image of Ambedkar's face with spectacles. Through the brilliant utilization of his facial geography, the authors depict the networks of power structure between Dalits and others. Upper caste people are shown as relaxing and occupying the spaces inside his spectacles, whereas the hard-working Dalits occupy other spaces on the periphery of his face. The outline of the spectacle reflects the borderline that separates these two categories of people in Indian society. Dalits are not allowed to trespass their confined spaces while guarding the others on the centre. This geographical partitioning of Ambedkar's face remarks the cultural discrimination in the society. The illustration reinforces the direction of power flow by marking the power distribution from the centre to the periphery.

The imagery of fish recurs throughout the novel. It is difficult to control the movement of fishes in water. Their transparent and swift movement at the water surfaces denotes the subjectivity of Dalits in Indian context. The tendency exhibited by the prejudiced, radical nationalist and imperialist historiographies to neglect the

agency and subjectivity of Dalits and other subaltern groups in India is criticized here. Fishes in the narration denote untouchables and their enthusiasm to move forward in different ways. Ambedkar has tried to uplift himself from the hardships of untouchability through education and conversion. The floating imagery of fish opposes the static nature of history. As Carr observes, "history is meaningless in a static world. History in its essence is change, movement" (132).

The second chapter, titled as "Shelter" explains how Ambedkar's arduous journey to find a shelter in an Indian suburb becomes futile without hiding his caste identity. The picture in which Ambedkar returns with several bags of books in both hands and symbolic thorns upon his shoulders is a remarkable depiction. The impossibility of emancipation is highlighted by the brilliant use of visual language in this context. Here the readers can interpret the same image in multiple ways. In one way, it signifies his inherent caste consciousness as an untouchable. The thorns on Ambedkar's shoulders also differentiate his identity as the ultimate 'other' created by the casteist society. It shows Ambedkar's identity from the perspective of society in that sense. Images stimulate varying possibilities of perspectives challenging a structured and unified narration followed by the conventional elitist historiography.

Suzanne Keen observes that graphic narratives have the capability to evoke catharsis or "narrative empathy" that can induce beneficial activities in the real world (Keen 135). *Bhimayana* creates this "strategic empathy" (135) through the representation of various animal characters. Human expressions and bodily postures are presented through "anthropomorphised" (135) animal characters at several instances in the novel. Animal types always have certain "pre-conceived schema" (137) in Indian culture. This is brilliantly utilized by the authors in the text. The symbolic speech bubbles in the shapes of birds and scorpions in the narration differentiate Dalit and non-Dalit characters. These speech bubbles are highly allegorical. It evokes a sense of empathy and realization for the need for justice, assistance and sympathy.

> The deployment of anthropo-morphized animal characters (a strategy with a long history in narrative literature as well as in cartoons and comics) evokes culturally scripted responses, to familiar schemas of sympathetic and antipathetic animals. (Fast Tracks to Narrative Empathy: Anthropomorphism and Dehumanization in Graphic Narrative 137)

Conclusion

The Dalit solidarity and power expressed through the visual language of tribes displace the traditional mode of narration in *Bhimayana*. It proves, as Spivak notes down, the "hegemonic access to 'consciousness' as an interpretable construct" (207). She explains the need to create a "subaltern consciousness" (204) that can surpass the hegemony enjoyed by the privileged class over 'consciousness.' Ambedkar's pointing finger which is present in almost all the pages of the work, demands a sharp awakening for 'Dalit consciousnesses'. Furthermore, he is also equated to Lord Buddha in one

page recalling Ambedkar's slogan, "educate, agitate, organize". His pleas for the strengthening of the "subaltern consciousness" (204) through education and solidarity are reflected in this slogan. He considers it as the best way to displace the hegemonic discourses. As Spivak notes, subaltern historiographers "generally perceive their task as making a theory of consciousness or culture rather than specifically a theory of change" (206). *Bhimayana* is a brilliant attempt to "turn upside down" the arguments of traditional historiographers by bringing together "impingement," "combination," "ambiguity," "unease," "transit" (206) etc. Therefore the text enables the readers to encounter different complexities of meaning overlapped with each other in an ambiguous environment. The representation of the treatment of caste in pre- and post-independent Indian context presents the extreme nuances of the highly unequal caste-based society which needs to be rectified at the earliest. Finally, the text became successful in narrating the subaltern history without objectifying the subaltern again.

Notes

[1]Edward Hallett Carr, best known for writing *A History of Soviet Russia* in fourteen volumes is a renowned British political scientist and historian specialised in modern Russian historiography. Carr extensively discusses history, facts, objectivity of historian, judgements in history in the work, *What is History?* (1961). It includes a series of lectures given by Carr in 1961 at the University of Cambridge.

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Vignettes of Food, Memory and History in Jaspreet Singh's *Chef*

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Abstract

We are living in an era where memory cannot be dismissed off as merely an idea or thought. With the field of memory studies witnessing a robust growth, it is time to consider and reconsider the place given to memory in literary studies specially with reference to the newly emerging concepts. This paper tries to establish the connection between memory, history and food through the historical fiction *Chef* by Jaspreet Singh. The whole narrative is woven through the memories of the narrator and the protagonist Kirpal Singh. The memories recollected are anchored in important moments in the history of India and Pakistan and the ongoing feud over Kashmir. The tense emotions and the situation are captured clearly through his memories and his role as a Chef to military authorities in Kashmir. The relationship between food and memory would be made clear through concepts associated with both.
Using the broad theoretical framework of memory studies, this paper will highlight the use of concepts put forth by scholars and theorists who put forward the points of contact between memory, history and food. The connection and the debate between memory and history is outlined by Maurice Halbwachs with his concept of collective memory and with the use of Jan Assmann;s concept of cultural memory which states the basic difference between memory and history. In addition, food being viewed as a locus of identity, gender and ethnicity as well as a site of memory and nostalgia, is analysed by the views proposed by cultural anthropologist Jon D. Holtzman and anthropological theorist David Sutton.
Keywords: memory, food, history, identity, political, personal

Memory studies, is a promising field with multiple possibilities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaboration. There has been a shift from enquiring the necessity of memory to welcoming the multidimensional potential of memory. Memory has been studied right from the early ages by philosophers like Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Dante Alighieri, Bergson, Proust to name a few (Radstone, Susannah and Bill Schwarz 15). However, it was only in the twentieth century that memory was seen as a topic fit for examination and study (Radstone, Susannah and Bill Schwarz 15). Pierre Nora, Maurice Halbwachs and Aby Warburg were the names associated with concepts like sites of memory, cultural and collective memory whereas 'cultural memory' was developed by Aleida and Jan Assmann (Tamm 545). During memory boom the field witnessed a drastic growth with the introduction of new concepts and theories. From studying memory as a phenomenon, the contemporary period is visualising the need for topics like transcultural, travelling, cosmopolitan and digital memory (Tamm 547).

The following analysis is an attempt at the intersections and interconnections of food, memory and history in the novel *Chef*. During his journey to Kashmir after almost fourteen years of being away from the city, Kirpal Singh or Kip, the protagonist recollects his first visit to the city and the varied experiences and memories obtained

from working as a chef under army authorities. Throughout his tenure, he was working in the Indian side of Kashmir and not the Pakistani occupied region. Now diagnosed with brain tumour, Kirpal Singh is full of emotions as he recollects his past and the country's past while on his way back to Kashmir, as he gets ready to cook for the wedding of the General's daughter.

There exists an inextricable connection between food and memory throughout the novel *Chef*. In his article on "Food and Memory", Jon. D. Holtzman says,

> These relationships include embodied memories constructed through food; food as a locus for historically constructed identity, ethnic or nationalist; the role of food in various forms of "nostalgia", dietary change as a socially charged marker of epochal shifts; gender and the agents of memory; and contexts of remembering and forgetting through food (364).

All these relationships could be found in the novel and have been analysed in this article. The novel begins by outlining the relationship between food, memory and life. Kirpal Singh responds to a question about the one thing that everyone misses after death, saying it is food. (Singh 3). "We miss peaches, strawberries, delicacies like Sandhurst curry, kebab pasanda and rogan josh. The dead do not eat marzipan. The smell of bakeries torments them day and night" (Singh 3). These lines capture the fact that food is an important part of the lives of human beings and that Kirpal Singh has this fond relationship or rather, bonding with food. In his article, "A Tale of Easter Ovens", David Sutton says: "I will argue that what makes food such a powerful site for exploring memory is the very fact that, unlike, say, public monuments, in producing, exchanging and consuming food we are continuously criss-crossing between the "public" and the "intimate," individual bodies and collective institutions" (160). Kirpal Singh's intimate connection with food is predictable and manifest in the narrative.

Food besides being a factor to aid nutrition, is a collection of many elements put together. Kip claims that the decision to return to Kashmir was made while he was cooking since he was dreading the moment he would return to Kashmir and was hesitant to do so, when he receives the letter from the General. The act of cooking is important to the extent that, he says, "But in the evening while preparing soup I changed my mind. I make all big decisions while cooking." (Singh 5). It is thus clearly evident that cooking and his life are very closely intertwined and interwoven that he feels his life is incomplete without cooking and food. Also, food has this invisible power to evoke and induce nostalgia.

"As a form of memory, "nostalgia" has several different senses, generally and in respect to food. Some food literature relies on a lay notion of sentimentality for a lost past, viewing food as a vehicle for recollections of childhood and family" (Holtzman 367). During his journey, he fondly recollects many of his life experiences that are closely associated with food. Most of Kip's memories are either of his childhood, or his time in Kashmir as a Chef to General Kumar. Most importantly, these memories are always connected with food, a specific food item or the Kitchen space. During his training sessions with chef Kishen Singh, he puts down his memories of the smells of kitchen. Olfactory and gustatory memory occupies most of the novel. "The kitchen. Scent of cumin, ajwain and cardamom. On the table, a little pile of nutmeg. Thick, oily vapour rose from the pot on the stove" (Singh 15). In the initial days of his work, Kip assists Chef Kishen with the cooking and slowly begins to

learn the ways of the people there, their likes and preferences with respect to food and the ways of cooking the authentic foods of Kashmir.

> This ability of food to both generate subjective commentary and encode powerful meanings would seemingly make it ideal to wed to the topic of memory. Memory and its oft forgotten alter-ego "forgetting" generate popular interest and commentary while simultaneously encoding hidden meanings. Like food, memory is clearly linked to issues of identity: gender, class and other (Sutton 6).

Food is seen as a medium that evokes subjective memories and emotions regarding certain contexts and events. The partition stories are brought to Kip's memory as he remembers his father eating mangoes as he listens to those stories. "Father never used a knife to cut mangoes, he would suck them. He would eat several at a sitting, one by one, all varieties, sandhoori, dusshairi, langra, choussa, alphonso. He loved good food. Good chutney. (Singh 20). A lot of the country's history and memory resonates with the memory of Kip since his own father, Major Iqbal Singh is depicted as a soldier fighting wars with the Pakistanis and faces death while fighting an important war. After his death, Kip joins the army as a chef (Singh 23). In addition to personal memories being evoked by food, understanding needs to be sought on the integral relationship between memory and history.

History and memory are always considered as rivals and it is a fact that history is always given preference over memory. This is because history is always seen in connection with empiricism and objectivity and a certain notion of truth (qtd.in Holtzman 363). This is contrasted with memory which is considered to destabilize truth and to construct the present using subjective understandings of the past (Holtzman 363). However, national history and individual memory get juxtaposed in the following incident. The railway authorities on the train examine his trunk and are unhappy with the fact that he is carrying such an enormous amount of spices with him. They say they are letting him go because his trunk is not a real coffin (Singh 9). Kip gets hurt and insulted at this comment and links it to the country's memory of the historical episode. This incident is a play between the acts of remembering and forgetting. Important events are forgotten but petty issues are retained in memory. "Our country is a country with a short memory. They don't remember the coffin scam which took place in the army during the war with Pakistan and cost the general his promotion" (Singh 10). According to historical records, the coffin scam is one where coffins were bought on an agreement with the US based company Buritrol and Bizarces in order to bring the bodies of martyred soldiers in a flag-draped aluminium casket. This was done during the Kargil war that happened in 1999 when India emerged victorious. A sum of Rs. 24,000 crore was believed to be the scam amount. (www.moneycontrol.com>news>india). Through a fictional representation of the interrelation between Kip's personal life and the historical incident, the author depicts the one-sided attitude of the authorities who forget the significant issues that the country needs to worry about and instead, trouble an ordinary passenger for carrying spices on the train.

Furthermore, the chaotic historic-political situation of Kashmir is captured beautifully through aural, olfactory and visual memories of the kitchen. The subjective memories and preferences of Kip gets registered through the novel. In addition, food and memory becomes closely linked to ethnic identity here. It is through food that Kip makes his association with the particular place clear. Kip gets worried that since they reside too close to the Pakistani side, danger is lurking close

by. He fears that something might happen to the General and the Governor since there are fights and wars happening over the issue of Kashmir. "The sound of machine guns would rebound in the valley and invade our lives. But then the guns would stop for a while and the delicious sounds of bugles and military bagpipes from our camp and the enemy camp would waft inside the kitchen, and mix with the sounds of coals in the tandoor" (Singh 26). The fact that he needs to cook according to the preferences of the General also brings to mind the connection between food and ethnicity. The general loved to eat authentic Kashmiri dishes like Mughlai mutton with turnips, rogan josh, kebab nargisi, lotus roots-n-rhizomes, gongloo, karam saag, the slow-cooked nahari, and the curd-flavoured meatballs of gushtaba (Singh 26). Kip also registers the love for food and the love for Kashmir through the action of eating. He associates the food with the place and links both to his memory. This makes it clear, that more than ethnic associations, food has the power to draw someone close to the place they are residing in. When he eats berries one night in Kashmir, he feels that "In Kashmir everything tastes of fruit. The days tasted of apples and the nights of bittersweet berries. I ate them very slowly, one by one" (Singh 43).

"Ethnic identity forms a central arena in which food is tied to notions of memory" (Holtzman 366). The episode below is a conglomeration of personal identity, food and ethnicity. The political situation of Kashmir gets reflected though Kip's memory of food. The relationship between food, religion and personal life becomes clearer when Kip seems to like a Kashmiri Muslim girl. More than his liking for her, what Kip found more interesting is the food that was offered to him there. Here food becomes a cultural marker of Kashmir as well as reminding one of the cultural differences. He describes the kehva tea that was given to him in this manner: "It was delicious! Strands of saffron floated on top, releasing the color. It had come right out of the samovar and the brew was strong. I detected crushed cardamoms, kagzee almonds…" (Singh 36). The historical story about the conflicts between the Muslims and other faiths and the chaos of the Kashmir valley is all remembered through Kip's conversation with this man and the subject of changing religion when it comes to marriage. Through a fictional depiction, the cultural, religious, political differences and priorities are made clear. Inspite of the differences, between the two varied sets of people, it is evident that food acts as a connecting link between them.

In an article, "The Hidden Politics of Vegetarianism Caste and The Hindu Canteen", Hugo Gorringe and D Karthikeyan, argue thus: "Prescriptions about what food one can eat and proscriptions about whose food you are allowed to eat animate caste boundaries and identities. Food practices, thus, are inherently political whether they are politicised or not" (20). One more historical moment connected with food and that can relate to the above statement is outlined below. According to history, back in December 1963, the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's deputy Sheikh Abdullah was replaced by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad as the former was involved with the Kashmir Conspiracy case. In this case, Sheikh Abdullah was believed to have been involved in treason and teachery (www.ikashmir.net). Due to this, factions arose, peace was disturbed and amidst this situation, the holy relic, that is, the hair from the prophet's beard went missing from the Hazratbal Shrine (www.Kashmirlife.com). As a result, riots began to break out in West Bengal and East Pakistan leaving over 400 people dead. In January, when Indian officials confirmed the relic being put back to its place, nobody believed and they wanted someone to

vouch for it (www.Kashmirlife.com). This historical event is etched in the mind of Kip since it made a huge impact on his life as well as Kishen Singh's life. The novel talks at length about the five Imams and their role to vouch for the authenticity of the same. The meal for these people had to be prepared with care and the job is delegated to Chef Kishen Singh. Because of the critical situation found in Kashmir at that time, Chef and Kip decide that they would prepare authentic Kashmiri dishes for the authorities. Here again food merges with the nation, the politics, history and the personal. The authenticity of food is really important since food is an important cultural marker. To help with the memory of this particular historical event, food emerges as the context and Kip remembers the event with the kind of effect that the larger political, historical event has on the personal lives of Chef Kishen Singh, Kip and even the General.

Chef Kishen Singh cooks the Kashmiri Muslim dishes with great care and Kip remembers the process of cooking such food, and all the details that go with the making of the food:

> We cooked in a tent pitched in the garden behind the mosque. I am still able to recall the copper vessels and slow fire. I remember setting up the long dining table under the plane tree. Tarami plates. White linens fluttering in the wind. Food was served. Fenugreek gosht. Nadir kebab. Aloobukhara korma. Goat tails. Haakh saag. Tabak maaz. Dum aloo. Rista-63. Gushtaba. Saffron pilaf in the middle. Shirmal. Rumali roti, tallow and thin like a two-day-old newspaper. No part of the tablecloth was uncovered (Singh 71-72).

The authorities are unhappy about the food and the quarrel that arises and the ensuing conclusion of the event proves the fact that food can indeed play a major role in national history. As a result, Chef is demoted and transferred to the Siachen Glacier and Kip takes his place as the chef.

This event leads Chef to the stark realisation about his place in the society. For Chef Kishen Singh this event remains in his memory and teaches him the ways by which food can be used to treat subalterns like him, to treat him and his feelings as if they were nothing. He says: "And yet, in the end…no matter, how hard we try- we are low-caste peoples and we do not matter. Army belongs to officers, Kirpal. I am worthless. I feed them, serve them, take *ardors*. I endure the heat of the tandoor, and then I am let go, or I leave on my own. My life has come to nothing. My work has come to nothing" (Singh 75). Since he is unable to survive the harsh climate of the glacier and his depression in life, Chef Kishen Singh kills himself in the presence of the authorities when they visit the camp to inspect the functioning of the place. Food is seen more than a cultural marker here, as it can also offend people and ruin relationships. Chef Kishen Singh says that subalterns and lower-class people do not matter to the officials and they play with their lives. According to him, he says "…the foods I don't eat, the things I find disgusting, have more to do with my memories and less with religion" (Singh 74-75). He recollects how he couldn't offer chocolate to his father at the time of his death, so he hates chocolate (Singh 75).

The final and most interesting episode is a testimony to the food and gender and memory connection. The fictional incident is a proof to the way women are treated when national history and politics is involved. The connection between food, gender differences and national history and politics is beautifully captured through the story of Irem, depicted as a Pakistani Muslim woman. She drowns herself in the river to end her life as her family constantly accuses her for not being able to conceive a child,

instead she ends up floating to the Indian side of Kashmir. Because of this she gets interrogated and everyone believes she is a terrorist, so much so that she is regularly referred to as the 'enemy woman'. Kip is given an assignment to find out more about her, as he is the only one who knows to converse in Kashmiri language. He talks to her and finds out her life story. He exhibits the Indian way of expressing hospitality by cooking for her. One dish that he cooks for her is the Rogan josh. It is when she reveals that they do not use tomatoes in the dish, instead use Kashmiri chillies to create the red colour. Food can indicate cultural differences but it can also create relationships. Despite the differences, both sides are the same as revealed by Kip: "I stopped my bike… and thought about the kitchens on both sides of the border, the culinary similarities and differences, and I thought about rain, which was now falling, too, on both sides, making the lines fuzzier and fuzzier" (Singh 45). She reveals that there is a plan to kill the General and asks Kip to save him. Unable to believe her, the Indian authorities shave her hair off, humiliate her and the General impregnates her. Kip falls in love with her and is mistaken to be the person behind her pregnancy. Through food, Kip creates this special bond with her and thus the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, was fondly remembered by Kip through the love he develops towards Irem, which could not be returned. Throughout his life, he cherishes the memory of Irem, and Rogan Josh and also regrets as his life takes a different turn. He returns to his home town after every one suspects him of making her pregnant.

In brief, the present article offers interesting and intertwined vignettes of food, memory, history, politics and relationships as manifest in *Chef*.

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Historicity Wrapped in Fictionality: Exploring *The Call of the Citadel* by Vikram Singh and Parneet Jaggi

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Abstract

History as a factual narrative can never provide an accurate interpretation of human reality in its myriad forms. The fictional narratives take the stage to stir the silent spaces, fill the gaps and fissures in history with lively events and characters. The role of fictional narratives becomes more important when a specific phase of an ancient civilization and culture, as that of Indus Valley Civilization is known only through limited archeological sources without any written document or inscription to narrate its true story. Underscoring the significance of the historical novels in unfurling the mysteries of history, the present paper intends to explore the most recent historical novel based on Indus Valley civilization, *The Call of the Citadel* jointly authored by Vikram Singh Deol and Parneet Jaggi. Analyzing the compositional markers which suggest the temporal setting of this historical novel, the paper attempts to underscore how the historical consciousness has been injected into a fictional narrative with the creative imagination at play 'to instill life in the dry bones of history' with a convincing plot, true to life characters and above all the vibrant picturesque narration.

Keywords: Fictional Narratives, History, Historicity, Indus Valley Civilization.

Introduction: Exploring History through Fictional Narratives

And even I can remember
A day when the historians left blanks in their writings,
I mean for things they didn't know.
Ezra Pound, Draft of XXX Cantos ,1930

The official version of history as documented by the historians or the archaeologists often miss the circumstances that shape the morals and manners of the people, the circumstances that set the stage for transition of communities and several silent revolutions in the bygone days. History as a factual narrative can never provide an accurate interpretation of human reality in its myriad forms. The fictional narratives take the stage to stir the silent spaces, fill the gaps and fissures in history with lively events and characters. They provide the readers with an intense, visceral experience where they can truly identify themselves with the characters from disparate temporal and spatial locations. Emphasizing the historical significance of the fictional narratives, an eminent American postmodern philosopher Louis Mink has rightly observed, "The researches of historians, however arduous and technical, only increase the amount and precision of knowledge of facts which remain contingent and discontinuous it is by being assigned to stories that they become intelligible and increase understanding of going beyond 'what' and 'when' to 'how' and 'why' " (545-546).

The fictional narratives set in the backdrop of historical settings speak volumes about the lived experiences of people and make a successful attempt to add to the historical records about different ancient civilizations and time-turning events and revolutions as it can be observed in the long tradition of historical novel which began with Sir Walter Scott in English, Kishorilal Goswami and Devaki Nanadan Khatri in Hindi in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the opening decades of the twentieth century. If we have a closer look at the growth of historical novel in the Indian subcontinent, we find multitudinous references to the historical themes associated with the Mauryan Dynasty, of Mughal period in Indian history, of Indian freedom struggle and the holocaust of partition of India-Pakistan which add life to the factual historical documents about these historical events.

The Call of Citadel: Unfolding the Layers of History through Fiction

The role of fictional narratives becomes more important when a specific phase of an ancient civilization and culture is known only through limited archeological sources without any written document or inscription to narrate its true story. I am to talk about the hidden narratives of ancient Indus valley civilization or Harappa civilization, the earliest known urban culture of Indian subcontinent. In such cases, the fictional narratives provide help even to the archeologists and the historians for focused research to infer those sources and frame a convincing historical narrative. Underscoring the significance of the historical novels in unfurling the mysteries of history, the present paper intends to explore the most recent historical novel based on Indus Valley civilization, *The Call of the Citadel* jointly written by Vikram Singh Deol and Parneet Jaggi. The novel is acclaimed in academic circles for its convincing narration with a fine balance between rich creative imagination and available meagre historical evidences about the Indus Valley Civilization. Emphasizing "an eclectic blend of history and fiction" (Anand 2020)) in this historical novel, distinguished creative genius and critic Dr. Jernail Singh Anand observes: "The novel looks more like an English movie opening in an ancient city. What impresses most is the research that has gone into the writing, the accuracy of detail, and the economy of expression" (Anand 2020). Dr. Sanjeev Gandhi appraises this novel as "a path-breaking work of historical fiction attempting to decode the most clouded era of the history of the Indian subcontinent" and states, " Vikram and Parneet, endowed with a fecund imagination, try to recreate the past and instill life in the dry bones of history. They have swept back into the past flushing the stones of history with colour and brightness and tried to construct the past as warm, breathing, excitedly alive" (Gandhi 2020). Analyzing the compositional markers which suggest the temporal setting of this historical novel, the paper attempts to underscore how the historical consciousness has been injected into a fictional narrative with the creative imagination at play 'to instill life in the dry bones of history' with a convincing plot, true to life characters and above all the vibrant picturesque narration. Skillfully wrapping the historicity regarding Indus Valley Civilization in this fictional narrative, the authors have perfectly managed the game

"where to pull the reins of history and where to let loose the bird of imagination" (Deol and Jaggi 2020) as the novelists corroborate in an interview to *The Bookish Elf*.

The story opens with a murder mystery that is the result of an encounter between two distinct human races- differently equipped. The indigenous race at Mohan-toh- Daro is that of peace-loving people, skilled artisans, farmers, and tradesmen with their deep inclinations towards arts and culture whereas the other is a nomadic clan comprising the hunters and the cattle-rearers. These are the invaders on the lookout for suitable environment and lands for their settlement. A close analysis of the novel reveals that the novelists have dexterously woven the threads of the life at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, two important centres of Indus Valley civilization in the fictitious location of Mohan-toh-Daro and Haripriya through a lively set of characters-Kalika Das, leader of a social group, Peter Das, a wealthy tradesman and counsellor to the leader; Chatur Das, a spy; Sundari, a dancer; Devika, a fearless and confident female whose family members have been murdered by the unknown invaders, Bhooto Das, a security counsellor and Amirodas, a goldsmith and on the other side, Indro, the leader of the invaders and his fellowmen- Ageneous, Vareneous, Kareneous; Guru Vashistha and Vishvamitra, mentors and guides of the invaders. With an aim to "lift the veil of obscurity from the enigmatic phase of history", the authors have successfully added vibrant colors in the patterns of Indus Valley civilization through a gripping narrative about rituals, city planning, administration and security, trade and commerce as available through the archives and limited archeological sources.

In the historical narratives, the initial reference to the ruins of Indus Valley civilization is available in Charles Masson's travelogue, *Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, the Panjab, and Kalat* written in 1842. It was the discovery of several Harappan seals by John Faithfull Fleet in 1912 which prompted an excavation campaign from 1921-1922 by Sir John Marshall, Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, which resulted in the discovery of Harappa. By 1931, much of the excavation at Mohenjo-Daro site had been completed. Later Sir Mortimer Wheeler continued with excavations initiated by Sir John Marshall. The hidden pages of this ages-old grand narrative were brought into light for the first time with the excavation of two great cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro emerging around 2600 BC with a team of eminent Indian archeologists like RD Banerjee, NK Dikshit, DR Shahani, and many more who worked diligently in excavation projects. The archeologists recorded this narrative as a story of a well-planned urban civilization with its perfectly planned cities, drainage system, roads, baths, flourishing trade, skilled work of artisans in gold, copper, bronze, stone, and clay as reflected in at the archeological sites and figurines which were collected from those sites. The blank spaces in this narrative with its undeciphered script captured the eyes of the literary artists as a result of which the distinguished Hindi novelist Rangheya Raghava set his historical novel *Murdon ka Teela* in the backdrop of Indus Valley civilization in 1948. With the story of economic prosperity through Manibandh , an affluent tradesman from Mohenjo-Daro, his female slave Neelophor from Egypt and the episode of the Aryan attack at Keekat Pardesh near Mohenjo-

Daro is projected through Veni and the singer Vallbhibutar who escaped to Mohenjo-Daro. The narrative moves with the cruelty of Manibandh and consequent rebellion of the public and closes with massacre, earthquake and flood which has been the divine course for the inhabitants of Mohenjo-Daro.

No doubt, past has irresistibly fascinated the novelists and prompted them to weave their stories around the historical events. Indus valley civilization is no exception. In English, the first narration of Mohenjo-Daro appeared in 1968 in Mulk Raj Anand's children fiction *A Day in the Life of Maya of Mohenjo-Daro*, an account of how a little girl spent her day 4,000 years ago. In Urdu, Yaqoob Yawar wrote the novel *Dilmun* in1998, which revolves around a young woman who allegedly killed a man. In 2004, the first English novel set in Indus Valley Civilization, *Winter on the Plain of Ghosts*, written by Eileen Kernaghan presents a 'a tale of sorcery, religious conflict, political intrigue and ecological disaster in the lost cities of the Indus Valley'. In the same year, the distinguished Urdu novelist Mustansar Hussain Tarar wrote *Bahao (Flow)* as the recreation of Indus Valley civilization. This novel is about existential anxiety, survival, and human relationships. It is not just about the rise and fall of a civilization but also deals with climate change and its impact on human civilization. The mystery of Indus Valley civilization, with its undeciphered script fascinated many writers as a perfect setting for thrilling stories of murder, mysteries, and adventures. Amish Tripathi used this setting for his *Immortals of Meluha* (2010), *Secret of the Nagas* (2011), *Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013). As an engineer fascinated by the rigorous town planning and underground water drainage system, Vasant Dave projected the Indus Valley civilization in his Trade *Winds to Meluhha*. Later in 2013, Iravati placed reference to Indus Valley in her novel *Tri-shapath-ga*. In 2014, three novels appear with Indus valley as their setting *Bhator* and *Maati* by R. E. J. Burke and *Fire See* by Amy Raby in English. In 2016, Vineet Bajpeyi set his widely read *Harappa* Trilogy in the historical setting of Indus Valley. In 2016, Pakistani-British writer Maha Khan Phillips wrote an engrossing thriller, *The Curse of Mohenjo-Daro* providing a reason for the so far unexplained collapse of the apparently well-organised and thriving Indus Valley civilisation. Through the story of an archaeologist Layla, who vanishes during a mysterious explosion during excavations at the site and the parallel story has a girl, Jaya, chosen to be part of a clan serving the corrupt ruler of Mohenjo-Daro, the novel shows how the struggles of the past can continue well into the present.

In this tradition of historical novel on this ancient civilization, Vikram Singh and Parneet attempted "to manage loose facts of history with literary imagination in order to secure an unabbreviated effect of connecting the young generation to the lineage and forgotten culture of our civilization through the trajectory of a narrative"(Deol and Jaggi 2021,335). Indeed, the mesmerizing narrative successfully connects us with the glorious past of a little-known era. The ruins of Mohenjo-Daro recorded in the reports of the archaeological surveys as a well-planned city, a flourishing trade centre and agrarian economy, an abode of peace-loving, religious people who love art and culture, come to life before the readers as if they are alive today. In this novel, the unknown tales of history are presented through the lives of the fictional characters "who had learnt to harvest the stars"(114) as well through the

powerful picturesque narration:

> It was almost dark as they had reached the hillock from where they saw Mohan-toh-Daro for the first time, dressed as if in a sparkling bridal sari, emitting shades of orange and yellow against the black backdrop. Reaching the hill top, they gazed at Mohan-toh-Daro. It was a sight they had never seen. Street lights were burning as if stars of the sky had been ordered to fall into straight lines- two lines parallel and straight leading to the citadel. The citadel provided a fine culmination like a yellow flower glowing with effulgence. (113-114)

With the eye of an archaeologist, the sense of perception of a painter, the creative imagination of a poet, the novelists have woven a convincing tale around the available archeological sources and survey reports and their own research-driven visits to Kalibangan in Rajasthan. Without any deciphered text, the sculptures, seals, pottery, gold jewellery and anatomically detailed figurines in terracotta, bronze, and steatite found at Indus Valley excavation sites are some of the most reliable sources of information. With the intensive research and poetic perception of the novelists, some figurines come to life and move on across the mind's screen. The fragmentary steatite sculpture of a neatly bearded man which was interpreted by the archaeologists as priest or the priest-king appears as Kalika Das, the chief of the people of Mohan-toh-Daro, "a heavy-set man with a trimmed beard and an assured countenance" (16). When the invaders led by Indro whom the people of Mohan-toh-Daro initially mistook for gods arrive at the gates of the citadel and the inhabitants of the city are gathered in the citadel worried about their survival, Peter Das and others want to leave the city, the priest-king of the museum comes to life with form faith in divinity in Kalika Das with his prayer meetings at the great Bath in the citadel and his firm belief, "… we shall seek path from the gods" (129). It is this priest-king only who ultimately clears the confusion about the invaders, "They are not gods...They are ordinary men with different features…The gods talked to me about them…They are merely nomads, gods have told me so" (151). One can observe the faith in divinity and the power of religious rituals in the prayers of different characters to Pasupati Mahadev and Mother goddess. References to Pashupati Mahadev incorporated in the story add to the iconography of the seal depicting a seated figure of a Yogi-*Pashupati* surrounded by four animals, which was found during an excavation at Mohenjo-Daro.There is one more figurine in bronze, of a dancing girl and shows a female figure in a pose that suggests the presence of some choreographed dance form enjoyed by members of the civilization. The archaeologists attempted to weave a historical narrative of a confident woman around this figurine. The archeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler described the item as his favourite statuette which presents a girl perfectly, for the moment, perfectly confident of herself and the world. Gregory Possehl too approved of the description about this 'dancing girl' by stating that, "We may not be certain that she was a dancer, but she was good at what she did and she knew it" (Possehl 114).The novelists have deftly instilled life into this tiny figurine of the dancing girl of only 11 centimetres in height in the character of Sundari, a dancer. When Indro and his men approach Mohen-toh-Daro, Sundari confidently and

prudently suggests Kalika Das that "we are strategically not very well placed." Kalika Das is surprised having heard this from a dancer. She warns him, "But what if the invaders break through the gate after killing our men?...These walls will become our tombs. We have nowhere to go. We become prisoners in our own town. We will be massacred" (131).The perspective of Kalika Das has been reversed by a dancer's observations (131). Through this episode, the novel brings into light the respectable status of women in Indus Valley Civilization. The same is portrayed through Devika, "the fearless tigress was beyond doubts, a female who commanded respect since her birth, one who taught the children of the city the basic trade of survival. Without its fearless females, the city of Mohan-toh-Daro would have perished" (22). She takes revenge of the murder of her father and brother by bravely aiming her spear at Kareneous, Indro's fellowman and his clan.

Through the encounter of two distinct clans, the clash of two ideologies regarding peace and war is also convincingly presented through the story of 'the revolutionary metal' that is, 'Aranyank' which is revealed through an arrowhead which the natives Chatur Das and Raghu collect from the invaders' camp. The people of Mohan-toh-Daro like Chatur Das and Peter Das are aware that 'this metal could change our destinies'; but the peace-loving, skillful artisans and traders, the natives feel that the invaders are wasting their fine craftmanship over 'Aranyank'. "They should have a fine industry running, they could have bought a thousand cows till now and have all the goodies in the world as a bonus" (70). But "...fighting was in their blood. …Their swords were heavy with blood, blood that had seeped into the soil for the coming generations to grow crops" (86). Ultimately, the natives realize that they are different as Peter Das tells Devika, "…their technology is apt in their life style whereas as our technology is apt for our life style. We are different" (95).

With a focus on the fictional narrative of the encounter of two races and defeat of one in a historical setting, the novelists have not lost the threads of historicity regarding the diverse theories about the decline of Indus Valley civilization. The archeologists Wheeler, Raikes, and Dales worked on several theories such as Aryan invasion, flooding, stagnation of water, changes in river courses, climatic changes, etc. In this fictional narrative, almost all these possible causes of decline are addressed through changes in the life -style as well the psyche of the characters with the spotlight on the invasion as the cause of decline of the Mohan-toh-Daro. There is a reference to Vedic literature about the Aryans capturing the 'walled citadels': "Indro came to be known as the "Purandhar", the destroyer of a walled settlement" (117).

Delving deep into the story line, one cannot avoid the role of rain and river in the rise and fall of the city. Peter Das while leaving the city with Indro's attacks, repeatedly refers to the receding level of the river. "Above all…out livelihood is dependent on river for both trade and food. And if I am correct, the river is not behaving the way it has always" (95).He further explains to Bhooto Das, "I am not good at arms, and even if we survive, it will be worthless to me. The river does not support me anymore."   Even as "…extensive hydrological studies have established that the river Indus and Sarasvati changed their courses several times… this calamity

must have brought out large scale changes or disruption in the internal trade routes connecting the hinterland with the coast" (Dikshit 132). In the presentation of this convincing tale of rise and fall of a civilization, like rain and river, 'the citadel' also records its presence as an active agent in the progression of the narrative. As the noted poet and critic Gopal Lahiri acknowledges "Digging deep inside the past events", the novelists give voice to the elapsed lives from history's shadows" (Lahiri 2020) through the call of a historic citadel which is portrayed as living presence in this fictional narrative, "…just above the gate was a majestic building. It was a citadel standing erect like a king on a hillock…It emanated the glory of a living entity, holding something in its embrace. In some mysterious sense, it was enchanting, seemingly pulling unknown energies towards it" (112). The living presence of the citadel as a witness of the rise and fall of a civilization in the story and the images of the excavation site at Kalibangan , the weapons and the figurines found in the museum create an ambience of a visit to an archeological museum where the stones statues and tiny seals and the arrowheads speak. The novel looks like a magical museum. The way Vikram Singh and Parneet have approached history and treated it in their fictional world justifies the role of a historical novelist as "the restorer of a damaged tapestry who weaves in whole scenes or figures to fill the empty places which a more austere museum curator might leave bare" (Fleischman 6-7).

Conclusion

William Henry Hudson in *An Introduction to the Study of Literature* suggests that the historical novelist is to do more than the historian because he has to bring creative imagination to bear upon the dry facts of the annalist and the antiquarian and …to evoke a picture having the fullness and unity of a work of art" since he has "to satisfy at once the claims of history and the claims of art" (159-161). In continuation with this quote by Hudson, I would like to conclude that *The Call of the Citadel* is the product of a blend of a historian mind and a creative poetic mind, that transcends the theoretical framework of revisiting history through words to create a graphic and pictorial trajectory of images that connects us to our ancient culture, our lineage and in a way to our own selves. Vikram Singh as a stern historian and Parneet as an established English poet construct a balanced framework of long-forgotten manners, customs, and stories of ancient Indian civilization. It captures the way history has shaped itself through the world of Mohan-toh-Daro that emerges as the protagonist of the novel.

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Cultural Silence on Menstruation: Texts and Contexts

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Abstract

Literary narratives on menstrual discourse is rare in the context of Indian literature. Contemporary writings choose to study the female body from the context of patriarchy, gender binaries and hierarchies with limited focus on the subject of menstruation and its treatment in literary discourses. Although rare, few contemporary Indian writers have given some space to concepts of menarche and menstruation. This article attempts to examine a few literary texts – Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters*, Indira Goswami's *The Moth-eaten Howdah of Tusker,* Kamala Das, *My Story*, A.K Ramanujan's short story *Annayya's Anthropology*, C.S. Laxmi's (Ambai) short story, *My Mother, Her Crime* and *Tattooed with Taboos: An Anthology of Poetry by Three Women Poets from Northeast India*, comprising seventy-seven poems by Chaoba Phuritshabam, Shreema Ningombam and Soibam Haripriya that articulate notions pertaining to women's bodies, menstruation and related issues. In a cultural context where motherhood/womanhood is hailed and celebrated, menstruation becomes a taboo subject; often relegated to subject of shame, stigma and silence. Drawing inferences from literary theorists, the article explores established and emerging literary voices that dismantle menstrual myth and related body politics. This exploratory study establishes that the foregoing texts dismantle menstrual stigmas and negotiate for a reconstruction of a cultural rhetoric that willingly embraces women's bodies and sexualities.

Keywords: menstruation, sexuality, body, culture, silence.

Menstruation is a natural phenomenon; a biological system in women related to fertility and reproduction. In medical terms, it is the monthly expulsion of the inner lining of the uterus if fertilization has not occurred in the female body. However, this biological phenomenon has received many socio-cultural and religious connotations across societies. Several societies consider the menstrual blood as 'impure' and 'unclean' and taboo. The Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament considers menstruating women as physically and spiritually 'unclean' and contagious (Newton 2016, 19). Women's bodies and menstrual blood also became synonymous with "shame, difference, castration, filth, reproductive power, disease, and death to the Other" (Miller 2005, 289). Even though certain myths ceased to appear, the ideas associated with menstruation as "unfortunate, unpleasant and distasteful subject to address" (Strange 2000, 609) continued. Lee (1994, 346) notes that the myth surrounding menstrual blood as impure and unholy compels women to avoid contaminating others. Menstrual myths are taboo subjects that largely affect the society, especially the minds of women who tend to internalize such concepts. Such an ideology is deeply rooted in the Indian psyche as well. Although the onset of

menstruation hails fertility and attainment of motherhood and is a celebrative moment in most societies in India, the discourses on/about menstruation are usually shrouded in taboos and concealment. Shame, guilt, isolation, embarrassment, silence and secrecy relegate it to a social taboo. Such an implication brings a lack of knowledge and understanding about puberty, menstruation, reproductive health and hygiene. Menstruation is considered a narrative to be held in silence and secrecy. Indian socio-cultural framework is rooted in such conventional orthodox approach, hence the limited number of literary texts that focus on this subject. However, the tidings of change are manifest in recent Indian films like *Padman* (2018) and emerging new works of literature explore taboo subjects, thus raising concerns over women's bodies and sexualities. Within the feminist writings, literary representation of menstruation is widespread. Literature directly reflects a cultural tendency, and therefore becomes a powerful platform to unearth and re-examine the otherwise misrepresented or neglected topics. Menstruation is one such area that requires adequate critical attention. Therefore, this article examines literary texts that articulate about 'leaking bodies' and speak for the 'unspeakable' topics.

Until recently, the discourse on menstruation has been deliberately avoided and universally recognized as a taboo shrouded in mystery and silence in most of the cultures. Most communities in Indian society associate the menstrual blood with ritual impurity and are largely perceived with negative meanings. The onset of menstruation among adolescent girls brings a set of rules, restrictions, isolation and expected behaviour in society. Religious texts, such as Manusmriti, put forth strict laws on menstruating women. According to this text, menstruation is treated as a 'communicable disease,' and the menstrual blood 'impure,' making women 'untouchable.' For Manu, the lawgiver, "one of the three kinds of bodily functions that bring impurity; the first one is menstruation" (Manu, 10:39). Manusmriti, the revered and fundamental Hindu text, provides laws that hold patriarchal ideals which are largely discriminatory. For example, Manusmriti equates menstruating women to animals, and such women must not look at Brahmans when they eat. These ideologies rooted in religious scripture provide the foundation for patriarchy and caste supremacy practiced unquestionably in present times too.

Hindu philosophy in general, observes menstruation as unclean, embarrassing and something that needs to be hidden from purview. Media and advertising agencies such as advertisements on sanitary napkins popularize how the monthly expulsion can be saved from public view and can be hidden. These discourses reveal that the biological cycle gets shunned away from public, kept in silence and not to be discussed from a liberal scientific approach. Scientifically, menstruation is ovulation that occurs when pregnancy fails, resulting in bleeding from the endometrial vessels and is followed by the preparation of the body for the next cycle. That menstruation is a natural process of monthly expulsion of blood from the uterus is overlooked. A rational understanding of the subject provides no substantial reason why women need to be considered 'polluting bodies' and the secrecy that it hails. In actuality, women are endowed with the power of procreation

and menstruation as a biological phenomenon, enables this. This scientific rationale is superseded by myth, shame, dirt, impurity and silence. Although certain stratas of Indian society celebrate the attainment of puberty as a symbol of fertility, vitality and motherhood, the idea of secrecy still prevails. This is because menstruation is associated with a range of constructed meanings. Jyoti Puri observes:

> In contemporary India, menarche and menstruation signify the emergent gender and sexual status of the hitherto presexual and prepubertal girl…so thorough is the perception of menstruation shaped by cultural knowledges and practices that it is impossible to argue menstruation is a "natural" event…where menstruation is presented as a personalized and individualized domain of experience, it calls for a healthy dose of feminist scepticism (1999, 44).

Menstruation denotes fertility and positivity but culturally, it has acquired many negative meanings. Menstruation as a subject finds ample space in medical and biological discourses but not in literature. Some texts give passing reference to the menstrual period and related nuances because of its inherent female characters and the realistic depiction that the text demands; a few literary pieces dwell deep on the subject and to make it a central theme. However, some literary works have drawn attention to the various experiences of menarche, associated with pain and celebration, cultural constructs in a patriarchal threshold, stigma and rituals. In Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru feels agony and shame at her menstrual isolation. Her experiences relate to the feeling of 'being a pariah', untouched due to the fear of 'pollution' and engulfed with a 'kind of shame'. Societal practices of isolation bring fear, shame and concealment. Women need to confront them along with their menstrual pain and suffering. However, although women undergo pain and suffering and undergo stringent norms to avoid 'contamination', they enjoy some privacy and rest in an otherwise overloaded work schedule. The following excerpt from Bapsi Sidhwa's 1978 novel, *The Crow Eaters*, justifies this. Putli in Bapsi Sidhwa's 1978 novel, *The Crow Eaters*, enjoys her menstrual days. Unlike Saru in *The Dark Holds no Terrors*, she feels the seclusion as "the only chance to rest' and as 'this seclusion was religiously enforced; she could enjoy her idleness without guilt" (48). Within these moments of freedom, Putli is aware of the condition that demands isolation and refraining from touching anything due to the nature of her 'polluting body.' Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb's *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (1988), an anthropological and cross-cultural study of menstruation, analyses the concepts of taboo and pollution and reinforces that menstruation in some cultures, in fact, gave autonomy. In the Indian context, though women seem to enjoy some amount of rest and freedom, the socio-cultural and religious implications put a strain on the psyche. Constructed myths and ideologies are dispersed through generations, forcing women to act, perform and pass on the tradition. The very stereotypical notions of women's bodies and gender performance are ways of construction that get performed repeatedly so that it appears natural. This sense of naturalization and internalization of myths and repetition of acts, as Butler

points out, "is [...] by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions" (Butler, 1993, 10). It is through repeated performance of stereotypical outlooks that gets internalized. The constructions on/about menstruation mediate gender performances in a natural way that gets normalized. According to Butler,

> …gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. [...] This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of decidedly public and social discourse. (1999 [1990], 136)

In this case, these repetitive acts of performance, the rigid codes pertaining to menstruation and its prevailing silence regulate and control women. As discussed earlier, religious texts play a pivotal role in disseminating cultural constructs and associated meanings, allowing people to follow unquestionably. This reminds one of A.K Ramanujan's short story *Annayya's Anthropology*, a social satire that beautifully critiques blind faith in the name of tradition and religious regime. The reason why this short story comes into this discussion is that the story points to how we succumb to traditional practices without understanding the more profound meaning or rationale behind it. The story highlights Manusmriti's views on impure bodily fluids, one among them being menstruation blood. The argument here is, therefore, as pointed out by A.K. Ramanujam, that a closer analysis of religious practices draws different perspectives and rationales. Religious and social practices dictate women's menstruating bodies as 'pollutants' and 'impure' and therefore, construct it as a narrative of silence and concealment.

Menstruation marks the possibility of pregnancy and motherhood, a matter of joy and celebration. However, as in many cultures, Indian women face socio-cultural pressures to be reproductive and attain motherhood. In a country with high expectations on women to procreate and attain motherhood, the biological system of menstruation and the nature of women's bodies becomes taboo and hence silenced. If a woman cannot reproduce, she is shamed and taunted. If such is the case, how does menstruation become a 'polluting' affair causing stigma and shame? This is a paradox.

For Julia Kristeva, it is because of menstruation that women are considered polluting bodies and these ideologies are used to regulate and sustain hierarchies and privileges (1982, 77). Stigma and silence shroud menstruation and menstruating women. Talking about menstrual stigma and silence, Joan C. Chrisler states, "'[m]enstruation is typically avoided in conversation [...] except under certain circumstances (e.g. in private with female friends and relatives, in a health education or biology class, in a doctor's office)' (2013, 12). This informs how cultural anxiety of shame, embarrassment, silence/concealment is built. Concealment brings in a lack of appropriate knowledge and fear. In *The Second Sex,* Simone de Beauvoir (354) observes that menstruation can "inspire horror in the adolescent girl because they throw her into an inferior defective category. This sense of being declassed will weigh

heavily upon her." In her autobiographical work, *My Story*, Kamala Das (2009) discusses her first period in the Chapter titled Mahabharata, confronting menarche with fear and anxiety, as she presumed to be sick. Many young girls do not know the nature of a woman's monthly bleeding until puberty sets in and creates trauma. Das narrates her experiences thus: "I am ill, I am dying,' I cried to my mother. 'Something has broken inside me and I am bleeding.' My mother lifted my dress and said with a laugh, 'It is nothing to be worried about, it is what all girls get at twelve or thirteen…'She asked me to change my dress and taught me to wear sanitary pads. She told me that the blood only showed that I was ready to be a mother" (Das 2009, 59). This lack of knowledge and understanding of menstruation coupled with fear and anxiety has passing reference in many texts. The chapter gets such as title so as to draw inference to Draupadi's menstruating state at the time when she was humiliated by Kauravas and dragged out of the court assembly.

Deep-rooted cultural anxieties of menstruating women get remarkably discussed in C.S. Laxmi's (Ambai) short story *My Mother, Her Crime*. This piece of work by Ambai is narrated through the eyes of a girl child, Nirajatchi. When menarche occurs, Nirajatchi is terrified to know its bleeding body. Although the narrator keeps reassuring herself that 'nothing has happened', the kind of treatment she receives makes her feel 'different.' Fear, anxiety and helplessness engulf her. She states: "I feel as if something has ended forever. As if I have left something behind, in the way one leaves the cinema after the show "The End" on the screen" (Ambai 71). At this juncture, it is pertinent to point out what Australian philosopher and feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz illustrates:

> For the girl, menstruation, associated as it is with blood, with injury and wound, with a mess that does not dry invisibly, that leaks uncontrollably, not in sleep, in dreams, but whenever it occurs, indicates the beginning of an out of control status that she was led to believe ends with childhood (Grosz, 205).

Though Nirajatchi has questioned her mother about puberty, she was never answered. She had asked her once, "Amma, what does 'puberty' mean?" (Ambai 67). This received only "Silence. A long silence" (Ambai 67). The young girl poses questions about her body which remain unanswered. The story surfaces women's experiences in a cultural context where the female body is subject to stigma and shame. Through its narrative, the text negotiates for a better understanding of the female body and its related nuances. Ambai's story clearly indicates a clarion call for a humane and non-stigmatizing approach to menstruation. The text decentres the notion of silence by bringing the very subject to the centre of discussion. Ambai voices that young girls should be educated about their bodies rather than passing a cultural tradition of silence and shame.

Talking about women's bodies, sexuality and gender, Jyoti Puri states that Indian literature has neglected the very nature of the female body, womanhood and lived experience (Puri 1999, 44). Of late, things have changed. Rather than making a passing reference, emerging works of literature challenge and question the stigma and taboos associated with women's bodies, enabling women to gain agency in the

dominant patriarchal hegemony. Recent works suggest subversive connotations and an understanding of tabooed subjects. One such work is *Tattooed with Taboos: An Anthology of Poetry by Three Women Poets from Northeast India*, published in 2015, a collection of seventy-seven poems by Chaoba Phuritshabam, Shreema Ningombam and Soibam Haripriya, hailing from Manipur, India's north-eastern state. In their anthology, these poets write about their bodies, sexuality and desires to challenge the existing norms in "subversive ways" and not to accept their bodies in "subservient ways" (Sabala and Gopal 2010, 43). Resistance to myriad ways of silencing women as a strategy to control marks the hallmark of the anthology. Their articulations transgress the conventional practices and moral codes imposed on women folk, particularly in Manipur. The poem "To the Ema Lairembi", by Shrrema Nigombam lays bare the cultural norms imposed on menstruating women. The poet voices her concern for not being allowed to religious ceremonies and offers flowers to the Goddesses because of her menstruating status and 'impure body'. Again, Soibam Haripriya's Five Days' Untouchable questions vehemently the nature of menstruation in a tabooed society:

> *Is this blood of life*
> *Merely to mark me impure*
> *For Genesis says*
> *I am not a creator, but created,*
> *Created from a man?*   *(FDU, 18)*

Referring to the biblical context, the poem underlines the constructed myth relating to menstrual blood. The cultural imposition of menstruating bodies as 'impure' and, therefore 'untouchable' is noted with anguish.

> *For five days*
> *Quarantined from the rest*
> *By this unholy fluid*
> *Wrapped with untouchable phanek*
> *Phanek after Phanek*
> *Carrying my untouchable-ness*
> *Accursed piece of cloth*
> *Contaminated for a lifetime.*   (*FDU, 18*)

The experience of menarche and its related experience is narrated by Haripriya in I Died A Little:

> *I died a little*
> *Killed by impure little droplets*
> *Though there were celebrations*
> *The stained cloth*
> *Became my cloth*
> *For reasons I knew not.*   *(IDL, 22)*

Talking about "leaking bodies," these poems not only narrate their experiences but, through their poetic rendition, dismantle the "continuous concealment" of the tabooed subjects and articulate the silenced topics. The poems resist patriarchal hegemony and

question the existing tabooed subjects steeped in silence. The narratives indicate the strategies of subjugation under patriarchal ideals and are an alternative way of writing about one's body.

As Butler (1988) rightly points out, gendered performative acts are constructed and repeated to gain an illusion of normalcy and naturalization. Male writers like R.K. Narayan, in his novel, *Kocharethi*, also highlight the ritual grandeur and celebration that surrounds the attainment of puberty in the Araya community of southern India. Menarche, as in this case and in many communities, is a matter of joy and celebration. However, things are spoken in 'low voices' and not discussed in the open, although all customaries speak the unspeakable. This cultural silence is brought to the forefront by the notable Assamese writer Indira Goswami too, in the novel, The Moth-eaten Howdah of Tuska. The narrative shows how the characters maintain secrecy on Eliman's menarche and how the subject is treated with shame and secrecy. Through this fiction, Goswami critiques the very notion of religious ceremony at the onset of menarche, paradoxically rooted in secrecy and shame against a community that worships the menstruating Goddess Kamakhya.

Conclusion

Literary references point out that menstruation is constructed as a taboo subject, learnt and passed through socio-cultural practices. Cultural silence on menstruation still prevails, and very little is discussed with rationale. Not enough literary space is given to these topics. However, the texts discussed here foreground liberal perspectives and allow us to mediate cultural overtones of menstruation, steeped much in stigma and silence. Though small in number, contemporary literary works have demonstrated a counter-narrative to the otherwise silenced and tabooed subject. By foregrounding women's bodies and bodily fluids through lived experiences, these 'menstrual texts' decentre menstrual myths and speak for/about menstruation.

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Kashmiri Postmodern English Poetry:
A Feminist-Intertextual Reading of the Select Poems of Asiya Zahoor

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Abstract

The present paper aims to explore the feminist streak in the select poems of Asiya Zahoor taken from her poetic anthology *Serpents Under My Veil* (2019) in the light of postmodern theory of Intertextuality which can be defined as a collection of relationships that a text has with other texts and/or discourses from different cultural and literary domains (represented by symbols, images, and phrases). The technique has long been employed by authors to introduce allusions to other literary creations that may aid in increasing the impression that their texts intend to have on the reader. This paper blends Intertextuality and Feminisms to focus primarily on the poet's use of numerous elements and symbols in her poems drawn from various cultures and texts to highlight women's rage over their tragic past and the experiences that they continue to have even now. There's an enraged Medusa clad in *Burkha* warning and daring her gazers, a *Zulekha*, derived from Quranic and Bilblical sources, demanding her dreams to be interpreted as she desires, and not from a male perspective, and a Phelomela in *Hawa Mahal* singing of her plight and collective woe of women and a fierce *Kali* sewing the tongues together and getting them ready so that they can speak up for themselves, and their rights in order to fight the atrocities meted out and injustices done to them.
Keywords: Postmodernism, Feminisms, Kashmir, Kashmiri, Literature, Poetry, Intertextuality

Serpents Under My Veil is the latest poetic anthology by Asiya Zahoor that came out in the year 2019. Asiya Zahoor is a contemporary Kashmiri poet, a linguist, a filmmaker and an academic who writes on diverse issues ranging from politics to the psychology of language acquisition, and the position of women and marginalized groups in literature. *The Stitch*, a 2018 short silent film by Zahoor, is about a Kashmiri Muslim girl who, like Zahoor herself, struggles hard to break societal conventions in the face of the challenges she encounters while immersing into art for solace. The film also won the critics award for Best Short Film at the South Asian Film Festival and has been screened at various prestigious festivals across the globe.

A collection of about 22 poems, *Serpent Under My Veil* (2019), is solely a feminist work that emphasizes the fate of women and the agonizing stories of love and loss. The poet cherry-picks various threads from Greek and Roman myths and characters, Quranic and Biblical tales, the epic material from Hindu texts, and various historical facts and matter and uses them to her heart's content. As a whole, the book travels through various geographically diverse regions and sheds light on the condition of women in general, and Kashmiri women and the scenario that they dwell in, in particular.

Out of these 22 poems, the poems that have been chosen for a more in-depth examination and analysis include "Medusa in a Burkha" which is the introductory poem of the collection and voices the title of the book as well, the other two being "Zulekha Reads Freud to Yusuf" and "Hawa Mahal."

The underpinning approach of this paper is literary theory of Feminism/s and Intertextuality and the selected poems have been analyzed using the blend of these two theoretical frameworks that collectively can be referred to as Feminist-Intertexuality, for in the poems, one finds a feminine identity, a female persona as well as a plethora of allusions and references drawn from various historical and theological works. The term "intertextuality" was coined by Julia Kristeva (1941-) in her essays "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (1980) and then in "The Bounded Text" (1966-67). The idea of intertextuality which she pioneered, offers a text to be seen as a dynamic space consisting interlinking and relational characteristics, rather than merely a static structure (Alfaro 268). The term originally used by Kristeva, finds its origins in 20th-century linguistics, particularly in the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), which she partly derived from Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), from his concept of "heteroglossia" and "dialogisim" and echoes of the same can be heard in Roland Barthes (1915 - 1980) when he calls the text "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" (Barthes 146) and Gérard Genette (1930-2018) who uses the word, "transtextuality" to denote the same term/device in his book, *The Architext: An Introduction* (1992) when he says that transtextuality includes all facets and elements of a specific text and everything that sets the text in a relationship, whether it is explicit or implicit, with other texts (83,84). The literary word, Kristeva writes in "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" (1980), is "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings" (65). Besides, the selected poems centre round women, their bodies and sexuality and can be studied by taking the Feminism/s into consideration. Feminism is known to be a political movement and a theoretical stance that uses gender as a lens through which cultural practices can be examined and it also acts as a platform from which women can raise their voice and demand justice, and equal rights. All in all, feminist literary theory connects how women are portrayed in art to the actual, material circumstances of their lives (Nayar 83).

The prime motif of the collection is to showcase the struggle faced by women since eternity, their quest for independence, and their desire to be free to be able to think, talk, and act as they choose before patriarchal prophets hammer their heads, stifle their voice, and silence it and "the chinar, Dal lake, almond, and plane trees, and angry young boys turning "stone into gods" being other identifiable motifs (Shetty, par. 01). Her poems focus attention on the lives of women; for instance, the future daughters of Kashmir are left with all that is unresolved and unfinished in the vale of Kashmir, age is just an ornament to be worn, singing is a way of life and a cure for war, and a visitor to the Hawa Mahal must stop by each of the 999 windows to hear the stories of the women who lived there before they depart. The collection's violent

history is woven throughout as the poems consider what it means to live in a world damaged by both historical and contemporary violence. These poetic threads show how a life can contain happiness, jubilation, revolution and rebellion, and survival and endurance all at once (Bahuguna, 2019). Besides, the entire collection can be said to be the reminiscent of Ovid (43 BC-17/18 AD), Milton (1608-1674), Eliot (1888-1965), and Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001) among others as the reader traverses through the pages of this poetry collection.

The women presented in her poems are all set to seek revenge and "Medusa in a Burkha" is one such example of this outrage:

> *I run with hem clenched between my teeth…*
> *I sail on winged sandals across a sky*
> *munching neo-liberalism from a packet of chips (Zahoor 17).*

These verses being that of the opening poem of the poetry collection, "Medusa in a Burkha" as already pointed out by the poet, is a shout out to Burkha Blues, an all-female indie rock group, that has been performing in Afghanistan since 2002 (Zahoor 65) while remaining incognito and donning a burkha. It is a satire on both the Taliban-inspired dress code and the western perception of what Muslims are like. The Taliban have historically subjected women in Afghanistan to a barrage of violence and human rights violations and according to a recent report by Amnesty International published in Washington Post, since they came to power, the extent, volume, and severity of these abuses have been growing month by month (Tksui, 2022).

"Medusa in a Burkha" provides a radical reinterpretation of the Greek mythical Medusa as deadly and since she is a woman and a member of a minority religious group that is frequently the target of prejudice and suspicion, the burkha-clad Medusa poses a double threat (Bahuguna, par. 03). She now cares the least about the morally bankrupt society because she has had enough of her toxic environment of abuse and insult. She becomes extremely agitated, escapes the constricting cage of long-standing false tradition and dominance, and assumes the shape of Medusa, warning others nearby not to gaze at her for she would turn them all into stone as has been depicted in the following lines:

> *You stamp my Burkha…*
> *but dare not look into my eyes*
> *for I will turn you into a stone (Zahoor 17).*

Zahoor appears to have mastered the technique of Genette's technique of transtextuality as she flutters into the court of Yusuf, the King of Dreams and listens to Zulekha as "Zulekha Reads Freud to Yusuf" and begins to speak for herself and express her love her beloved Yusuf (Joseph). In this retelling, Zulekha rejects the condition of being old in the hereafter just to be with her beloved Yusuf, where everybody else would be young. She challenges the deal put forward by archangel Gabriel, and how men see her love and make judgments about her. She informs him indignantly that sexless spirits and men cannot understand what goes on in a woman's heart and mind:

> *'I reject the bargain.'*

Zulekha says, combing
her dark, unruly hair,
holding the moon for a mirror.
'It's a pity,' she says. 'sexless
angels don't know how a woman
falls in love…. (Zahoor 24)

Zulekha, in all her elements, reminds Yusuf of how she fought for him and lived through all unhappy droughts of lovelessness and bore stones and insults of everyone surrounding her in the callous society dominated by the views and an age old rule of men:

I fought drought, hunger, poverty.
Gave all away-
my jewels, royal robes, and my sight
to the rougish boys
who teased me with false rumours of
your arrival. (Zahoor 25)

Asiya reminds us of wandering Echo, 'a woman of few words, who fell in love with Narcisssus' (Zahoor 24) and hence alludes to the very popular Roman myth of Narcissus and Echo from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (8 AD). Moreover, this Zulekha, unlike the one that appears in the religious texts, 'holds up Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), flings it at Yusuf' and asks him 'can a man interpret a woman's dream?' (Zahoor 25, 26) and makes a point that a man can never resolve the maze that a woman travels through and hence can neither interpret her dreams nor would he be able workout the feminine aspect of the divinity that connects and binds the earth together. She appears to call to our attention the fact that a woman is repeatedly judged and misinterpreted by the males of the society and is forced to accept the norms laid by them. Perhaps no woman has been misinterpreted as widely throughout history as Zulekha, the seductive wife of Aziz (Potiphar) in the Yusuf story mentioned in the Quran as well as in the Bible. Till date she is considered the one who made an attempt to entice Joseph into a life of lust and infidelity and the one who, after Yusuf rejected her, accused him of rape, leading to his imprisonment for years.

Even though conventional Muslims view/ed Zulekha as being wicked, the Sufis have a very different opinion of her. Zulekha merely symbolised a person who was entirely and madly in love with the Sufi saint (in the shape of Yusuf). Today, a few people in the west are aware of this long-standing disagreement between the exoteric (*zahiri*) and esoteric (*batini*) interpretations of the Quran. The modernist, reformist cultural elite of Muslim nations is also unfamiliar with this hermeneutical heritage and it has consistently been she who has received the brunt of the criticism and condemnation from conservative and male dominated religious world (Shafak, 2005), who not realizing her love and affection for the King of Dreams has represented her as the symbol of feminine evil and wickedness as is the case with *Bibi Hawa*, the Biblical Eve.

Zahoor is somewhat experimental and hence has tried her hand at visual

poetry and has compiled a graphic/visual poem titled "Hawa Mahal" in the collection that is shaped like the Hawa Mahal (Shetty, par. 04), a palace that was designed by Ustaad Lalchand in the shape of Lord Krishna's crown with countless windows that are as many as 999 at the behest of Maharaja Sawai Pratap (1764-1803) as an extension to the Royal City Palace of Jaipur. The titular Hawa Mahal, can also be loosely translated as the "Palace of Biblical Eve" or the "Palace of Quranic Hawa", or simply "the Palace of the Women" as the palace was meant for royal ladies to allow them to get the glimpse of the procession without being seen as during the era they observed *purdah* (veil). In the poem, we find Asiya sitting alone on the sill of all 999 windows, where 'sheets made of snow on beds of burning sand' of Jaipur cannot hold the secrets of the past obtaining in all times, lands, and climes (Shauq, 08).

The poet exploiting the device of apostrophe, discusses the predicament and horrific state of the women and discovers queens of the mahal in the guise of windows begin the account of their suffering and victimization:

> *Eyes turned into tongues at once, wailing hair down,*
> *voices poured from windows to wall.*
> *As bees waggle from hives, like soggy pages tongues were torn*
> *but stories could still be read… (Zahoor 52).*

In the lines of "Hawa Mahal" we meet Eve of the *Genesis* who is a representative of women-folk and is 'blamed for the sins of man and the serpent too' and who is perceived as a 'witch by the ones who see God's image in man' (Zahoor 53). We encounter goddess Sita of the *Ramayana* who 'was thrown into testing fire' (Zahoor 53) and had to undergo *Agni Pariksha* (trial by fire/fire ordeal) in order to prove her chastity before she is accepted by the Lord Rama and Draupadi of the greatest epic of the *Mahabharta* who was "bet in the game of dice by the wisest of the men" (Zahoor 53) who are none else than her spouses, the five Pandava brothers who sold her to Kaurvas after losing the bet and was dragged by her hair to the royal court before the great assembly of people and was disrobed in front of the royal assembly. With her eyes begging for assistance, Draupadi turned to everyone present in the court, but none of them came forward to save her and the mute spectators were stunned along with husbands who sat with their heads lowered.

Asiya speaks on behalf of all women and paints grim and bleak images of women of the world whose bodies are treated nothing more or less than a battle ground by the ones who are all flesh. Women have endured innumerable silent wars and invisible battles in the clampdowns and have survived feticides, acid attacks, burns, mutilations, and virginity tests:

> *Scars by acid do I wear on my squashy little face,*
> *a million times at hundred places, I was sold,*
> *And yet to none I told, of the pain of burns,*
> *of mutilations, of ironed breasts and of virginity tests (Zahoor 53).*

Towards the end of the poem, "Playing Phelomela in Kashmir" there is a glimpse of the future that depicts justice being served as we are introduced to a fierce and ferocious Kali who has undergone rehabilitation and is preparing to avenge the

demons by weaving chopped-off bloody tongues into a necklace on the sewing machine as she keeps an eye on the time:

> *A tongue-less, rehabilitated Kali, stitching a hundred*
> *bleeding tongues into a necklace on an Usha sewing*
> *machine, looking at the stuttering clock that burps*
> *out staccato tick-tock. (Zahoor 59)*

The above quoted lines make it plain and obvious that it is goddess Kali, in all her savior mode, who will now be able to serve justice, deliver it, and bring joy to the world that will last for good.

 ""I am a torn-off page/from one of my burnt books," says Zahoor (64), but this book exists, for us to read and hear her voice through" (Kabir 90) and Zahoor's use of allusion, mythical personas and imagery, and retelling technique creates a feminine space where she finds herself free to talk about and portray the troubles and tribulations of the women of the world. Dreams, re-imaginings, and personifications recur in her poems. In this way, she approaches reality slant, exploring love, fear, hatred and existence by separating them from the distorting realm of humans. Mythical Zahoor, through her palimpsestic poetic talent, appears to hold her Kashmiri tradition and history strong enough to bind it to her individual talent and hence, it would not be an exaggeration to refer to her as an 'Intertextual Kashmiri Feminist.'

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Traversing Cultural Barriers: A Bengali Mother's Unyielding Fight for Justice in *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway*

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Abstract

Mothers and children are as inseparable as two sides of a coin. Their relationship is unique and special, based on love and utmost care. However, there is a fixed notion about how an 'ideal' and 'perfect mother' should be in our society, as motherhood is inextricably linked to rigid gender roles in typically patriarchal societies. Over the years, movies have served as an effective platform to challenge and dismantle patriarchal structures, promote gender equality and empower women. They have depicted a mother's struggle in society and highlighted themes such as discrimination, abuse, suppression, resilience, sacrifice, and their journey to self-discovery. Within this paradigm, through the movie *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* by Ashima Chibber, the paper highlights the struggles of Debika, the central character, who grapples with the injustice meted out to her due to the rigid patriarchal mindset of her in-laws and the cultural conflicts and conspiracies she is subject to in Norway. The paper applies the theories of J.W. Berry, R.W. Connell and Sara Ruddick to elucidate the pain and agony of a distraught Bengali mother as also her power of endurance, grit and determination in a hostile environment.

Keywords: Bengali culture, Cultural Clash, Patriarchal society, Motherhood, Disparity

Introduction

Movies have been considered robust and effective tools in influencing and inspiring people. They have left an indelible mark on society as they portray individuals' diverse and dynamic lives, offering an immersive viewing experience. They have their own language, colour, form and emotions to entertain and broaden one's knowledge about cultures, ethnicities, lifestyles, and people, especially women's struggles to impact society positively. Watching movies is like venturing into darkness; one doesn't know what will come one's way, i.e., they have the thrill of the unknown, which has a unique flavour of its own. Although movies refresh the minds and give the audience a respite from their routine lives, they often also emphasise the challenges faced by characters. Some movies and web series have been dedicated to exclusively depicting challenges faced by immigrant's in foreign lands. Movies and web series such as *Namastey London* (2007) by Vipul Amrutlal Shah*, The Namesake* (2016) by Mira Nair*, and Never Have I Ever* (2020) by Mindy Kaling, Lang Fisher, Ben Steiner, and Aaron Geary highlight the challenges faced by women struggling between two cultures after migrating to different countries. Several films have depicted motherhood as having the rare capacity to elicit a variety of feelings and capture the essence of the profound and complex role. Popular movies such as *Mother*

India (1957)*, Paa* (2009)*, Boyhood* (2014), *Jazbaa* (2015)*, Mom* (2017) and many more have captured strong-willed and ambitious mothers. The film *Paa* emphatically demonstrates how a mother's love and affection for her child suffering from Progeria is unaffected by the latter's physical or mental state and how she raises him as a single mother despite multiple hurdles. The movies *Mom, Boyhood, Jazbaa* showcase the struggles of mothers striving hard to provide a secure, comfortable and loving environment for their children battling against all the odds and challenges that come their way. The movie *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* by Ashima Chibber captures the emotions, sentiments and feelings of an immigrant woman who suffers as a mother in Norway, fighting against the Norwegian Foster Care System to get the custody of her own children while struggling to hold on to her troubled marriage. The movie represents the life of Debika Chatterjee, the wife of Anirudh Chatterjee and the mother of Shubh and Suchi, who had to undergo an ordeal trying to get the custody of her children back while she was in Norway and then subsequently even in India. It is based on the life of Ms. Sagarika Chakraborty, who wrote her autobiography, "The Journey of a Mother", in 2022, sharing her ordeal in fighting the legal battle claiming the custody of her children both in Norway and in Kolkata, India. Based on the real-life experiences of Sagarika Chakraborty, the story focuses on her anguish at being separated from her children by the Norway Welfare Services, who levied the allegations of her being incapable of taking care of her children because of her typically Bengali way of bringing them up. "The Journey of a Mother" can be likened to other works on similar lines, such as *Mummy's Still Here* by Jeanne D'Olivier, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, and *Against All Odds: a Mother's Struggle to Survive: A True Story* by Treshia Green and more where one gets to read about mothers who do not hesitate in going to extremes to safeguard their children and raise them under their loving care.

A mother is a natural nurturer who instils the foundation of strong morals, self-assurance and bravery in her children. She is recognised for comforting, protecting and inculcating good values and ideals in her children from an early age. It is widely understood that a mother loves so deeply and profoundly that it cannot be expressed with words but can only be felt. Sociologist, Sharon Hays opines in "The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood," "Children are sacred- their price immeasurable" (54). From the moment they are born, a profound bond is formed that transcends time and space. For a mother, her child is the most precious person who experiences every triumph and shares in every pain with her child. Whenever a child suffers, a mother suffers; whenever a child cries, a mother cries, and whenever a child smiles, a mother smiles. Therefore, if a mother and her children are separated, both experience sadness and loneliness. "A mother's love for her child is like nothing else in the world. It knows no law, no pity. It dares all things and crushes down remorselessly all that stands in its path" (Christie 12). Mothering includes social and psychological actions as well as cultural norms, values, and beliefs. Linda Rennie Forcey, in "Feminist Perspectives on Mothering and Peace", discusses mothering as "the main vehicle through which people first form their identities and learn their place in society" (357). During

infancy and early childhood, children are highly dependent on their mothers, who, in case of any physical or emotional threat to their child, act as a shield to protect their child. Sara Ruddick, in "Maternal Thinking", writes, "Powerless mothers are also powerful…For a child, a mother is the primary, uncontrollable source of world's goods…." (343). The present paper highlights the struggles of Debika, a loving mother who manages to emerge strong while fighting to get custody of her children amidst cultural clashes in a foreign land. The paper also explores a woman's fight against unrealistic societal expectations and gender stereotypes. The paper approaches the movie by applying a qualitative method to construct its argument by applying J.W. Berry's theoretical framework to analyse the cultural clash, R.W. Connell's concept of the sexual division of labour and unequal division of power and understanding the struggle of a mother who defiantly resisted the label of a bad mother.

Cultural Barriers

Migrating to a foreign land brings many complications, difficulties and challenges to an individual. Although the migrant faces difficulties in adjusting due to changes in environment and culture, native people already residing in the country also face difficulties. It becomes hard for them to understand the new culture they come across, and therefore start questioning the culture, customs and rituals of migrants. Movies such as *Pardes* (1997), *Swades* (2004), *Namastey London* (2007) and *The Namesake* (2016) have explored the theme of cultural shock faced by migrants in a foreign land. The movie, *The Namesake* (2016) by Mira Nair, based on a novel by the same name, is the story of a Bengali couple, Ashima and Ashok Ganguli, who have migrated from Kolkata to the United States and envision a better future for themselves. The movie illustrates how Ashima constantly struggles to adapt to the new culture. She repeatedly demonstrates her resistance to American culture and resolutely follows her Bengali Indian cultural practices. In the movie *Pardes* (1997), one gets to witness the cultural dilemma faced by Ganga, the female protagonist, who was raised in an environment where her family valued Indian values, traditions, and culture immensely and undergoes a cultural shock when she moves to America to live with her affluent and Westernised husband and in-laws. Dealing with culture shock or cultural differences is one of the most common difficulties of living in a foreign land and one gets to watch, read and listen to several stories depicting this struggle.

The movie *Mrs Chatterjee Vs Norway* depicts the anguish of the Chatterjee family when the Norwegian authorities challenge their mannerisms and cultural practices. It is usual for Indian parents to sleep with their children and feed them with their hands, but Norwegian society finds it unacceptable. The Norwegians expect both parents to contribute equally to raising their children, unlike in typical Indian households where the responsibility lies primarily with the mother. The totally opposite Norwegian and Bengali cultures create a miserable situation for the Chatterjee's. Sagarika Chakraborty recounts her experiences in her autobiography,

"They wanted to impose their ways on me, but it was not possible to change everything in a matter of seconds. I came from a different culture and would need much more time to cope up with this culture" (46).

The movie begins with two women from Norwegian Child Wellbeing Services visiting the Chatterjee household to assess the welfare and safety of the children. They are shown to be worried about the children's welfare based on their perceptions of responsible parenting. A senior officer from Oslo is also brought in who, after several discussions, investigations, and assessments, concluded that Mr. and Mrs. Chatterjee should not be permitted to look after the children as Debika was an unfit mother. Since the authorities felt that the kids were not being raised in a safe and healthy environment, they took them away without bothering to inform the parents. For the Norwegian society, Debika's cultural orientation was strange and totally unacceptable. It, therefore, led to the allegations against her of not being a good mother and being unfit to take care of the children. The question of Debika not being a good mother raises some questions, such as Who is a good mother? And what are the specific qualities of a good mother? Sociologist Terry Arendell states, "The good mother is heterosexual, married, and monogamous…She is not economically self-sufficient, which means, given the persistent gender gap in earnings, largely economically dependent on her income-earning husband (unless she's independently wealthy and, in that case, allows her husband to handle the finances). She is not employed" (3).

J.W. Berry, a famous psychologist known for his theory, "Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures", defines, "Acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (698). Berry further mentions that individuals who experience acculturation can either assimilate, integrate, separate, or marginalise. Debika rejects the host countries culture and decides to follow her own cultural practices. She continues to feed her child Shubh mashed bananas and rice with milk and does that with her hands instead of using a spoon. Although no certain cultural practices of Norwegians were depicted in the movie, their question about certain Bengali rituals highlighted their inability to understand them. Anirudh urged her to use a spoon to give the meal to the infant. Debika's statement, *"Bacha ko haath se khana khilata hai kyuki maa ka haath mein amrut hota hai"* (A mother hand feeds her child because God blesses her hand), voices the sentiments of all Bengali's, infact all Indians, as hand-feeding, is a cultural practice of not just Bengalis of all Indians, and it is something all Indians are proud of (00:30:45-00:30:50). Debika's deep rootedness and commitment to upholding her cultural heritage are exhibited in yet another incident when Suchi, Debika's daughter, got sick while she was under foster care and Debika had to be called to help out and soothe the child. Debika couldn't resist asking them for rice; she told the foster mother that, as per tradition, Suchi was old enough to be starting on rice and fed the baby some rice with her hands. She tells them that a rice-eating ceremony- *Annaprashana,* is performed in Bengal, where a child is given rice before starting solid food.

Anirudh a stereotypical male, is constantly shown blaming his wife for everything that goes wrong and for all the difficulties they encounter as a family. When the children were taken away, Debika requested Anirudh to hire a private advocate as she was scared that the advocate offered by the Norwegians would be paid for and bought by child welfare. His inhuman, aggressively dominating behaviour towards Debika highlights his stereotypical mentality of controlling his wife. Raewyn Connell, a prominent sociologist in *Gender and Power*, integrates the concepts of patriarchy and masculinity into an overarching theory of gender relations. She explains that in Western societies, gender relations are still defined by patriarchal power. Connell sets forth three aspects of society (labour, power and cathexis) which interact to form a society's gender order, i.e., power relations between masculinities and femininities widespread in the society. She defines labour as the sexual division of labour within the home and the labour market. This division of labour can be seen in the movie when the Norwegian society blames him for not helping with the household chores stating, "You don't contribute to taking care of the house, like cooking food, cleaning, running chores, and things like that" to which he replies, "Actually ma'am, I earn and she takes care of the house" (00:12:01-00:12:19). The question startles him, and he later argues with his wife, saying, "Toh ab main saree pehen kar chudiya pehen lu?" (Do you want me to dress like a woman as well?) (00:14:22-00:14:25). His beliefs and actions demonstrate that he clings to the traditional gender roles and societal expectations, where he views a man should be only working outside the house, i.e. be the bread-winner and a woman should be confined and responsible for managing the household and taking care of the family. As Simone de Beauvoir observes, "…woman, integrated as slave or vassal into the family group dominated by fathers and brothers, has always been given in marriage to males by other males" (503).

While describing *Power,* R.W. Connell states that power operates through social relations such as authority, violence and ideology in institutions, the state, the military and domestic life. The power dynamics between Anirudh over Debika become evident when Anirudh's co-worker accuses him of breaking Debika's hand in anger, illustrating his control and dominance within the relationship. In addition to the physical display of power, Anirudh consistently failed to provide emotional support and connection to Debika. His emotional unavailability also indicates the gendered expectations of women to be responsible for emotional connection. Even her in-laws never supported or understood her. Her mother-in-law rebukes her blatantly, "Aisi kamaal ki maa maine phle kabhi nahi dekhi…apna bacha nahi sambhal sakti" (I have never seen such an amazing mother! Who can't manage her own children?) (01:21:14-01:21:19). Veronica Beechey, a feminist sociologist, describes family ideologies by stating, "…the form of sexual division of labour in which the woman is the housewife and mother and primarily located within the private world of the family, and the man is wage-earner and bread-winner and primarily located in the 'public' world of paid work, is also normatively desirable" (99). The mother-in-law's constant nagging and sarcastic remarks reflect the typical

oppressing mentality where a woman is supposed to take permission from her husband for every action of hers. She believes that Debika has been given too much freedom by her son.

With every passing day, Debika's pain of being away from her children worsens. Her children were experiencing major setbacks; besides being separated from their parents, they were also being raised in an alien environment under foster care- an unfamiliar environment that alienated them from their cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. In "Maternal Thinking," Ruddick proposes, "For whatever reasons, mothers typically find it not only natural but compelling to protect and foster the growth of their children" (344). Ruddick goes on to state that mothering requires fulfilling three requirements: preserving children's lives; fostering their physical, emotional, and intellectual growth; and teaching them to be socially acceptable. Therefore, when Debika realised that her husband was not going to listen to her and hire a private lawyer to fight their case, she planned to take her children from foster care and run away with them. Her secretly taking her children to Sweden indicates her helplessness, pain and frustration as she has lost hope in everyone around her, including her husband.

Battling one hardship after the other, Debika reaches a point when she seeks help from the Indian government. During a telecom deal between India and Norway, Debika raised her issue in front of Hon'ble Minister Vasudha Kamat, who happened to visit Norway to sign the deal. She urges the minister that the problem of her children being snatched by the Norway government is a matter that her country should handle. The intervention of the Indian government changed the course of the case, and the Norwegian authorities decided to give the custody of the children to a reliable third party. Anirudh's brother, Anurag, then a bachelor, recommended that he was ready to be the foster parent of the Chatterjee children. However, his motive behind the custody was not for the welfare of the children. He was only interested in the money coming to him because of his secret deal with the Norwegians, who offered him money to raise the children as a foster parent. Although Debika did not favour Anurag becoming the foster parent, she eventually gave up when Anirudh convinced her that she could take the children with her as soon as the children were in Kolkata. However, it turned out that all his promises were fake, and Debika could not reunite with her children when she reached Calcutta. When the children reached Kolkata, and Debika went to her in law's house to meet them, she was not allowed to enter her house, and she was attacked by some local goons hired by her in-laws to scare her away. She was threatened and forced to leave their house without her children. Debika was not left with any other resort now but to move to the court in Kolkata in order to be allowed to meet her children. Her lawyer states that as per the Child Welfare Association and Commission for Protection of Child Rights, the children were not kept in sanitary conditions and were unsafe in her in-law's custody. Debika had to continue fighting for her children's custody without her husband's support, who became physically, financially and emotionally unavailable. She was completely unaffected by the damaging allegations levied against her, as her only aim was to get her children back. Her actions reflect

what Germaine Greer propounds in "Sex and Destiny"- "Besides the virtues of tenderness, patience and self-forgetfulness, a mother has to exercise courage, determination and decisiveness" (222). Debika exuded incredible strength and continued fighting to get her children back with her parents' support and eventually won her children's custody back.

Towards the end of the movie, she declares that she is no longer concerned about others' expectations and allegations and would only focus on what is good for her children. She said, *"Par aj hum sabka btaya hua sahi nahi karega sir, humko jo sahi lgta hai hum vohi karega sir. Hum acha maa hai, bura maa hai pta nahi, par maa hu sir aur mera liye yahi sahi hai ki hum apna dono bacho log ke lie ladu"* (Today, I won't do what others think is the right thing to do. I will do what I think is right. Am I a good mother? Am I a bad mother? I don't know. But I am a mother, sir. And I think the only right thing for me to do is to fight for both my children) (2:00:47-2:01:18). The movie reveals the struggle of a woman, mother and a wife against social dogmas where women are expected to be emotionally weak and dependent on others for everything that happens in their life. Debika emerges as a strong, independent woman fighting against all odds for the welfare of her children.

Conclusion

In this age of digitalisation, movies act as a powerful medium for filmmakers to convey messages, evoke strong emotions, and promote a deeper understanding of the world around us. The movie *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* has played a significant role in questioning and challenging the status of women in society. The movie highlights that even today, in the 21st century, women are subjugated, oppressed, marginalised and questioned on many platforms. They are obligated to follow specific gender roles or expectations that perpetuate inequality. Womanhood and motherhood are two synonyms that tie woman's identities to their roles as caretakers, child raisers and nurturers. As Ann Dally, in "Inventing Motherhood- The Consequences of an Ideal (1982), submits, "motherliness is warmth, caring in a sensitive way, together with a desire to protect and enhance the child and the capacity to do this" (198). One cannot deny that no matter what, a mother goes out of the way to ensure the safety and interest of her children in spite of all odds. The fact that a woman is labelled as a 'good mother', or a 'bad mother', a 'good wife' or a 'bad wife' emphasises that specific roles and expectations are placed on women within the context of marriage and motherhood. In *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway*, Debika's parenting style was attacked on various platforms, but her husband wasn't questioned even once. She is subjected to physical and psychological abuse by her husband, but she displays remarkable resilience by fighting against all difficult circumstances and challenges. Although the judge rules in favour of Debika, the movie raises the question of why women are the only ones who are judged and questioned. Anirudh, who was neither a good husband nor a good father, wasn't questioned, showing the need for our society to cease doubting and questioning women based only on their gender.

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Dystopia and the Quest for Survival: Reading *The Platform* in the Post-pandemic Society

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the recent Covid-19 global pandemic, the paper analyses the themes of violence and death as factors of the socio-economic and spiritual struggle for survival with a special focus on the Spanish social science fiction film, The Platform (2019) by Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia. Besides looking into the dichotomy of utopia and dystopia in a post-pandemic, the present paper underlines a pragmatic definition of a dystopia as manifest in the present society and represented in fiction. The paper examines the role of food as a symbol of vital resource distributed across various strata of social or economic classes, and highlights the nature of the violence that ensues as a result of the struggle for the same. The proposed understanding may bear relevance to the study of social structures as well as human behaviour.
Keywords: Social Science Fiction, Cinema, Death, Violence, Food, Dystopia.

As the world stands divided in binaries wherein power struggle between the dominant and subordinate groups has become the norm, the question of hope and the dream of a better world remain relevant with reference to the present times. Frederic Jameson in his chapter "Varieties of the Utopian" a part of *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005) talks about the need to understand the concept of Utopia in its multiplicity and its everyday reality or everyday lived experiences. For example, Utopia can be understood as a movement for peace and leisure. It can also represent hope against death, revolutionary political practices, resistance against oppressive forces, etc. Jameson while discussing non-utopia, talks about humans as an extension of commodity that is caught up within the dominion of pleasure and to an extent disconnected from need. (2) Moreover, Utopia can also be understood as a method, process, quest, possibility, concept, imagination or mere illusion. Or do we understand 'Utopia' as an idea that can make humans aware of mental and ideological imprisonment, if yes then can one propose that utopia is a movement to find a sense of order and purpose within dystopic settings? This paper will examine *The Platform* (2019), a Spanish 'social science fiction' film by Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia. The genre of social science fiction is less concerned with technology and more with observations related to human behaviour, interactions, and society at large.

The Platform has a futuristic backdrop as it deals with a structure that is made of hundreds of floors. It is a prison/hole that accommodates two people on each floor. Every day, a huge platform with food descends from top to bottom through a large

hole located in the middle of the building for a fixed time frame. People on top eat whatever they desire in the stipulated time before the leftover food on the platform moves to the level below. Stealing food is not an option as it may result in severe retribution. On floors above, people get to have access to a feast, however, the ones below get nothing. There are supposed to be three hundred and thirty-three floors or more and the survival key is, if everyone eats a small portion of food, then it could make it to the bottom with something for each person but it never does and this leads to things and developments that are both horrific as well as dystopic. Moreover, people are reassigned to a new floor/level every month. The pandemic exposed human civilisation and made the gap all the more apparent that exists between the ones who are privileged and all those who remain at the margin. However, if one is to flip the location of the underprivileged with the ones who exist in a privileged socio-economic arena then does it act as a learning lesson? Or one could propose that the human race has come so far in its greed that individuals/people refuse to see the world beyond their comfort zones. While discussing several deaths that happen in the name of food and existence in *The Platform*, this paper will discuss the need to look at the world from a different set of rules and perspectives so that the humans of the present times can find their way to purpose and meaning and eventually home. Here, the idea of the home represents the constant act of struggle to destabilise the tropes of control and hegemony. What happens when a certain principle is projected as propaganda without one being aware of its true nature then does this qualify as dystopia within utopia or vice versa?

While discussing *The Platform* and its depiction of a dystopia in relation to the social and spiritual human condition in the context of the Corona Virus pandemic, this paper will proceed keeping in mind Mark Featherstone's book *Planet Utopia: Utopia, Dystopia, and Globalisation* (2017) in which the author attempts to find ways to challenge the institution of Capitalist Utopia to further foreground the possibility of imagining alternative ways of living outside capitalism. While proposing a critique of the market economy, Featherstone mentions that humans have lost their value of imagination and wonder and to retain their imagination they may need to look at the world through the eyes of children/innocence.

The Platform of Inequality

The film begins with a line that the world is divided between the ones who are at the top and the ones at the bottom and all those who fall. 'The Fall' may mean the fall of mankind as well as those who do not survive in their journey to earn a diploma after having spent a limited time in the Hole, the vertical self-management centre. The seemingly bottomless structure involves people assigned two each to every floor, and as an early interaction between Trimagasi and Goreng explains, they must not speak to the ones on the floor below them for the simple fact that they are below; the same way as the ones above them would not answer to them. This description emphasizes the

internalization of social hierarchy and, considering the greater age and experience of Trimagasi as compared to Goreng, the way said internalization is assisted by societal upbringing. This structure represents the way society functions, those who are at the top consume far more than they need while the ones who are at the bottom suffer the most in the absence of resources. Food works an as important signifier in the film; in an interview, the filmmaker Gaztelu-Urrutia states that he treated food as a character, and the colour palette for the same was carefully picked so the visuals reflected the importance of the food in contrast with the dark setting (Aguilar). The way people on top levels consume food is violent. They eat as well as destroy. Some inmates after having eaten their share do not mind urinating and spitting on the rest of the food items that are kept for others on the descending platform. The top v/s bottom divide may also guide us towards thinking of the world that remains divided by totalitarian global neoliberal capitalist forces. The film being an obvious allegory of capitalism is pointed at when Goreng's rational suggestion of rationing food makes Trimagasi ask whether he is a communist and suggest that the ones above would not pay heed to his idea; which seems increasingly relevant in the years following the pandemic when the economic divide between the classes seems to have widened more than ever (Henry). Featherstone goes on to argue that "globalisation of neoliberal capitalism has plunged the majority of the world's population into a situation of social and economic insecurity" (3). And this insecurity can be read in opposition to peace and stability. Moreover, the precarious nature of our existence may lead us towards believing in the narrative that proposes the lack of a 'human future'. In the film, the accidental killing of an immigrant boy by the Samurai knife that was bought by Trimagasi, seems to be the fault of the boy as he was at a place where he did not belong somewhere indicating that violence towards immigrants shall not qualify as violence. Or if the so-called 'other' is subjected to violence then it is the fault of the other. The film also highlights the obsession concerning the possession of commodities irrespective of need. Trimagasi gets furious upon realising that a supposedly better knife called 'Samurai Plus' is already in the market to outdo the one that he had just bought. In a moment of anger, he throws away the knife out of the window and it ends up killing the boy. This death may also indicate the death of innocence and imagination that lie outside the ambit of profit and margin. Death may be a way to assert global dystopia within which humans are reduced to mere objects (3), and the unhindered aggression of a higher class casually victimizes the one below. It is important to highlight that people in the Pit/the hole are reassigned to a new floor/level every month. On levels below 50, things start to take a dystopic turn. Trimagasi reveals that when he was assigned to level 132, there was hardly any hope of survival. This descent, and perhaps even the "fall" mentioned at the beginning of the film becomes reminiscent of Denis Villeneuve's short film "Next Floor" which seems to depict more of a moral degradation, perhaps even a biblical allegory of hell as Hollwedel suggests, than a social hierarchy; however, the overlap appears when one considers the aforementioned death of innocence through the desperate and immoral acts people

commit to survive in the Hole.

Another important character, Goreng has also entered the facility for a diploma in exchange for six months in it. After the monthly ceremonial shuffle of levels, Goreng and Trimagasi end up on floor 171, making the question of peaceful cohabitation redundant. Trimagasi suggests consuming strips of Goreng's flesh to survive since he is younger. In his defence, Goreng with the help of Miharu, a woman who descends the pit with the platform once a month to search for her lost kid, kills Trimagasi and consumes his flesh. Imoguiri, a facility administrator, volunteers to enter the Pit to repair the dystopic living circumstances observed by some members; she uses her administrative power to choose her cellmate. Imoguiri teaches the folks below to construct a plate after eating and do the same so that there may be order, but Imoguiri is ignored, suggesting a lack of dialogue and trust across all levels. Her subsequent suicide shows that greed, distrust, disdain, and violence trump rationality. Notably, the suicide occurs on floor 202, which emphasizes the importance of hope in survival since Imoguiri initially thought there were 200 floors and was horrified to discover that the reality was far worse than she had expected from her former privilege that she willingly left for charity. This scene seems to symbolize what millions throughout the world would experience following the film's release: anxiety, dejection, and irreparable loss in the face of the epidemic, whose psychological effects are still being investigated and re-evaluated. (Bonati, et al). Goreng enters the pit with his book because one is allowed to take any one object. However, soon he realises that books may not change the common behaviour of the mass. Trimagasi comments that when people have the option of investing in objects of warfare, baseball bat, guns and bombs then who needs a book? The larger question that lingers is: can books change the way humans think? The film also introduces the idea of spontaneous solidarity. Perhaps, it is the tool of solidarity that could help in bringing people together but can one hope for solidarity when conflicts seem to dominate the everyday narratives? For instance, Baharat, a black man, cannot be happier when he finds himself on level six. He asks for assistance from a white couple on the level above in his quest to go up so that he can break away from the Pit. The couple agrees to help, observing that Baharat claims to have heard from the same God they believe in, but the moment Baharat is about to reach level five with the help of a rope, the woman above defecates on his face. At this moment, his hope of survival turns into both despair as well as disgust. What Baharat gets for asking help is humiliation. The act is enabled by the woman being placed above Baharat, which naturally points to the nature of entitlement and the ability of the ones up the ladder to attack the ones below in a manner that cannot be answered in kind. While the scene potentially comments on discrimination based on religion as well, adding to this is the instance when Baharat makes an attempt to collaborate with Goreng in order to defy the rules of the structure and rescue the people below, Baharat's former friend attempts to provoke him by asking if he is a white man's servant, thus attacking a sensitivity rooted in another form of hierarchy. The whole episode points at the rarity of human nobility shown by

Goreng and Baharat but not the others who were at higher floor; and questions the plausibility of a seemingly utopian idea like "spontaneous solidarity."

The Human Spirit in the Hole

In its portrayal of people plunged into a dystopic state of living, the film rather appropriately also makes heavy commentary upon the spiritual and religious experience in such a world. In one of its earliest mentions of the same, Trimagasi states that he believed in God the said month, being placed on a relatively higher level, suggesting that faith is more a matter of circumstance and choice than facts and reason.

When Goreng is called "the Messiah" for attempting to save his fellow inmates, religion—especially Christianity—remains central to the story. However, Goreng hallucinates Imoguiri telling him to eat her corpse to survive, reflecting the biblical promise of eternal life and salvation. This raises the pertinent question: what does salvation look like in the modern world that remains focused on survival? This may also reflect religion's role in rationalizing violence, which may be redeemed by forgiving oneself. This in turn makes religion the force that either helps preserve the cultured human in a wild world or encourages surrender to the forces of natural order.

The commentary upon the natural order, therefore, is also intertwined with the one upon the human spirit that religion is intimately connected with. Goreng's act of consuming Trimagasi, whom he had seen in horror upon speaking about cannibalism, seems like a process of inheritance that affirms violence as the natural order. In retrospect then, it also seems reasonable that the early description of the Hole as a "vertical self-management" system suggests an absence of human intervention in the way it is run (which seems contradictory to the suggested degree of surveillance and control in the facility), and therefore equates it with the unbiased system of nature that treats and punishes all people equally, even if it is subject to a level of power any individual can assert over it from their relative position. Later, Goreng's behaviour increasingly resembles Trimagasi's, who appears to Goreng as a hallucination, stressing their oneness. Miharu murders Trimagasi to rescue Goreng and feeds him the former's meat; notably, Goreng then dreams of Miharu protectively embracing him. This may be when Goreng first discovers union with Miharu and starts thinking about finding the child, which would become his primary objective later. This makes Miharu a religious symbol of revolution, regeneration, and enlightenment and links the child's search with the spiritual pursuit of nobility that remains uncorrupted in the midst of the violence and suffering that surrounds religion's history.

In Search of the Child

While death and violence control the narrative of The Platform, however, it is the journey of Miharu that needs to be mentioned before one concludes. Besides their

names seemingly derived from multiple Asian languages that seem to symbolize something about the characters, the object every character brings into the Hole also seems symbolic of their journey. Goreng's Don Quixote mirrors his journey as a saviour, Trimagasi's knife that sharpens when used symbolises his violence the need for which grows every time, Baharat's rope shows his desire to ascend the levels which he gradually loses after losing the rope; in the same vein, it seems the possession Miharu brings in is her child, the journey of losing, searching for, and protecting whom represents her whole arc. If, as mentioned above, we see the child as a symbol of innocence and nobility, this adds further depth to the character and the journey of Miharu. While she is looking for her young daughter she is subjected to physical, psychological and sexual violence. Before she could find her daughter, it is death that waits for her. It is Goreng and Baharat who find the girl on level 333 and offer her a dish named "panna cotta" something Goreng and Baharat had protected all the while to send it to the administration as a message. This takes us back to the point that was raised at the beginning of the paper concerning Mark Featherstone. Perhaps, the way out of the hole of this materialist world is to see through the eyes of the child, saved by Goreng and Baharat, as the child is yet to be integrated entirely into the merciless world.

It is important to note, however, that despite always initiating dialogue, Goreng and Baharat resort to physical violence to stop people on higher levels from consuming more than they need, in order to protect the "panna cotta" as the message. While this depicts the assumption of leadership over the desire for escape, it problematizes the manner of addressing inequality – returning to the well-established idea of violence as a part of nature, embracing it, and turning it into an instrument in the course of the search. It may be argued well within reason that the morality of said action is heavily questionable, but put in the context of the rest of the story, the violence in this part of the narrative can be seen as an act of defence against greed, which therefore becomes a much greater act of violence in its own right.

Ultimately, when Goreng and Baharat find Miharu's daughter who they did not believe existed, they realize it was not the panna cotta but the girl herself who is "the message." The change trivializes the focus on managing resources that the film had built up to, suggesting instead that it is the preservation of innocence and nobility that is the true purpose of being. The conclusion further finds Goreng encountering Trimagasi again, who states that Goreng, having rescued the girl, does not need to carry her back to the top. He insists that "the message doesn't need a bearer," which perhaps highlights how the essential values of equality, peace, and love need not be preached but realized internally by all people. Whether it is the question of social inequality or the machinery of politics or religion that emerge from and impose it, as the film seems to suggest, this internal realization seems to be the true answer.

Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia in one of his interviews remarks that if we are to exist as a human race then there has to be a fair distribution of resources, wealth, and avenues (Rivera). Urrutia who is quite pessimistic about the human species remarks if

instead of food we had put face masks or toilet papers on the Platform, the nature of the discussion would not have changed (Jones). How to weave a narrative to imagine a future without conflicts should be the need of the hour. There is no need to imagine an ideal place, simply because it does not exist. Moreover, "the realisation of utopian fantasy relies on the violent destruction of alternative models of living and that essentially contradicts the ethical core of utopia itself— the freedom of individuals to realise themselves through interactions with others" (5).

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Bad Mothers, Bad Daughters: A Study of Maternal Ambivalence in Avni Doshi's *Girl in White Cotton* and Renuka Shahane's *Tribhanga*

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Abstract

At every stage of motherhood, women across cultures have confronted maternal ambivalence - a condition wherein a mother shares a love and hate relationship with her child. For most women, motherhood has been a source of both pain and pleasure as it corresponds to their chances of being labelled either as good or bad mothers in relation to the culturally prescribed standards of mothering. Such cultural prescriptions and the associated emotional trauma often cause regret and maternal ambivalence in women, thereby making motherhood a paradoxical experience. Through a thematic analysis of a literary text *Girl in White Cotton* and a cinematic text *Tribhanga*, this article examines how women negotiate the maternal ambivalence arising out of the conflict between self-actualization and maternal responsibilities. The article also explores how maternal ambivalence in the mother gets reproduced in the daughter, impacts their individual identities, and leads to transgenerational trauma.

Keywords: Maternal ambivalence, Transgenerational trauma, Mother-daughter relationship, Self-actualization. Motherhood.

Introduction

> Behind all your stories is always your mother's story.
> Because hers is where yours begin…
> **--** Mitch Albom, *For One More Day*

A woman is not born a mother; she becomes one. Mothering is a culturally and socially configured practice which has been designated as an integral part of a woman's life. Mothering a child requires a woman to ensure the preservation, nurturance, and social acceptance of her child (Ruddick 17). She has to perform preservative love to ensure their survival in society, which can be supplemented with the act of nurturing the child towards their healthy growth and development. However, the most important of these three is the mother's duty to train the child to achieve social acceptability. The society and culture she is part of demands that the mother "shape their children's growth in 'acceptable' ways. What counts as acceptable varies enormously within and among groups and cultures…." (Ruddick 21). However, when a mother fails to perform one or all three of the duties of preservation, nurturance, and social acceptance, then society considers her to be a bad mother. These mothers are then blamed and shamed not only by society at large but also by their close relatives, spouses, and sometimes even by their children; they are made to

feel guilty for having failed as a mother, even if they may be successful elsewhere. These bad mothers are often women who perform non-traditional mothering and resist the patriarchal notion of motherhood by claiming an independent identity as a woman beyond their role as a mother (Miller 211).

This vilification of mothers who adopt alternative mothering strategies is not only common in Western culture but can also be seen in the Indian context. Here, mothers have been glorified while being denied narrative empowerment (Krishnaraj182). This has led to the silencing of diverse maternal experiences and the predominance of a hegemonic narrative of mothering. This narrative of mothering depicted the good Indian mother as self-sacrificial, healthy male-childbearing, and economically dependent. Bad mothers were represented in texts and cinema so as to portray what a good mother should not do or should not be. This dichotomy of good/bad mothers highlights what the culture fears about women in general and mothers in particular. However, this social desire to monitor women through their reproductive capabilities and maternal responsibilities is currently being challenged by women, who have problematised the good/bad mother dichotomy. Women who are prioritising their dreams, aspirations, and well-being and voicing their maternal ambivalence are still marginalised and treated as bad mothers, but they are gradually acquiring narrative empowerment as they are being represented in cinema and literature. This article examines how women who prioritize their self-actualization and growth over their role of procreation are alienated and delegitimised by their family and society at large, leading to maternal ambivalence and guilt. The article also studies how maternal ambivalence in the mother and the inability of the daughter to separate herself from the mother leads to transgenerational trauma and how it shapes both their identity as mothers and daughters. Most importantly, the article also maps the points of convergence and contrast between cinematic and literary narratives of bad mothers in the Indian context. For this purpose, this article uses thematic analysis as a tool to examine Avni Doshi's novel *Girl in White Cotton* and Renuka Shahane's film *Tribhanga: Tedhi, Medhi, Crazy.* The article identifies and discusses in detail two main themes- in the first section, the theme of maternal ambivalence and identity formation are discussed. The themes of intergenerational relationships with mothers and confronting transgenerational trauma have been analysed in the second section.

Cinema and literature have a proclivity towards narratives (Stam and Raengo 5). Together they become important tools through which the dominant ideology of gender, sexuality, race, and class are communicated to the masses. Both cinema and literature form a large part of popular culture and are important tools for shaping public imagination. Contemporary Indian literature and cinema have portrayed multidimensional and independent images of women in general and mothers in particular (Shekhawat 81; Chatterjee, Shekhawat, and Sharma 12). We see complex portrayal of the mother in Gitanjali Shree's *Mai* and *Tomb of Sand,* in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things,* Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084,* Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Baburao Bagul's *Mother* among others. Indian cinema too has portrayed strong and independent women and mothers in Sujoy Ghosh's *Kahaani* and

Kahaani 2, Ashwini Iyer Tiwar's *Nil Battey Sannata*, Anvita Dutt's *Qala,* Ashima Chibber's *Mrs. Chatterjee vs Norway* among others. These mothers in literature and cinema alike help reconfigure the mothering practices and the ideology of Indian motherhood which expects mothers to be selfless, sacrificial, and ever-loving without any personal dreams, desires and aspirations; they also help blur the dichotomy of good/bad mothers. Thus, an analysis of a cinematic and literary text together, help establish each as cultural artifacts which communicates the reality of the microcosm as well as the macrocosm in which they are situated.

Maternal Ambivalence: A Quest for Identity

Ambivalence in a mother is too dangerous for the culture to
integrate. A relationship understood as originary and natural
should be automatic, a reflex, and there is very little room
for complexity. It comes down to how much agency a woman
is supposed to have and what feelings she is allowed.
There isn't a place to put maternal resentment. Or maternal regret.
-- (Doshi Interview n.pag)

Maternal ambivalence, maternal regret, or maternal resentment have recently received significant academic attention within the discourse of motherhood studies and within the discussion of good/bad mothers. Following Rich, motherhood studies have started acknowledging that literature and popular media discourse have failed to address the multiple tensions and complications that underlie traditional mothering practices, which often prompt mothers to regret and go back to the state of non-motherhood. It is because those mothers who publicly speak of their abhorrent maternal experiences are still shamed, and they are treated as failures who are unable to adapt to motherhood and the good mother paradigm (Quiney 26). These mothers are constantly monitored so that they can be legitimised and alienated by society. Oftentimes, their children are also stigmatised and are not considered socially acceptable (Mackenzie 89-91). Thus, when these mothers are subjected to such scrutiny and alienation, it is likely to intensify maternal ambivalence (Hertz & Ferguson 249). It is important to note that ambivalence is also not a state of mixed feelings; instead, it is "a dynamic experience of conflict with fluctuations felt by a mother sometimes almost moment by moment at different times in a child's development and varying between different children " (Parker 4). The states could vary or waver between "positive/negative, upside/downside, nice things/problems, and loss/gain." (Donath 353). Both the texts, *Girl in White Cotton* and *Tribhanga,* selected for the study are narratives of single and separated mothers stigmatised by society and their families. Based on the analysis, multiple codes were identified in both the texts, and the codes were then classified into two theme tags: Maternal Ambivalence (codes: bond with the child, relationship with the partner, and body image) and Identity Formation codes: self-actualisation through work, and mother-daughter relationship). The analysis and discussions have been taken up in the

following sections.

1. **Maternal Ambivalence**

1.1 Bond with the child

"I am tired of this baby. She demands too much, always hungering for more." (235) Antara narrates her feelings of ambivalence in *Girl in White Cotton* after giving birth. She is weary of her inability to meet the demands of the baby. Similarly, Tara too had a difficult time when she gave birth; she separated from her husband and decided to move to a Baba's ashram. Tara hated it when Antara wanted to return to her father -"You used to make me feel so bad… You would talk about your father all the time…You used to make me feel like shit"(261). Nayantara in *Tribhanga* also harboured ambivalence towards Anu and Robindro when they were children. She preferred to lock herself in her room and write when her mother-in-law cared for the children. This led to conflicts in their family and her eventual separation from her husband. Much like Tara, she is not involved as a mother, nor do they believe in intensive mothering. However, Anu as a mother dearly loves Masha and is a protective mother to her, which is evident from the cordial relationship that they share.

1.2 Relationship with the Partner

Tara, Nayan, and Anu separate from their spouses and later have partners outside their marriages. Tara separates from her husband when she cannot deal with her intrusive mother-in-law, and so does Nayan. Anu, also a single mother, leaves her abusive lover during her pregnancy. Antara does not leave her husband, but she has passing thoughts about the possibility of separation during postpartum and her mother's illness. Tara develops a spiritual and physical relationship with the Baba in the ashram, which helps her escape the dysfunctional relationship with her husband. She also falls in love with Reza; later, Antara also develops intimacy with him. Nayan remarries a photographer and afterwards starts a relationship with an artist. Her second husband sexually abuses Anu and scars her for a lifetime. Similarly, Anu also has a series of affairs, but she never let those men interfere in her relationship with her daughter because of her traumatic experience with her mother's lover. However, her promiscuity affects Masha negatively when she is publicly ridiculed at school because of her mother's relationships. These women separated from their husbands when they were criticised for their inability to adhere to the socially prescribed standards of mothering, yet the yearning for love and conjugal relationship was common among all.

1.3 Body Image

Antara bemoans her pre-pregnancy body saying, "Milk drips when my

daughter cries, staining my clothes. In the mirror, I see my stomach, dark and shrivelled as a date. I try to cover it with my hands when Dilip (*the husband*) enters the room." Similarly, Nayan recalls how her photographer husband helped her explore her desire and sexuality, which was impossible with her husband. The several relationships that Tara, Nayan, and Anu develop allow them to explore their sexuality and their body; otherwise as mothers the society expects women to be asexual and to relinquish sensuality and sexual allure. Thus, the lack of conjugal life and a supportive partner may further aggravate maternal ambivalence in women.

2. Identity Formation

2.1 Self-actualisation through Work

In the film, Nayan, an author, and Anu, an Odissi dancer and actress, are highly successful women. Masha, however, chooses to be a housewife. In the novel, Antara is a successful artist, and her mother never works as she takes up spiritual duties as the Baba's wife at the Ashram. Tara does not believe a job could fulfil her desire for self-actualisation and seeks spiritual means to fulfil her higher-order needs. Antara, Anu, and Nayan find self-actualisation through the means of art. It is their desire for self-actualisation which is in conflict with their role as a mother.

2.2 Mother-daughter Relationship

Tara-Antara are separated at the Ashram, and it is from here that she starts hating her mother. Anu starts hating her mother when Nayan's second husband sexually abuses her, following which she attempts a suicide, but her mother never understands her cry for help, so Anu blames her mother for having failed to protect her. As a mother, Anu becomes fiercely protective even when she pursues a career in acting and dancing. She never marries so that she can be present for Masha whenever necessary. While it seems that these women are invested in a selfish pursuit of their career, ignoring their children, they are mostly in a state of a dynamic maternal ambivalence. Speaking of the suffering of ambivalence, Adrienne Rich wrote- "the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness" (21). So, it is not like these mothers and daughters shared a resentful relationship; instead, it was a dynamic one. Listening to Antara's narrative, the reader might assume that Tara is a bad mother who failed to give her child protection, nurturance, and social acceptance; however, their relationship is complex, and as Antara's husband Dilip would say, it is hard for anyone to understand their relationship. Antara grew even more distant from her mother during her adolescence because she found it difficult to cope in a world where everyone seemed to be angry with her and hated her. Similarly, in *Tribhanga,* Anu and Nayan share a strained relationship. Anu, too, blames Nayan for separating her from her father, upsetting their traditional family setup and for neither understanding nor protecting her. In reality,

Nayan learned about the abuse much later in life when a grown-up Anu revealed it in her interview. Teenage was difficult for Masha, too, who was bullied in the conservative school by the administration and her classmates because of her mother's promiscuity. Tara, Nayan, and Anu do not adhere to the patriarchal ideology of motherhood and have apparently fails to provide protection, nurturance, and social acceptability to their respective daughters. Their daughters become the voice through which society criticises them. But these daughters, much like the society, willingly ignore their absent fathers. Antara remembers little about her father, willingly forgetting unpleasant memories and absolving him of all guilt. Similarly, Anu forgets how her father never met them and blames her mother for separating them. Masha does not complain about the lack of maternal love and understands how she was delegitimised not because of the failure of her mother but because of the absence of a father. Her decision to marry in an orthodox joint family was to provide her children with a normal family, which she never had since her childhood.

Unbecoming and Becoming the Mother: Negotiating Transgenerational Trauma

A mother's relationship with her daughter is not only complicated but also transitional. It changes over the years during the daughter's adolescent period, her marriage and motherhood, and finally, during the mother's old age and infirmity. They bring a sudden "major change in state" for not just the mother and daughter as individuals but also in their affective relationalities (Parkes 101-115). The desire to separate and attain autonomy and the desire to be intimate with the mother remains an important aspect of the mother-daughter relationship (Flax 171; Lerner 60). Chodorow has discussed the female's lifelong struggle of separating herself from her mother and forging one's autonomous identity. Both Chodorow and Irigaray, though theoretically different, have asserted the daughter's struggle for independence from their mothers. The mother-daughter relationship impacts the daughter's feelings about her "body, self-esteem regulation, career choices, and relationships to men" and other women (Fenchel xvi). Daughters try to turn to their fathers/men to separate themselves from their mothers and to achieve freedom. This, in turn, puts them in an emotional triangle, where sexual/genital love for their father/men and their identificatory love for their mother/women are in conflict (Chodorow 127). On not being able to fulfil their need for love through men, women want children, giving them a place for their deep, intimate, and identificatory love and intimacy (Chodorow 201-204).

Similarly, codes were identified in this section, which were then classified into two theme tags- intergenerational relationship with the mother (code: attachment and separation anxiety) and confronting transgenerational trauma (coming out/not coming out of the shadow of the mother).

1. **Intergenerational Relationship with the Mother**

Tara named her daughter Antara, not because it was a beautiful name, but because- "She wanted her child's life to be as different from hers as it could be. Antara was really Un-Tara- Antara would be unlike her mother" (244). Tara did not have a loving relationship with her mother, so to undo herself would mean that she wanted to share a cordial relationship with her daughter. Antara, too, wanted to separate herself from her mother by developing an independent identity. Her art was a domain which she had created independently of her mother. However, her mother's attempt to destroy her drawings and her unreasonable rage towards her art was interpreted by Antara as her mother's act of destroying Antara's life, art, marriage, and everything outside their relationship. Similarly, Anu wanted to give her daughter everything that her mother could not. So, she became fiercely protective of her daughter. However, despite her best efforts, she, too, could not prevent her daughter from being bullied at school. As daughters, Tara, Antara, Nayan, Anu, and Masha want to unbecome their mothers, to have a separate identity beyond their mothers, yet gradually, they also gravitate towards their respective mothers. Initially, when Antara comes to terms with her mother's Alzheimer's, she feels an uncanny pleasure in seeing her in such a state. While she confides that the disease has given her an opportunity to exact revenge, yet she seems extremely concerned and researches possible ways of helping her mother get back her memory. Similarly, Anu rushes to the hospital, leaving her performance midway when she hears of her mother's brain stroke. Masha, too, is a supportive daughter, standing by her mother as she cares for Nayan and in other difficult times.

2. **Confronting Transgenerational Trauma**

Even when these women tend to bear unidimensional hate towards their mothers, it becomes complicated with time. The film comes to a bittersweet ending with resolving the conflict between Nayan and Anu. Although Nayan lies unconscious in comatose, Anu begins to understand her mother. She no longer sees her mother as just a mother but sees her as a woman. She also acknowledges the transgenerational trauma that she and her daughter experience and also feels guilty that Masha chose to marry in an orthodox family for the sake of legitimacy, which Masha lacked in her pre-marital life. Anu blames herself for making Masha feel socially unacceptable and illegitimate, on account of which she chose this family as a form of social sanction. Thus, accepting their individual selves and ability to look at each other beyond motherhood helps them negotiate with transgenerational trauma. But Antara is not fully healed; her decision to continue to blame and doubt her mother persists until the end. By the end of the novel, the reader identifies her as an unreliable narrator and considers her unstable, like her mother, one whose perspective cannot be fully trusted. Nevertheless, her ability to voice her disgust and contempt for her daughter also takes her a step closer to understanding the self. However, she can attain

a holistic understanding of her 'self' when she can fully resolve her past issues with her mother and her father; this is also necessary if she wishes to overcome transgenerational trauma and offer her daughter a healthy childhood, unlike the one she had. Unlike the cinematic narrative, the literary narrative is not bound by the need to offer its audience a happy ending; Antara's ambiguity and chaos are closer to reality and one that leaves the readers confounded.

Conclusion

Motherhood, a life-altering experience for women, often also becomes a patriarchal means of their repression and is used to curtail their dreams and aspirations. When few of these women act against this patriarchal ideology to perform non-traditional mothering, which lets them balance their role as a mother and an individual, they are blamed as bad mothers. This form of blaming leads to guilt and regret within the mother and causes them to experience maternal ambivalence. Women's experience of maternal ambivalence has received little to no attention in literature and popular culture in the past; in the present times, these diverse experiences are being acknowledged as a result of more women gaining narrative empowerment. The novel *Girl in White Cotton* and the film *Tribhanga* are written by women and, therefore, best narrate the intricate emotions of women as mothers. Both exemplify how bad mothers very often bear the burden of absent fathers and the lack of a supportive home and school environment. The article also delves into how the complex mother-daughter relationship may lead to transgenerational trauma if daughters and mothers are not fully able to separate from each other. While *Tribhanga* ends on a hopeful note, *Girl in White Cotton* ends bleakly as neither Antara nor Tara is fully able to recover from their chaos, preventing their reconciliation, and there is hardly any scope for rectification after years of conflict. Set in fictional middle-class families, the literary truth of Tara-Antara and Nayan-Anu-Masha is closer to reality and raises awareness towards the need for attention towards mothers and their wellbeing.

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Writing the Experience of Illness as a Doctor-Patient-Author in Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air*

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Abstract

The growth in interdisciplinary studies has opened up arenas to explore various themes from multiple perspectives. The body of writing that emerged under the genre of illness narrative elaborated on the accounts of the patients. The growing number of patient narratives exposed aspects of illness that medical accounts and clinical reports did not capture. The writings gave autonomy to the patient over their experience making them the subject and not the object of their stories. This paper aims to examine the identity of a doctor-patient-author and the impact of this identity on the experience of illness through the interpretation of Paul Kalanithi's work *When Breath Becomes Air*. This intersectional and hyphenated identity in Kalanithi's narrative engages in a dialogue with the illness. The paper will also attempt to analyse the different identities he describes in his narrative and each of their roles in his experience of illness.

Keywords: Medical Humanities, Identity, Self, Autopathography, Cancer

Introduction

The growth of interdisciplinary studies has opened up new areas for exploration of various themes from multiple perspectives. This exploration allows a well-rounded, detailed, and in-depth understanding of issues and conflicts. It has combined various branches of knowledge and created newer areas like the Medical/Health Humanities. Borrowing from numerous disciplines such as medicine, literature, social sciences, psychology, Medical/Health Humanities explores the concerns of health from a wide range of perspectives. This area helped in broadening the understanding of the medical world with regard to the concerns of illness and healing. The body of writing that emerged under this genre of illness narrative elaborated on the accounts of the patients. The growing number of patient narratives exposed the side of illness that medical accounts and clinical reports did not capture. The writings gave autonomy to the patient over their experience making them the subject and not the object of the narrative. This genre of writing was termed Autopathography by Thomas G Causer in 1997. The term helped distinguish the patient's narratives from those that spoke of the illness from a caretaker's perspective. Autopathography was coined to refer to the narratives written by patients about their illnesses, placing them in the larger context of their life. Arthur Frank talks about a "Space for Humanities in Illness" (Vonnegut 32) explaining the need for humanities to understand the illness and the ill person. Humanities helps identifying the patient as an individual. It asserts the understanding that "the medical history is not the ill

person's story" (Vonnegut 34). Humanities creates a space for this individual story to be narrated and this adds to the pathological understanding of the illness.

The patient's voice elaborates on the experience of illness outside the hospital's parameters and transcends beyond the clinical records. It allows the patient to be seen as a human and not as a clinical record or a case. Through the act of writing, the patient becomes the author of his/her own stories, further gaining control over his/her experience. The articulation of the experience in the larger context of life also allows the patient to make sense of the chaos that is caused by the illness. It helps the patient untangle the threads of disruption caused by the experience of illness. These autopathographical accounts follow the trajectory of life of the patient-authors covering the various nuances of the experience of illness. Through the narratives, they draw connections between the various aspects of their lives and illness. This connection becomes one of the central themes in the story. While the medical records explain the disease, these accounts elaborate on the illness. They serve as alternative accounts, further facilitating an in-depth and nuanced understanding of what the patients undergo in their lives. An added dimension is brought into these accounts with the published narratives of doctors who turned patients. While these authors share the identity and experience of being a patient, they differ from other patients due to their knowledge as doctors. These narratives brought the two ends, doctors and patients, of the spectrum of illness closer. This paper aims to examine the intricacies of a doctor-patient-author and the influence of this complex identity on the experience of illness through the analysis of Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air*. This intersectional, hyphenated identity in Kalanithi places him at the juncture of multiple paths interacting with each other to facilitate a dialogue among his identities. The paper will also attempt to analyse the different identities he describes in his narrative and each of their roles in his experience of illness.

Doctor-Patient Relationship

The identities of a doctor and a patient are often placed on the two sides of the experience of illness. In the medical structure these two identities, which occupy prominent roles, drive and fuel the system as a whole. They contribute to the formation of the system and can be viewed as the pillars of the medical world. These two roles are often complementary to each other within and beyond the space of the hospital. These roles cannot be viewed in isolation from the larger context within which they are formed. They are influenced and are part of the social, political, and cultural spaces that govern each individual. American social scientist Talcott Parsons theorised the relationship between the doctor and the patient in the social structure. In his book *The Social System*, he builds on the term 'system' as an interrelationship and arrangement among society's various sections and subsections. Parsons elaborates on the relationship between the doctor and the patient among the many equations that build the system (Parsons 289). He also put forth the understanding that to be ill is a social role and not only a biological condition. The role of the patient is often associated with set qualities such as helplessness, a condition in which one needs to be

looked after. In contrast, the identity of a doctor is created around the qualities that fulfill and feed the patient's needs (Milton). "The situation of the patient is such that he or she is probably 1) helpless (passive) and in need of help; 2) relatively incompetent technically, and 3) emotionally involved in shock, anxious, disturbed, and 4) vulnerable, making a high level of rationality of judgment particularly difficult" (Betterton 24). Due to their roles, these two identities stand on either end of the spectrum covering the gradient of the experience of illness. The dividing line between these two identities is marked and defined by the social structure and the medical world.

Arthur Frank, another sociologist who has extensively researched on the understanding of the self in narrative medicine and narrative therapy, has also written about the patient-physician relationship. He closely examines the encounters between these two prominent characters of an illness story. He writes about the physician's role in this tale yielding greater responsibility "because of the patient's vulnerability" (15) Unlike Parsons, he does not theorise the relationship in the social context alone but uses instances and interactions between the two to improve the interactions to heal each other. While Parson's theory puts forth the social role and characteristics of the two, Frank deconstructs this relation based on the dialogue between the two. His writing focuses on the significant number of illness experiences where the doctor and patient are two different characters in the same narrative. The interactions and cases he quotes in his article "How Can They Act Like That?': Clinicians and Patients as Characters in Each Other's Stories" help the understanding of the two identities with their ingrained dependency and intertwined nature. Parsons explores the complexity of the experience of a doctor becoming a patient and acknowledges the difficulty the doctor endures in taking on the role of the patient. This paper explores the complex identity of a doctor-patient navigating through the characteristic expectations and contrasting experiences of the two identities. It will also attempt to examine the impact of this dual identity on the experience of illness and healing through Paul Kalanithi's book *When Breath Becomes Air*. He will be read as a doctor-patient-author whose writing will be looked at from the lens of Autopathography.

Writing the Illness as a Doctor-patient-author

In Kalanithi's narrative, the line separating the two identities is erased by his illness. His writing elaborates on the nature of this conflicting identity of being a doctor and a patient. This dual identity binds the threads of his narrative and traces his oscillation between his experience of trauma as a patient and his practical knowledge as a doctor. He moves from studying the illness as a doctor and experiencing it as a patient. The identities briefly exist in the same time frame before one overpowers the other. This shift in his identity occurs over a gradual process where the patient dominates and pushes the doctor's identity outside the picture. Kalanithi's vulnerability coexists with his knowledge as a doctor. Like other patients, he does have to wait or rely on an external source to read his reports. He described the first

encounter with his reports when he diagnosed himself through the CT scan images. He addresses this at the beginning of the narrative and describes the conflict by saying.

> I knew a lot about back pain-its anatomy, its physiology, the different words patients use to describe different kinds of pain- but I didn't know what it felt like… I wasn't in a radiology suit, wearing my scrubs and white coat. I was dressed in a patient's gown, tethered to an IV pole. (Kalanithi 12-13)

This radiology suit and the patient's gown symbolise the two ends of the spectrum. They represent the two ends of the relationship that Parsons talks about. The suit and the gown also point to the contrast in his identity as a doctor and a patient. He moves from diagnosing a patient to being diagnosed as a patient. After the scan, when he lay in his bed, he relied on his experience and knowledge as a doctor to read the reports. His knowledge was accompanied by the hope of a patient to "find something that would change the diagnosis" (Kalanithi 4). At that point, he can be seen as possessing all the qualities of Parsons' description of the doctor-patient relationship. What Parsons described as two "complimentary normative structures" can contrast within the same individual. The identity of a patient not only affects his physical self but also attacks his identity as a doctor. It attacks his sense of self which he largely drew from his identity as a doctor. When physicians become patients, they experience "violations of the self, including lack of privacy and direct physical defilement of the body" and a loss of autonomy as any non-physician patient would, but their doctor role, their professional identity, is stripped much more patently than a patient of a non-medical occupation (Betterton 23). It is also due to the close relationship between the two identities, born in the same space as the hospital. The identity of the doctor is built and formed based on everything that the patient is not. The training that goes into building the identity of the doctor comes at the cost of the patient's identity. Hence their professional identity is stripped much more patently when they are forced to the other side of the line.

As described in Kalanithi's writing, the illness presents the two voices that replicate his dialogue as a doctor with his patients. The acceptance and awareness of his reality with the illness allow him to let go of the doctor's identity. In the hospital's space, he moves from being the doctor who acted to become the patient who is acted upon, from being the subject to becoming the direct object (Kalanithi 180). Kalanithi's narrative combines the voices of medicine and life through his two identities. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in "The Story of "I": Illness and Narrative Identity" talks about the difference between the clinical report and the personal account of the experience, wherein "[t]he difference between the two types of account is often formulated as a contrast between 'the voice of medicine' and 'the voice of life' (Mishler; Hunter; Frank, *At the Will of the Body, The Wounded Storyteller*)" (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 11) These two voices in Kalanithi's narrative add a dimension to the story that is not common and enhance the intensity of the understanding of the nuances of such experiences of illness.

His writing is divided into two parts; the book's first section presents a detailed

account of life as a neurosurgeon resident. In the narrative, he establishes his identity as a doctor and gradually brings in the patient's identity. He does not only battle the trauma of the illness but also struggles against his knowledge and experience as a doctor. Even after the diagnosis of cancer, he continues to perform as a neurosurgeon knowing the liminality of that identity. His narrative marks the last case and his final time in the hospital as a doctor in charge of a case before he entirely embraces the identity of the patient. He recalls his conversation with the nurse after his last case, which shows the shedding of one identity for another,

> "As we uncovered the patient, the scrub nurse, one with whom I hadn't worked before, said, "You on call this weekend, Doc?
> "Nope." And possibly never again.
> "Got any more cases today?"
> "Nope." And possibly never again." (Kalanithi 178)

The dialogue also shows his awareness of the reality that awaits him. Unlike other patients, he cannot hope against the illness's medical information. While most patient-authors present second-hand information about their illness in their writing, Kalanithi speaks from a first-hand account of both the voice of medicine and life. The first part provides space for the voice of the former; he writes about the doctor's experiences with the patient and a doctor's thoughts before acting on the case. His account shows the process of a doctor's desensitisation and intellectualisation of trauma and death. "It was not a simple evil, however. All of medicine, not just cadaver dissection, trespasses into sacred spheres. Doctors invade the body in every way imaginable. They see people at their most vulnerable, scared, and private. They escort them into the world and then back out. Seeing the body as matter and mechanism is the flip side to easing the most profound human suffering" (Kalanithi 49). The writing follows this process through the patients he engages with and his changing response to each case. By the time he becomes a patient himself, he begins to intellectualise the trauma and does not allow his disease to dictate to him. His training and experience with of engaging with patients both benefit and conflict with him. While it helps him accept the course of the illness, it also robs him of hope as a patient. This perspective is translated in his writing.

The second part of the book witnesses the formation of the patient's identity. It traces the identity of the patient overpowering his other identities, especially that of the doctor. He begins to display the role of the patient as characterised by Parsons. He lets go of being in control and charge, allowing another doctor to fill that space in his case. The elimination of his professional identity, which was also his primary identity, causes the complexity of his narrative, creating a void in his understanding of the self. The complete absence of one identity affects his sense of self and alters aspects of his everyday life. His presence in the same hospital space is affected when he shifts to being a patient who needs to be taken care of. Because of his own experience, he is also able to critically gaze at the medical system. He critiques doctors for their dehumanised approach to patients. He writes about learning to treat his paperwork as patients, not the patients as mere case studies and paperwork. He breaks the image of

doctors and writes about the mistakes they can make and how different it is to study a case in training and to handle the patient in reality, he said "reading books and answering multiple-choice questions bore little resemblance to taking action, with its concomitant responsibility" (Kalanithi 97). His writings present the nuances of both sides of the experience. He plays the role of both characters in his story of illness, through which the narrative presents what Frank proposed to achieve regarding the doctor-patient relationship. According to Frank,

> dialogue depends on the capacity to share the seriousness of what's at stake in the telling of a story. Clinicians and patients are fairly good at making each other characters in their stories… the dialogical task- and the profoundly ethical task- is for people to see themselves as characters in others' stories. (21)

Kalanithi's narrative performs the dialogical task of seeing the story from both perspectives allowing his writing to capture a spectral vision of the experience. His identity as the story's author allows him to incorporate the characters and their stories into the same narrative thread. He performs the ethical task of placing himself as a character in the story of the other. Although he moves between these different characters and perspectives, the authorial identity weaves him all together within the larger narrative of life. The book also explores his identities as a son, husband, and father. Though the characters of the doctor and the patient take up the space as central characters of the story, other identities also contribute to the experience of both traumas of illness and healing. His identity as a father comes to him towards the latter part of his life. It fills the void created by the absence of his identity as a doctor. He embraces fatherhood towards the end, knowing the short life span of the identity. The decision to have a child for him helps to see his life as a blank sheet of paper rather than a wasteland, "Looking out over the expanse ahead I saw not an empty wasteland but something simpler: a blank page on which I would go on" (Kalanithi 196).

Conclusion

The experience of illness is often associated with the trauma of the body. The term 'illness' is misplaced with 'disease,' even used interchangeably, while the two have different meanings. While disease refers to what happens to the body, illness is the experience of disease beyond the body. Autopathographical writings further helped clarify and establish this distinct difference between the two. They allowed an understanding of illness and created space for dialogues about illnesses such as cancer which carry the reputation for being the most feared illness. Cancer continues to be an illness with no defined cure leading to an immediate association with death. Patient narratives about cancer feed and fuel conversations about the experience and create awareness. It sensitivities the readers towards the trauma of these patients. It also provides people with information about the illness from a humanistic perspective. It takes illness beyond the world of medicine and addresses the more significant socio-cultural understanding of the illness.

Kalanithi's book not only achieves the purpose of articulating and narrating

the experience of illness but also shows the complexity of the same. It shows the influence of abstract aspects of the patient's life in their experience. It challenges the crystallisation of the idea of illness as a state of the body and puts forth the concerns of its emotional and psychological effects. The role of identity in his experience is prominently portrayed through the struggles he describes in conjunction with the physical struggles of the body. Although illness is the more significant theme of the story, it is placed in the larger context of life. His story also shows the complexity of an internal and external struggle of a doctor who also becomes a patient. It moves beyond the theorisation of the relationship between the doctor and patient and provides a novel framework to understand the intersection of the two identities. His book not only provides an alternate clinical record of his illness but also an alternative to a patient's story.

The identity of the author allows him to gain control over his story. The act of writing becomes a therapeutic and powerful tool in bringing out the stories of ill individuals. It helps to understand these experiences of trauma in the larger social context they are part of and not in an isolated personal space alone. The articulation of these stories brings to the forefront issues that often remain in the periphery. They open up the experiences of individuals as both a personal story and a collective tale of suffering.

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The Body Exhibit: An Altermodern Study of Shelly Jackson's Hypertext Memoir *My Body: A Wunderkammer*

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Abstract

We live in a post-postmodern globalised world. The increasing identification of cultural nuances and their subsequent accommodation and assimilation has led to an increase in standardization that has adopted the form of a grand narrative, worshipped by the modernists. This article is a study of Shelly Jackson's digital experiment *My Body: A Wunderkammer* where she has reinvigorated the memoir genre. This hypertext uses technological tools like HTML to exhibit a fragmented female body that invokes memories and imaginations specific to each body part when readers click on it. The article borrows from the Altermodern theory by Nicolas Bourriaud to study the act of individual representation by Jackson, as a response to a globalised uniformity. It proposes that the altermodern effort of producing singularities, to revolt against standardization, can be traced in this hypertext because of its non-linear and layered narrative that does not produce the same conclusions after each reading. It is also argued that the utter fragmentation of a body is not a result of postmodern alienation, but of deconstruction, which is the first step towards forming new intercultural connections and meanings. Finally, the article seeks to establish Bourriaud's argument of reading altermodern art as hypertext in the work under study.
Keywords: Altermodern, *My Body*, Shelly Jackson, Wunderkammer, memoir

Introduction

In his seminal work *The Radicant*, Nicolas Bourriaud asks a pertinent question – "why is it that globalization has so often been discussed from sociological, political, and economic points of view, but almost never from an aesthetic perspective?" (7). By engaging in a discussion of globalised art, or art produced as a result of the effects of globalisation, Bourriaud wants to direct our attention towards an increase in the practice of overproduction and standardisation that seeks to fulfil the demands of a capitalist economy. He further argues that postmodern multiculturalism, which succeeded modern metanarratives, has also resulted in the same standardised representations due to the focus on the homogenisation of different cultural values. He opines that we can save diversity only by cherishing it like a value (20).

To propel the discussion, Bourriaud proposes a solution that seeks to "refigure" modernity in the specific context of our contemporary times (15). He calls it – Altermodern – an alternate kind of modernity. The conceptual framework of the Altermodern, or Altermodernism, comes from the structure of an archipelago, an orientation that seeks to connect different elements together. He draws this concept from an understanding that "the exposition of an idea through fragments, through a

roving and disconnected type of writing, can sometimes better circumscribe its object than can a more linear approach" (8). This is the aesthetic-intellectual ideology that Bourriaud proposes using which contemporary works can be better analysed.

The next question he asks is, "How does this phenomenon affect the life of *form*?" (7). To project the answer to this question, Bourriaud curated an Altermodern exhibition in Tate Britain in 2009, where all the artwork was arranged in a labyrinthine structure that he famously refers to as a journey. This was done because he wanted to create a space that calls for "new intercultural connections" by replacing the question of origin with destination (40). He gives the responsibility of forming these connections to the artists who have to become the "surveyors of a hypertext world" that can no more be looked at as flat, absolute, or static but as a multi-layered space that resembles an ever-changing network of different fragments (184). So, this article focuses on Shelly Jackson's hypertext published on the web titled, *My Body: A Wunderkammer*. Her work has been studied with perspectives such as posthumanism, feminism, post-feminism, etc., but this article borrows from Bourriaud's Altermodern ideas to study the structural and contextual presentation of Jackson's memoir.

The present article analyses how *My* Body'*s* structural organisation and narrative method can be looked at as an altermodern response to the standardised tactics of our globalised ethos. It first discusses how Jackson executed the construction of this hypertext, followed by a detailed discussion of its multiple layers while constantly juxtaposing it with Bourriaud's theorisations. By focusing on specific lexias and the images included in them, the article seeks to establish a fundamental altermodernist methodology underlying the textual framework, which might or might not have been a conscious effort by the writer/creator of this hypertext. It is also argued that the negotiation between the mind and body, and image and text, results in individual representations that seek to disrupt the established norm of uniformity across diverse representations, both literary and cultural. Finally, the article proposes important conclusions based on these arguments.

Discussion

Shelly Jackson's web hypertext *My Body: A Wunderkammer* is a personal yet public exploration of the female narrator's body on screen. The text begins with a black-and-white sketch of a naked woman broken into pieces and each piece, which constitutes one body part, is accompanied by its name. When a reader clicks on any one of these parts, she is redirected to a portion of the narrative, called lexia, describing the memory associated with that specific body part. This lexia contains links within to take the readers further into the narrator's memories. While reading *My Body*, the readers can choose how to proceed, as they can either go back to the main sketch of the body or follow the links provided within this lexia, for the cycle to continue.

Each of these memories and anecdotes by the author is personal and intimate. Critics have observed how, via the use of the electronic medium, Jackson has

reinvigorated the memoir genre, which makes *My Body* a semi-autobiographical work. For instance, in the lexia associated with her shins, she talks about their colour, texture, and the marks they bear. She also recounts how she used to accidentally bang them against the metal frame of her bed while lying down and then squeezed them tightly while waiting for the pain to go away ("shins").

While analysing the structure of this hypertext, Jorge notes that this "canvas-body, map-body, is a bidimensional diagram" which contains multiple layers and acts like an entry point to the interior of the body "formed by the intertwined nodes" (96). She points out that only these two layers of *My Body* are accessible to the readers fully because the entry points of the third layer can only be accessed within the lexias available on the surface (96). The "shins" lexia contains two phrases in blue, "when I get a tan" and "tiny white dots", which act like hyperlinks and will take the readers to other lexias. These links would have been inaccessible at the beginning of the text. It is here that the metaphor of the "wunderkammer", that is, the cabinet of curiosities, becomes apparent. Jackson is invoking the very hypertext aesthetic by not providing the links beforehand. She wants the readers to participate in this exploration and have expectations of discovery at any point.

In the manifesto prepared for his Altermodern exhibition in Tate Britain, Bourriaud states that art in today's world "explores the bonds that text and image, time and space, weave between themselves". Jackson's hypertext does precisely this. It is a negotiation between body and memory, tangible and intangible, image and text. It is via this negotiation that the narrator formulates some sense of her self. She carefully examines the physical aspect of her body to invoke her feelings about it and retells what she experienced in the past. Because this entire process depends on her memory, which is clouded by her own interpretations of the real-time encounters, the entire narrative becomes subjective and unreliable. It demonstrates that one cannot possibly dissociate subjectivity from the act of writing (auto)biography (Regnauld 205). In one of the lexias, she recalls how she was made fun of in school because of her masculine shoulders and writes that in her "mind's eye," she was a "leering giant, gesticulating and capering around the little people, making them laugh, just one jot off a Frankenstein monster" ("shoulders"). Thinking of herself as a giant or a monster is an example of how she uses imagination as a trope to make her memories, and the feelings associated with them, come alive.

Despite this unreliability, which she shows no interest to address, the narrator asserts that she is "a different animal" ("arms") and that she has many theories about her body ("theories"). Like the multiple levels of the form that she has used, her negotiations with this body are also multiple. The act of exhibiting her body digitally is a part of that ongoing negotiation. According to Bourriaud, this kind of expression is a response to a "new globalised perception" which seeks to preach uniformity and homogenise diversity and diverse representations ("Altermodern Manifesto"). So, by infiltrating memory with imagination, the narrator of *My Body* has resisted this sense of uniformity. She has curated an array of artistic bodily images within the lexias that significantly differ from the reality of the body sketch at the beginning. In the sketch

included in the "hair" lexia the GIF of the narrator's hair constantly changes colour from black, blue, red, green, yellow, etc. It is a visual representation of the "magic markers" she had as a child with which she used to draw princesses having hair in different colours. The quick and continuous change in the hair colour echoes the altermodern design that seeks to disrupt modern universalism and its substitute, cultural relativism, signified by the black colour. The narrator claims that, unlike the "ordinary" princesses, she used to draw "magical beauties" with her markers ("hair"). Her later insistence on not keeping the natural colour of her hair which is dark brown, "if color exists where there's no one to see it", reflects her rebellion against the idea of a uniform sense of being. She views herself as a magical beauty who resists the standardised viewpoints directed towards her body.

It has been suggested that using hypertextual fragmentation as a form of literary writing to disrupt the linearity of narratives reiterates and reminds us that storytelling is "an illusory creation of coherence" (Page). In the case of *My Body,* this cannot be deemed true. The hypertext form, which gave Jackson the freedom to play with images and text, becomes a space for her imagination to foster. This fragmented exhibition of her body is similar to Baurriaud's installation of his Altermodern exhibition. He explains:

> I tend to think that the spatial organization of an exhibition has to be directed towards a specific effect, and has to be articulated in order to make a certain pattern appear. Here, it was a certain feeling: scattered or fragmented forms, archipelago-like, and the impression of a journey . . . More concretely, I tried to organize the exhibition as a maze, with many pathways leading to smaller rooms, and a general plan in the form of a snail, that comes from and leads to the spacious Duveens' Hall of the Tate Britain. (Ryan)

The production of a coherent being, or even its illusion, is the last thing that Jackson wants her endeavour to result in. Although not pursued consciously, it is clear that her writing method was directed towards producing a scattered and fragmented body which looks like Bourriaud's archipelago. The use of hypertext form is another concrete proof here. The very direction in which the narration moves, reflects a disoriented journey. First, we have a sketch of an almost complete body with visible cracks that make us feel as if it was very difficult for the writer to make it whole. The subsequent lexias contain beautiful, detailed sketches of each part, which seem to celebrate the freedom from that forced totality of the previous sketch. One such sketch is of an eye in the "eyes" lexia.

The accompanying text in this lexia demonstrates Jackson's intention as an artist. The narrator expresses her concern regarding painting exactly what she saw because if she did, she would have to paint the faint shadow of her nose at the bottom end of the canvas every time, and also the faint shapes of the nearby surroundings. She worries that nothing stays still and therefore drawing it will not be easy. To her benefit and delight, she reads in a book that "[t]here are no lines in nature" and calls the outlines on her canvas the "supposedly self-evident bits of piping around every given thing" ("eyes"). As an artist Jackson is very clear with the aesthetic portrayal of this

female body – it is a "Wunderkammer", a cabinet full of things which are waiting to be discovered and unravelled. So, like Bourriaud's maze-like exhibition, this body is a labyrinth with multiple pathways and entry points which take the readers to other signs and symbols.

The use of the body in *My Body* has also been looked at as a "cognitive schema", one that acts like a map, guiding the readers across the work (Tyrkkö 41). With this view, it becomes slightly possible for the readers to hope for the presence of some linearity within the text. But, as soon as one comes across the links within the already-opened lexias, the wish for coherence becomes improbable. The third layer of this hypertext undercuts all the possibilities of a linear narrative progression. In Jackson's two hypertexts, *My Body* and *The Patchwork Girl*, the negotiation between the mind and body, explains Jorge, is a direct result of this negation of linearity. She writes:

> The mind-body relation does not emerge from an ontological integrity, but in the immanent and recursive parceling, fragmentation, and reconstruction of the whole, the subject, by a reflexive and creative self through a variety of metaphors. These metaphors allude to the mechanisms by which the notion of the subject is reconstructed: acts of fictional creation like reading and writing. (Jorge 87)

Jorge's way of looking at the acts of reading and writing as a process through which the self is reconstructed becomes important here because this reconstruction would allude to the altermodern aesthetic of creating a self every time the text is written or rewritten and read or reread. This is the fundamental role that artists have to observe in these altermodern times, the role of producing artistic singularities in the globalised era of commercial linear representations.

Some critics have argued that this hypertextual fragmentation of the body is a way through which Jackson expresses a sense of modern corporeal alienation (Jones). This alienation has resulted in self-normalising behaviour which is apparent in the narrator's words. She writes - "The world was still wonderful and I was still eagerly a part of it, but I was not the world's privileged daughter and suitor. I had no magical insight into the will of things, and I would be doled no special favours" ("theories"). It is clear that the narrator of *My Body* is conscious of this globalised standardisation, but her identification of the contemporary state of the world is no proof of her acceptance of the same. Although she might be perceived as a victim of modern corporeal alienation, we cannot ignore her taking up the role of Levi Strauss's bricoleur (18) as she uses the available literary, linguistic, and technological tools to fulfil her purpose. Because she knows she would not be favoured singularly, she takes it upon herself and uses art to present her singularities.

Conclusion

Astrid Ensslin and Alice Bell, two principal critics and theorists of hypertext fiction, label the works, which use the digital platform and are a blend of text, image, sound, video, etc., as "unnatural narratives" (2). When it comes to Jackson's *My Body*,

its unnaturalness is less due to the use of a digital platform to write a memoir, and more due to a sense of incoherence that the creator of this hypertext consciously and actively pursues. The body, which we see as utterly fragmented, is used as a map to go on a journey of self-reclamation. The writer first deconstructs the existing totality of her corporeal self and then reclaims it, piece by piece, by attaching the value of lived experience to each. Theorists have suggested that a body derives its meaning through the discourse of construction, of perceiving it as separable from the physical substrate (Bonita Chatterjee 7). Thus, the act of self-construction of a self, by deconstructing the ongoing totality of a physical structure, is an act of altermodern representation which allows the negotiation among these fragmented elements without compartmentalising them categorically into associative structures of the existing knowledge discourse.

As per Bourriaud's claims, altermodern art must be read as hypertext. His argument is relevant here because he believes that an altermodern artist must "wander in geography as well as in history" ("Altermodern Manifesto"). Through *My Body*, Jackson inadvertently demonstrates how the hypertext form is the best way to do this because one can form new connections only by deconstructing the existing ones first. This deconstruction, and the subsequent reconstruction, was possible only via a writing method that not just fragments time, but also the space of a literary work. By breaking this space, through technology, the idea of deconstruction becomes tangible, and its visual representation adds to that effect. Now readers can look at the fragments of the body as puzzle pieces and begin on a journey of holistic construction which, ironically, remains elusive. This is the aesthetic result of the hypertext principle – generating a sense of closure where there is none.

While it may be argued that deriving closure is the very literary bliss that readers seek, Jackson's text, and other such hypertexts, seems to be drifting away from the idea of closure completely. They are directed towards the creation of a textual universe that negates any possibility of resulting in a totality of meaning. This can be interpreted as their postmodern deflection from the modern grand narratives. So, the absence of coherence cannot be termed as alienation, but rather a confirmation of the true post-postmodern value that we see Bourriaud advocating for. Hypertext narratives like *My Body* can thus be read as a celebration of fragmentation that paves the way for new elemental connections and altermodern representations.

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Decline of Novel and "Post-Fiction": A Critical Introduction

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Abstract

The genre of novel enjoyed a privileged position in the history of English literature since the nineteenth century. However, after the two horrific and devastating world wars the reality of a complacent Victorian world was shred to pieces. The reality has become all the more complicated in the 21st century with the catastrophic environmental changes brought about by the Anthropocene, the subversion of the cultural binaries of dominating and marginalized groups and the unprecedented growth of mass-media. The academic discourse turned to focus on the limitations of the realistic tradition of the novel and its unpromising future. It became problematic for the writers to capture authentically, in the narrow confines of the novelistic form, the paradigmatic cultural shifts happening under the impact of mass scale devastation caused by two world wars, its incumbent economic depression, drastic environmental changes and the great strides taken by the new mass media. So, the experiments in new forms of literary representation began and with that the cult of realistic fiction lost its credibility. The present paper aims to present a survey of the academic discourse centered around the crisis in the genre of fiction since the first half of the 20th century and to highlight the major factors responsible for its decline. It will also suggest the arrival of the genres of "post-fiction" as the possible literary alternatives to novel in the cyber-age. It uses the qualitative-basic research methodology. The paper does not claim to be a comprehensive account of its field of inquiry.
Keywords: Novel, Realistic, Anthropocene, Authentically, Post-fiction.

Introduction: Rise of the Realistic Tradition of Novel

The genre of the novel has been one of the most "outstanding and representative phenomenon" of the 19th century ("Nature" 12) and "the third principal genre of Western literature" (Steiner 389) after the epic and verse drama. It has been a specific product and most privileged cultural companion of modernity with its foundations in the socio-economic changes and the rise of middle-class in the post-romantic industrial capitalist society of the 18th century. Literary historians, philosophers, writers and critics alike - Hegel, Lukacs, Bakhtin, Ian Watt, George Steiner, to name a few - all have established a correlation between the rise of realist novel and the rise of bourgeois and the capitalist culture in the era of enlightenment and industrialization. Hegel hailed the novel as the "Modern bourgeois epic" (qtd. in Jha PE-36). Elaborating upon Hegel, Lukacs views it as the mutated form of the great epics of Homer, Virgil, and Dante and proclaims it as the "epic of an age that has been abandoned by God" (88). It is "the representative art-form of our age: because the structural categories of the novel constitutively coincide with the world as it is today" (Lukacs 93). Bakhtin has called it the "leading hero" in the drama of literary

development in the "new world" (7). The novelistic characteristics, he further states, are powerfully affected by "a very specific rupture in the history of European civilization" with its entrance "into international and interlingual contacts and relationships" (11).

The novelistic form is essentially realistic and this-worldly in nature. Its principal device has been the presentation of factual information. It is closely connected to "the realist epistemology of the modern period," and "the individualism of its social structure" (Watt 62). Watt views the "formal realism" of the works of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding as the manifestation of novel's commitment to authentic representation of society. The works of these early masters present "a full and authentic report of human experience" giving "such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms" (Watt 32). The realist fiction boomed in the 19th century in descriptive fictional works of the writers like, Dickens, George Eliot, Balzac, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Flaubert, to name a few. The social realism of Victorian era gave way to the psychological realism in the early decades of the 20th century with the new concept of psychoanalysis given by Freud and Carl Jung and we see the new experiments with the form of novel with the introduction of stream-of-consciousness technique by the modernists like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

The Altered Reality of the World and the form of the Novel

However, after the two cataclysmic world wars there happened paradigmatic shifts in the realistic view of the world. The altered reality of the post-war world subverted the fixed structures of the existing socio-cultural institutions and foregrounded the incompatibility of the form of the novel of social realism to the enormity of such catastrophic events. The make-believe world of fiction seemed insufficient and the writers felt the compulsion to invent new critical idioms to define and authentically present the horrors of mass scale devastation and destruction in all their minor details. "The diminution of the reality-function in the novel" can be judged, as Steiner asserts, by comparing the literature of the two world wars. He, further, observes that the experiences of first world war led to such classic pieces of fiction like Cummings's *The Enormous Room* (1922), Madox Ford's *No More Parades* (1925) and Hemingway's *A Farewell to the Arms* (1929) and Proust's last volume of *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927); however, the realistic fiction failed miserably before the horrors of the second cataclysm, as, "no poet, no novelist has, until now, been able to give to the reality of the concentration camps that discipline of insight, of shaped experience, which we find in Bruno Bettelheim's sociological study, *The informed Heart*" (388). He notes that the major works which have captured with "vivid authority" the horrific realities of the period are either "reportage or immediate witness" (388). The observations highlight the limitations and ontological failure of the novel before the contemporary realities of the world.

At a time when the canon of English novel felt jeopardized before the horrific realities of post-war world, a breather came from the margins of the Empire. A whole breed of novelists emerged from the Commonwealth nations with the ostensible political purpose of "writing back." The novelists like Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe, V.S.Naipaul tried to resuscitate the form of novel by introducing the native narrative forms like magic realism, self-reflexivity and meta-fiction to bring about a new way of configuring reality within the frame of the novel. However. the post-90s, the discourse of civilization unfolded in unprecedented ways necessitating a change in literary representation. The cultural shifts in the post-war world ecology, like, the digitization of text, enormous growth of the mass media, the omnipresent threats of nuclear annihilation, global terrorism and climate change the novelists themselves felt the insufficiency of the structures of 19th century social novel and realized the urgency to devise new strategies and techniques to meet the challenges of the new realities. In this context Amitav Ghosh highlights the insufficiency of novelistic form when he exclaims that these issues pose "peculiar forms of resistance" to "serious fiction" which is, in a way, a failure of the form, and a "cultural failure," in general (10-11). He further points out the handicap of the magic realist and surrealist novels while dealing with the improbable weather events happening today which are so "overwhelmingly, urgently, astoundingly real" that "to treat them as magical or surreal would be to rob them of precisely the quality that makes them so urgently compelling—which is that they are actually happening on this earth, at this time" (36-37). The "serious novel" was further compromised and a variety of metamorphosed forms creeped in- clubbed together as the "Genre Fiction"- viz. Thrillers, Fantasy Fiction, Graphic Novel, Science Fiction and so on. Literary scholars, again, view these mutations, which Amitav Ghosh deridingly calls as the "generic outhouses" and "the humbler dwellings that surround the manor house" (32)- the sure signs of a rupture and loss of mass appeal of the "serious novel."

Discourse on the Crisis of the novel

Taking cognizance of the doubts raised about the fate of the genre of novel, the present study seeks to propose the arrival of a post-fictional scenario, where the domination of the fictional from of the novel is sufficiently compromised, alongwith the concomitant arrival of possible post-fiction genres, such as autobiography, travel-writing and the contemporary essay, which could bring authenticity and plausibility to the compelling realities of contemporary world. More emerging forms can be suggested, like, blogs or vlogs, twitter-fiction, graphic memes/ narratives, oral testimonies but these forms survive more in the new media and does not come under the limited scope of my project. To arrive at this understanding, the basic research methodology with qualitative approach has been employed along with the analyses of the discourse on the "crisis in the novel" prevalent among scholars and literary critics since the first half of the 20th century. The scope of this research work is limited in time and space as it seeks only to reach at some understanding of the fate of the "serious

novel" in 21st century and does not aim to map the graph of the emerging post-fictional genres.

     It is almost a century or so now that the novelists, literary critics, and theorists have speculated that the novel like other classical genres - great epic, drama, and lyrical poetry - has lost its centrality in English literature and has no future in its practical sense. Lukacs's philosophical account of the novel's "fallen state" (xxxii) and his presentation of it as "the form of the epoch of absolute sinfulness" (Fichte qtd. in Lukacs 152) hints towards the problematic status of the form of novel. He sees only hope for the revival of the classical age of epics in the works of Dostoevsky whom he regards as the Homer or Dante of the new world or a forerunner to it; he writes about Dostoevsky: "whether he is merely a beginning or already a completion" (153). While expressing his dissatisfaction with his contemporary writers, Lukacs pins hopes on posterity to represent totality of experience like the classical works of Homer:

> It will then be the task of the historico-philosophical interpretation to decide whether we are really about to leave the age of absolute sinfulness or whether the new has no other herald but our hopes: those hopes which are signs of a world to come, still so weak that it can easily be crushed by the sterile power of the merely existent. (153)

In "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy," as T. S. Eliot describes the Modern age, the narrative mode of fictional representation failed to do justice to the prevailing formlessness of the social structures and the writers, like, James Joyce, Beckett and Borges started experimenting with the novelistic form in the altered social demography. Joyce's "mythical method," was one of the ways "of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance" to the chaos of contemporary times (Eliot). In his review of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (1922) Eliot expresses his pessimism about the fate of the novel; he states that "the novel is a form which will no longer serve; it is because the novel, instead of being a form, was simply the expression of an age which had not sufficiently lost all form to feel the need of something stricter." Sensing the bleak future of the form of the novel Eliot decreed: "the novel ended with Flaubert and with James."

     Jose Ortega y Gasset, in his study titled *The Dehumanization of Art and Notes on the Novel* (1925), also talks about the "general shipwreck of nineteenth century novels" (74) and announces that "as a routine production, as an exploitable mine, the novel may be finished" (99). Referentiality and verisimilitude being the essential tools of realistic fiction, it draws its empirical data from the material world. Gasset argues that "the resources of a literary genre are definitely limited" (58) and the genre of novel also is not "an endless field capable of rendering ever new forms" (58); it has "certainly entered into its last phase" (60). Another cause of its decline assigned by Gasset is that the production of quality works has made the sensibility of the audience so "subtler and more fastidious" that it has become difficult, ironically enough, for the contemporary writers to impress it any more with the same themes repeated time and again (Gasset 59). Lionel Trilling likes to describe this decline of the 19th century realistic convention as "the death of the novel." While accepting the fact of a very much visible presence of discourse on the certain decline of the novel, he gives

expression to this apocalyptic gloom: "It is impossible to talk about the novel now a days without having in our minds the question of whether the novel is still a living form. Twenty-five years ago, T.S. Eliot said that the novel came to an end with Flaubert and James, and about the same time Senor Ortega said much the same thing," and, though, the concerns regarding novel's fate are not expressed in the "formal discourse," but in the "conversations," yet, it is certain that "the opinion is now an established one and has a very considerable authority" (qtd. in Jha PE-36).

The prominent postmodernist literary critic and novelist John Barth has also pointed out the "used-upness" and "the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities" of the genre of the mainstream novel in his controversial essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1984). He contends that over consumption of themes may exhaust the possibilities of new creations which has resulted in the crisis of the genre of novel. He pronounces that the "literary forms certainly have histories or historical contingencies," and like the genres of classical tragedy or the sonnet-sequence, "it may well be that the novel's time as a major art form is up" (71). Barth talks about "the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessity, of writing original works of literature" (69) in contemporary time while referring appreciatively to Borges's experimentation with the form when he re-creates several chapters of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* in his metafictional story *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*. Borges's strategic re-use and re-creation of Cervantes's text is an ironic commentary on the utter insufficiency of the realistic fiction to communicate the sheer implausibility of the contemporary culture. The "artistic victory" of Borges here is that "he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself, to create a new human work" (Barth 69-70); however, conversely enough, these highly intellectual, enigmatic and densely self-referential literary novels baffled the readers who got disenchanted with the mainstream fiction and sought peace and pleasure in the easily-understandable "Genre-fiction" or the popular fiction.

Besides the limited resources, the literary genres have cultural and historical specificity, and their specific socio-economic contexts, as Gasset writes: "each epoch prefers a definite genre" ("Nature" 12). The realist novel, a product of 18th century capitalist economy, witnessed a sharp decline in relevance with some major socio-cultural upheavals in the second half of the 20th century, viz. globalization, subversion of Eurocentrism, emergence of technological powerhouses in the postcolonial east, and the rapid growth of social media and mass culture. Its constructed structures and forms face a serious challenge from the tendencies of subversion and deconstruction. Summing up the crisis of novel Steiner writes: the novel is a genre in which "the dreams and nightmares of the mercantile ethic, of middle-class privacy, and of the monetary-sexual conflicts and delights of industrial society have their monument. With the decline of these ideals and habits into a phase of crisis and partial rout, the genre is losing much of its vital bearing" (Steiner 389). The "great age of the industrial, mercantile bourgeoisie," represented in the great novels between 1830-1930, from "Balzac to Proust to Joyce," came to an end in the early decades of 20th century "gutted by two world wars and the decline of Europe from economic

preponderance" (Steiner 82). This sense of cataclysmic gloom has been reiterated by Frank Kermode in the article "Life and Death of the Novel" (1965) when he writes that "the special fate of the novel" as the most popular genre is dying. The serious writers no longer endorse the "land of fiction" and merely popular" which, according to Kermode, amounts to absurdity, as he proclaims: "If that's a novel, I'm going to write an anti-novel."

Cultural Shifts and Fiction's Decline

The medium of fiction again feels handicapped before such phenomena as the global warming and climate change, the dangers of nuclear annihilation or the global terrorism which are posing a big challenge to the contemporary society. Sensing its limitations, a host of contemporary novelists like Arundhati Roy, V.S. Naipaul and Amitav Ghosh have shown propensity to shift towards non-fiction in a major way. V.S. Naipaul expressed his frustration with the art of fiction writing which failed to accommodate the varied fluidity of his experiences as an Indian Immigrant and to capture its true essence. In the preface to the last of his India trilogy *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (2010), he laments: "I thought when I began to write that I would do fiction alone . . . . But after a few books I saw that my material—the matter in my head, the matter in the end given me by my background—would not support that ambition" as his experiences were "more fluid, harder to pin down and to present to the reader in any accepted, nineteenth century way" (v-vi). Amitav Ghosh clarifies the reasons behind his adoption of the non-fiction to tackle the issue of climate change in his non-fictional work *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016); he writes: "This, then, is the first of the many ways in which the age of global warming defies both literary fiction and contemporary common sense: the weather events of this time have a very high degree of improbability. They are not easily accommodated in the deliberately prosaic world of serious prose fiction" (35).

Thus, the 21st century has witnessed the definite "tectonic cultural shifts" (Self). Further, the art of literary representation in print media has been significantly challenged by the technological revolution in McLuhan's "global village." The digitized text has now replaced "the culture of the codex and the printed paper books" (Self). Till the end of 19th century, the plots of the realists displayed such realness and authenticity while mirroring the historical and social events that it appeared much deeper than that conveyed by the documentaries or the historians. However, now the serious prose fiction is no more able to match, as Steiner asserts, "the claims made on the life of the imagination by the new media of direct knowledge and graphic reproduction" (394). Jonathan Franzen has discussed the problem of representation in his much-discussed essay "Why Bother?" (2002) where he records his observation that in the cyber-age the visual media has completely enraptured the audience. He writes: In the nineteenth century "the novel was the preeminent medium of social instruction. A new book by Thackeray or William Dean Howells was anticipated with the kind of fever that a late-December film release inspires today" (qtd. in Compana

vii). Sean O'Hagan in her review of David Shields's book *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (2010) points out that the reason for the writer's repulsion and boredom with the form of the novel may be that it has become "too hidebound by plot, too traditional and old-fashioned to reflect the speed of 21ˢᵗ century culture" (qtd. in Twidle). The bulky novel in print has, to be sure, lost its battle for supremacy to the technology and mass media which are the instant sources of the information and entertainment.

Along with the changing imperatives of the publishing industry, the reading habits of the young generation are also changing. Philip Roth makes a pessimistic prediction that the form of novel in present times will become cultic and will be read by very few selected groups of people. Expressing his pessimism about the survival of the novel in the contemporary times he states: "I was being optimistic about 25 years really. I think it's going to be cultic . . . . To read a novel requires a certain amount of concentration, focus, devotion to the reading . . . . I think that kind of concentration and focus and attentiveness is hard to come by. . ." (Roth qtd. in Flood). Will Self also argues that literary fiction is no more central to the culture of the digital age as "the hallmark of our contemporary culture is an active resistance to difficulty in all its aesthetic manifestations." Echoing Eliot, he considers Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1932) as the last monument of "serious novel" and decrees that the novel "should have been laid to rest" after it. Though the "good novels" are still being written, but they are rare and most of the novels written during the century are the "zombie novels," or the "instances of an undead art form that yet wouldn't lie down" (Self).

The rising discontent with the form of the novel may be a product of the postmodernism's incredulity towards meta-narratives as has been hinted at by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984). He notes that in the "post-industrial society, postmodern culture… the grand narrative has lost its credibility" (37). Of course, by grand-narrative he largely meant overarching narratives which tend to structure the complexity of culture in consistent frames. As against the tyranny of grand-narrative, Lyotard argues in favor of "petite narrative" or the small narrative which is grounded in the personal and subjective experience and, thus, endorses, in a way, the non-fiction based on first-hand experience.

Conclusion: The Post-Fictional Landscape

The above discourse clearly reflects that there is a certain stagnation and lassitude in the genre of novel which made the writers declare its end. Many writers had suggested reconfiguration of the novelistic form to save it from total annihilation. Alain Robbe-Grillet proposed "Nouveau Roman" as the substitute of the traditional form of the novel based on the concepts of chronology, plot and characterization, but that too couldn't replenish it as, observes Steiner, a "sense of disarray" had set in even "in the *nouveau roman* with its fetishistic naturalism and moral neutrality" (80). Even the transmutations of the serious fiction into "the Genre or popular fiction," categorized, derisively, as Science fiction, Graphic novels, Thrillers, Fantasy novel, Women's fiction, Young Adult novel, web series, Netflix show and other "networked

genres" (Partington 4), are "self-negating," since they have abandoned their "responsibility to the real" (Steiner 388) and rely heavily on the make-believe world of fiction and aim only at the instant gratification of senses.

Thus, the genre of novel "no longer has the supreme status it enjoyed for ninety years [1875-1965]" (Wolfe qtd. in Campana 111-12) and a post-fictional world with new, hybridized genres is fast emerging which has drastically altered the ontology of the English literary canon. Many writers have announced the arrival of a variety of new genres as "the replacement of fiction" (Steiner 83). George Steiner proposes a "documentary poetic or 'post-fiction'" as "the representative transitional *genre"* (83). Tom Wolfe predicted the "New Journalism" as the newly emerging artistic form. In his article "Post-fictional Genres: The Christian Apocalyptical Thriller" (2010), Gill Partington speaks about the "quasi autobiographical circumlocutions," documentary fiction, "misery memoir" and "Christian apocalyptic thriller," as a replacement of the realistic novel because the "accepted notion of the novel   as fictional world" seems to have become "unstable" due to the rapid strides in contemporary media technologies (1). Franscesco Compana, on the other hand, asserts that the more direct and instant media such as television, radio, photography, and even journalism have taken the pivotal role which once was played by the social novel (vii). The established novelists are rediscovering the non-fictional forms like travel writing, autobiography, memoir, biography and literary essays for their authenticity and mass appeal. Moreover, the post-fiction literary landscape is marked by the dilution of the traditional concept of pure forms and the resulting hybridization of genres. In this context, Partington observes that the boundary between fact and fiction has become loose and "porous," and the "recent mutations in the paradigm of novelistic fiction," point to "the possible emergence of something like a 'post-fictional' mode of novel" (4). However, detailed explorations in this regard is beyond the scope of this paper.

The novel, thus, seems to be a restless literary phenomenon that goes on transforming and re-inventing itself continuously in order to survive. However, despite its various mutations and experimentation, it is now an accepted fact that the novel has taken on a more lateral role, a back seat in the 21st century. It is not that serious novels are not now written, but, as Federman claims, that the "good novels are no longer being read, considered, accepted, and published by the so called 'big' commercial publishers…" (qtd. in Mete 50). Various cultural imperatives are working behind its fall, as Milan Kundera notes: "the end of the novel can take place, it is not because its propulsive force has ended, but because it is located in a world that is no longer its own" (qtd. in Campana 117). To sum up in the words of Will Self: "In the early 20th century, under pressure from other, juvenescent, narrative forms, the novel began to founder." Though, the demise is not altogether complete, the recent mutations in the paradigm of novelistic fiction and the drastic socio-political upheavals around the world point to the possible emergence of something like a "post-fictional" literary world marked by the emergence of multiplicity of hybridized genres where writers no more demand a suspension of disbelief, rather they invite the

readers to participate in their own lived experiences.

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Lenses of "Personal" and "Political" Language in Herta Muller's Prose

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Abstract

Herta Müller, a Romanian-German author and Nobel laureate in literature, is known for her powerful and distinctive voice in Germany and Romania. Her early life, impacted by Nicolae Ceauşescu's communist dictatorship, eventually shaped her writings. Herta Muller's prose and fictional works are characterized by a unique combination of realism and surrealism and transport the readers to a world where personal and political problems are tangled, and the line between reality and imagination gets hazy. The fictional works of Herta Muller delve into the struggles of the common man surviving under repressive regimes, the fear and surveillance that permeate their daily life, and the profound effects of censorship and repression on personal and collective identities. She frequently paints marginalized and suppressed characters who reflect the broader social and political contexts in which they live. Her literary works, specially her prose works evoke a vivid sense of intimacy with the characters, thus making readers privy to their vulnerabilities, aspirations and traumas. This paper will scrutinize how her few prominent essays like "Always the Same Snow and Always the Same Uncle," "In Every Language There are Other Eyes," and "Christina and Her Double" address the vulnerability of individuals suffering from oppression and persecution, and examine Muller's experiences as a German-speaking ethnic minority, and explore the relationship between language perception and symbolism. It will also highlight the beauty and depth that language diversity adds to our understanding of the world. In her literary prose, she meticulously explores how language can be manipulated and used as a tool of censorship, propaganda, and control. Besides, her works portray the struggle of individuals to communicate their experiences, feelings and thoughts under oppressive conditions.

Keywords: Prose, understanding, language, political oppression, fear, cultural identity.

Herta Müller is a Romanian-German author and Nobel laureate in literature. In the literary arena, she is known as a powerful and distinctive voice in Germany and Romania. Born on August 17, 1953, in Nitzkydorf, a German-speaking village in Romania, the formative years of Müller were shaped by the oppressive regime of Nicolae Ceauşescu's communist dictatorship. This turbulent upbringing significantly impacted her writing, imbuing her prose with poignant themes of political oppression, identity, memory, and the indomitable human spirit. Her works particularly explore the effects of repression and dictatorship on individuals, families, and communities, highlighting the pervasive fear, surveillance, and control that permeates every aspect of life. The feeling of exile and displacement remains a persistent theme in her fiction as many of her characters find themselves physically or emotionally removed from their homeland, experiencing a sense of alienation and loss of belonging. Their ability to persevere, adapt, and find strength to weather the tough and extreme challenges, is a recurring motif. In this regard the following observations are quite pertinent:

> Herta Müller's literary works address an individual's vulnerability under oppression and persecution. Her works are rooted in her experiences as one of Romania's

German-speaking ethnic minority. Müller describes life under Ceauşescu's regime—how dictatorship breeds fear and alienation that stays in an individual's mind. Innovatively and with linguistic precision, she evokes images from the past. Müller's literary works are largely prosaic, although she also writes poetry. (Herta)

The prose works of Herta Muller are acknowledged for their poetic strength and skilled use of language. Her fiction includes a one-of-a-kind mix of realism and surrealism as it transports the readers to a world in which personal and political problems are tangled, and the line that separates reality from imagination becomes progressively blurred. She creates haunting and evocative images of individuals who have confronted the harsh realities of oppression and brutality and the traumatic impact these had exerted on their lives.

The linguistic virtuosity exhibited by Herta Muller is an extraordinary, striking, and enduring feature as is manifest in her frequent use of linguistic playfulness and inventive expressions of the written word. Being the bilingual writer - German and Romanian – she has added a new dimension to the art of storytelling and essayed a deeper analysis of varied themes relating to migration, cultural identity and communication.

The literary approach of Herta Müller is to explore identity through the use of Romanian words in her works in German and English language writing that mirrors her deep faith in the richness and intricacy of human experiences. It creates a linguistic dissonance that reflects Muller's experience in a country where she is not fully accepted. She admits that proper understanding requires probing beyond superficial descriptions and embracing the complexity that emerges at the intersection of cultures and languages. As Doris Mironescu critically observes:

> Müller sees identity as something irreducible to clichés, a complicated construction that reveals its complexity by the obvious fact that it is formed at the intersection of cultures and languages. And the Romanian words that Müller evokes in her recollections are part of complex experiences that cannot be summarized but only alluded to in dense symbols that require long narrations in order to unfold their rich array of significations. (Mironescu)

Müller's prose transcends the boundaries of traditional storytelling, and is a relentless search for truth and an unflinching examination of the human condition that has suffered under an oppressive regime. The literary works of Muller encounter the gloomiest aspects of totalitarian rule and expose the psychological toll of life beneath the constant surveillance and fear. Despite the darkness that informs her literary works, we witness an unwavering resilience in her characters who assert their compassion, sympathy, and morality in the face of degrading and dehumanizing conditions. Her notable poetry and essays include, *Hunger and Silk*, "The King Bows and Kills," "Always the Same Snow and Always the Same Uncle" (Kuiper).

The present paper is based on the language and words employed by the author and the language and words used by the people in her *oeurve*. Muller believes that things become "something else" at first when we look at them and later when we start to "describe" them through our "words" (Muller, 1). The author adds, "If you want to be precise in your description, you have to find something completely different within the sentence to allow you to be precise" (Muller 1). The author proposes an interesting approach to attain precision in the description through language. One may use a metaphorical or indirect method to communicate one's ideas accurately and precisely.

The author advocates inserting imaginative language to convey deeper layers of meaning, and develop a more nuanced understanding of the subject one intends to share. Muller emphasizes the potency of human imagination in carving the notions and reactions of a human being. According to Muller, imagination can magnify the emotional impact of the perceived threads. It often surpasses the effect of actual dangers in our lives. The following insightful passage suggests analytically that our fears are not solely based on reality, though they heavily influence our mental constructs:

> These vagabond qualities that turned one object into another were unpredictable. They distorted one's perception in the blink of an eye, made of it what they wished. Every thin branch swimming in the water resembled a water snake. Because of my constant fear of snakes, I have been afraid of water. Not out of fear of drowning, but out of fear of snake wood, I never learned to swim for fear of scrawny, swimming branches. The imagined snakes had a more powerful effect than real ones could have; they were in my thoughts whenever I saw the river (Muller 2).

The author challenges the conventional idea of language as a reliable tool for drawing a valid and reliable image of reality. Expressing a deep sense of skepticism towards language and laying down the foundational doubt in the ability of a language to accurately convey the meaning, the author points out the inherent ambiguities and gaps in the structure. Highlighting the illusive nature of language, the author avers:

> I don't trust language. At best, I know from my own experience that, to be precise, it must always take something that doesn't belong to it. I have no idea why verbal images are so light-fingered, why the most valid comparison steals qualities it's not entitled to. The sur- prise comes about only through invention, and time and again, it proves true that one gets close to the truth only with the invented surprise in the sentence. Only when one perception steals from another, one object seizes and uses the substance of another - only when that which is impossible in real life has become plausible in the sentence can the sentence hold its own before reality (Muller 3-4).

In an essay, "In Every Langauge, There Are Eyes," the author reflects on the language's simplicity and directness, the absence of abstract thinking, and the dominating presence of routine instinctive actions. She highlights a child's perspective where the language the village people employ, is straightforward and literal. The author presents a nostalgic reflection on the language and life of villagers seen through a child's eyes and recalls when language and reality were in perfect harmony and an immediate connection between words and the objects they represented. One may observe this idea in the following text:

> In the language of the village so it seemed to me as a child-the words of all those around me lay directly on the things they denoted. Things were called just as they were, and they were just as they were called. An agreement concluded for all time. For most people, there were no gaps that allowed them to glimpse between the word and the object and stare into nothingness as if sliding out of one's skin into the void (Muller 15).

Herta Muller delves deep into the intricate relationship between the loss of language, silence, and work arising in a labour-intensive society or environment. She also suggests that the act of working is instrumental in the preservation of language and knowledge. When human beings are engaged in labour, their bodies and minds are occupied with the physical demands of the assigned tasks. At this stage, words usually

become unnecessary and secondary. However, when the work ceases and the silence lingers, a fear arises that the individuals might lose their linguistic abilities over time because language always requires continual practice and use to remain alive. Exemplifying the essence of human experience with specific context and environment, Herta Muller observes:

> Words only accompanied work when several people were engaged in a task, and one was dependent on the actions of another. But even then, that wasn't always the case. The heaviest work, such as carrying sacks, digging, hoeing, scything, was a school of silence. The body was under too much strain to waste energy on speech. Twenty or thirty people could remain silent for hours on end. Sometimes I thought, as I watched, that I was learning what happens when people forget how to speak. Once they cease toiling, they will have forgotten every single word. (Muller 16)

In her famous essay, "In Every Language There Are Other Eyes," the author metaphorically expresses the different perspectives and ways of looking at things relating to the speaker's longing for understanding and connecting it with others. In this connection, Herta Mullar contemplatively reflects on the effects of reading and writing books. She points out that "reading books or even writing them' does not provide relief. However, their value lies in the frequent availability of passages that evoke a silent disconnection in the head" (Muller 28). Dealing with the transformative power of literature, the author continues to refer to this disconnection and pinpoints the movements when the reader's thoughts are drawn to a place, triggering a deeper understanding or emotional response:

> Reading books or even writing them brings no relief. If I have to explain why I find one book rigorous and another shallow, I can only point to the frequency of passages that bring forth a disconnection in the head, passages that draw my thoughts straight to places where no words can survive. The more frequently these passages occur in the text, the more rigorous the book; the sparser they are, the shallower the text. (Muller 28)

Muller also discusses the distinction between prose and poetry and states that both forms of writing share the exact requirement of depth and density. However, the prose contains a more extended form and is rendered differently. Highlighting the unique power of poetry to evoke a vast and immersive experience beyond the literal meaning of its words which weave together lines that interact and overlap with each other and finally create new spaces and depths of meaning, Muller alludes to interview of Bruno Ganz, a frequent performer of poetry, and remarks:

> With poetry, it's possible for one line to lay bare a vast space beyond the sense conveyed by the words. In a strange way, it crosses over itself with the next line; new spaces keep opening up, not like a presentation of the evidence in linear prose. There it's a question of shifts, with verticals and strange movements. For me, poetry is to be found in a large space, enveloped with air. There is always more meaning, always more movement than is expressed in words. (Muller 29)

Furthermore, Muller adds that the quality of a well-crafted sentence should be present in both prose and poetry. She suggests that a powerful sentence can transcend the boundary lines of poetry and prose and can effectively blur the lines of prose and poetry forms of writing. Analyzing the distinction between good poetry and prose, she observes:

> A good prose sentence is often praised for being lyrical. Perhaps because it stands on

its own, it resembles only a good sentence in poetry: a and not flat one. It's simply a case of two good sentences resembling each other. The sentence: 'When the birds die, they drift belly up in the wind" in Antunes's prose is self-evident. It only sounds like good poetry because it is also good prose." (Muller 38)

Muller also reflects on her experience of language acquisition and the significance of her surrounding. According to her, people listen attentively to the language spoken around them and absorb it when verbal communication fails, "When your surroundings only speak what you can't speak, you listen to the language along with the whole region. And if you stay long enough the time in the region learns the language for you. That was my experience; the head had no idea how it happened" (Muller 32). She also emphasizes the importance of listening in language learning, a foundation for effective communication. When the speaker immerses in the language and culture, their speaking ability naturally develops. Giving a contrast between the two languages, Muller says, "But listening is a preparation for speaking. One day the mouth began to speak of its own accord. Then Rumanian was like my own language. In contrast to German, the words were astonished when I found myself involuntarily comparing them with my German words" (Muller 32). Muller analyses language's wide variety and nuances by describing the wind and different dialects. She draws attention to how the high German and Romanian village dialect has unique ways of expressing the wind's movement, sound, and impact.

> In the village dialect, we say: the wind GOES. In the High German spoken in school, we say: the wind WAILS. And to my seven-year-old ears, it sounded as if the wind had hurt itself. InRumanian we say: the wind HITS, vintul bate. You could hear the sound of movement as you said "hits', so the wind didn't hurt itself but others. The wind ceasing is as different as the wind wailing. In German, we say: the wind has lain down - flat and horizontal. In Rumanian, we say: the wind has STOOD STILL, virtual a stat, steep and vertical. The example of the wind is just one of the constant shifts that occur between languages. Almost every sentence is a different glance. Rumanian saw the world as differently as its words were different. It was also differently woven into the net of grammar. (Muller 33)

Muller explores the intricate interplay between language perception and symbolism of a lily as seen through the critical lens of two different languages, German and Romanian. The author implies that knowing and appreciating other languages enriches one's perception of the world. For instance, lily becomes a multifaceted symbol. It opens multiple layers of meaning and invites the reader to see more than a single perspective can give us. It also enhances and showcases the beauty and depth that language diversity can add to our understanding of the object of this world. She adds:

> What does the lily become in two languages that are running side by side? A woman's nose in a man's face, a long, greenish palate, or a white glove or collar. Does it smell of coming and going or of staying put? Through the meeting of two aspects of the lily, the closed lily of the two languages has become a mysterious never-ending event. An ambiguous lily remains restless in the head and is always saying something unexpected about itself and the world. You can see more in it than in the one-language lily. (Muller 33)

Pinpointing the profound relationship with the mother tongue and the challenges that arise when one navigates to a new language, the author remarks that we all trust the

"familiarity" and solidity of the mother tongue as it flows naturally; from our mouths without conscious effort. It is an intrinsic part of our self, akin to our skin. Despite all such truths, this comforting connection turns vulnerable when others belittle, disregard or forbid its use. However, the unique characteristic of the mother tongue gets visible through its exposure to other languages. The encounter with other languages may boost and strengthen the relationship with one's mother tongue by fostering a sense of solid connection and a relaxed form of love. One gains a new perspective and understanding of idiosyncracies of one's mother tongue when a person holds one's language up to the scrutiny of another language. When the individuals examine and evaluate the intricacies and unique features of their mother tongue in comparison to a different language, they experience a profound shift in how they perceive and comprehend linguistic intricacies.

By subjecting their language to the scrutiny of another, individuals uncover subtle nuances, peculiarities, and distinct qualities that might have previously gone unnoticed. This process fosters a heightened awareness of the idiosyncrasies present within their native language. As a result, individuals not only become more attuned to the mechanics of their own language but also gain an enriched perspective on how language functions in general. The act of juxtaposing languages encourages a deeper understanding of the ways in which grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural connotations shape communication. It can lead to a more profound appreciation for the beauty and complexity inherent in both the mother tongue and the language being compared. This exploration can also highlight the limitations and strengths of each language in conveying certain concepts, emotions, and ideas.

Through this process, one may appreciate one's nuances and distinctiveness, thereby deepening one's bond with one's native language. The author says rightly, "No mother tongue suffers when its randomness becomes apparent in the seeing of other languages. On the contrary, holding one's language up to the eyes of another leads to a solid relationship, a relaxed kind of love. I didn't love Mother better because it's the most familiar" (Muller 35). Muller explores the profound impact of the repressive regime on language and communication. According to Muller, words collapse under the weight of existential turmoil when life starts searching its meaning**.** Dictatorships often exploit language and manipulate words to control and suppress the truth.

While discussing the metaphorical conceptualization of injurious and injured language employed by Herta Müller, the power of language to harm and silence, to underscore the importance of preserving freedom of expression and the complexities of communication under such circumstances, Pavlo Shopin, a critic of Herta Muller observes:

> In the most extreme scenario, the injury inflicted upon language metaphorically kills it and silences the speaker, where silence is construed as a symptom of a lethal injury to language. While injurious language can bring about the death of a human being, injury is conceptualized by Müller as a possible factor in the metaphorical death of language, leading to silence. Ultimately, the metaphorical conceptualization of injurious and injured language allows Herta Müller to convey to the reader the dangers and limitations of art and communication in the condition of oppression. (Shopin)

Herta Muller refers to her first book titled *Nadirs Niederungen* (ogriginally published in 1982) which was set in Banat Swabian village. The Romanian publisher of this

book censored the word "SUITCASE" and other content of it. The censors of the book were afraid that the word "SUITCASE" would suggest the desire to leave the country, which was a crime under the communist regime at the time. Such an act of censorship mirrors an attempt to silence specific vital topics. Through censorship of words and concepts, the dictatorship aims to blindfold people's understanding of language and hinder them from expressing and comprehending certain truths. Here, prescribed language enforcement perpetuates the malevolence of oppressive regimes and contributes to the degradation of society and decline in intellectual and emotional freedom. Language manipulation and censorships by the dictatorship hinder communication, suppress the truth and create an atmosphere of oppression and fear.

To sum up, language is not a neutral entity but an integral part of power dynamics. If we pore over the pages of history and look beyond the horizon of culture, we find that language is entwined with politics as a tool for communication or as a means of persuasion and influence. Language remains interwind with the actions and intentions of the people to use it so that it can be influential and ethical. In every linguistic expression, there are some underlined perspectives. The way people communicate one another mirrors their value system and belief system. Therefore, the phrase 'other eyes' seems apt when we go through the following passage:

> Nowhere and at no time was or is language a non-political preserve; it cannot be separated from what one person does to another. It always lives in the individual case. Every time we must listen to what its intentions are. Inseparable from action, it becomes legitimate or unacceptable, beautiful or ugly; you could also say: good or evil. In every language, in every way of speaking, there are other eyes. (Muller 46-47)

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The Discourse of Visual Culture and Its Spectacle

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Abstract

The digital landscape understands the power of an image and the spectacle of visuals to represent, confront and affirm the dominant discourse. Image offers a social commentary, makes space for cultural participation, for it constitutes an utterance in contemporary reality. It plays an important part in 're-territorializing' and challenging 'stereotypical representations'; within the framework of visual capitalism, images counter the politics and invisibility. The image curates and constructs subject positions, it may be paradoxical but the difference enables opportunities for intervention and transformation, offering itself as site for art and culture, and also citing art and culture into newer references. The present paper attempts to locate the visual grammar of digital spaces; for it is increasingly enabling us to build a conceptual picture of experience: patterns of knowledge, patterns of consumption and patterns of cultural interaction. The space shared by technology and image is ambivalent; and it leads to inconsistency in meaning. This mutability (ambiguity in meaning) was called 'enunciative function' by Foucault, for it allowed language to thwart, challenge and rupture the precincts of controlled cultural codes. It makes way for complex and contradictor. Image within visual culture enunciate the function as it frames the volatile ideas in volatile spaces. The truth of 'volatile in-between-spaces' is framed by unlike, unequal fragments of mass-mediated culture; our contemporary reality is pervasively negotiated by visual culture; examination of its dominating postulations, our ability to interpret, assess and criticize its spectacle makes the study of visual cultures and images essential and imperative.

Keywords: Visual Capitalism, Discourse, Spectacle, Culture, Semiotics.

> Is it possible for an image to contain that, which has no image?
>
> Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Dostoyevsky was talking about Holbein's painting of *Dead Christ*, which offered no beauty but etched horrible suffering and pain and showed the 'corpse of a tortured man' (476). In fact, Dostoyevsky's stunned reaction to it was, 'A painting like that can make you lose your faith'. In his book *The Idiot* Dostoyevsky touched upon an idea that has gained importance in the era of digital reality, that 'visuals' and 'images' are constructed culturally, painstakingly cultivated through history of arts, social practices that make both image (display/art) and viewership (spectatorship) a dynamic embedded in human societies. Dostoyevsky underscored the visible invisible in an image and pointed towards the dialectics of politics, aesthetics and ethics. The epistemology of being seen, and seeing is learnt; the hermeneutics of images in our contemporary world mediated by technologies and new media is moving towards study of semiotics of images. Julia Kristeva (1989) described Holbein's *Dead Christ* as being, 'without the promise of resurrection' (110). Rowan Williams (2008) explains

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the painting as 'kind of anti-icon, a religious image which is a non-presence or presence of negative… the icon seeks to confront the viewer/worshipper with direct gaze…a dead man in profile, a double negation of the iconographic convention' (53).

Saussure (1922) in his *A Course in General Linguistics* offered that communication in human societies could be deciphered through religious ceremonies, flags, signals, clothes and other as language. He called the study of all these signs as semiotics. Semiotics offered linguists a new definition of language as it created its object of study; images and words turn into utterances/statements in particular discourse. Saussure proposed to take 'sign' (art, cinema, songs, memes, images) as a unit for analysis; it's a sign that threads subjective actuality to the structural paradigm of collective reality. In the present times the audio-visual discourse offers both verbal and visual as signs; Umberto Eco explained that signs could be gestures, sounds, objects and words. In a world marked by multimodality communication, multiples modes (signs): language, gaze, designs, music, images, and gestures are operating simultaneously. Each unit is helping in construction and comprehension of our reality/society. Van Dijk (1989) Fairclough (1989) talked about representation of social practices and investigating language as a locus of power and cultural change. The trajectory from context to text in order to offer and create meaning has now turned attention to semiotics; in a diverse world of images, language imposes its denotation on an image turning it into a comprehensive unit of conversation. The present paper attempts to locate the visual grammar of digital spaces; for it is increasingly enabling us to build a conceptual picture of experience: patterns of knowledge, patterns of consumption and patterns of cultural interaction. The visual has always been part of the human civilization: cave paintings, hieroglyphics, maps, photos, paintings; and WJT Mitchell puts it we have been attempting 'the visual construction of the social field' all through history. The presence of images underscores human nature, 'images are not just a particular kind of sign but something like an actor on the historical stage, a presence or character endowed with legendary status…' (Mitchell 3).

The visual culture today makes space for unending 'flow of message (Castells 508) they are more like 'basic thread of our social structure' (507). This flow of images is ubiquitously enabling visual narratives to offer 'legitimacy' or shape the idea of good and evil (Nye 2011). In our networked societies, images are offering new ways to circulate knowledge (Castells 511). The power of cultural capitalism spread through information networks has undermined the construction of subjectivities (Brea 157). Debord (1994), Jameson (1991), Brea (2010) have debated the influence of images in a world marked by hyper visibility, they are to be reckoned as an immersive and commercial force today. Parks (2002, 286) explained visual capitalism as a 'system of social differentiation', explaining, as recognized pyramid of knowledge/ power based on access to technology. In the new configurations of knowledge there are asymmetries; it's a world inundated by images that hide, 'unequal mediatic distribution of goods and images of different cultures' (Canclini, 41), quantifiable prosperity may not be evenly distributed but the images and visuals are

more evenly and effectively distributed. Cohen (2007 76) describes current globalization as paradigm, 'anyone can become observer of a world in which most frequently they cannot participate as actors' (76).

The images hold power as they influence and alter consciousness and perception; cultures across the globe are conceiving and navigating reality through the seamless maze of images and pictures. Contemporary world has been described as 'Pictoral turn' and it necessitates looking at the cultural, political, social, ecological dimension and discourse of visual cultures and communication.

II

The spectacle is the acme of ideology, for in its full power it exposes
and manifests the essence of all ideological systems: the
impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life.
-- Guy Debord

Guy Debord described spectacle as more than a 'collection of images rather it is a social relationship that is mediated by images' (12), underpinning a comprehensibility that images/visuals are ideological and they influence our discernments, our perceptions; and also the way we think and deal with each other. Visual instruction and impact help to internalize the constructed paradigms of body as natural and thereby looking at identities as 'one –dimensional; Herbert Marcuse offered that single dimensional understanding is 'populated by self-validating hypotheses, which become hypnotic definitions or dictation' (Marcuse 24-25). The inherent dichotomy of visual cultures allows to read them as both representative of visual capitalism, embedded in corporate structures, fabricating our desires, deciding our choices, selections; ubiquitously present in our everyday life; and as democratic cultural space that facilitates a close scrutiny of doctrines, ideologies and codes within itself to identify and thwart social injustice. There is no doubt that visual hegemonies serve cultural imperialism but at the same time visual grammar delineates a new informed citizenship aspiring towards 'cultural democracy.'

We are living in a world where we are being consumed by the images and in the mages however, we are learning from the universe of images as well while we engage as spectators. bell hooks underscored that we consume visuals/images both for entertainment and learning (2); Martin Jay offered the idea that, 'plurality of vision to wean ourselves from the fiction of a 'true' vision and revel instead in the possibilities opened up by the scopic regimes we have already invented and the ones, now so hard to envision, that are doubtless to come' (20). The dominant cultural codes experienced as 'true' are countered by the profusion of images that offer multiple impressions, discourses, and discernments about the same cultural truth.

Fabricating spectacle in a visual capitalist society has been described as 'the mass ornament' by Siegfried Kracauner; the analogy parallels the construction of visual cultures in terms of performers and spectators, as it subtly and artfully silences values, desires and meanings that are rooted in individual spaces, and offers them as

'mass ornament' to be consumed insidiously. Theorists as early as 1920s from the Frankfurt school of thought, expressed the influence of mass mediated images on the various dimensions of knowledge and society. They underscored the bias of our representation and conceptualization of reality in images as rooted epistemologically. Daniel J Boorstin was the first to describe the idea of 'pseudo event' and also their 'geometric progression'. Pseudo-event is primarily production and distribution of images of cultural experience whose truths meanings and realties are complicated with ambiguity to arouse and captivate public interest (11, 1987); this concept resonates in Adorno's 'pseudo-personalization', which implies 'commodity fetishism' offered by 'culture industry' of capitalism (Adorno 173). Thereafter Marshall McLuhan pivoted the idea that the world of electronic communication can be looked at as an extension of human mind even though it offers 'passive' and not an 'active' experience; nonetheless the experience though vicarious is impelling; this consistent symbiotic experience of images affects our construction and determination of desires needs and choices. Boulding (1961) elaborated that, 'the image not only makes society, society continually remakes the image' (64-65).

Images not only offer a glimpse of a manufactured reality but also assist in subtle commodification and incessant indoctrination, establishing itself as an authority over the public and private self. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) ascribed it as 'manufacture of consent', the power of media to allude to 'debate, criticism and dissent' all the while enabling commodity culture of corporate capitalism (302).

III

Visual capitalism is based on 'productive consumption' (316), as it networks and transforms the matrix of 'circulation, consumption, production and cultural interaction'. The power of image and its impact was accentuated by Nestor Garcia Cancilini, who offers a new dimension for evaluation, of 'geopolitics of the image in the society of knowledge is so important than the transnational organization of representation and art images and cultural industries' (2007 40); Arjun Appadurai explains the images, the imagined and the imaginary as field of organized social practices, forms of labor, form of negotiations (1996 27). Buck-Morss describes the inherent character of image as 'being-in-the-world', it thwarts any kind of individual usurpation, collectively perceived, collectively exchanged they are cornerstone of culture' (157). Visual Capitalism, in contemporary world perpetuates hegemonic neoliberal order of power; we are completely immersed in spectacle. The embodiment of everyday life was explained by Pierre Bourdieu: the collective world as a spectacle offered to a spectator who takes up a 'point of view' an action; Debord confronted these conceptions by attempting to interpret, assess and evaluate representation of spectacle culture. Lives being lived through reality-TV are the truth of the spectacular society: *Big Boss*, *Roadies, Mika Ka Swambar*, *Survivor*, *The Bachelor* are examples of commodity fetishism, a clamorous appetite for gazing at others and in doing so building an apt ecosystem for capitalism, 'by subversive and destabilized identities

who seek new modes of enjoyment through form of romanticized resistances' (Jagodzinshi 107).

The 'ecology of images' (Susan Sontag 1977 180), 'pleasantly internalized… impelled by visual culture…(Bourdieu) represent an idea in consonance with Barthes' (1977) understanding of mythic power, it 'depoliticizes critical speech'. The panopticon understanding of scopic regimes today is comprehended as we, 'no longer watch TV, its TV that watches [us]' (Baudrillard 29), where we are participating without actually participating; annihilating the political dimension of society. The spectacle of visual capitalist society acts as a distraction and offers a politics that is regressive and linear. It becomes imperative to call out these cultural codes of distraction, which would otherwise reduce cultures into degenerating space, a trending fetish that is decadent, giving rise to voyeuristic culture of conceit.

IV

The digital landscape understands the power of an image and the spectacle of visuals to represent, confront and affirm the dominant discourse. Image offers a social commentary, makes space for cultural participation and is in consonance with Audre Lorde's idea, 'use of language to transform silence into action' (142); where an image constitutes an utterance. It plays an important part in 're-territorializing' and challenging 'stereotypical representations'; within the framework of visual capitalism, images counter the politics and invisibility. The image curates and constructs subject positions, it may be paradoxical but the difference enables opportunities for intervention and transformation, offering itself as site for art and culture and also citing art and culture into newer references. The space shared by technology and image is ambivalent; and it leads to inconsistency in meaning. This mutability (ambiguity in meaning) was called 'enunciative function' by Foucault, for it allowed language to thwart, challenge and rupture the precincts of controlled cultural codes. It makes way for complex and contradictory; 'the transgressive and transformative representations and interpretations are possible' (309). For Foucault the enunciative function of language offers an 'archaeology of knowledge' where socially historically coded representations are excavated, examined and critiqued' (206). Similarly images within visual culture enunciate the function as it frame the volatile ideas in volatile spaces; and offer 'immanent critique' exposing 'society's inherent contradictions; instead of pursuing absolute truths they offer complexity, ambivalence and at times aggressive confrontation with the status quo' (Becker 17). The truth of 'volatile in-between-spaces' is framed by unlike, unequal fragments of mass-mediated culture; our contemporary reality is pervasively negotiated by visual culture; examination of its dominating postulations, our ability to interpret, assess and criticize its spectacle makes the study of visual cultures and images essential and imperative.

45-year-old Argentine artist Luciano Garbati had first posted the picture on his Instagram account in 2008. It went viral in support of #metoo movement. It was originally made in resin; New York based Bek Anderson came across it and tracked it down. It has been now installed across the street from Criminal Court; Medusa holding the head of Perseus in one hand and sword in the other. It attained a symbolic value; an image for women's rage: re-imagined Medusa

In the chaos that ensued in 2021, as the Americans left Afghanistan, the screens were inundated with images of people fleeing with their belongings and children. One such image was of a two-month-old infant being handed over to the soldiers at the airport. The image turned iconic; questions, speculation and politics played out, as the image framed humanity's kindness, valour and discipline.

Conclusion

The pictures shared above offer a montage of impact of images on the dominant discourses. The paradoxical relationship between arts and society underscores the possibility of resisting cultural and political codes that frame our knowledge. These images/visuals enable us to critically reflect and evaluate: staging aesthetic and imaging the composite reality onto the digital landscapes for digital nomads. The discourse of the visual culture includes anthropology, art history, literature, film studies, cultural studies, and that is why, it is to consider objects/ideas beyond 'picture analysis'. It is situated in the historical and cultural constraints, it maps the webs of visual, it studies the platforms and technologies from where the images are distributed and generated as it lays bare the dynamics between seeing and knowledge. Mieke Bal explained the experience of seeing as synaesthetic (Bal 9) for affects all the senses: visual synaesthetic experience.

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Postcolonial Studies: Reconsideration of Key Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Postcolonial studies have played a vital role in addressing the issues pertaining to representations and descriptions of colonised cultures. Academic world no doubt welcomed the arrival of postcolonial studies and recognised its contribution. However, the latest studies taking place within the domain of Cultural Studies have started enquiring the very status of postcolonial studies. Serious deliberations have also taken place to explore the limitations of postcolonial studies. The present paper tries to revisit some such scholarly discussions and debates about postcolonial studies and underlines the need for overcoming the challenges being faced by the discipline so that the limitations can be overcome and newer modes of theorisation of other cultures can be thought of.

Keywords: Postcolonial studies, western descriptions, orientalism, colonialism.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a seminal text that launched a series of interdisciplinary studies across different domains. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said observed this phenomenon and brought it to the notice of the world that the descriptions of other cultures came first from the West. In fact, Said's *Orientalism* established that most of the available knowledge that exists today on non - western cultures actually came through the painstaking efforts of European enterprise, which he calls 'Orientalism.'

Said's text became an instant inspiration for further studies. *Orientalism* was hailed as something that "created an awareness of the divergence between what we *say* and what we *experience*" (Dhareshwar 213). However, some of the scholars also recognised the limitations of Said's findings. Robert Irwin, for instance, speaks about the obscurity of orientalism and declares that it is caused due to Said's "frequent references to Gramsci and Foucault" who are "yoked" together by Said in his "bashing" of orientalists (289). Despite such criticism, the influence that Said's text exerted remains undoubted. The subsequent studies which modelled their arguments on Said's *Orientalism* marks the beginning of an intellectual enterprise called 'Postcolonial Studies', a "disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and crucially interrogating the colonial past" (Gandhi 4) and postcolonial literature that "critically and subversively scrutinise(s) the colonial relationship" (Boehmer 3).

The origin of postcolonial studies, in fact, can be traced back to Frantz Fanon's influential book, *The Wretched of the Earth* published in 1961. In this text, Fanon gives a call for "cultural resistance" through reclaiming the past. However, it was with the publication of Said's text in 1978 that the enormity of western representation of the other cultures captured the attention of the academic circles. *Orientalism* not only discusses western representations of the East, specifically Middle East, but also

shows us how such representations assumed a lucid structure over a period in time and became an integral part of western discourse and academic attitude not only in the West but also in the East. An important impact of *Orientalism* as noted earlier is that it paved the way for postcolonial studies and the emergence of postcolonial studies is in itself a significant milestone in the sense that it provided new lenses to examine western descriptions of the other cultures. With its interdisciplinary approach, postcolonial studies opened different avenues to check and challenge the western representation of the Orient by offering alternative representations, descriptions and narratives. It tried to probe questions about colonial aftermath and the extent of colonial damage that continue to perpetuate even to this day. Hence, Leela Gandhi aptly outlines postcolonialism as a, "theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath" (4).

However, the newer studies taking place within the discipline of Cultural Studies have started questioning the very status of postcolonial studies itself. The crisis within the discipline of postcolonial studies is highlighted by Kwame Anthony Appiah. In his article, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" (1991) Appiah assesses postmodern art of Africa and postcolonial literature, particularly contemporary African literature. He describes postcoloniality as the "condition of comprador intelligentsia" which refers to a comparatively smaller group of writers and thinkers who follow western style and are also western trained and who arbitrate the trade in "cultural commodities". Appiah further explicates that in the western front they are recognised through the Africa that they offer and their fellow citizens recognise them both through the West that is presented to them and also through Africa that they have "invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa" (348). Added to this, Appiah observes that postcolonial intellectuals in Africa are reliant upon the support of two institutions, that is, the African University "whose intellectual life is overwhelmingly constituted as Western" and the "Euro-American publisher and reader" (348). He also stresses that even though these writers want to escape from the West, they cannot do so because "their theories of their situation are irreducibly informed by their Euro - American formation" (348). Thus, Appiah's observations help us to understand the problem faced by postcolonial studies as a decolonizing project.

Arif Dirlik too expresses his concern about the nature of postcolonial studies. In one of his papers "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" (1994), Dirlik takes up the question of Ella Shohat "When exactly ... does the 'post-colonial' begin?". In the backdrop of Ella Shohat's question, Dirlik tries to explore the answer. He claims that 'post - colonial' began with the arrival of the third world intellectuals in the first world academia rather than with the opening of "new vistas for critical inquiry" (329). He elucidates that postcoloniality is the "condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism" and therefore the question is,

> whether, in recognition of its own class-position in global capitalism, it can generate a thoroughgoing criticism of its own ideology and formulate practices of resistance against the system of which it is a product. (359)

By focusing their attention on the theoretical framework of postcolonial studies, some of the scholars even feel that the entire discipline of postcolonial studies as it is practiced today needs a rethinking. In this regard, the observations of Russell Jacoby become crucial. In his article "Marginal Returns: The Trouble with Postcolonial Theory" (1995), Jacoby critiques post-colonial studies. He describes post-colonial as a "catchall term to dazzle the academic mind" (30). He argues that post-colonial studies have an identity crisis and is obsessed with itself and there are confusions regarding the period, territorial reach and also about concepts within post-colonial studies. More than these confusions, as Jacoby points out, post-colonial studies is made up of "loose formulations" (32). He highlights the contradiction in the claim made by post-colonial critics - they claim to be "marginal" even when they are amidst mainstream success and the "word 'Marginal' has become their favorite word (33). Jacoby asserts that post-colonial theorists keep repeating "relentlessly that multiplicity, difference and specificity constitute the colonized world" (35). While exploring the problem of post- colonial theorists about generalizations and universalisation, he argues that this attitude of post-colonial theorists itself is problematic because without generalizations, nothing can be written by the theorists about anyone except on themselves.

Jacoby applauds post-colonial theory for introducing new areas of study beyond traditional Western literature and raising questions about Western perception of the others and evaluation of Western texts. But at the same time, he is very critical about the love for jargons, technical terms and fractured English of the post - colonial theorists. He argues that post - colonial studies is grandiose, obscure and solipsist (37) and concludes sharply,

> While the post-colonial studies claim to be subversive and profound, the politics tends to be banal; the language jargonized; the radical one - upmanship infantile; the self-obsession tiresome; and the theory bloated. (37)

Amidst the thinkers who have raised their concern about the challenges faced by postcolonial studies, Graham Huggan's insights look thought provoking. In one of his papers written in 1997 "The Neocolonialism of Postcolonialism: A Cautionary Note," Huggan draws attention towards the phenomenon that colonialism still continues to sustain and manifest in different fields. He begins his paper by asserting that we now live in "neocolonial, not postcolonial times" (19). He starts his arguments by remarking that at the present times, colonialism repeats in different forms like US military intervention, multinational companies and Information industries, corruption and ethnic violence, internal strife supported by ex-imperial forces etc. Huggan links these new forms of colonialism to what Frantz Fanon has announced way back in 1960's itself that political independence will not guarantee the end of colonialism. Huggan opines that this is the reason why Fanon advocates decolonization to keep a check and resist colonial threats.

From general, Huggan moves on to specific details and explains the manner in which the term postcolonialism has become a new fashion, especially in academics. He investigates the reasons for the "widespread academic currency" that the term

postcolonialism has gained especially in the universities of the West and at the same time, unravels the subtle contradiction about postcolonial studies. On the one hand, the critiques of postcolonialism have acknowledged postcolonialism as "intellectually bankrupt" (20). But on the other hand, the field is prospering and has become an academic fashion. Huggan then moves on to emphasize upon the limitations of postcolonial studies. According to him, postcolonial studies are preoccupied with the "structural forms of colonial power" and this preoccupation has resulted in inattentiveness towards "cultural specifics and historical details". Postcolonial writing has reduced to mere "textual politics and aestheticized modes of resistance,"

> Postcolonial studies' fascination with the structural forms of colonial power has, at best, brought with it an inattention to cultural specifics and historical details; at worst, the oppositional force of postcolonial writing risks being reduced to textual politics and aestheticized modes of resistance. (20)

Huggan strongly cautions that if postcolonial studies continue to offer intellectual tourism or capitalize on the "otherness" of the marginalized cultures, then it would be apt to term it as neocolonial rather than postcolonial (21). He criticises that postcolonial studies have not just become academic fashion, but it is participating in the "commodification of cultural knowledge, in the manufacture and trafficking of ideas about "other" cultures" to satisfy the hunger of the West (22). Huggan underlines the contradiction within postcolonialism to argue that postcolonialism does not mean the end of colonial era. But on the contrary, it "confronts the neocoloniality of our present times". However, Huggan is optimistic about postcolonial literature and the role it can play in offering resistance in "textual terms". He cites the example of Salman Rushdie and mentions that Rushdie's celebrated novel *Midnight's Children* appeals Western readership but at the same time it also mocks "their orientalist fantasies of magical Eastern cultures" (23). Therefore, he ends his paper by expressing his hope on postcolonial literature which he describes as "alive and kicking - against the neocolonial times" (24).

Huggan's ideas find better expression and expansion in his text, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001). The text explores the sociological dimensions of postcolonial studies. Huggan states that he no doubt honours the intellectual project of postcolonial studies and its scholars (Preface xvii), but at the same time, he is also sceptical about the wide circulation of terms like 'marginality', 'authenticity' and 'resistance'. He expresses that in recent years, these terms are getting circulated as "commodities available for commercial exploitation" (Preface xvi). With this proposition, he starts his "inquiry into the status of postcolonial literatures - postcolonialism itself - as a cultural commodity" (Preface vii). The manner in which postcolonial literature repoliticises and redeploys exoticism and marginality and thereby translates the cultural otherness is elucidated to demonstrate how the postcolonial tactics of resistance are dependent on metropolitan modes of production and consumption. The text demonstrates various strategies of exoticism and staging marginality adopted by the writers of Africa, India, South Asia

and also in settler cultures like that of Canada and Australia thus ensuring steady supply of 'exotic' to meet the European demands. The role of publication companies and award companies in promoting the production of culturally 'othered' goods is also stressed. Thus, he highlights the fact that postcolonial studies and especially postcolonial literature is engaged in "Marketing the Margins".

In the chapter, *Consuming India*, Huggan specifically analyses the popular literary magazines of the West like, *The New Yorker* and *Granta*, that published special issues on the 50th year of India's independence. He uses the example of such popular literary magazines to illustrate the persistence of imperial gaze of the West even in the present times towards India - "an India which, while it cannot be fully comprehended, can certainly be consumed" and the "image of India as an object of metropolitan fascination" (63). Huggan validates that Britain is using the New India as it did the old to "rejuvenate itself" (63). The implication of this claim is that Britain's dependence on India to define itself continues in newer forms even to this day. He also states that such images and clichés about India get reproduced in contemporary postcolonial Indian English literature, particularly in the novels. With this, Huggan makes an important claim that the clichés about India are repeated and reproduced not only in Western writings about India but even contemporary Indian works are also reproducing them (60). Speaking about Indian English writers, Huggan states that Amit Chaudhuri, Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy produce such kinds of stories that focus on "domestic mishaps and comic scenes of mass confusion. Such stories are difficult to disagree with and are unthreatening" (62). Further, he highlights the media hype created around Indian diaspora novels in English and also some homegrown novels (74-76). These arguments of Huggan shows the attempts of the scholars not only in identifying the limitations of postcolonial studies, but also the way in which they explore the interconnections between postcolonial studies, Western academic world and publication impacts.

The problem within the discipline of postcolonial studies is again emphasized by Sandra Ponzanesi in her book *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (2004). Ponzanesi captures the growing anxiety about the extremely "theoretical framework" and "political evasiveness" of postcolonial studies. She elaborates upon the reasons for such anxieties. She stresses upon the need for the postcolonial studies to adopt a "systematic and compact approach to the staging of colonial encounter" (xiii - xiv). Further, there is also a need for the postcolonial intellectuals to "think beyond the premises of their original quest" due to the demands of new global challenges (xiii - xiv). Ponzanesi again explains,

> The major impasse generated by the field itself concerns the viability of the postcolonial paradigm for the assessment of disparate sociopolitical realities that were generated in the wake of different colonial legacies, were marked by diverse forms of anticolonial struggles, and are now characterized by divergent interventions into neocolonial policies. (xiii - xiv)

Some of the scholars like Lisa Lau and Om Prakash Dwivedi argue that the entire

project of post colonialism needs a rethinking. In their text, *Re- Orientalism and Indian Writing in English* (2014), Lau and Dwivedi applaud the impact of postcolonial studies that have "proved to be extremely far-reaching, deeply penetrative disciplinarily speaking, and altogether increasingly influential in academic circles". But simultaneously they also elucidate that postcolonial studies need to pay deeper attention towards the study of power dynamics,

> closer attention still needs to be paid to the power dynamics that drives this knowledge authority, which paradoxically, in pockets at least, promotes what it had set out to critique and even deconstruct. (Lau 2)

Inadequate theorisation and the impermeable vocabulary of postcolonial studies have also been studied by some scholars like S.N Balagangadhara. While paying due respect to Said's discoveries and building upon the insights of postcolonial thinkers, S.N Balagangadhara observes the lack of adequate theorisation in postcolonial studies. He points out the current condition of postcolonial studies and lists out its limitations. According to S.N Balagangadhara, at the outset, there is an increasing criticism about the advantages of postcolonial project. Secondly, postcolonial thinkers themselves have difference of opinion about the issues regarding the "identity of the field" and its goals. Then there is also an "impenetrable jargon" used by postcolonial scholars. The danger of the usage of such impermeable jargon is that the significant questions get overshadowed by them. Finally, there is a kind of "narcissistic self - reflection" which is "paralysing the practitioners in this domain". (35)

Thus, in the background of the above discussed texts, it becomes evident that postcolonial studies suffer from certain limitations. Scholars, researchers, cultural critics and academicians have no doubt welcomed the arrival of postcolonial studies and recognised the important role it has played in the study of the issues related to cultural representations and descriptions. But at the same time, serious studies have also taken place to explore the limitations of postcolonial studies so that such limitations can be overcome and fresher modes of theorisation can be thought of. These texts shed much light on the boundaries of postcolonial studies and its practices. Some of the aforesaid texts emphasize on the commodification of postcolonial studies and claim that postcolonial discourse is marketing the exoticism and marginality to satisfy the appetite of the West for consuming the otherness. These scholars demonstrate that the existing postcolonial studies have not handled the issues of representation of postcolonial societies and postcolonial situation in an adequate manner. In addition to this, these texts also highlight the contradictions prevailing within the field of postcolonial studies. At the same time, these observations also call for expanding the horizon of postcolonial studies to initiate renewed perceptions and address the issue of description and representation of the colonised cultures in a more authentic way. These studies thus underline the need for developing alternative modes of descriptions and theorisation of the postcolonial societies that are completely liberated from the clutches of colonial influence. Hence, there is a necessity for revision of the approaches and practices being followed in the postcolonial studies.

Further, there is also a need for reconsideration of the issues and challenges being faced by this dynamic and diverse field called postcolonial studies.

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A Dialogue with British Poet Usha Kishore

Usha Kishore is an Indian-born British poet and translator who lives on the Isle of Man. Usha attended the University of Kerala in India, Sheffield Hallam University in England, and Canterbury Christ Church University in England. Her poetry has appeared in journals such as *Aesthetica, Asia Literary Review, Atlas, Bare Fiction Magazine, Index on Censorship, Indian Literature, Poetry Salzburg Review, South Asian Ensemble, South Asian Review, The French Literary Review, The Frogmore Papers, The Stinging Fly, The Warwick Review, and Under the Radar.* She won the Pre-Raphaelite Poetry Prize in 2013 and the Exiled Writers Ink Poetry Competition in 2014. Usha has received the Isle of Man Arts Council Award (2013), the Culture Vannin Award (2013 and 2016), the SETU Award (2016), and the Word Masala Award (2016). Usha's poetry is featured in both British school and Indian undergraduate syllabi. She has authored and published several outstanding poetry collections, including *On Manannan's Isle* (2014), *Night Sky Between the Stars* (2015), *Translating the Divine Woman* (2015), *Home Thoughts* (2017), and *Immigrant* (2018). Usha has also translated Jai Shankar Prasad.

Beauty Das is a Research Scholar at the Department of English at Banaras Hindu University. Her area of research is South Asian diasporic poetry. She published her poems in *Aulos: An Anthology of English Poetry,* and her Bengali poetry was published in *Sangsaptak.*

*Beauty Das***:** *Gender as a category is oppressive worldwide, and women's marginalization occurs due to their intersecting social identities like class, caste, religion, sexuality, disability, etc. What impact has migration from one country to another had on your identity? Can we call it your intersectional diasporic experience?*

 Usha Kishore: Your question is fairly complex. Let me try to address all the points that you have raised. Yes, gender is an oppressed category worldwide. It is surprising that in the 21st century, women are being oppressed. Today, in war zones across the world, the heinous crime of rape is weaponized and women dehumanized. It is regrettable that women are not safe anywhere in this day and age. What has been happening in India, the UK, and elsewhere is unpardonable: women are abducted,

assaulted, and murdered.

In India, where goddesses are worshipped, and people chant: "O goddess of the world, power incarnate," women are still considered objects of male desire, puppets in the hands of patriarchy. The female entity and female body are revered in Sanskrit scriptures; however, this reverence is buried in religious stone. In real life, crimes against women like female foeticide, rape, assault, denial of female inheritance rights, and the lack of the right to security are all burning issues. This in itself is a socio-cultural contradiction, a bitter irony; what I call parables of shame. In 2015, in the introduction to our translation of Kālidāsa's *Śyāmalādaṇḍakam*, my uncle, the late M. Sambasivan, and I raised these questions. I am still pondering over them helplessly. In the current geopolitical climate, I have no choice but to start off this interview on a grim note.

Now, looking at intersectionality, as a woman of colour in the UK, as an ethnic minority woman teaching English in the British Secondary Sector, as a first-generation Indian immigrant living and working on the British Isles, and as a diasporic writer, I can see the academic need to explore gender and intersectionality.

I pride myself on my Keralan heritage, but when I go back home to Trivandrum, despite my local dialect of Malayalam, people call me a foreigner. Here in the British Isles, I stand out anywhere with my Indian skin and dark hair. Nowadays, I go by the nomenclature of an Indian-born British poet and translator. The empire has, at last, absorbed us postcolonials into its multicultural center. I define myself best in my poetry:

I am not one but two.
India bleeds in my veins; England
paints my feathers with her mists.
(I am not one, but two)

Looking at the intersectionality of a gendered diaspora, race, and gender are intertwined, almost always inseparably. As a woman born into a Tamil Brahman family from Kerala, I have often felt weighed down by socio-cultural patriarchal norms. I have always challenged them, sometimes successfully. One such battle with the patriarchs in my family was the chanting of the *Gayatri Mantra,* which was denied to the women in the family. My poem, "Twilight Prayer," is a challenge to this then-taboo:

I am the earth,
seeking the sky
at twilight time.
I am that woman
Gayatri - lover
Of Brahma.

Now, I am delighted that South Indian women have broken the shackles of restricting tradition to chant the Gayatri, a *mantra* personified as a woman.

As a diasporic, you feel you are caught in the double jeopardy of race and gender. Strangely, despite the Western belief in equality et al., women of colour are often perceived as submissive and voiceless. This duality of race and gender often leads to marginalization, which is something that diasporic women writers like me question incessantly:

You want me to be invisible

I want to be seen. You preach
equality, I want difference.
You call me fussy. (Fussy, Militant, Rebel)

 However, there has been a gradual change in certain sections of mainstream British society, which acknowledge women of colour. I cannot but laud this change. I have always taught in mainstream British secondary schools. I am not unique here. I am only one of many. British universities boast of many female academics of colour. Racism is not altogether obsolete here in the UK, you do face racism from some quarters, but increasingly not all. In the poet's world, there are other diasporic people like me, Indian-born British women writers, and first-generation immigrants. Bashabi Fraser and Debjani Chatterjee are two well-known British Indian poets.

My poetry reflects my experiences as a gendered diaspora, an intersectional experience of gender and ethnicity. *Night Sky Between the Stars* is my second collection and encompasses my preoccupation with Indian womanhood, highlighting my concerns about a marginalised gendered identity. I challenge marginalisation through the metaphor and metonymy of myth:

I am she – beheading myself
at the altar of light – sucking
my own life- devouring myself.
Burning myself in winged flames
of legends, I disintegrate into
syllable, word, metaphor and allegory –
only to be reborn in your verse.
(Night Sky Between the Stars)

BD: Diasporic status incorporates varied shades of experiences that are different from homeland experiences, and these experiences can be both positive and negative. What is the difference between your homeland experience and your experience in the host land?

UK: I have read your paper on gender and race intersectionality in my poetry. I am grateful for your interest. However, I would like to highlight that I bring both marginalization and assimilation into my poetry. I must emphasize that I have had a whole plethora of diverse experiences in both nations. As far as the home and host nations are concerned, I do not address them as such anymore. I was born in India, and I live and work in the British Isles. Most of my life has been spent here in the UK. So, I am British, – but being born in India, I am Indian as well. I am at home in both countries.

When I go to India, I say I am going back home. When I return to my house on the Isle of Man, with its Indianised interiors, I say I am back home again. So, both are home nations. I wake up to the tiger skies of the island, to seagulls singing a litany of seas and hills, I know I am home.   When I go back to Kerala, when I hear lilting Malayalam, when I smell spices in the summer air, I know I am back home.

As a practicing Hindu, I have an altar at home; home to a pantheon of Indian gods, to whom I chant in grief, in joy, in gratitude. In my tutor room at school, idols of Hindu gods, are showcased by the Religious Education Department. I begin each working day with a prayer to my gods, who are waiting for me there. I have always

been at home in British Secondary schools. When playful students shout out my name in Douglas city center and ex-students, who are now teachers, lawyers, and bankers greet me with respect, I am at home on this island. In the last twenty years, I have happily taught English in three island schools and the Isle of Man College, what is now the University College of Man. In my English classes, when I wax lyrical over Browning and Rossetti, I know I am not English, but I have coloured English with my Indianness.

I think I live in my poetry, and my creative work:

> *I live in words*
> *in words that I read*
> *in words that I write*
> *in metaphors of exile*
> *in allegories of solitude*
> *I have given up fighting exile*
> *I have befriended new gods*
> *I have drunk new wine*
> *tasted new bread*
> *breathed new air*. (Solitude)

There has been a balance between the good, the bad, and the ugly in both nations that I write about. In the UK, I enjoy my independence, my work life, and my socio-cultural setting. I have British friends and I have Indian friends; I maintain close links with both communities. Then there is the multicultural writing setup in the UK, which promotes talent. I have been awarded grants by *Culture Vannin and the I*sle of Man Arts Council. I have won prizes in British Poetry Competitions and my poetry was first published in British magazines. My work is endorsed by the local poetry society and promoted by my British publishers. I know I am a woman writer of colour, reflecting the multicultural dreams of the contemporary British Isles. There is the assimilation, that both I as an individual, and the UK as an institution have engaged in. I also pride myself on being a writer of the Indian diaspora. A lot of work is being done in the UK, by individuals and institutions to promote the Indian diaspora and writers of colour.

However, as mentioned earlier, I cannot deny the elements of racism and difference present in UK society, which I write about quite prolifically. As a writer, I feel I should reflect on society and bring about change; that is the very essence of writing.

> *I am Caliban, you want to tame me,*
> *I am the exotic, you want to taste me,*
> *When I say I am human, like you,*
> *you get lost in the dual labyrinths*
> *of nature and culture.* (Fussy, Militant, Rebel)

I think as an immigrant, there is bound to be marginalisation, but assimilation has been attempted by mainstream UK political institutions and the wider community. When Rishi Sunak, the current Prime Minister took office as the first PM of Indian descent, I could not but well up in pride.

As far as India is concerned, I am nostalgic about Indian festivals, culture, and languages. I miss the collective cultural paraphernalia:

> *A country stretches across my wings,*

at times a burden, at others a blessing.
I have learnt to live with it, its silhouettes
of waving palm fronds seizing my dreams,
its myths spreadeagled on my verse, the cry
of its peacocks, haunting my silent nights.
I feel its goddesses in the feminine flow
of my form, I whisper its twilight prayers
in my sleep. My country grows with its roots
penetrating my bones, it binds the culture
of distance into my heart. Its paraphernalia
of blue gods, red demons, sun festivals,
its skies screaming with the wild colour
of a thousand autumns and its aching moons
scatter my forlorn thoughts in desert storms.

(Immigrant)

Gender is a prime concern in my poetry, and I am critical of the status of women in India. Despite the millions of women occupying political, institutional, and administrative jobs in India, we have miles to go as regards the status of Indian women in society. This is something I have written about and will continue to write about. I use myth as a metaphor and metonym to voice my concerns, as illustrated in the poem, 'Dakshayani,' the myth of Sati.

Let me be born again and again to question pater ire,
to wipe womanhood's grief, to triumph over the sins
of womb and breast that relentlessly bear generations
for your unending wars, your sky searching quests,
your bloodthirsty might.

BD: Now let's go into the realm of your poetry, Ma'am. While going through some of your poetry collections, like Night Sky Between the Stars and Immigrant, I observed that you have used many Hindi words as well as Sanskrit words. This reminds me of Salman Rushdie's "Chutnification" Do you find this observation justified in the context of your work?

UK: I cannot agree with you on 'Chutnification.' I do not particularly approve of this terminology, despite the humorous analogy to Indian cuisine. I would call this term Salman Rushdie's definition of his own work, in novels like *Midnight's Children and Satanic Verses,* and in the work of others, where he and other writers indulge in code-mixing and code-switching, which are linguistic strategies that unsettle the colonial authority of the language; both contributing to the hybridisation of English. Code-mixing is affected when the language, in this case, English, is arranged structurally according to the conventions of Indian languages, affecting syntactical and grammatical shifts. This is seen in many of Rushdie's works and in the Indian English poems of Nissim Ezekiel. Perhaps Rushdie is calling this code-mixing with grammatical, syntactical, and structural shifts in language "chutnification." Code-switching occurs when interlanguage terms, such as words and phrases from Indian and other languages, are used alongside English.

I tend not to code-mix. I would say that I use code-switching with

interlanguage—the use of words and phrases from other languages in my poems written in English. I use not only Hindi and Sanskrit lexis but lexis from other Indian languages and European languages like French, German, Latin, etc. I am not at all fond of this culinary metaphor of Chutnification.

BD: You portray the joint histories of India and Britain in your work. Concerns of postcoloniality, diaspora, and migration recur in your work. Can you elaborate on this?

UK: I became postcolonial when I came to Britain in the 1980s and will remain so. My engagement with postcoloniality is not merely academic, it is a lived-in experience. The joint histories of India and Britain feature regularly in my work, especially in *The Immigrant*. I often think: *How have I got here to the Isle of Man from Kerala?* I explore both political and personal history in my work. My poem, 'We ain't no more Paki mate,' although written with a humorous twist, in the London cockney accent, is a brief poetic history of Indians in Britain and concludes with the current political, institutional, and economic situation of Britain. The anaphora 'We ain't no more Paki mate' signifies my challenge to the racist term *Paki*, used as an abuse towards South Asians in the UK. It is also my endorsement of the Cockney accent and dialect with the double negatives and the verb usage in the negative, 'ain't' (for are not, is not, etc.)—this is common in the Cockney dialect. I lived and worked in Kent (South-East England) for some time before I moved to the Isle of Man. London has many fond memories for me. It is a city I keep returning to.

> *We ain't no more Paki mate*
> *our desi tycoons*
> *in your poshest Kensington*
> *wooing you in steel and style*
> *our desi doctors*
> *wandering the corridors*
> *of your NHS, in A&E,*
> *in Cardiology, delivering your*
> *babies, saving your lives,*
> *keepers of your island health*
> *our brown bobbies in blue*
> *serving in your forces*
> *leading your MET,*
> *in apna London, a desi mayor,*
> *in 10 Downing Street apna aadmi*
> *running the sahib's affair.*

The last line is about the current British Prime Minister and is not included in the original poem, published in *Immigrant,* 2018.

   In addition, I have poetised the historic "Radcliffe Line" between India and Pakistan in an eponymous poem:

> *How a barrister from Lincoln's Inn,*
> *with no knowledge of the land*
> *and its colours, could redraw a nation,*
> *no one knew. On an outdated map,*

he demarcated seas, rivers and
valleys of a country, he had never seen.
He earmarked cities, hanging on
the edge of conflict; he broke iced
mountain peaks into impasse
and imbroglio; he drew a frontier land
of life and death. The architect of
partition, he was the empire's avenger
on a nation, whoring after alien gods.

Another painful poem is simply entitled "Partition 1947." The poem is inspired by William Dalrymple's article, "The Great Divide," on the Partition of India, 1947 (*The New Yorker,* June 2015). The epigraph of the poem is a quote from Dalrymple's article: "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."

I wrote the stanzaic poem, without any punctuation, to indicate how the partition has continued to affect the nations of India and Pakistan. The poem has the anaphora of 'this subcontinent is a nation no more, no more.'

this subcontinent is a nation no more this subcontinent wallowing
in bloodbaths has no beginning no end its seething memories stretching
across the centuries a standing testament of imperial follies a distortion
of historical trajectories that eclipse nations making trysts with destinies
at midnight when the world sleeps this subcontinent will divide into two
its cities ablaze its furies unleashed smothering all sense and sensibility
shrinking its languages groping for lost words its soul weeping in funereal
silence on its maimed body a mutilated apology of a nation sowing seeds of
discord and the mother nation waging an inglorious war on its glorious Raj

On similar lines, "Postcolonial Poem," is a brief history of Indian Independence and Indian immigration to Britain. There are other poems in the collection as well, like: "East London," "Jallianwala Bagh," and the humorous, "Great British Curry," on the migration of Indian cuisine.

A poem I would like to draw your attention to is "Men in Turbans," which highlights the participation of Indian soldiers in World War I (WWI), which is not well-historicised or acknowledged in India. This however has a history in Britain. Only recently, in 2018, the Khadi Poppy was introduced during the 2018 centenary of WWI by Jitesh Gadhia, a Member of the House of Lords, to specifically commemorate and acknowledge the contribution of the 1.5 million soldiers from pre-Partition India to WWI. The Khadi Poppy is another element of the Remembrance Poppy. This is an artificial poopy (usually made of paper or cloth and now in metal) worn in the UK and in some Commonwealth countries, leading up to Remembrance Day, a Memorial Day observed, since the end of WWI to honour members of the armed forces, who have lost their lives in the line of duty. My poem, inspired by Shrabani Basu's 2016 book, *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front, 1914–18,* commemorates the soldiers of Undivided India:

Our dreams lie scattered
across the Western Front;
our blood spilt in vain,

*our memories fragmented
by empire, colony and nation.
Our lives, a redundant sacrifice
for king and another country.*

BD: Speaking of your collections, whereas the first volume articulates the concerns of multiculturalism, assimilation, and linguistic ethos, the second volume focuses on women's issues in general. So, what are the reasons for this drastic shift in the subject matter?

UK: *On Manannan's Isle* (2014) and *Immigrant* (2018) feature ongoing concerns of mine and articulate, as you say, concerns of postcoloniality, language, culture, and history, which will recur in the future. The second collection, *Night Sky Between the Stars,* is primarily based on Indian womanhood, or rather, my preoccupation with it and my articulation of a marginalised gendered identity. I have tried to challenge patriarchal texts, rendered new voices to female mythical characters, and voiced a different gender dynamic, creating an alternative dimension for Indian womanhood. This will certainly recur!

Thank you for your interest in my work, Beauty, and my Best Wishes for your academic study.

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Using Simulations in Teaching English at the Tertiary Level: A Case Study

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Abstract

Language teaching is ideally suited to language practice. Language teaching can be an interesting process when teachers make efforts to explore a variety of approaches.Unfortunately only a few teachers can do it. It can be caused by the lack of experience and knowledge about the varieties of teaching methods and techniques. There are many techniques that can be applied in teaching English in the language classrooms especially at the tertiary level. One of the most popular and emergent of these is simulations. The growing popularity of simulations invites the production of insights that help academic teachers to use simulations and games in their courses. Their use largely depends on teachers' personal initiatives and experiences in courses rather than on grounded information about which simulations work in which courses and for which learning objectives. Some benefits of simulations are allowing students to experiment with new vocabulary and structures and giving them a chance to carry out a task or solve a problem together. Though, simulation can be used at every step or stage in the English language teaching process but it is strongly felt that its use is direly needed in the skills in evaluation process as it is endowed with the power to transpose the normal classroom into an authentic setting where language skills can be evaluated under more realistic conditions. The research presented here explores the rationale and unique benefits of simulations in evaluation processes with the help of a language assessment model designed at an engineering college in Fatehgarh Sahib district of Punjab (State of India) to test communicative English.
Keywords: Simulations, Language Teaching, Communication Skills, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Tertiary Education

Introduction

Research in the field of second language learning has been extremely dynamic and enterprising in the recent decades and the communicative approach is partly a response to the perspectives that have evolved and deepened over the years. Behaviourist theory views language learning as an acquisition of new behaviour. A child learns a language by imitating sounds and structures that she hears in the environment. All behaviour is explained solely with reference to the external factors in the environment. Watson (1924) denied the existence of internal mental process. Noam Chomsky was a firm advocate of the nativist theory in the field of linguistics. He argues that the brain plays a decisive part in creating the ability to produce an unlimited number of sentences with knowledge of a limited grammatical rules. Chomsky claims that children are born with a language acquisition device (LAD) in their brains. According to the nativist theory, when the young child is exposed to a

language her LAD makes it possible for her to set the parameters and deduce the grammatical principles, because the principles are innate, human beings inherit these principles. This explains where grammars come from and how people come to produce sentences which they have never heard before. Research by Piaget and Inhelder (1966) paved way to cognitive theory of language acquisition. Language development is related to cognitive development, that is, the development of the child's thinking determines when the child can learn to speak and what the child can say.

Halliday (1973) produced constructions of language functions. He used the term function to mean purposive nature of communication. He outlined seven different functions of language:

The Instrumental Function: Using language to gratify material needs

The Regulatory Function: Using language to control other people's behavior

The Interactional Function: Using language to interact with people around

The Personal Function: Using language to express individual feelings

The Heuristic Function: Using language to learn and to explore

The Imaginative Function: Using language to create a world of imagination

The Representational Function: Using language to communicate information.

Instead of describing the basics of language through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary, Wilkins (1976) endeavored to highlight the systems of meaning underlying the communicative use of language. He detailed two kinds of meanings: Notional and Functional. Vygotsky laid the foundation for the interactionist view of language acquisition. Interactionists see language as a rule-governed cultural activity, learned in interaction within a community. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. He proposed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners construct the new language through socially mediated interaction. The zone of proximal development is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. For example, during the learning process, a child may not be able to achieve a given task. However, the same child may achieve a more complex task with guidance and encourage from a skilled partner, termed by Vygotsky (1978) as the more knowledgeable other (MKO). The difference between these two accomplishments is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Accordingly, the role of education is to provide children with experiences which are in their ZPD, thereby, encouraging and advancing their individual learning.

Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory, stresses that language learning comes   through using language communicatively. He felt that Second Language Acquisition occurs subconsciously as a result of communicating in situations where the focus is on meaning. Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drills. This subconscious process is similar to the process children use in acquiring their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language, that is, natural communication in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances

but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. Since the mid-1960s, the focus in linguistic theory has shifted from the study of language in isolation to the study of language in a social context (Savignon 2002). It is this socio-linguistic aspect, which is the unifying principle and the driving force behind the communicative approach to language teaching. Although the communicative approach is basically a language theory and not a learning theory, considering Richards and Rodgers' (2001) definition of approach, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) includes a theory of language and a theory of language learning, and they see it as an approach than a method. In brief, an approach can be defined as a set of theories about the nature of language and of language learning. A method, on the other hand, is the level at which theory is put into practice and at which choices are made about the particular skills to be taught, the content to be taught, and the order in which the content will be presented. Besides, Richards and Rodgers claim, "at the level of language theory, CLT has a rich, if somewhat eclectic theoretical base"(71).

Communicative Language Teaching has gained popularity over the past three decades, with a variety of non-traditional, humanistic teaching methods (e.g., Total Physical Response by James Asher, the Silent Way by Celab Gattengo, Suggestopedia by Georgi Lozanov, the Natural Approach by Krashen, Community Language Learning by Charles Arthur Curran, etc.) have been introduced to India in the hope that students will learn to speak English more fluently in their quest to achieve success in their personal and professional lives as has been promised by technological advancement and globalization. Coupled with the ushering in of these methods, a new and greater emphasis on testing has emerged to the foreground.

Yet, while many skills can be assessed using pencil-and-paper tests, oral proficiency "is widely regarded as the most challenging of all language exams to prepare, administer, and score" (Madsen 147). Creating standard criteria of assessment, solving problems of administration, designing test items that resemble tasks in normal language use, and testing the complex and interlocking nature of language and skills in content-based courses are only a few of the logistic hurdles teachers must surmount in creating a sound testing instruments as referred by Hughes, Littlejohn. Proper testing methodology proposed for sound testing instruments as referred here will be too lengthy and can form a separate study. Focus in this research paper hence has been kept as limited to the scope of the simulations.

Scope and Justification of Study

In India, the growing concerns of providing a more enriched communicative environment for English language learning and especially assessing the language proficiency of students has brought about a shift in the teachers' attention to the use of simulations as a means of testing the language skill in action. A research confined to the study of the engineering colleges/institutes under Punjab Technical University, Punjab was carried out by the authors of this paper to come to this conclusion. 34 engineering colleges/institutes (at least one from each district of Punjab) were

selected and surveyed. Extending the research further, simulation as a tool was studied. Simulation based education has the potential to provide greater efficiency and rigour compared with routine learning. Simulations can be scheduled, observed and then repeated to consolidate learning. It has positive implications for the students as well as teachers. Simulations have the ability to enhance theoretical knowledge and facilitate its transition to practical experience. Since simulations are generally computer aided , tasks and environments can be artificially created to facilitate learning. Even complex situations and learning tasks can be made easier. A key advantage of simulations is its ability to create learning environments that facilitate practice and observation. Artificial intelligence is already gaining momentum and may be affecting teaching-learning process in future. Simulation based teaching-learning process hence is important and is further helpful in Feedback on performance, Deliberate practice which can be repeated also to augment learning, Curriculum integration and outcome measurement, and Skill acquisition and maintenance.

Most of the theories related to language acquisition and teaching focus on the learner who is regarded by these as a passive learner who is controlled by the omnipotent teacher. Simulation turns the learner to an active one and the teacher is no longer the sage but a silent observer and evaluator or facilitator at the backend. Simulation in contrast to other theories of learning, with the help of technology, fosters a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered and even student-generated approaches, leaving enough space for maneuver to the individual learner and laying emphasis on the power of self-instruction and responsibility for learning. Simulations provide a way of creating a rich communicative environment (a representation of reality) where students actively become a part of some real-world systems and function according to predetermined roles as members of that group. More important, however, is the notion that a simulation becomes reality and students can get actively involved in what they are performing without focusing too much on the environmental details, but rather on the language to be produced in that particular realistic context. Among the innate benefits of simulations we emphasize the fact that they fulfill the students' need for realism – a desire to "relate to life '. Simulation transforms the roles of teacher and learner. Instructors become facilitators and guides as learners work in groups or teams during the simulations. The learners become the real participants in the classroom A simulation refers to an activity in which participants are assigned duties and are given enough information about the problem to perform those duties without play-acting or inventing key facts. A simulation is based on a representation of a model that imitates a real-world process or system. Key information is provided to carry out tasks, debate, negotiate from different points of view and solve a specific problem. Simulation involves the interaction of human and system with elements of cost efficiency and safety to the user and system, while providing an effective means of training, evaluation, and analysis. To sufficiently justify and validate simulator usage and applicability as a training device and systems engineering tool, advantages as well as disadvantages must be expanded upon.

Although disadvantages do exist, they are surpassed by the magnitude of overall benefits. Simulators are a viable, safe, and cost-effective method for both training and system evaluation, justifiably extending application to a multitude of environments and situations. Keeping in view the benefits of simulation, present research was carried out even though resources were limited and psychological and systemic resistances co-existed.

Simulations

Simulation is an interactive learning that involves students both personally and groups in a real setting. Jones (1982) defines a simulation as reality of function in a simulated and structured environment. Additionally, Garcia, et al (2001) define simulation as an exercise in which participants are competing against nature. The most common view of simulations is that they provide a way of creating a rich communicative environment (a representation of reality) where students actively become a part of some real-world system and function according to predetermined roles as members of that group. More important, however, is the notion that a simulation becomes reality and the "feeling of representivity fades" (Crookall and Oxford 15), so much so that the world outside the simulation becomes, paradoxically, imaginary as suggested and referred by Black, Jones, and Taylor-Walford.

The innate benefits of simulations include: (a) fulfill students' need for realism---a desire to "relate to life 'out there' beyond the classroom's box-like walls" (McArthur 101); (b) increase student (and teacher) motivation, especially for those in EFL situations who might see English as a deferred need at best as seen by Jones, and Stern ; (c) dismantle the normal teacher-student relationship so that students take control of their own destiny within the simulation, leading towards "declassrooming" the classroom by Sharrock and Watson,; (d) help the learner confront and identify with the target culture by Oxford and Crookall ; (e) reduce anxiety levels which is essential to language development by Krashen ; and allow teachers to monitor the participants progress unobtrusively. As part of this movement, Littlejohn (125) suggests that "the use of simulations as a testing device is… an important development since it should be possible to replicate the situations in which learners will have to use the language." He also feels that this kind of replication "allows us to view not only the language product but also the process by which that language emerged" (Littlejohn 125). Whereas standardized methods give us insight on how the student might do in a real setting, "simulations will show us how the student actually performs" (Littlejohn 128).

The CV Project: A Simulation Model for the Communicative English Class for the Undergraduate B.Tech. Course

Overview. To bridge the gap between simulations and testing; a task-based model had been developed at Baba Banda Singh Bahadur Engineering College, Fatehgarh Sahib as part of an ongoing research work; taking into account the need and desire to

measure language proficiency (in this case, Communicative English) at the tertiary level.

Design. Students were required to participate in a simulation activity called "The CV Project" as part of the final evaluation near the end of the second semester. A project was set up that was basically a simulation in which the students of B.Tech- I were divided into three groups. One of the groups played the role of employers. Students from the second group played the role of job-seekers applying for the positions advertised by the first group. The third group acted as objective observers and evaluators of the whole selection process. As the virtual job-seekers were in competition with each other for the target job, they needed to tailor their respective CVs (Curriculum Vitae) according to the needs of the post advertised and then appear for its interview. This gave them a challenge as well as an opportunity to present their profile in the best possible manner to outshine the other candidates (students). This entire activity was conducted during two consecutive communicative English Laboratory Sessions over a period of 4 hours. The necessary infrastructure was provided to the students which included a conference room with the required furniture for conducting the interviews, computer systems with printer and internet facility, projector, etc.

Elaborate preparations were made to fulfill, what Jones (4-5) terms, the three essential elements of simulations: (a) *Reality of function* (participants are assigned roles and are told they must fully accept them both mentally and behaviorally as if they were actually those people); (b) S*imulated environment* (a realistic setting constructed to enhance role-acceptance by utilizing a variety of realia and (c) S*tructure* (the whole action is built around a set of problems or tasks---not invented by the participants but rather evolved as the action progresses)

Measuring the Process: Performance Checklists, Recordings, and Debriefing

1. *Job appraisal checklist.* Useful assessment tool of student-created job appraisal checklist that, in reality, served as a prop used by employees as a way of measuring performance. Participants filled out checklist based on whether they felt they fulfilled the duties as outlined in their job descriptions. The advantages were: (a) it empowered the participants with the know-how to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses without constant feedback from an external evaluator; (b) its application was not limited to the classroom, but could be used later on the job; and (c) it satisfied the students' belief that their work should be fairly judged based on a system they clearly understood rather than be graded, as opined by one of the students, "by a subjective scale created at the discretion of the teacher."

As participant-reported responses often lacked impartiality, considerable time was spent training students how to be more objective by putting them in charge of writing the checklist as part of the regular coursework and then having them view past students on video engaged in similar simulation tasks and identifying positive models of the skills they wanted to acquire. Then, they practised evaluating each

other in short role plays that resembled situations found in the simulation. At the same time, notes were taken, teacher's evaluations were recorded, and later discussions were held on how teacher's ratings coincided with those the students wrote down. The validity and reliability of their own marks was reinforced in their minds through teacher's feedback.

2. *Videotaping or tape recording*. For recording simulations, firstly, the position of the camera was adjusted to blend with the surroundings without inhibiting students from assuming their roles in a natural setting. It was assured that the camera became a regular fixture of the classroom weeks before (or months through repeated use) the simulation was carried out. By that time, students had accepted its presence and ignored whether it was rolling or not.

Further, because tape recorders were always easier to operate and required less supervision, a recorder was set-up in each office to tape the group's discussions. The machine had the play button always on, so that by just plugging in the cord from outside their office, the recorder could be activated without participants being conscious of when it was going or not.

3. *Debriefing*. Success of this simulation hinged on the efficacy of a wrap-up or debriefing session (together with the self-evaluation checklist and recordings) where students and the controller could openly discuss behaviors, outcomes, general language difficulties, and the contextual appropriateness of their language discourse. Because teacher, as the controller, did not take part in the simulation, he/she was able to look in as an observer without inhibiting students from assuming their roles. Although there were several different approaches to debriefing (see Bullard, 1992), a two-hour session was held in the next language laboratory class on the following day, giving the teacher time to reflect back on the simulation and organize his/her comments regarding students' behavioral or linguistic errors that were most apparent. Further, as Bullard puts it, "the teacher has the chance to analyze the errors and to develop strategies for dealing with them at leisure rather than having to operate on the spur of the moment" (64). Pedagogically speaking, this allowed the teacher prepare follow-up classroom lessons in the form of short role plays to reinforce areas that needed improvement.

Measuring the Product: The Proposal

The second part of the evaluation dealt with the *product*: the written proposal. Grades were assigned by looking at several specific criteria: (a) layout of the proposal (introduction, rationale, design, etc.), (b) mechanics (punctuation, spelling, and capitalization as studied in class), (c), content (organization, depth and breadth of arguments, and presentation of ideas), and (d) language usage. These proposals were collected at the end of the simulation, scored and then returned to the students. Each member of the group received the same grade.

The Final Assessment: Process and Product

Ultimately, a meeting was conducted with the participants individually to discuss comments and ratings on the checklist and to look over a copy of their proposals. The results were compared, and a final grade was given for the whole simulation project based on: (a) the student's own rating, 50%, (b) teacher's assessment, 25%, and (c) the written proposal, 25%.

Final Reflections

The results of the survey and our own observations helped us chart a new course using simulations as the cornerstone of the program. One might question the plausibility of carrying out such elaborate simulations, considering the limitations of time and space, for example, while dealing simultaneously with weighty demands of classroom requirements already. Finding ourselves under the same constraints, we have slowly progressed from simple skits, to detailed role plays, to more involved productions over some time, giving time to digest and process this unique method of teaching and testing while gaining converts along the way and the reward has encouraged us to push on.

The extent to which the students praised our efforts not only reflects how radically different this kind of approach is at the tertiary level especially for professional courses, but how little simulations have permeated into the classroom although they have been the focus of discussion for many years in teacher-training circles. Since initiating the use of simulations as a pedagogical learning and testing tool in the classroom, our students and we have found a great sense of fulfillment and satisfaction in taking part in activities that are innovative, pragmatic in nature, and fun, augmenting what Jones observed several years ago "The time seems to be ripe for extending their [simulations] use… particularly in the field of language assessment" (77). Experiment has been successful.

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Beyond the Classroom: Leveraging the Metaverse for English Language Learning

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Abstract

Multilingual proficiency is increasingly crucial in our interconnected society. The metaverse facilitates foreign language learning. This study examines how technology can help engineering students learn English and develops a metaverse-based curriculum. VR and AR can help students improve communication skills through immersive learning experiences as they learn a new language. The research utilized a Quantitative research design with Quasi-Experimental approach (Traditional Classroom group and Metaverse-based group) as a methodological framework to investigate the effectiveness of metaverse-based English language learning. The participants in this study were undergraduate students enrolled in the Bachelor of Technology programme at SRM Institute of Science and Technology, located in Kattankulathur, Tamil Nadu, India. This study demonstrates the efficacy of metaverse-based English language learning environments in enhancing the readiness of prospective engineers to operate in a technologically advanced and interconnected global landscape. The advanced metaverse technology enables individuals to engage in authentic conversations with native speakers while learning a second language. Studying metaverse languages and enhancing curricula can better equip engineers for a dynamic world.
Keywords: Curriculum Development, English Language proficiency, Metaverse, Technology-enhanced language learning

1. Introduction

"The Metaverse offers a new dimension to language learning, allowing learners to experience language and gaining the new experience on the world"

Technology has helped higher education for the past 20 years. After the pandemic, technical enhancements were needed to improve digital learning (Kye et al. 4). As technology has become more prevalent in daily life, it has also made its way into language classrooms, bringing the benefits of a worldwide computer network and a plethora of new teaching tools, including interactive textbooks and teachers. According to Pradeepa and Hema evaluates that tools like whiteboards, wikis, blogs, and others can help teachers streamline their work and increase opportunities for students to collaborate and communicate beyond the classroom. Recently, the metaverse has become a recurrent topic that is being explored as a new path to advance educational opportunities (Jovanovic and Milosavljevic 11). Even though the metaverse is not a novel concept, it has been speculated that a three-dimensional-

based virtual reality. Metaverse might be adapted for use in educational settings, particularly blended learning (Dayoub 49). In higher education settings blended learning benefits greatly than the traditional classroom, which emphasizes the student's engagement in the form of social interaction. Shekhawat and Geetha asserted that implementing collaborative learning would enhance students' communication skills (34). Consequently, the researcher introduced new pedagogical practices at BITS Pilani that required students to collaborate in teams. Given the information mentioned above, it is appropriate to expect that language learning in the metaverse enables efficient and effective communication when students works collaboratively. Metaverse technology enables remote learning; this implicitly enhances student's performance while providing opportunities for pleasure and education (Li and Zhonggen 14). Metaverse compared to conventional learning, this helps students in numerous ways, and ICT generates a virtual environment and provide better educational setting. The widespread adoption of technology in the classroom has diminished its novelty (Pradeepa and Hema 19). The current employment landscape necessitates that the individual and work force possesses a competitive edge and comprehensive proficiency in both technical expertise and interpersonal abilities (Shekhawat 263).

EFL learning is progressing towards adopting more advanced metaverse technologies (Imaoka 403). However, the question of metaverse's value in the context of second-language learning has yet to be answered. Aydin inquiry pertains to metaverse's potential as a language acquisition platform and whether this aligns with contemporary theories, models, and approaches (13). Hence, a thorough investigation is warranted to ascertain the efficacy of metaverse as a potential tool for foreign language acquisition from a theoretical perspective. Aydin has observed that a comprehension of the metaverse is necessary for foreign language acquisition. Upon acquiring a more profound comprehension of metaverse, it is imperative to establish the justification for its implementation and utilization as a platform for foreign language learning (17). An investigation into the potential benefits of metaverse in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning is deemed imperative. This research aims to determine whether using metaverse improves students' academic outcomes when learning English as a foreign language. This research aims to present student viewpoints on how the metaverse is used in EFL classes, thus stressing its positive and negative elements. Integrating metaverse technology within the English language classroom presents a promising avenue for language learners to engage in language practice and enhance their linguistic proficiency. The metaverse presents a promising prospect for individuals seeking to enhance their language proficiency through a dynamic and engaging platform. Using metaverse capabilities, educators can design language learning experiences that are both impactful and captivating, thereby equipping students with the necessary skills to navigate a technologically advanced and interconnected global landscape.

The research questions are as follows:
a) What is the efficacy of utilizing the metaverse to facilitate English language

acquisition among engineering students?

b) How does utilizing the metaverse for English language acquisition contrast with conventional language learning approaches concerning learner engagement, language skills and abilities, and motivations.

2. Literature Review

Aydin presented a theoretical framework for implementing metaverse in foreign language learning. The framework conditioned the language learning potential of the metaverse grounded in contemporary theories, models, and approaches. The author has integrated the theoretical framework related to incorporating the metaverse in learning foreign languages, highlighting its practical implications and potential for future research. Aydin has posited that metaverse holds potential for effective utilization in foreign language learning, primarily due to its emphasis on social interactions that facilitate communication and interaction in language learning processes (17).

The review of literature reveals that employing metaverse in EFL instruction offers numerous benefits. Metaverse allows students to engage in authentic English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking and learning experiences, unencumbered by temporal and spatial constraints, thereby facilitating the development of their oral communication skills in English. Furthermore, students can recognize the significance of language acquisition by engaging in diverse virtual activities that simulate real-life situations (Imaoka 408). The virtual environment is viewed positively by both teachers and students in EFL contexts for various reasons. In summary, Aydin suggests that metaverse has the potential to serve as a valuable tool for language acquisition, particularly for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners (17).

In spite of the advantages of employing metaverse, specific issues persist concerning its application as a platform for foreign language acquisition. The virtual environment can facilitate interaction between adult and underage learners from diverse locations. However, this mode of interaction may have adverse implications for the improvement of their ability to interact with others and expand their understanding of the world around them. Moreover, Aydin highlights that learners may encounter various challenges, including abuse and misuse, cyber bullying, addiction disorders, and health issues, which can lead to depression and anxiety (17). Additionally, technical difficulties may hinder providing adequate hardware and software infrastructure, Global financial and technical disparities may exist. According to Imaoka, the accessibility of these expensive technologies may be limited to a specific demographic. Stated differently, it is imperative to consider accessibility concerns (404).

The Metaverse's inherent complexity necessitates significant computational resources, which can constrain its accessibility and sustainability. The concerns above pose a scientific quandary that necessitates collaborative endeavors from various

scientific disciplines, including but not limited to artificial intelligence, machine learning, ethics, and others, to resolve. Academic sources have identified obstacles related to the need for more familiarity with the Metaverse platform. According to Aydin the unfamiliarity of EFL teachers with its utilization has resulted in their neutral perceptions regarding its efficacy in facilitating their teaching processes (202), hence the potential apprehensions regarding the efficacy of metaverse as a platform for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The potential advantages of incorporating metaverse into EFL instruction remain uncertain as stated by Aydin (13). The insufficiency of scholarly inquiry regarding the application of metaverse when discussing English as a Second Language (EFL) education necessitates a more comprehension of the potential of metaverse in facilitating EFL learning. In order to achieve successful implementation and practice, it is imperative to establish a clear rationale, as noted by Aydin (17).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a Quasi-Experimental design comprising an Experimental group and a Control group; the experimental group received the intervention, while the control group maintained their regular classroom activities like face-to-face interaction. The intervention group engaged in language-learning activities primarily using the metaverse platform, specifically "Mozilla Hubs." The control group employed conventional language learning methods, likely involving instruction in a classroom setting. The study compares the outcomes of using a metaverse platform compared to traditional classroom procedures for English language instruction. The study stated the impact of the metaverse-based language learning on English language proficiency among engineering students.
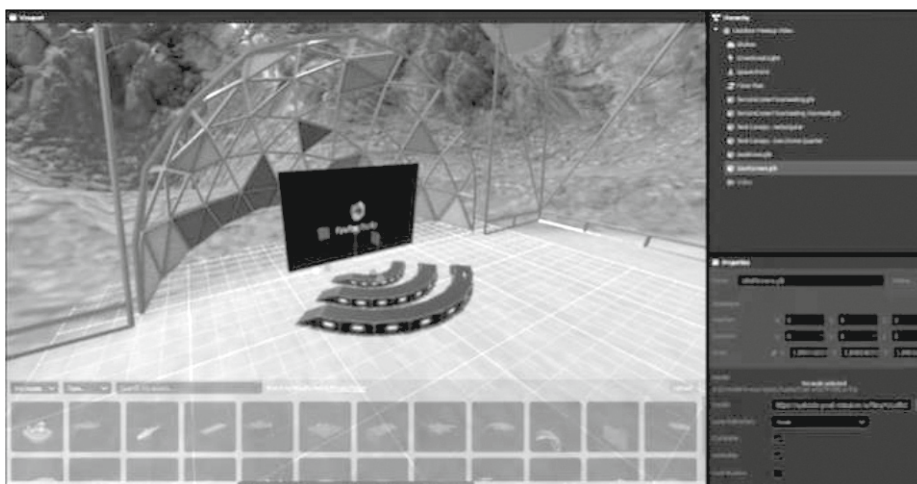
3.2 Participants

First-year 50 students from Bachelor of Technology stream, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Tamil Nadu, India, were participated in this study. One traditional and one metaverse-friendly group were randomly generated. The first group practiced informal talks by switching partners in the classroom. Second-Cohort performed the same in the metaverse. Fifty students were evenly divided between metaverse and control groups. This study's participants took a consistent pre-test based on the conventional and metaverse groups at the start of the semester.

3.3 Metaverse Platform: Mozilla Hubs

In this discussion, Figure 1 illustrates the utilization of Mozilla Hubs, a web-based virtual reality (VR) platform, in immersive education for aviation students. The figure illustrates the features and benefits of Mozilla Hubs employed in the study. As depicted in Figure 1, Mozilla Hubs provides a virtual reality platform to create and modify their avatars, enabling them to express themselves online and also the platform offers various digital spaces, such as rooftops, outdoor stages, and conference rooms,

used for aviation training scenarios. This showcases how Mozilla Hubs can effectively simulate aviation-related real-world environments for educational purposes. Customization makes students' learning more immersive and authentic. Figure 1. also shows how students can communicate, shift, and interact in Mozilla Hubs. This aspect encourages learners in aviation to work together and learn. Figure 1. summarizes Mozilla Hubs' robust VR platform for aviation students' immersive education. The picture shows how Mozilla Hubs provides rich content, realistic simulations, and interactive instruction. Aviation education benefits from the platform's ability to practice critical thinking and advance academic careers. Students can utilize the platform to practice critical thinking in real-world circumstances and

Figure 1. Mozilla hubs a VR platform

3.4 Procedures and Instruments

Participants will take a pre-test to assess their English language skills to prepare for Mozilla Hubs' intervention. Engineering-related listening, speaking, reading, and writing will be assessed. This will assess participants' linguistic skills. Mozilla Hubs will host language-learning programmes. Participants will role-play and simulate engineering scenarios online. Mozilla Hubs will host these activities. Technical vocabulary, professional communication, and oral presenting skills will be emphasized. For this, Mozilla Hubs will split participants into smaller groups. Each group will work on collaborative language learning projects like engineering-themed virtual presentations. They will improve their English by participating in online debates and commenting on peers. First, Mozilla Hubs will test participants' language skills. Virtual presentations, role-playing, and interactive quizzes will comprise these assessments. Secondly, observations and field notes will capture participants' involvement, interactions, and virtual language during the intervention. A post-test will assess language skills after the intervention. The pre-test language evaluation

will be repeated as the post-test to assess their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis will use quantitative methods. The quantitative analysis will compare pre-and post-test results using paired t-tests to determine if language competency has improved. The survey was given via Google Forms. The poll asked EFL students 10 questions about using the metaverse platform for language learning, focusing on language technology and future applications. The survey used a Likert scale with 1 representing strong disapproval, 2 moderate disagree, 3 moderate, 4 moderate agree, and 5 strongly agree. The survey analysis used percentage comparisons rather than student responses because each topic had a low average score. Based on student replies, frequency and percentages were calculated and analyzed into primary ideas.

4. Results & Discussion

T-tests on paired samples were used to compare pre-and post-test mean scores between the classroom and Metaverse groups

Group	Test	M	SD	t	P
Traditional (N-25)	Pre-test	67.2	4.5		
	Post-test	71.4	3.9	-3.62	.001
Metaverse (N-25)	Pre-test	66.8	4.2		
	Post-test	75.1	4.8	-2.94	.005

Table 1. Result of a Paired Sample t-tests

The control group contained 25 individuals; their mean pre-test score was 67.2 (SD=4.5), and their mean post-test score was 71.4 (SD=3.9). The control group's mean scores changed significantly following the intervention (t=-3.62, p=.001). The control group's English proficiency increased. The experiment group (n=25) had a pre-test mean score of 66.8 (standard deviation = 4.2) and a post-test mean score of 75.1 (SD = 4.8). The pre-and post-test mean scores of the experiment group were statistically different (t=-2.94, p=.005). This confirms the notion that trial participants improved their English language skills significantly.

The control and experimental groups improved their English language proficiency from the pre-test to the post-test. The experiment group used Mozilla Hubs for language learning and had a higher mean score and impact size than the control group. Based on this evidence, Mozilla Hubs as a learning platform may improve English learning outcomes. Mozilla Hubs' immersive and participatory virtual environment increased the experiment group's language proficiency. Both the control and experiment groups showed a statistically significant improvement in

English language ability after exposure to the interventions. The results support the idea that Mozilla Hubs can improve language learning compared to other techniques.

Test	Group	M	SD	t	P
Pre-test	Traditional	65.8	4.3		
	Metaverse	66.8	4.1	.321	.002
Post-test	Traditional	70.1	3.7		
	Metaverse	74.3	4.5	.465	.0001

Table 2. Result of Independent t-tests

Table 2 shows the independent t-test findings comparing the control and experimental group mean scores. Each test's table shows means, standard deviations, t-values, and p-values. The control group (n=25) had a pre-test average of 65.8 (SD=4.3), while the experimental group had 67.5 (SD=4.1). The control group had a post-test mean 70.1 (SD=3.7), and the experimental group was 74.3 (SD=4.5). Independent t-test results were also equivocal (t=.321, p=.002), indicating that the intervention had significant effect on linguistic proficiency. The control and experimental groups improved their language skills from the pre-test to the post-test. This finding demonstrates a statistically significant improvement in the English language proficiency of the metaverse group between the pre-test and post-test. The t-values and p-values for both the traditional and metaverse groups indicate an enhancement in language proficiency in both learning environments. The results suggest that both traditional classroom instruction and the metaverse platform successfully improved the participants' English language proficiency. The effect sizes and magnitude of improvements may vary between the two groups. The study's findings emphasize the potential advantages of combining traditional classroom instruction with the immersive metaverse platform for English language learning among participants
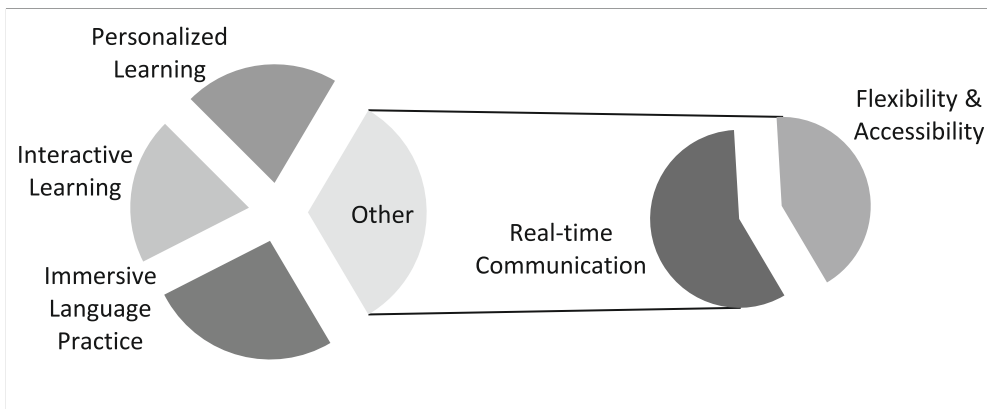
Figure 2. Benefits of Metaverse in English Language Learning

Figure 2. Shows how the metaverse helps English language learners. 26% of students regarded metaverse as an immersive virtual environment for foreign language practice. Virtual characters, locations, and activities allow students to practice speaking in real-world situations. The metaverse's gamified and interactive features make studying English fun for 20% of students. Virtual teams can solve language-based puzzles. This contact helps students learn, remember, and be motivated. 21% of students said metaverse platforms offer these elements, making learning more personalized. Students can build avatars, explore virtual worlds, and create language-learning programmes. Customization enhances learner autonomy and ownership, improving learning results. 19% of students say metaverse tools enable collaboration with peers and teachers. This helps students communicate and socialize by using natural language in meaningful circumstances. 14% of students said metaverse platforms can change time and place. In the virtual classroom, students can learn anywhere with an internet connection at their own pace. Students can study a new language regardless of time or location, bringing up new opportunities. Shekhawath suggest that instructors should incorporate advanced instructional methods and pedagogical practices when developing engineering courses (264). Integrating metaverse platforms will enhance language learning by creating an immersive environment and serving as a central hub for engineering students to improve their English language proficiency. So by designing metaverse-based language learning curriculum for engineering students would benefit them and it aims to engage students and foster their motivation towards enhancing language skills and acquiring knowledge in it.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Metaverse platforms enhance English language learning. Immersive and interactive platforms provide authentic language practice and dynamic learning. Learners can role-play, talk to fictional characters, and do language-specific tasks. Most of the researcher claims this improves communication, cultural awareness, and understanding. Metaverse platforms let students personalize their education. Avatars can be customized, numerous virtual landscapes explored, and many language resources accessed. Metaverse technologies enable real-time instructor-student cooperation. Discourse and group work help students learn and socialize. Interactive spaces help students learn English and collaborate, According to Lee, Metaverse platforms allow learners to improve their English abilities regardless of location or schedule (46). Remote learning enables flexible scheduling and various student demands, it also provides authentic language materials and experiences that may not be available locally benefit learners. Effective metaverse platform integration in language education involves careful instructional design and instructor assistance.

The small sample size used by the researcher in particular circumstances or student demographics, may have inherent limitation but a definite pointer for future studies to aim at recruiting a more representative sample to increase the generalizability of the findings. Future studies with larger sample sizes could subgroup students by attributes and produce more precise results. Comparative metaverse ESL instruction studies are possible. Comparing the benefits and drawback of several platforms might help choose the best one for language learning and learner engagement. Longitudinal studies can assess metaverse platforms' effects on ESL education. The study did not examine instructor attitudes and behaviors within categories. Instructor variability and metaverse-based language learning outcomes need further study. Participants had to be proficient in the metaverse virtual reality platform. Technological restrictions and individual technological proficiency may have affected the outcomes. Technology access and proficiency may affect students' academic motivation and performance. Addressing metaverse platforms' shortcomings and undertaking further research will help improve ESL instruction. Metaverse systems for English language learning offer customized, interactive, and immersive experiences that improve language, communication, and cultural awareness. Metaverse technology can help English language teachers create engaging learning environments.

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Lalit Mohan Sharma. *There's No Death* - A Review Essay

Dr. Tamali Neogi*

Lalit Mohan Sharma's seventh anthology of poems *There's No Death*, published by Authorspress, New Delhi, 2022, is a bouquet of verses as fresh as blooming peonies in early Summer morning, notwithstanding the fact that the title of the book conjures up similar titles from the 19th century to the current times. Probably, by offering fresh verses to the readers, the poet intends to present timeless truths in contemporary contexts. Significantly, the poems sandwiched between the first poem, *There's No Death* and the last *Born Again* symbolise the unceasing flow of life. The anthology of poems epitomises the poet's belief in the existence after death as "To cease is a matter purely personal, life goes on as before" as a person

<p align="center">once buried or mixed into elements,
Renewal is maybe in a new flavour of
A being full of new genes and shape.
(There's no Death)</p>

The anthology underlines the Hindu mythology that there is no end of soul as it is a cyclic movement of birth, death and rebirth. Thus, it confers structural unity to the book.

Like L.M. Sharma's previous anthology, *Parables*, the book in hand embodies the poet's predilections with social concerns and changing shades of love, as the blurb pithily states: "Despite the dismal scenario obtaining in socio-political space globally, love is a reverie to the poet as his mind soars into space of beauty and ardours of love to stem the ugly turns and twists in life." *On Reading King Lear* highlights the urgency of reading classics to negotiate the dilemmas of life. *Gift of Speech* is a signature poem of Lalit Mohan Sharma as it reflects his philosophy as a poet. *Cruise On* embodies elements of meta poetry as the poet alludes to the process of poetic creation:

<p align="center">. . . a sapling triggers
Writing, imbibes life from invisible
Springs of the psychic soil.</p>

One discovers how the ecstasy of creation functions as a major driving force in the poet's journey when the final stanza projects him ablaze with passions of creation.

Sharma's love poetry is his forte though what ails humanity at large engages his concern no less. *Joy-in-Life, Young Lovers, She Lifts Her Face, My Last Surrender, She walks at Dusk, No Other Way, Half Embrace, Wrinkles, Finite Bonds, Portraying in Vignettes, She, To Woman with Love* may be viewed as love poems. The poet's credo of love enriches and ennobles his poetry which is definite stance against negativism and dismal scenario prevailing in life. *Joy-in-life* delineates the positive impact of feelings of love which enables human beings to rise above parochialism:

<p align="center">sensations and feelings of love
intuit such thoughts
as can survive the ugly turns.</p>

If poetry is all about truths governing delicate human bonds, the poem *Young Lovers* sensitizes the readers to the emotion of love as it defines love through the eyes of an

ageing lover who has experienced vicissitudes in love. *She Lifts Her Face,* albeit a short poem, evokes the pleasure of reading a sonnet sans its technicalities. *Joy-in-Life, She Lifts Her Face* and *She Walks at Dusk* deliver a powerful message of love. Mesmerizing beauty and feminine grace overpower the poet-lover in whose life 'Joy luminous' pervades the arid zones of existence as his mind brims with joy in the loving presence of his beautiful mistress. What is most important in romantic liaisons is the feeling of trust which acts as glue in bonds of love. In *Accepting the Other* the poet takes cognisance of the tremors at times experienced in relationships "as functional conversations turn almost impossible" but underscores that the lovers "must appreciate the difference and accept the other with respect." As people become prisoners of their petty selves and bloated egos, they rupture the delicate strands of human relationships. The poet seems to say that lovers too must

> *Jump over ego-hurdles, reach across*
> *Finite bonds of hurts and of self-doubt.*
> (*Finite Bonds*)

As the lovers advance in age, the ravages of time become visible on the corporeal frame:

> *tenantless gums*
> *eyes without sight*
> *ears immune to sound*
> *human dissolving into elements*
> (*Beyond Sensual*)

Half Embrace portrays the grim reality as visits the loving souls in the evening of their life:

> *Snuggled*
> *In half embrace like kids*
> *The old couple lay*

absolutely unmindful of wrinkles crisscrossing their once beautiful faces as "*The script of wrinkles has a language/Similar for every tongue in all ages*" (*Wrinkles*). *No Other Way* offers a peep into the mind and heart of the ageing lover caught in a queer dilemma over the incompatibility of the beloved's age:

> *You aren't too close to me in years , yet*
> *We have such talents as can fine-tune*
> *The personal and the impersonal into*
> *A communion of mutual resonance.*

Such shibboleths causing irritants and emotional setbacks will be overcome by the lover through the bond of trust:

> *And no less at risk of caught in the wrong,*
> *We know no other way than to trust*
> *What we eat, drink or follow the scripture*
> *of the conscious awareness of our life.*

The *mantra* to overcome the incompatibility in age and other paradoxes that bedevil loving relationships lies in complete trust and surrender as the poet innocently asks:

> *And when did I last surrender,*
> *At times I am caught off-guard*
>   *(My Last Surrender)*

In brief, the first five love poems are infused with the fleeting emotions of love. Here, we find the self of a youthful lover passionately driven towards his beloved. The next four poems record the mellowed outlook of an ageing lover. The poem *She* is a wonderful tribute to the 'woman', the wonder in his life whereas the next two remaining love poems namely *Portraying in Vignettes* and *To Woman with Love* again present the self of a young lover sensually drawn to the feminine grace of his beloved, and trying to negotiate the process of ageing and changing shades of love.

In *Myths Whisper Us* the poet urges the readers to hear the whispering of the myths. By alluding to the myths of Razia, Luxmibai, Ahalya, he pleads for serious thinking about the issues that deny "ordinary human aspirations" (35) to women. *Of Native Land* and *High Flutters the Flag* reveal the secret vault of human mind that treasures patriotic emotions. The cover page of the book takes its shape from the poet's *Epiphany*. The same image occurs again in *Reverie*:

> *Thoughts like boulders*
> *Raised layer upon layer,*
> *No feelings to lie in-between,*
> *Meaning crumbles. (64)*

The poet is tormented by the "dirty games, riots and arson" as "we do act as Tribal denizens, trigger prejudiced populace" but wonders that "we have kept quiet" and painfully asks "Shall we keep quiet" (*Chorus for the Republic*). *A Soldier's Diary* portrays disturbing scenario that has bedevilled the polity as soldiers are *Airlifted for peace*

> *To a town in siege*
> *Beyond civil control,*
> *Rioting and arson*
> *Among a people gone berserk,*
> *Not of a race but of a religion,*
> *Moving around as armed gangs.*

The metaphor of Bastille is effectively used in *Then Happens Bastille* by the poet to hammer the point that when man

> *suffers half in rage, half in patience*
> *lack of food or roof on his head*
>   ....
> *freedom from avoidable*
> *Wrongs, corporal tortures, and whims*
> *Of self-centered slew of men in power.*
>   ....
> *Then happens Bastille.*

When the discontent soars, solutions cannot be turned into slogans as "Anger cannot be gagged long" (*True Patriot*), and when people

> *chose to surrender*
> *Their ornamental right of thinking*

> *Into the government treasury,*
> *...............................*
> *being turned into herds,*
> *Not gatherings but turned into mobs*
> *(Gift of Speech).*

A Modern Parable essays to explain away the rationale behind the present and past happenings though eventually concludes:

> *Our life is a series of hallucinations*
> *Or a bio-bubble, a cage built,*
> *Self-inflicted over history.*

Alone in a Gazebo reveals the poet brooding over his country and thinking of the Father of Nation who has been turned "into a statue" in contrast with the hullabaloo and life-size hoardings of the "towering leader" as the country

> *Sinks in self-esteem,*
> *Loses its place among nations*

Lalit Mohan Sharma's *There's no Death* brings into sharp focus the poet's amazing sagacity in selection of the titles of poems as each poem though independent entity, reflects the thematic and structural unity as symbolized by the title of the book. The poet does not pontificate though feels traumatized by the extinction of human in man and the waning of ethical substance in life. With his creative antennas upped significantly the poet receives conflicting signals that agitate his creative consciousness but through remarkable restraint he emerges as "creative," "original" and decent" (57). In spite of being well read and knowledgeable, his poetic craft does not bamboozle the readers. His ironic and satiric glances at the afflictions of contemporary global polity do not leave a trail of acrimony, rather display his love of humanity and loyalty to his native land, and therein lies the charm, beauty and romance of Lalit Mohan Sharma's *oeuvre*.

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Ritika Agnihotri. *Empowerment Through Self-Narration*
Cresecent Publication Corporation, New Delhi, 2022, Rs.925, pp. 210.

Dr. Gurleen Ahluwalia*

"I say if I'm beautiful. I say if I'm strong. You will not determine
my story – I will."
— Amy Schumer

Empowerment through Self-Narration is a persuasive yet praiseworthy attempt made by Dr. Ritika Agnihotri in bringing forth the idea of 'construction of self.' Putting together the autobiographical writings of the five Indian women, the potential worth of a self-narration is presented in her book as a tool for breaking stereotypes of powerful patriarchal structures like rape, marriage, domestic work, sex work and religion. As writing about the self involves a deep insight into one's life, an autobiography written especially by a woman is not merely a narration of her personal history rather a vehicle of the feminist emancipatory movement. Women from the margins use this mode of writing to represent their realities and their feminist concerns. Taking five autobiographical writings of Indian women into account: *I, Phoolan Devi: The Autobiography of India's Bandit Queen* (1996) by Phoolan Devi; *A Life Less Ordinary* (2006) by Baby Halder; *Provoked* (2007) by Kiranjit Ahluwalia; *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* (2007) by Nalini Jameela and *Amen: The Autobiography of a Nun* (2009) by Sister Jesme, the book explores how the construction of subjectivity through the narration of the self gives voice to the oppressed and marginalised women to create their own identities. Their indomitable will to defy social norms to define themselves than be defined by others emerges as the common denominator that strings all the selected narratives together.

There is no denying the fact that the texts have been judiciously chosen for the study. With the analysis of the selected texts, the author succeeds in underscoring the idea that the rot of misogyny runs deep in the social circle of every strata of society. Women from all walks of life are subjected to physical, sexual or psychological abuse. Whether it is the story of a low caste woman, or of a domestic servant in a metropolitan city, or of a local woman married to an NRI, or of a sex worker or of a doctorate degree holder working in a religious educational institution - each one of them suffers at the hands of patriarchy, of course, magnitude of suffering varies in each case.

The book opens with a customary introductory chapter providing information and analysis of the concepts of discourse, resistance and narrative with respect to self-writing. In order to set the tone for the analysis of the works in the upcoming sections, the chapter puts forth the ideas and arguments of theorists hailing from their respective fields of psychoanalysis, feminism and cultural studies. Stating the importance that literacy, awareness and translation play in taking the regional voices to the global readers, Agnihotri traces the hardships of some of the writers in reaching out to the public forums and in creating respectable places for themselves in the society.

Thereafter, the following five sections of the book succeed in highlighting the odyssey of each autobiographical protagonist from being an oppressed and marginalised other to becoming a woman of substance. Looking at Phoolan Devi's autobiography through an analytical lens, Agnihotri describes her book as a sociography. The impact of societal sub-divisions, the social patterns in tandem with the heart-wrenching incidents that shaped her identity have been discussed in detailed in Chapter II. In Chapter III, an attempt has been made to situate Baby Halder's A Life Less Ordinary in the context of development of self of a woman who is marginalized in two ways: economically and geographically. This chapter explores the identity of Baby Halder who used writing as a form of resistance to overthrow the power structures which made her a weakling in spite of her invincible spirit. Chapter IV of the book contemplates upon the plight of women in Indian diaspora through the life of Kiranjit Ahluwalia. Narrating the most daunting and harrowing episode of her life how her subjectivity undergoes a remarkable change and gives space to the rejuvenation of her new self-identity is very well presented in this section of the book. Agnihotri makes an attempt to study the construction of the self of a woman sex worker in Chapter V by parsing the The Autobiography of a Sex Worker by Nalini Jameela who subverts the social taboos and exposes the hypocrisies of the patriarchal society. The analysis depicts that a woman is not always how she is projected by those in power or at the centre. An analysis of Sister Jesme's narrative, The Autobiography of a Nun done in Chapter VI reveals the hegemonic power that rests with the oppressive structures, which in this case, is religion. It also proves that in a patriarchal society, a woman who refuses to obey the rules which are solely in the interest of men and oppressive towards women, is looked down upon as a harlot or a witch. It is only by the realization of one's identity that such images can be re-shaped. Besides, in the concluding remarks, the book addresses an array of issues ranging from discrimination against women on the basis of caste, creed, gender, social status, level of literacy, marital status, economic dependence to physical and mental weaknesses.

There is never a dull moment in the book. The simple yet stimulating style of writing remarkably succeeds in decoding the underlying messages presented in each narrative. In order to put sharp focus on the seriousness of the issues, the language is deliberately kept simple so as not to distract the reader from experiencing the multitude of emotions that the book unfolds. Another unique feature of the book is the judicious selection of autobiographical voices with individual identities. The book offers a rich mine of information for the for researchers working in the field of feminism and cultural studies. Hopefully, It may open up new possibilities in research pertaining to feminist-cultural theory as well as translation studies.

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Dr. K.B. Razdan's *Calliope's Leaves* – An Oeuvre of Resonating Oceanic Depths

Dr. Molly Joseph*

As a post, postmodern text that reverberates on the random, uncertain shores of contemporaneity, *Calliope's Leaves* offers the world through the word. It was deep drowning experience hovering round the thick iceberg of this ocean! Here I emerge having gathered parts of it, illumining my inscape. This is indeed a masterpiece by Dr. K.B Razdan, who is soaked in the wisdom of ages by his deft forays into ancient myths and legends, great writers thinkers and movers. There in the pantheon we rub against Shakespeare, Milton, Jonathan Swift, Khalil Gibran, Jean Paul Sartre, Sigmund Freud and many others.

Reading, delving deep into the book is a real experience in itself… As Gibran puts it the wet feathers of yours shudder, 'like the naked leaf in the winter wind.' Calliope, the Greek Goddess of eloquence and Epic Poetry fans her leafy poetic flakes all over the precious pebbles that have been gathered from the seashore of experience, and sediments wisdom. The book breathes in an out a uniqueness, it weaves out a magic web of tapestries, teems with thoughts, images, poems and poetic drama, interweaving the timeless of history with the temporal and spatial, multi layered with insights and interpretations of a revisit to renew things in tandem with our times.

If creativity evolves fine saturation of the past, spreading it on the quick sands of the present to blow it over to the expanding horizons of future, here is poet approximating that 'time less' with his own mediation mavericks. He puts it succinctly in *The Kind Creator* (3)

> *The lord cast his divine grace*
> *Upon myself…*
> *To reinvigorate my existence*
> *To give it a meaning, a Purpose, direction*

After exposing Narcissus's psyche of cocooning in Solipsism (Poem 6) the self critical scrutiny is strong in *Caged Bird*. Here man's anthropocentric cage building, hegemony is put to ridicule. The poem turns self reflexive.

> *As the apex of creation, man thinks he can lord over all creations?*
> *Aren't we caged in our bodies/ yes mind sets too caged,*
> *Get going. Bury the cage,*
> *Break the bars: fly to carefree freedom... (11)*

How the voyaging self wants to be a *Time Traveller,* ducking in and out of the folds of history, witnessing 'epic wars' floating on the melody of Krishna's flute and launch cosmic cruises across Galaxies Nebulas, Constellations. Calliope's Leaves fall, flutter over, catching the random, be it on dreams, the mundane memories. this splash of the contemporary spices up the verses that flow sometimes from the prosaic into fine lyrical cadence.

> *Men, women changed in wedlock*
> *making a mockery of sanctified, avowed matrimony"*

(Love Triangles 7)

See expressions like 'exploring fictional cosmos within' (11). The Poetic Dramas that interweave within the matrix, do not project 'discord.'

Everywhere, reinventing, redefining on 'the given', goes on with fine poetic flourish. Faustus, the human who made a bad bargain with Satan through Mephistopheles, still pits his brain against the evil when once again he is enjoined and entrusted with the malignant schemes of Lustus - to execute the satanic road map of monomaniacal ruination among humans, severing man's faith in God, stigmatising God for all suffering.

It was at Faustus' connivance that the Pandemic was thrashed out in his workshop filled with chemicals. Here how the nihilistic waves devour the contemporary.

> *the mono maniacal breeds of barking humans*
> *akin to rabid dogs, in a cacophony of pain,*
> *hopelessness, hysteria and self annihilation…*
> (*Dr. Faustus…Post Modern Incarnation*, 36)

The Poetic Drama, Shakespeare and Anne Hath way... A Tryst with Destiny is a fine creative poetic dramatization of Shakespeare's last days. The diction suits Shakespearean style and in a touching way there is the unveiling of the dramatic start of Shakespeare's conjugal bliss which later in a realistic way, get swayed over by Shakespeare's absorption of his whole self into theatre. The torn self of Shakespeare is poignant to the core when he suffers the death of his only son, Hamnet. These dark days proved to be the time of his dark tragedies too. Here the play makes tangible impact through poignant scenes where we find Shakespeare's family reel under so much of distress and loss. The very epitaph Shakespeare writes pulsates with this. 'Oh William Shakespeare, son of John live in thy shame, but die not shame with thee.' With these last words, Shakespeare, with his soul twirling as an autumn leaf to fall, makes his way to the other world. The play captures us in all its poignancy, with poor Anne weeping over the loss...

> *where has thou gone leaving thy Anne forlorn*
> *as a lost eve on a grassy expanse*
> *to be devoured by a wolf?'*

The Poetic Drama, *The Judgement of Paris* connotes more than mere abduction of Helen, the wife of the Spartan King, Menelaus by Paris. In fact Paris was a mere instrument of the forces from above, the Gods who chose him to become, the arbiter of beauty when a contest was held among three Goddesses. His judgement resulted in getting Helen as his love, since he judged Aphrodite (Venus), the Goddess of Love as the winner. The offer came from her to Paris, that the paramount beauty of Sparta, Helen would be his.

There accrued the great Trojan war and consequently the destruction of so many precious human lives. Thus, as Shakespeare puts it, 'as flies to wanton boys, are we to the Gods.' – man a mere puppet in the hands of destiny wreaking destruction all around! The play teems with profundities, gives more than what meets the eye. Here is a daring poetic mind boldly interrogating old truisms posited by thinkers or religious codes.

> *When Krishna made Arjuna to kill Karna,*
> *consigning conscience to the cleaners,*
> *was it justified?*
> *Apparently not!.*

Here is a poetic self always on a quest to question and reinterpret the given time old concepts and notions (Poems18,19,21).

The poem *Borderline Consciousness* well analyses what constitute consciousness: *It is a flexible mind, a viscous brain an elastic thinking* (Poem 31). Interrogations continue in Poems like *My Freer Self, Situations, Prevarications* where there is a powerful critiquing of each through different angles.

The poem, *Borderline Consciousness* well analyses what constitutes consciousness: "*It is a flexible mind, a viscous brain an elastic thinking*" (Poem 31). Interrogations continued in Poems – *My Freer Self, Situations, Prevarications* – where there is a powerful critiquing of each through different angles.

A tongue in the cheek is there as motif in many poems (*Anatomy of Bullying*, 57). We cannot stop laughing over poetic coinages like 'verbal diarrhoea' (*Thinkers and Prattlers*, 180). We get virulent bytes of social criticism and correction in *Mammon Worship, Cross and Owls, Mind Games, Confidence Tricksters*. Social satire is pungent in the poem, *Republic of Dogs (62)*. *Anatomy of Pain* well analyses how patience matters in healing and the inner physician treats and heals your illness.

The Love poems (78,79,95) teem with genuine warmth and intimacy. A futuristic poem like *Cassandra* denoting man's wreckless indulgence with technology, specially Artificial Intelligence as insane as the Trojans who proceed with the Trojan Horse of destruction, flouting the warnings of Cassandra (193) the Prophet of Doom. If we proceed that way, a graveyard awaits, a graveyard even in the Milky Way of Galaxy, the poet reminds us.

The Poetic self, sheds it veneers like a snake peeling off its skin, when we read *Broken dreams, Talking to God* (47, 48). They are deeply introspective.

> *Held up in a 'victim's psyche strait jacket'*
> *the soul talks to God across the terrains of mind*
> *and God listens in silence and puts him by the still waters. (33).*
> *His Grace, his finger touches me, invigorates me.*

Great life lessons are meted out in poems like *Daedalus And Icarus* (157). The Poem, *Life: An Unchartered Journey* (76) offers insights about the core to our existence.

> *Play the see - saw of existence across*
> *the high way of life. (178). Yes, proper balancing Matters.*

The Razdan Poetics thus points at safe mooring for us, the ships in search of safe anchors in the turbulent seas. *Calliope's Leaves* fan, flutter over, in and around us with its gentle ripples, wafting in cool fresh air and insights.

> *Play the see - saw of existence across*
> *the high way of life. (178). Yes, proper balancing Matters.*

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POETRY

Eva Petropoulou-Lianou*

My Dream of Togetherness

The sun has fallen
Behind the mountain s face

Looking at the horizon
I see your shape..

The sky had so many colors
Orange
Pink
And some green
In the middle

As a painter I mixed up
The cold and the warm colors
Making yours eyes with a black pencil
and your lips with a light red

-I ask the sky
-Did my sun, will come back again?

The sky responds :
If you believe in Light
Sun will always shine for you!!!!

Sometimes

Sometimes you wake up
find no strength to leave the bed

Believe me
You are not the only one

Sometimes you see the past.
see the present
and just wonder

what have I done all these years?

Believe me
people face this dilemma

You look in the mirror
and you like nothing
ninety percent people feel alike

That is life
a beautiful miracle
as day and night
come and go.

Go out
see the sun
have a great day
walk to the sea.

Think positive
only you decide
to be happy or sad.

Life is divine boon
not a graphic manual
how to live
how to succeed
yet we fight every day,
if we find love in this journey
we are really lucky

So keep dreaming
keep believing
miracles happen..

Eva Petropoulou-Lianou is a multilingual poet from Greece. She has published books and eBooks - Me and My Other Self, My Shadow, Geraldine and the Lake Elf in English and French, The Daughter of the Moon in Greek and English, The Fairy of the Amazon Myrtia Lefkadios Hearn, Myths and Stories of the Far East, illustrated by Sumi-e painter Dina Anastasiadou, and The Adventures of Samurai Nogas san in English. She collaborates with the electronic literary magazine, The Poet and for thepromotion of literature and the works of Greek poets. Eva's works figure in the Greek Encyclopaedia Haris Patsis. eviepara@yahoo.fr

Dr. Jyoti Puri*

Of Mosquito's Sting in Spring!

It was a usual day at work except
for an intermittent intervention by a mosquito's sting.
I tried my skills at hitting the sole buzzer while
underestimating the trailing swarm of mosquitoes behind it.

My imminent enemy had dashed out of my reach while
smashing away my sole wish to mash it.
It seemed that the swarm had a secret pact and
also, the best training for guerrilla warfare.

My workstation had transformed into the summer battlefield
that had buzzing noises and sharp proboscis.
Soon the undercover agents deployed behind curtains
and foot rest received signals to operate.

I panicked and tried to counter attack my opponents
with papers and pepper sprays.
Desperately I dashed out and reached out at one of them
only to separate its peel from its skin.

The mushed mosquito had left a trail
of my blood in my palms.
As I caught myself red-handed
some mild and muddled itching set in too.

Eventually, the lazy yet ambitious lot
managed to lay siege over my skin and station.

Metamorphizing

Imbibe an author's respiratory rhythm and adopt it,
Invent and then inhale those peculiar scents, smells and stenches,

Perspire in proportion to the writer's sweat,
Cook a foreign meal with indigenous ingredients,

Revert the bolus into mouth and remould it into a morsel,

Witness the tree yet go back in time to bury its seed,

Impress identical footprints on sand post the tidal sweep,
Become claustrophobic when the context chokes,

Break in the already broken in news,
Outlive *Orf* and *Mutawa* and yet return to *Mahram*,

Deliver an infant only to sustain labour again,
Discover the killer yet feign ignorance and suspense,

Plan a murder for the corpse all over again,
Rediscover yourself after deliberate misplacement,
Arrive and yet baffle others.

[1]In Saudi Arabia, it refers to convention.
[2] The moral police.
[3] A woman's male guardian.

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Dr. Alapati Purnachandra Rao*

Nature , the Mother

The petals of tiny flowers swaying with mirth
Unleashing a fresh lease of life on the earth;

The lulling breeze awakens the life-doting waves
Stimulating the dormant pulse of wind that saves;

The nature's kith and kin optimistically gaped wide
Enjoying the spell of breath in the dwelling abode;

It's an emanating mystic melody that springs up symphony
To soothe the wavered mind with a string of harmony;

An unperturbed emotion escalates to the blue heights
That dampens the dry heart with sweet weight;

Ah! The mystery of nature is gently unveiled
When its creatures rush to reside in its divide.

Human Action

The conscious human is confused in his deeds
The subconscious in a way neglecting the landscape;

The fauna and flora are scratched rampantly
in the cleavage of woods that lay like a monument;

The ruthless movements of human thoughts destroy
the beauty of unarmed dumb elements of nature viciously:

The indifferent actions of man make oxy rudiments
Dwindled in fragments reaching the corners of the sky;

Everything decayed in the name of progress
When people believe it a sort of comfort:

The innocence of humans displayed amenably
amidst the illusion of his pessimistic actions blatantly.

Nature, the Rebellion

The permanence of the eternal nature unveils
the vigour of transient life that suddenly halts;

The soul of the woods suddenly shudders
Reminding the relentless damage happened to hers;

It broods to knock the man to his life
To make him realize his real human 'self';

But it's a futile exercise that fails to reform
When he is in a state of static object form;

A reflection of revolt surges from the heart of landscape
to fold the activity of human that manifest in scape;

A culmination of nature's rebellious waves conveys
through pandemic that prompts the value of his existence.

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Dr. Padumi Singha*

In the Season of Laburnums

The heart's
secret chamber's
window is open
let in
a handful of
smile-hued sunshine!

Endearing

Now
time too has slept . . .
your
lullabies
have become hushed . . .
just kept resonating
deep inside heart
a
melodic word . . .
quietly . . .
intimately . . .
'love' . . .

To the Field I grew up with

My green field
how you ran with me
into the wild
when I was a small child

My sweet field
when you sleep at night
keeping your fingers crossed
you dream of a pure heart

My poor field
your riches are reaped
people caress you
only to rip you apart

My small field
your roots have grown

deep inside me
as concretes grip you all over

My sick field
you cough smog
now you don't laugh anymore
the petals of the green sun

My old field
your primordial presence
has succoured lives
today you lie truncated

My dear field
growing up with you
an experience extraordinaire
to last my last breath.

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