

# Literary Voice

A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies

*U.G.C. Care Approved Group II Journal*

ISSN 2277-4521

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**Literary Voice**

**Editor : T.S. Anand**



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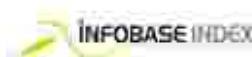
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## ***FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK***

Consequent upon lockdowns, dislocations and confinements caused by Covid-19, life in the current scenario is not what it used to be. It has lost rhythm and regularity. The regularity of the *Literary Voice* has been affected. March 2020 edition of the journal got so much inordinately delayed that September 2020 edition *per force* had to be skipped. Currently we place in your hands *Literary Voice* March 2021 which comprises critical interrogations of literary texts from English, American, Afro-American, Black-British, Australian, New Zealand, African, Turkish, Omani, Indian, Pakistani, Egyptian, Nepalese and Children literatures. Fifty-three research papers interrogate thematic, linguistic and theoretical concerns that range from the feminist revisionist mythology in literature and cinema through the prism of marginalization and queerness-to the complex dimensions of transgender phenomenon-to Phenomenology of the Spirit-to the dystopian vision about the future of urban development and-to the African American women's resistance against institutionalized sexism, racism, marginalization and invisibility and the failure of the American dream. The flawed narratives of Eurocentric colonial history of New Zealand which ignore the momentous role played by the immigrants and the natives, comes in for critical scrutiny. The essays on literature from the Middle East examine the dissonance between Art and Religion, and overturn the spurious notions of Western liberal feminism about the institution of harem in Islam.

Multiple marginalities in Dalit literature and 'differences' between the feminist perspectives from western feminist to Indian-Nepali feminist discourse have been critically appraised. Socio-psychological conflicts, women's perpetual struggle and existential dilemmas in a diasporic setting within the framework of war and terrorism and what it means to be homeless within one's own country and in an alien setting, have been incisively interrogated. Apart from critiquing autobiographies and memoirs, the papers focus on nationalism-religion dynamics, complexities of human relationships, gender fluidities, multiculturalism, memory as bulwark against the trauma of Partition through re-envisioning spaces, the problematics of the Indian postcolonial modernity, eco-spirituality as an approach to inspect the human-nature relationship from *Bhakti* and *Sufi* perspectives, and Dalit Literature. Besides papers on ELT, the present edition comprises critical inquiries into Science fiction within the framework of Michel Foucault's heterotopia and Victor Turner's liminality.

Prof. Harish Narang's thought provoking discourse on the ethical dimensions of Creativity and Critiquing and Prof. Swaraj Raj's musings on Rutger Bregman's *Humankind: A Hopeful History* have significantly enriched the current edition of *Literary Voice*. Other significant highlights of the issue are two Interviews with the contemporary Indian English Novelists, Kavita Kane, Vikram Singh Deol and Parneet Jaggi and poems from four new women poets--Bipasha Mazumdar De, Supriya Bhandari, K.Suneetha, Swarnjit Savi from India and Mehnaz from Pakistan--and four in-depth Book Reviews about contemporary Indian fiction and poetry. Dear Readers, your responses to our endeavours will be gladly awaited.

***T.S. Anand***

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# 'Projections of Megalopolis' in J.G. Ballard's *The Concentration City & Billennium*

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## *Abstract*

*J.G. Ballard's The Concentration City and Billennium are both short stories that depict an utterly dystopian vision about the future of urban development. The Concentration City provides a glimpse of an overgrown, gigantic city with no limits whereas Billennium presents a perspective of the burden of living in an overpopulated society. Both stories are projections of the megalopolis as coined by philosophers Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford. These thinkers have outlined the notion of megalopolis as the final stage of development before necropolis, city of the dead. This paper explores how and in what ways Ballard's vision of megalopolis is reflected in The Concentration City and Billennium. To that end, the effects of megalopolis on the individual, nature, society and government institutions are revealed. In addition, the paper also demonstrates that human liberty is restricted on all accounts as a consequence of the conditions created by the megalopolis. Finally, as put forward by Geddes and Mumford, regionalism is proposed as an alternative to prevent excessive urban development which is destined to lead to megalopolis and ultimately, collective downfall.*

*Keywords: J.G. Ballard, The Concentration City, Billennium, Megalopolis, Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, Dystopian Fiction*

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## **Introduction**

A pioneer of the new wave of science-fiction movement, J.G. Ballard produced works within a wide spectrum of postmodern, biographical, transgressive and climate fiction. The majority of his fiction however, remained within a dystopian context. *The Concentration City* is a short story that was published in the *New Worlds* magazine in 1957 whereas *Billennium* was published in the 1962 edition of *Amazing Stories*. Both short stories reflect a dystopian setting in the distant future. *The Concentration City* depicts the portrait of a gigantic city lacking frontiers and open spaces. *Billennium* on the other hand presents a vision of an extremely overpopulated society where space has become the most valuable commodity. Both stories reflect Ballard's dystopian vision of urban development gone beyond control. Both works converge on the lack of and longing for space.

Ballard's urban dystopias demonstrate the results of excessive urbanisation on the society and on the individual. Thereby, it could be asserted that *The Concentration City* and *Billennium* display the Megalopolis stage, which is the final stage before the necropolis, the city of dead. Thus, this article aims to analyse Ballard's stories through the perspectives put forward by influential philosophers of urbanisation and town planning: Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford. Both intellectuals have coined the particular stages of city development and maintained that after the industrial revolution, urbanisation is diverted towards the wrong direction. This article contemplates to interpret Ballard's stories from the window of Geddes' and Mumford's views, in specific, the megalopolis.

## **Patrick Geddes and the birth of *The Megalopolis***

Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) was a Scottish philosopher whose work maintained a wide range from biology to sociology, history and town planning (Baigent 688). Geddes used the term

megalopolis (1927) to indicate the stage of urban development in a particularly negative context. In his notable work, *Cities in Evolution*, Geddes stated: “the expectation is not absurd that the not very distant future will see practically one vast city-line along the Atlantic Coast for five hundred miles, and stretching back at many points; with a total of ... many millions of population” (48-49). However, he ascribes negative features to these gigantic urban centres: “depressing life . . . [with] disease and folly . . . vice and apathy . . . indolence and crime” (Geddes 86). As a visionary of urban planning, Geddes was the first intellectual to envision, foresee and warn the society of the consequences of extreme and disproportionate urbanisation. He was also the first to combine the notion of megalopolis with degeneration and economic abuse (Baigent 689).

Geddes established a noteworthy categorization of cities which he put forward in six stages: “village – town – city – metropolis - megalopolis and finally – necropolis” (Meller 117). Whether Geddes was associating this with the present or future is ambiguous but on the other hand, it is obvious that he envisioned a dystopian, nightmarish, and bleak outcome for the future of urbanisation. As a biologist, Geddes likened the city to a living organism and claimed that after a certain phase of development, they would die due to their organic nature (696). As one of the greatest city planners in history, Geddes acknowledged and foresaw an utterly catastrophic tendency alongside extreme urban development. Hellen Meller expressed that for Geddes: “Megalopolis was the manifestation of an imbalance between organism - human society - and the environment it was creating for itself. Inherent in this approach was the possibility that if interaction between organism and environment were better understood then urbanisation in the future, since it was man-made, might create a great civilisation, an inspiration to all. 'Megalopolis' would only lead to 'necropolis' if no heed were taken of this” (117).

To that end, Geddes argued that the relationship between human beings and the environment ought to be better acknowledged and taken into serious consideration as a necessity in creating an exemplary civilisation. In case this was ignored, megalopolis would only lead to necropolis; death and destruction. Another point that Geddes made was that the industrial revolution caused a burst of population which could not be dealt with and emphasized life quality over quantity; bigger cities do not provide better living standards for humans (Meller 118-119). Thus, rather than scale and proportion, Geddes focused on the quality of life as early as the 1920s and coined three essential factors that he deemed imperative for urbanisation: balance, culture and personal development (119). Balance referred to the balance between urban and rural regions, the city as a vital receiver and embodiment of culture and individual quality as the basic determiner of culture and civilisation (120).

All in all, Geddes was an advocate of high-quality living standards who predicted overachieving urban growth to become a serious threat for humanity. Therefore, Geddes promoted regionalism as the alternative to disproportional urbanisation. Geddes' ideas and notions were to be taken up and continued by his disciple, Lewis Mumford. Both Geddes and Mumford's views have contributed to the domain of urbanisation but remained in the shadow due to the upcoming two world wars (127).

### **Lewis Mumford's *Megalopolis* and *Regionalism***

Lewis Mumford (1885-1190) was an American philosopher, sociologist, historian and literary critic. A disciple and colleague of Patrick Geddes, Mumford was noted to continue Geddes' work, particularly in the field of urban concentration. Geddes once said to Mumford: “Remember, I have none like you, but you, to be my heir . . . so you must take over much of my further Sociology (Renwick and Gunn 59). Despite being involved in a wide variety of disciplines, Mumford was often associated with city planning and architecture (60). Among his most credited works were *The Culture of Cities* (1951) and *The City in History* (1962).

While Mumford was an ardent scholar, the extent of the influence of Geddes and his works was truly immense. Mumford picked up and continued Geddes' works and even referred to him as his

master. In accordance with Geddes, Mumford also set forward six stages of urban development: “eopolis – polis – metropolis – megapolis – tyrannopolis – necropolis” (Baigent 689). Thus, Mumford's formulation of urban development was quite alike Geddes' but the only difference he maintained was his certainty about the downfall of the megalopolis. Geddes wrote about this in a more ambiguous, doubtful context compared to his follower (689). Mumford was convinced that the megalopolis represented the last phase of urban development that would eventually lead to self-destruction which he deemed was inevitable (690). Therefore, his opinions were more in line with a dystopian sphere. According to Mumford, overdevelopment and overgrowth was destined to be doomed. He openly expressed his catastrophic predictions in *The Pentagon of Power*: “Every overgrown megalopolitan centre today, and every province outside that its life touches exhibits the same symptoms of disorganization, accompanied by no less pathological symptoms of violence and demoralization”. [as did imperial Rome before its fall] (Mumford 277-278)

Mumford's prediction not only validates Geddes' work but also consolidates his precursor's theories. In *The Culture of Cities*, Mumford openly describes the megalopolis as the beginning of downfall. He points out that the city is under the large impact of capitalist tendencies of greatness and display of power which results in the prioritisation of richness and flamboyant, unnecessary vanity. He adds that economic hegemony of capital narrows down and gradually destroys other life supplies such as agriculture and finally brings about the standardization of culture and mechanization of government institutions (Mumford 289).

In short, Mumford associates the megalopolis with notions such as excessiveness, greatness, bigness, vanity, overgrowth and tyranny. Mumford is highly convinced about the megalopolis' inability of setting up positive living standards for its citizens. According to him, the problems caused by its overgrowth cannot be overcome and only lead to worse conditions. Mumford traces the roots of megalopolis to the metropolitan civilisation which he regards as a complete fiasco (Mumford 300).

On the other hand, the disaster of the metropolis has given rise to a response against the mechanistic, automated tendency. This response defends an organic worldview which favours organic life forms over other non-organic constructs. According to Mumford, all organic life forms ought to be integrated to the society (301). Favouring the organic over the machine is to highlight quality over quantity (303). Mumford argues that humans must be integrated in nature and reject all isolation from the natural environment. For this reason, regionalism is proposed as a solution to prevent the megalopolis: “Regionalism served to emphasize compensatory organic elements. [...] In its acceptance of natural diversities as well as natural associations and uniformities; in its recognition of the region as a permanent sphere of cultural influences and as a centre of economic activities, as well as an implicit geographic fact-here lies the vital common element in the regionalist movement.” (Mumford 305-306)

As a proponent of organic life, Mumford defends the organic over the machine, the local over the mainland, the natural over the artificial and integration over isolation. Moreover, regional communities will claim ownership and usage of the land for their own well-being (328). This will result in the mutual ownership and supervision of natural resources (329). As a result, the community will make the last decision over the use of resources and provide equal distribution amongst their people. This will cause a better and sustainable relationship amongst the members of the society as well as with organic life and the environment.

### ***The Concentration City & Billennium: Ballardian Visions of Megalopolis***

As an author with a distinct dystopian style of writing, J.G. Ballard wrote countless works of dystopian fiction. *The Concentration City* (1957) and *Billennium* (1962) are two of Ballard's dystopian short fiction which share common themes and characteristics. Both stories deal with the theme of space shortage and explore Patrick Geddes' and Lewis Mumford's vision of the Megalopolis. Ballard reflects the future of urban development in these works of fiction and exposes the burden of

human life in an overcrowded and overexpanded city.

*The Concentration City* focuses on the adventures of Franz, a 20 year old physics student who dedicates himself to the quest of finding 'open space'. As with most of Ballard's fiction, the plot structure of this story bears little significance in comparison with the setting and underlying themes. *The Concentration City* is set in a gigantic overexpanded city comprising endless streets and mega structures. The city basically has no limits and is isolated from all natural and organic wildlife, including trees. In this city, the most precious commodity is space which is sold a dollar a cubic foot. Ballard's use of excessive language is striking: "Millionth street, West Millions, thousand levels, 3,000 levels, 568<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 422<sup>nd</sup> Street" (Ballard 1). Then, Franz sees a dream: "I was suspended in the air above a flat stretch of open ground, something like the floor of an enormous arena. My arms were out at my sides, and I was looking down, floating-" [...] All around me there was free space. That was the most important part about it. There were no walls. Nothing but emptiness. That's all I remember." (Ballard 3)

Franz's longing for flying and eventually finding open space reflects his ultimate craving for freedom. The city, with its never ending buildings has extended to such an extent that the inhabitants have become captive in their own giant prison facility. Human beings yearn for open space and nature to regain their sense of freedom which they have lost with this immense city. Thus, a setting with no walls, building and as simple as it may seem, open spaces have become the subject matters of dreams and fantasies. This reveals the deviation of growth and development into the wrong direction and sets the setting for the downfall of civilisation.

To that end, *The Concentration City* depicts a Ballardian vision of Geddes and Mumford's megalopolis. Ballard's city is no different than the megalopolis and comprises all the features indicated by Geddes, one of which is instability between human society and organic environment. In the story, there is no mention of trees, forests, animals or any organic life. Therefore, human society has isolated itself from the natural sphere. The only sphere left is that of the city with its unending walls, buildings and massive structures. As outlined by Geddes, Ballard depicts the beginning of the decline of civilisation. In addition, the Ballardian megalopolis emphasizes quantity over quality as all excessiveness has become a common feature of daily life whereas no attention is paid to the quality and comfort of life. Greatness, bigness, excessive numbers and buildings are all that matters in this dystopian vision. Moreover, the city's dystopian context owes its bleakness to the density which marks the number of people in relation to other cities and to the number of apartment blocks that increases density (Tuna Ultav 26). Consequently, it is the extreme population density which brings about the circumstances that result in an utterly gloomy atmosphere in *The Concentration City*.

In accordance with his mentor, Lewis Mumford argued that the megalopolis would bring about standardisation of culture and mechanisation of state institutions (Mumford 289). In Ballard's story megalopolis has drastically reshaped and reduced culture to a limited extent: "over 75 percent of the student enrolment was in the architectural and engineering faculties, a meagre 2 percent in pure sciences. The physics and chemistry libraries were housed in the oldest quarter of the University" (Ballard 5). Thus, engineering and architecture have established hegemony, leaving no space for science, art, literature or other social sciences. In the following pages Franz takes the elevator up 150 levels to 677-98 to reach the bureau of the Precinct Estate Office. This reveals the government's reluctance to provide public service and its aspiration for unattainability. Probably the only mention of nature in this story is when an elderly man talks to Franz: "They say they're going to build gardens and parks for us, even heard they might be able to get a tree. It'll be the only tree in the whole county" (Ballard 7-8).

As the old man claims, parks, gardens and trees are the examples of utmost fantasy in Ballard's megalopolis. On the other hand, open space has become the ultimate obsession for Franz as he is determined to give up on everything to reach space and fulfil his dream. Due to his obsession with open space, the doctor tells that Franz should see a psychiatrist. At the end, after traveling on the train,



Franz realises he ends up where he had begun his journey. Upon this realisation, the doctor states: "I prefer the accepted view that the City stretches out in all directions without limits" (Ballard 19). Thus, it took Franz three weeks to travel around the city, ending up back where he had started and thus proving the pointlessness of escaping the city.

*Bilennium* is another Ballardian story that deals with the extreme shortage of space in a futuristic, dystopian setting. In accordance with *the Concentration City*, *Bilennium* also focuses on the need for space, but this time as a result of overpopulation. The story centres on the adventures of John Ward and Henry Rossiter. As the world's population has reached 20 billion, people are forced to live in very small spaces called cubicles. As with most of Ballard's fiction, the plot structure is simple with relatively little action. Ward and Rossiter are close friends who discover an empty room in their house which they rejoice over at first sight. At the end, the friends bring over their girlfriends who in turn bring over others as the room quickly fills up to become no different than the rest of every other location.

Geddes' and Mumford's Megalopolis is manifested in *Bilennium* as well. The city with its overpopulated areas represents the stage before necropolis. Ballard's vision of Megalopolis in *Bilennium* is consistent with Geddes and Mumford's formulations as the emphasis is placed on overpopulation, overgrowth and excessiveness on all domains. The immense restriction of freedom is a natural result of megalopolis in *Bilennium*: "over a hundred people lived in the top three floors of the old rooming house. [...] He had shared a room with seven others on the ground floor of a house on 755th Street" (Ballard 125). Queues, locks and jams have become the common elements of everyday life. In addition, privacy and personal items are symbols of luxury. This becomes more obvious when they find a Victorian wardrobe which they are forced to give up in the end due to lack of space.

*Bilennium* reflects Mumford's prospect of an overgrown, overdeveloped, plethoric society that tortures its citizens every single day. This overgrown society is regulated with mechanic measures and strict punishment. The lack of space not only limits personal belongings but also seriously restricts and annihilates the presence of nature, animals and all non-human organic life forms. In *Bilennium*, the city has grown to such an extent that some vital buildings and natural areas have to be taken down so as to create space for people. The excessive population density has severely transformed and devastated human lives. On the whole, Ballard's second vision of megalopolis is more dystopian, bleak and claustrophobic compared to its predecessor.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Concentration City* and *Bilennium* are both Ballardian visions of the megalopolis which project a dystopian outcome for the future of humanity. Both stories share common characteristics and are different varieties of Geddesian and Mumford's megalopolis. As it is the case with most Ballardian fiction, the author does not propose or formulate any type of solution or alternative for the current situation. Thus, Ballard aims at shocking the readers with the utmost dystopian visions and warning the public for what might one day become reality. While Geddes and Mumford propose and defend organic life and regionalism to avoid such scenarios, Ballard, on the other hand pushes readers to reflect on the growth of societies and urban centres. *The Concentration City* and *Bilennium* are both representations of Geddes' and Mumford's megalopolis. These works expose how and to what extent urban overgrowth reshapes, restricts and eventually ruins human life. In these stories, Ballard openly demonstrates that the megalopolis eradicates Geddesian elements of balance, culture and personal development. As Ballard's stories are open-ended, it can be inferred that conditions in both settings are likely to aggravate and living standards are bound to degenerate. Therefore, the growth of the city is in the inverse ratio with human rights and liberty. The more the city grows, the more human conditions degenerate. For this reason, urban consciousness needs to be achieved and it must be acknowledged that constant growth does not necessarily lead to a better

society. All in all, despite powerful premonitions, Ballard's short fiction did not receive widespread attention as urban development gradually continues to grow towards the very direction that Geddes and Mumford had envisioned.

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## Richard Yates's *Young Hearts Crying* : Chasing the Mirage

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### *Abstract*

*American dream, at the outset, germinated in the puritanical framework with piety, hard work, diligence and freedom as the core values aiming at making America a land of abundance, egalitarianism and individual freedom. Ironically, after the World War II, it got transformed into a blind race for materialistic gains, thereby giving rise to crony capitalism, consumerism and blatant individualism. This transformation continues to have adverse impact on the social fiber, institution of marriage and individual well being. The ironical fallout of the ideals of self-reliance, and transcendence alienated the young Americans from the very moorings of love, familial bonding as well as social values and lead them to paranoia, failures and nightmarish political and cultural shocks. The paper analyses Richard Yates's novel *Young Hearts Crying* (1984) that showcases the inherent fragility of American Dream by encapsulating the alienation of the young American generation in the wake of World War II.*

*Key Words: American Dream, Alienation, Individualism, Consumerism, Transcendence.*

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American dream has its roots in the reformative possibilities of the world embedded in the puritanical faith. Jim Cullen, relating Puritanism and American dream in his book *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*, states that Puritan's "faith in reform became central legacy of American Protestantism and cornerstone of American dream." (15). It marked a shift from medievalist idea about the supremacy of God to the rationalistic spirit of enlightenment. John Locke's 'liberty and unhindered materialistic attainment' and Thomas Jefferson's "life, liberty and pursuit of Happiness" (Bradley 279) ironically and subsequently transformed the American dream from democratic principle of man's socio-spiritual growth into a blind race for materialistic gains, thereby giving rise to crony capitalism, consumerism and blatant individualism. This transformation continues to have adverse impact on the social fiber, institution of marriage and individual well being. The ironical fallout of the ideals of self-reliance, and transcendence alienated the young Americans from the very moorings of love, familial bonding as well as social values and led them to paranoia, failures and nightmarish political and cultural shocks.

In addition to the popular discourse, the use of the term American dream has been traced in American literature ranging from autobiography of Benjamin Franklin to William Cather's *My Antonia* (1918), F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Tony Morrison's *Songs of Solomon* (1977) etc. Others who explored American dream through their writings are Hunter S. Thompson, Edward Albee and Langston Hughes etc. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) has been referred to as the striking example of the failure of American dream where Willy Loman becomes the victim of its altered connotations. Similarly, Richard Yates, being a realistic writer, narrates the trials and tribulations of common Americans who believe in the popular axiom of 'rags to riches' and run through the horrors of their ordeals.

Richard Yates, born in Yonkers, New York on February 3, 1926, is an unsung American novelist and short story writer whom Eric Pace called "a chronicler of disappointed lives, 'Of ruined lives'" (10). Brought up in penury by a divorced mother, Richard developed a keen sensitivity to



poverty, tragedy and loss. He joined Army in 1944 and witnessed combat, contacted TB and was retired on disability pension. His literary career included journalism, teaching creative writing, speech writing, novelist and a short story writing. His creative *oeuvre* includes publication of six novels; *Revolutionary Road* (1961), *Special Providence* (1969), *A Good School* (1978), *Young Hearts Crying* (1984) and *Cold Spring Harbour* (1986). His two short stories collections are *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness* (1959) and *Liars in Love* (1981). Richard died in Birmingham's Veteran's Hospital because of emphysema at the age 66.

*Young Hearts Crying* is the penultimate novel of Richard Yates, published in the year 1984. Like most of his works this novel did not attain commercial success but was well received by critics. For Christopher Lehman-Haupt, the novel was “beguilingly vivid yet ultimately tiresome” (*Daily Times* 16). In this novel, Yates casts such characters as represent the young college educated professionals and are distinguished from their peers not by their homes and jobs but by their artistic and romantic idealism. American Dream which was earlier a dream of hopes, of individual success and prosperity was now in a state of fragility. Yates successfully portrays the fallout of American dream on the lives of young struggling artists and creates a chronology of life of young American couple which starts in 1950s with their courtship, to their divorce in 1960s and finally in 1970s into a long, old age. Consequently, the novel is divided into three parts and each part is further divided into chapters. Writing about the structure of the novel, Blake Bailey quotes the review of Brain Stone Hill written for the *Los Angeles Times*, in his book *A Tragic Honesty: The Life And Work of Yates* that *Young Hearts Crying* “unroll(s) itself seamlessly, inevitably, with the ineluctability of a three act tragedy, but without classic tragedy's effort to rise its characters above our own level” (531).

As the narrative unfolds, the reader is introduced to the world of Michael Davenport, a war veteran belonging to Morristown, New Jersey, who “wanted to write poems and plays” (Yates 4). At Harvard he meets twenty nine years old Lucy Blaine, “a lovely Radcliffe girl” (5) who belongs to a wealthy family, suggestive of “the timeless repose that only several generations worth of success could provide. This was class” (9). For her “money had never meant anything” (12) whereas Michael “was a middle class boy and had always assumed that he would make something of himself” (13). It is only after their marriage that Lucy reveals about her multimillion dollar inheritance, revelation that does not create much difference in their lives. Michael represents a young American, who is spirited, full of life, ambitious and talented and wants to find his way to success only through hard work. After marriage, Michael and Lucy move to New York and dream of becoming successful artists. Michael settles for job “like other fledging writers took” (13) in a publishing house. In the spring of 1950s, Michael and Lucy have a daughter, whom they name as Laura. In order to meet their increased expenditure Michael shifts his job and becomes a “staff writer for a slick, fast growing trade magazine called Chain Store Age” (16). The new job introduces Michael to a group of artists that exposes him to various nuances of creative writing. Michael becomes friendly with Bill Broock, another staff writer who also harbours an ambition to become a writer and is working on a novel about the working class. His girl-friend Diana Maitland is a fine, attractive lady, whose brother Paul Maitland is a painter and represents a young American who “works hard at it and doesn't seem to care if he ever makes a nickel out of it or not but does rough carpentry to pay the rent. He is an uncompromising artist and on being offered a commercial job, “he'd punch'em right in the mouth. He'd think he was being compromised” (18).

Like all other young people in Yates fictional world, Michael and Lucy aspire to lead a perfect American life. The fact of being surrounded by successful people mounts the pressure on Michael and Lucy to work harder. Beth Johnson Healthier, explaining the American dream, in his book, *The American Dream And The Power of Wealth* states that:

American dream rests on the idea that with hard work and personal determination any one regardless of background has equal opportunity to achieve his or her aspirations. The American dream promises that our system is meritocracy. Within a meritocracy, people get

ahead or behind based on what they earn or deserve than what circumstances they are born into. This notion is central to American dream and is the central logic of how our culture is supposed to operate. (20)

Since Michael needs to devote more time to writing, the couple decides to move to suburb of Larchmont where he becomes acquainted with another artist couple, Tom Nelson a septuagenarian illustrator and his wife Pat. Tom Nelson represents a successful American who symbolizes American self-reliance and individualism. Although Michael and Lucy harbor the desire to realize the dreams and hopes, their lackadaisical approach paralyses their half-hearted attempts in this direction, thus making their destinations illusive. Michael's unsuccessful career as a playwright begins to weigh heavily on his marital life, something that drives a wedge between them. Yates encapsulates the tension between Michael and Lucy thus: "She seemed to stiffen in his arms, or maybe it was his arms that stiffened; it might have been that he stepped on her shoe, or that they broke apart too quickly; in any case, it felt like the clumsiest embrace of their lives together" (107).

With sudden expansion of American suburbia, new set of problems emerged, which was collectively given the name 'urban sprawl.' Paul Stiles, in his book *Is The American Dream Killing You? How The Market Rules Our Lives*, quotes William Whyte who propounded the concept of 'urban sprawl' in 1958, having said that "bursting its bounds, the city actually sprawled and made countryside ugly, uneconomic [in terms] of services and doubtful social values . . . You can't stop progress, they say, yet much more of this kind of progress and we shall have the paradox of prosperity lowering our standard of living . . ." (152). Living in this unhealthy atmosphere was a demand for conformity to what was rapidly becoming 'corporate America.' The monotonous routine followed by Americans living in suburbs introduced a strong sense of ennui into their lives as it constituted of attending offices, driving the kids to school, striving to climb career ladder and drawing a dreamy satisfaction from owning a house, having a nuclear family and social prestige. In addition to other things, car became a significant symbol of wealth, status and a sense of new found freedom. As soon as Michael receives his first advance of five hundred dollars from a publisher, he buys a good second hand car. For Michael it is a symbol of the little success and for Laura, it symbolizes togetherness, family bonding and security.

The second part of the novel, consequent to the divorce between Michael and Lucy, has been split into two sections, first dealing with Lucy's experiences of life after Michael and the second detailing Michael's experience without Lucy. The utter sense of failure alienates Michael to an extent that he feels paranoid, "scared to walk out of the door and up the street, because everything [he sees] all kinds of people and things that aren't even fucking there"(152). In *The Pursuit of Happiness: Government and Politics in America*, John A. Moore Jr. and Myron Roberts lay out a set of values and beliefs that in their opinion characterize what is essentially being American.

Happiness is a prime concern of democracy, and in its pursuit, Americans have created the world's first and richest consumer economy; have undertaken to mass produce education, entertainment, and goods on an unprecedented scale; and have sought to build a society in which most people would be free to follow the star of their own destiny in their own fashion. And if in the process, we have become restless, troubled, and sometimes divided person that is a price that had to be paid . . . (45)

Yates has used the metaphor of insanity to reveal the maddening impact of the pursuit of American Dream on the minds of characters. If in *Revolutionary Road*, John becomes the prey to the American myth of 'rags to riches,' it is Michael who, in a fit of utter dejection bordering on insanity, exposes the emptiness and illusiveness inherent in the concept of American Dream. He asks Lucy:

Know what we did, Lucy? You and Me? We spent our whole lives yearning. Isn't that God damndest thing? Remember when we both so young we thought anything in the world was possible When we thought the world itself stopped turning every time we got laid? (155)

After divorce, Lucy and Michael float like rudderless ships on the ocean of life. Lucy pathetically

fails to enjoy any semblance of independence in a series of artistic attempts from community theatre, to creative story writing, to painting, until she realizes that it is better off simply living on her wealth. In an endeavour to fill the void in her life, Lucy enters into series of relations with different men. Michael, on the other hand, becomes a chronic drinker and a womanizer. Elizabeth Long, in her book *The American Dream and the Popular Novel*, studies the trend of popular novels from 1950's to 1980's and observes that, sex is constructed as the ultimate moment in the immediate gratification of impulse. She further states:

It is not surprising that sex should take on the characteristics of its social context and become itself translated into a commodity; its commoditized form in popular literature reproduces the fragmentation and alienation of the wider social order on an intimate level. Sex is split off from human needs for intimacy, friendship, security and love and becomes a pure expression of hedonism, self-involvement, and the free play of the impulse. As such it perpetuates the isolation of individuals from each other and from their own deepest desire. (107)

It is not that Michael and Lucy are the only victims of American dream but other characters in the novel too disintegrate in the face of its realities. Yates's fiction essentially expresses his unique ability to strip life down to its essentials revealing the often soul destroying truths. Bill Brock, the friend of Michael attains professional success by becoming an accomplished playwright. But in his personal life he loses Diana since he was afraid of long term committed relations. He says, "I m all right in short term relationship I get bored and then I get restless" (41). As he grows older, he realizes that there is a void in his life. Diana has married Ralph Morrin, an upcoming director and the couple represents an ideal American couple, attractive in looks, successful; have a perfect family and bright future. The novel reflects the harsh reality behind the lustrous perfect 'American' life of Diana and Ralph by bringing to surface the lack of emotional connect between them.

After World War II American society witnessed more failures than successes. It is Paul, an uncompromising artist, who has struggled hard to attain success on his own terms but ultimately, his repeated failures lead him to compromises. He joins hand with Tom Nelson; together they achieve great success. Coming together of Paul and Tom symbolizes the hollowness of American dream because this act brings the robust individualism under the scanner. This act reveals that togetherness is a better option than being alone.

The myth of ideal and happy family as popularized by media has been dumped as an illusion. Michael and Lucy's divorce not only breaks the myth of ideal American family but also adversely affects the life of Laura. She lives the life of a neglected child and resultantly grows into a lonely and psychologically disarranged adult. Laura leaves her house at the age of nineteen for California as her parents are so involved in their own lives that they have forgotten their responsibility of raising a child. Laura's condition, as depicted in the novel, raises an important question on American parenting system. Lucy's words depict the gravity of this problem in America where "Every kid in America is fooling around with some kind of drugs, and most of them aren't any worse than alcohol or nicotine" (35). Laura ends up in the university hospital psychiatry ward, where she is "all alone and . . . lost" (363). Laura is not the only child who is facing this problem but the younger son of Tom Nelson, is also caught in the vicious trap of drugs and is being treated in rehabilitation centers.

Lucy's current condition, after the divorce, is the consequence of extreme individualism and sense of transcendence. Emerson in his essay "Self Reliance" gives another reason for growing psychological problem in American society that is "We are afraid of truth, afraid of fortune, afraid of death, and afraid of each other. Our age yields no great and perfect persons. We want men and women renovate life and our social state..." (Bradley 1081). Michael could not handle his loneliness and was admitted to Bellevue, a state mental asylum.

Part III of the novel traces the journey of Michael and Lucy in their old age a stage when they have made some sort of reconciliation with their respective lives. Michael has married a much younger girl Sarah and has a son, the son being the symbol of new beginning. Michael's marriage with

Sarah also ends in divorce and Sarah's words, before she leaves Michael, summarize the essential condition that such a social order generates: "I think I'd prefer to believe that everybody is essentially alone, our first responsibility is always ourselves" (410). These words strike the main theme of the novel and the reality of American life. Michael receives an employment offer from English department at Boston University. He is happy and satisfied with this job but more satisfied because the chairman has specially mentioned his poem, "Coming Clean" as one of the first poems written in this country since the Second World War" (396) a comment that grants him a sense of achievement as an artist. On the other hand Lucy, as Tom Nelson said, "tried just about everything... in the art line, I mean, except music and dancing" (402). Now she lives in Cambridge, has donated all her inheritance to Amnesty International and works in some of their committees. Lucy likes her work and says "because it's real. It's real. Nobody can deny it; Nobody can deny it; nobody can shrug it off, or make fun of it, or even take it away" (417). This gives Lucy a sense of doing something meaningful, an act that dispels the illusion inherent in American dream.

The narrative, towards the end, depicts the meeting of Michael and Lucy at Cambridge, both being comfortable and satisfied with them after having accepted mediocrity as a mode of survival. Like Michael, Lucy has also realized in the end that throughout their lives they had been chasing a hopeless desire that of achieving artistic excellence and idealism. She says to Michael

I mean really Michael, Fuck art, okay? Isn't it funny how we've gone chasing after it all our lives? Dying to be close to anyone who seemed to understand it, as if that could possibly help; never stopping to wonder it might be hopelessly beyond us all the way-or even it might not exist? Because there's an interesting proposition for you: what if it doesn't exist? (419)

Sarah's new found wisdom that "everybody's essentially alone" (423) reveals the paradoxical fallout of 'self reliance' which Emerson had preached a century ago saying that "We must go alone...But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is must be elevation," (Bradley 1079). Whereas Emerson's self reliance is rooted in the puritan faith and has high moral ground, Lucy, Michael and other characters in the novel practice the self reliance that results from the selfishness and failure on all fronts. Lucy finally finds peace in being altruistic than being self-centered, a life that recognizes the need of camaraderie and compassion. Yates ends the novel without having hinted at future lives of Michael and Lucy but sends a strong message across that any attempt to live a 'dream' is bound to prove disastrous and disintegrating.

The title of the novel signifies the cry or yearnings of those millions of young Americans who have to live a life of disappointment, delusion and tragedy while chasing their golden dream. America is a land of opportunity and prosperity, a myth that has gripped the country since its existence, but this dream has become a nightmare especially in Post World War II America. *Young Hearts Crying* is a novel about the desires and dreams, about yearnings for 'something' that can't be named; it might not even exist but is pursued relentlessly and regardless of its results.

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## An Ecocritical Reading of Ursula K. Le Guin's Select Fictions

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### *Abstract*

*The changing environment of this earth is a major threat to the human race, as this planet is becoming uninhabitable day by day. Environment is not a static entity, it is a process. The West has constructed this environment 'anthropocentric' and not 'bio-centric.' The works of many writers have mirrored threats through their dystopian and apocalyptic visions and suggested ways to reconstruct the world 'biocentric' in a natural way--a possible solution for the sustenance of the cohabiting species and the human kind. The signs that bio-centricity is imperative, are found in the creative and artistic expressions that the humans articulated unconsciously and sometimes, consciously. Ecocriticism a new perspective and approach to study literature and physical environment has been in vogue for the past two decades. Science Fiction literature, which has been adapted into films, gaining strength and legitimacy in today's global era, is best understood by applying ecocritical tools to its study. The present paper seeks to present the ecocritical perspectives as reflected in select works of Ursula K. Le Guin.*

*Keywords: Ecocriticism, Environment, Ecofeminism, Ecofiction, Ecological crisis.*

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*My world, my Earth is a ruin. A planet spoiled by the human species. We multiplied and fought and gobbled until there was nothing left, and then we died. We controlled neither appetite nor violence; we did not adapt. We destroyed ourselves. But we destroyed the world first.*

*-Le Guin, The Dispossessed*

### **Humans' Anthropocentricity versus Biocentric Necessity**

Clark in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* begins with Ulrich Beck's statement, "We live in an age of "unintended consequences" (17). The changing environment of the earth is a major threat to the human race, as this planet is likely to become uninhabitable in course of time. The cause is the "assumption that the natural world be seen primarily as a resource for human beings, whether economically or culturally, but it strives to defend and conserve it against over-exploitation" (Clark 18). Environment is not a static entity, it is a process. It is in a state of flux and responds to the way how humans transact and interact with it. Further it is the egotism of the humans to make them think that the world is for the humans alone, and forget that every cohabitat is



playing its role in preserving the life of the planet. Contrarily, the West has constructed this environment 'anthropocentric' (3) and not 'bio-centric' (3). Today, the world is facing ecological based disasters and the life of human being as well as animals and birds are in danger. Ecologically based literature generates awareness among the people to have better understanding about nature and its significance. Many contemporary writers through their dystopian and apocalyptic vision have mirrored the dangers to humanity, thereby suggesting ways to reconstruct 'biocentric' world for the sustenance of the cohabiting species and the human kind.

### **Anthropocentrism**

Any standpoint view or idea that makes the humankind as the centre or norm can be claimed as anthropocentrism. The attitude that the human kind has about the natural world that it is “a resource for economic use, or as the expression of social or cultural values, can be anthropocentric.” Anthropocentrism is a discourse on environment which underlines “that human beings and their interests are solely of value” and always take precedence “over those of the non-humans” (Clark *The Cambridge Introduction* 3).

### **Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism, a perspective and approach to art, and here, specifically towards literature has been in vogue for the past two decades. Ecocriticism is an expression of environmental criticism and the study of literature in relation to the environment. Ecocriticism has under its purview a list approaches to literary pieces. It has been influenced by perceptions from philosophy, sociology, feminism, Marxism, ecology and other disciplines and approaches. Pramod K. Nayar rightly defines 'Ecocriticism' as a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it (330).

### **Le Guin and Ecoconscious Essence of Her Writings**

Ursula Kroeber Le Guin, an American, primarily viewed as a science fiction writer, crossed genres and contributed much to children's literature, coming of age novels, young adult fiction, short story, poetry and nonfiction. She started writing even when she was five and continued her writing till her death in the year 2018. Guin's prime was backed up by her parents' anthropological scholarship which can be perceived through her works wherein she creates alternative cultures and worlds. Her works often depict and focus futuristic, imaginary alternative worlds in politics, natural environment, gender and racial equality, religion, isolation, sexuality and feminism, ethnography and ecological awareness. Her *oeuvre* embraces Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Anarchism and Taoism. Science Fiction literature, which has been adapted into films, gaining strength and legitimacy in today's global era, is best understood by applying ecocritical tools to its study.

### **Environmental Crisis in Le Guin's Speculations**

Le Guin's works fall under the category of fantasy writing and science fiction. Her speculative science fictions are seen in terms of its presenting possible alternative worlds. The world she creates in her works offers an insight into different patterns of society. It elicits a common doubt of how a liveable world can be imagined, as ecological crisis collapses the sense that a better world is possible. Science Fiction offers an ambit of literary-critical methodologies and a fertile terrain for

researching how societies think about ecology and ecological crisis.

Le Guin signals in her writings that “the present dominant socio-political American system as problematic and destructive to the health and life of the natural world, humanity, and their interrelations” (Wikipedia). This idea recurs in several of Le Guin's works, most notably in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Word for World Is Forest* (1972), *The Dispossessed* (1974), *The Eye of the Heron* (1978), *Always Coming Home* (1985), and *Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come out Tonight* (1987). In addition to her fiction, Le Guin's work *Out Here: Poems and Images from Steens Mountain Country*, written in collaboration with Roger Dorband, is a clear environmental testimony to the natural splendor of Eastern Oregon. Le Guin has written several poems and nonfiction on Mount St. Helens.

Le Guin's works center on ideas regarding socio-political organization and value-system experiments in both utopias and dystopias. While she has written several well-known science fiction utopias, such as *The Dispossessed* and *Always Coming Home*, it is her genre fantasy sequence, the *Earthsea* trilogy, and mainly its third novel *The Farthest Shore*, which most compellingly attends to the question of imagining utopia in environmental crisis.

### Le Guin's Euclidean World

Talking about Ursula Le Guin's utopia, it is 'Euclidean' (Buse 1). Her novel *The Farthest Shore* illustrates her alternative explanation of literary utopia, proposing that in times of ecological crisis, seeking utopia must surpass the boundaries of the possible. Using the genre of fantasy and its resonances with Rachel Carson's portrayal of ecological crisis in her *The Silent Spring*, Le Guin foregrounds the function of narrative and naming in bringing about a habitable world.

### Ecoconscious Narratives

An ecological crisis occurs when changes to the environment of species or population destabilize its continued survival. Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore* unfolds accounts of a developing ecological crisis. A farming ecology has been set upon by incomprehensible rigor: 'there was sickness among them, and their autumn harvest had been poor,' and the problem appears to be spreading across the archipelago in which the novel is set (*The Farthest Shore* 305). Arren, the diplomatic emissary, narrates of 'trouble among the flocks this spring, the ewes dying in birth, and many lambs born dead, and some are... deformed. [...] "I saw some of them," he said. There was a pause' (306). The mental imagery, which addresses ovine form of farming associated with the pastoral, elicits imprints of an Arcadian springtime weirdly thrown into disorder. The textual reluctances reflect the tempo of cinematic suspense, suggesting an effect of gothic realisation.

### Man's Dissociation from Nature and Greed Driven Consumerism

*The Farthest Shore* appears to repeat many of its images, themes, and philosophical inquiries, beginning with a crisis in the pastoral, taking as its conflict a scorched earth movement of ecological destruction motivated by human greed, ruminating on the role of human beings in the non-human world.

Seen across ten miles of sunlit water, Lorbanery was green, green as the bright moss by a fountain's rim. Nearby, it broke up into leaves, and tree-trunks, and shadows, and roads, and houses, and the faces and clothing of people, and dust, and all that goes to make up an island inhabited by men. Yet still, over all, it was green, for every acre of it that was not built or walked upon was given up to the low, round-topped hurbah trees, on the leaves of which feed



the little worms that spin the silk that is made into thread and woven by the men and women and children of Lorbanery. At dusk the air there is full of small grey bats who feed on the little worms. They eat many, but are suffered to so and are not killed by the silk-weavers, who indeed account it a deed of very evil omen to kill the grey-winged bats. For if human beings live off the worm, they say, surely small bats have the right to do so. (Shore 100)

*The Farthest Shore* also has something important to say about humanity's role in the environment. In a heartfelt discourse with Arren after being saved from death, Ged talks about the great gifts given to humanity. Ged points out that humanity is unique and special:

We alone out of all the species in this world are able to know ourselves and recognize life as "...But only to us is it given to know that we must die. And that is a great gift: the gift of selfhood. For we have only what we know we must lose, what we are willing to lose... That selfhood which is our torment, and our treasure, and our humanity, does not endure. It changes; it is gone, a wave on the sea. (Shore 160)

The narrative of *The Farthest Shore* sparks society's connectedness with nature, the dangers of greed and consumption, and qualities essential to leaders and educators. Cob tries to escape dying and therefore opens a rift between the world of living and the land of death. This dissociation of man from nature is the cause of ecological crises as it can be perceived through Lynn White's *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*. He posits the idea that science and technology are not the answers to saving the environment; on the contrary it is the "superior, contemptuous" (Yuen) attitude the West harbours towards nature that must change. Ged's confrontation with Cob in the Land of the Dead is the climax of the story. Cob's will to surpass death is his greed, which metaphorically alludes to the consumerism in modern society.

### Ecoconscious Narratives

John Freeman in *Boston Globe* says that "Le Guin wasn't just ahead of the curve in contemplating the social construction of gender. While science fiction zoomed toward the technological future, she wrote about anarchist movements, the way societies created aliens within themselves, and climate change." Le Guin has taken science fiction to a new dimension that explores the entirety of the cultural pyramid— how societies could evolve with policy, economy, technology, and ideology all of which "largely depend on our natural environment."

*The Left Hand of Darkness* is part of *The Hainish Cycle* series. The work resembles Isaac Asimov in exploring ideas of human expansion. It revolves around the planet in cold climate and the inhabitants are in a cyclic hermaphroditism. The adult inhabitants have the power of sexual cycle for the period of one month which strongly connects the ecological system that gives the immense power. *The Word for World is Forest* also belongs to Hainish series, depicting environmental themes. The *Earthsea* fantasy series presents a fictional world in which nature's presence dominates.

When scientists focus on the fact that global warming would be the next big risk to Earth, Le Guin fixes it as 'anthropogenic global warming.' Le Guin's short story *The New Atlantis* is on climate change. When Belle, a woman, is bothered to mend stockings during a bus ride, she has a conversation with a passenger from which it is clear that the world they live in, has rising seas and of an autocratic type. The following narrative helps assert the aforementioned idea:

Polar ice caps are melting, Manhattan is under water, and, in Portland, where the story takes place, tectonic plates are shifting, there are constant power outages, and people are being arrested for piddly crimes. (*The New Atlantis*)

When she reaches home, the entire city is amidst blackout. She lights a candle and moves towards the bed to see a stranger, but this is her husband who has just returned from a rejuvenation camp. They envision a world free from totalitarian regime and with no power outage. Both the story and its title are allegorical that it consoles the humankind with a hope of "rebirth after destruction, a

continuation of the life-cycle, and the idea that there is not a final end to us all” (*Ecofiction*).

It is hinted that the humankind has made this planet unliveable and '*The New Atlantis*' represents the second chance. Climate change is so huge and omnipresent, in which the effects of it can submerge us both figuratively and literally, and in which the political narrative is often in denial of its very existence and provides no mechanisms for fighting environmental catastrophe.

The French feminist Francoise D'Eaubonne defines 'Ecofeminism' as the intersection between feminism and ecology. Ecofeminists believe in the interconnectedness of all things: What happens in one part of the world, or in one life, will eventually affect all others in the way that all threads reverberate from movement at any spot in a web (Bennet). Le Guin tells a story *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*, a fable that everyone can understand, on various levels.

*The Tombs of Atuan* narrates Ged's attitudes towards nature and objects around him. Ged reveals his relationship with a rabbit in a brief but revealing passage:

I can call a rabbit,” he said, poking the fire with a twisted stick of juniper. “The rabbits are coming out of their holes all around us, now. Evening's their time. I could call one by name, and he'd come. But would you catch and skin and broil a rabbit that you'd call to you thus? Perhaps if you were starving. But that would be a breaking of trust, I think. (Tombs 157)

Ged's inherent respect for the non-human world is known by not using his power over others. Le Guin's depiction of nature was inspired by the Oregon deserts in her creation of Atuan, describing it as a similarly harsh and hauntingly beautiful landscape:

It was evening. The sun was down behind the mountains that loomed close and high to westward, but its afterglow filled all earth and sky: a vast, clear, wintry sky, a vast, barren, golden land of mountains and wide valleys. The wind was down. It was cold, and absolutely silent. Nothing moved. The leaves of the sagebrushes nearby were dry and grey, the stalks of tiny dried-up desert herbs prickled her hand. The huge silent glory of light burned on every twig and withered leaf and stem, on the hills, in the air (Tombs 89). As mentioned by Sandip Kumar Mishra “*Ruskin Bond's No Room for a Leopard* presents the pathetic condition of the animals after deforestation. *The Tree Lover*, *The Cherry Tree*, *All Creatures Great and Small* and many others are all about the chain which binds man and nature, as in the chain of the ecosystem, showing interdependence.”

## Conclusion

Le Guin asserts that environments are not all pretty picturesque forests and landscapes; chaos, unpredictability, and death are also intrinsic elements of nature as represented by the Tao symbol. The writer's works offer a vast terrain to explore from other ideological dimensions. The usual way of seeing issues of environmentalism as just another political aspect to be reckoned with, is arguably one of the causes for the “lack of any large-scale mobilization in our times of environmental crisis” (Brunscow 54). Le Guin does not avoid the occasional seething critique of our present way of living, but offers alternative views through which to see it. The vision of wholeness is one that is good at various levels.

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## **Experiential Narratives: Contextualizing Black Feminist Standpoint in Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe***

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### *Abstract*

*The present paper attempts to contextualize Black Feminist Standpoint in Gloria Naylor's Bailey's Cafe and portrays, through the quintessential narrative matrix of seven women protagonists, how African American women are thrown into the depths of the cataclysm of institutionalized sexism, classism, and racism, and are forced to taste the pungent flavours of marginalization, brutality, invisibilization, and exploitation by the authoritative hands of the mainstream patriarchal hegemony. Further, the paper accentuates upon how, facilitated by their experientialities and experiential narratives, these objectified women eventually smash the shackles of domineering supremacy and construct their distinct Black Feminist Standpoint. These experientialities refer to the ways in which the narratives of these sexually scorned women tap into other victims' acquaintanceship with experience, allowing them to create radically creative spaces for themselves, which not only establish and announce, but also uphold their subjectification, their ultimate standpoint.*

*Keywords: Black Feminist Standpoint, Experientiality, Marginalization, Individuality, Experiential Narration.*

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The identity of Black women has chronically been assessed, viewed, and expressed within the experience of servitude, enslavement, banishment, and struggle. Black women's bodies are deconstructed as mere objects of sexual humiliation, exploitation, and gratification. Further, the absence of physical-cum-psychological support from their male counterparts/parents eventually, subordinates them by pushing them towards the periphery of human civilization. Keeping these concerns in mind, the paper examines the dominant perspective by valuing the day-to-day lived experiences of Black women who are muted, suppressed and marginalized, using the theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist theorists like Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Bell Hooks (2000), Dorothy Smith (1990), to name a few. Patricia Hill Collins (Collins, 1989: 745-773) articulates that African American women are distinctively placed at the pivot of two intersecting networks of subjugation-racial discrimination and gender disparity, which endows them with a special knowledge, ultimately leading them to create "safe spaces" (Collins, 1989: 745-773) for themselves. These spaces, as Collins mentions, are "social spaces where Black women speak freely" (Collins, 1989: 745-773) and

withstand "objectification as the Other" (Collins, 1989: 745-773). It, therefore, facilitates them with the opportunities leading to self-empowerment and self-individualization. Using this concept, she reiterates how Black feminist standpoint emerges from the unrecognized potential as well as everyday lived experiences of these Black women which ultimately lead to their subjectification.

Additionally, defining narratives in terms of experientiality is concerned with enriching human experiences, articulating about everyday human apprehensions, and aiding in negotiating existing beliefs and values. Thus, narratives are intensely concerned with what Caracciolo (2014) calls "the experiential background" (Caracciolo 2014) of the addressee. In the similar vein, Fludernick also adumbrates that experientiality "refers to the ways in which narrative taps into readers' familiarity with experience through the activation of 'natural' cognitive parameters and particularly the embodiment of cognitive faculties, the understanding of intentional action, the perception of temporality, and the emotional evaluation of experience" (Fludernick, 2003: 243-67).

The above-mentioned parameters can be successfully delineated in Gloria Naylor's novel, *Bailey's Cafe* in which her and her characters' narrativity emerges "from the experiential portrayal of dynamic event sequences which are already configured emotively and evaluatively but it can also consist in the experiential depiction of human consciousness *tout court*" (Fludernick, 1996: 30). Additionally, Gloria Naylor spectacularly incorporates, in *Bailey's Cafe*, an assortment and multiplicity of what Maria Makela calls "stereotyped plots" (Mäkelä, 2018: 175-86). Naylor brings into public attention all the stereotypes and hegemonistic power structures that marginalize, mute and objectify women of color, and how these exploited women, through the power of their experientialities, accumulate sufficient energies to negotiate and re-negotiate with the mainstream patriarchal power-system, and eventually construct their distinct black feminist standpoints.

The novel under scrutiny is undoubtedly designed around a sequence of diverse monologues, with the fundamental linear account commencing in 1948, climaxing on the eve of New Year, and then culminating in 1949, with George's birth. The women protagonists in the novel are "poised on the edge of aggression and terror, unable to dismount, caught in the imploding vortex...the black hole of paranoid politics" (Kroker and Cook, 1991), advocating institutionalized racial discrimination, along with other dead-end signs, such as patriarchal hegemony, misogyny, sexism and classicism, which marginalize, suppress and mute African American women. If provided with a respite, these fractured women may deconstruct their 'selves' from the assaults and blitzes of the mainstream patriarchal society, eventually crafting boundless leeway for them.

Racial oppression combined with gender-based suppression confirms to be a deadly amalgamation in the journeys of those women who sojourn at Eve's boarding house. On asking Bailey, the owner of Bailey's Cafe, about the location of the boarding house, he says, "Go out the door, make a right, and when you see the garden – if you see the garden – you're there" (81). In fact, Bailey's cafe can be considered as situated on metaphysical crossroads. It is found "right on the margin between the edge of the world and infinite possibility" (76). It is from this site that "the choices have always been clear: you eventually go back out and resume your life – hopefully better off than when you found us – or you head to the back of the cafe and end it" (221).

The first consumer arriving at Bailey's cafe is Eve, epitomized as the central motherly figure in the novel. Her narrative attempts to deconstruct the notions that delineate females utterly on the basis of their sexuality and sexual preferences. She is sexually oppressed by her dictatorial godfather and a stern preacher who raises her: "Godfather, a figure for male authority, is ubiquitous in his influence within the delta community. Perhaps the most definitive change in Eve's evolving consciousness occurs when she comes to recognize his church as a social construct" (Montgomery, 1995: 27-33). However, she is banished from her Louisiana delta house after a sexual encounter with Billy Boy, an irresponsible and foolish prankster. She further highlights her stereotypical godfather's vindictiveness upon her when he "burned every one of those brown sack dresses he'd sewn for me. And then he made me strip off the one I was wearing—and he burned that, too, along with the cotton

underpants and cotton wraps I used to bind down my breasts” (88). Ashamed, and alone, she makes a symbolic journey from Pilottown to Arabi, and then ultimately reaches Bailey's Cafe, where she is transformed as a brawny yet very delicate and sensitive female with a sharp business intellect and affinity towards beautiful gardens. In her narrative, we find destiny playing a major role by helping her get away from her catastrophic doom. She becomes triumphant in rejuvenating herself, as well as preparing herself for her upcoming job as a care-taker for the stereotypically exiled-women.

The shrieking and injuries highlighting the accounts of “broken dreams” (144) is evidently shown in the novel emerging from the cataclysmic doom of racism, classicism and sexism in the mainstream patriarchal America. This is clearly seen in the heart-rending narrative of Sadie, another female character of the novel, who is born in the stereotypical world of exploitation that conventionally defines a woman as a “whore”. Sadie's mother ingeniously plays the “sick and near death” (45) card and drags her daughter into prostitution to manage her source of revenue. Naylor also presents the animalistic brutality of men over Sadie's body when one of them whispers to her ears, “yeah I like it when you scream” (45). This forced prostitution perturbs her to such an extent that she takes refuge in her reveries and dreams. She eventually approximates her wish/dream after her nuptials with a reticent man, Daniel, “a man older than enough to be her father” (44). Unfortunately, he too turns out, like Sadie's mom, to be a neurotic drinker. The most dreadful part of her narrative comes when Sadie is deprived of even the estimation of her wishes/dreams after her husband's death, and is dragged out of the house by his daughters. Ultimately, she sojourns and takes a shelter at Eve's boarding house, where, through the autoethnographic experiential narratives of Eve and other boarders, she ultimately understands her self-worth and realizes her own individuality.

The concept of women objectification to male cravings can be evidently seen in Sweet Esther's narrative, whose persistent abhorrence for males emerges from exploitation and capitalization of women of colour within the bucolic economic structure. In her narrative, Esther is seen getting browbeaten and exploited by her elder brother, who, without a guilt, barter her to a much older, landed farmer just for the sake of raised sharecropping remunerations. Submissively, she capitulates to her master's caprices who prefers getting intimate only in the dark basement: “So I come down when he calls. And rejoice that it is dark” (96). Esther eventually begins taking refuge in her physical captivity as well as sexual enslavement of her master, ultimately losing her own identity.

Externally, she is seen surrendering to the vague desires of her other half, always going to the basement to please him, but in her chasmic realization, she always “thought of killing this man when I was within hours of becoming the next lying bitch to leave” (99). It is when she converts a part of Bailey's Cafe “into a block of ice” (94), that we realize Ester's profound hatred towards men. Hence, by putting various demands before her male callers during her stay at Eve's boarding house, does she ultimately realize her individuality and construct her experiential standpoint: “men must only visit in the dark. And they must bring me the white roses. And they must call me *little sister*. Or I no longer come” (99). She is further seen adding her solitary experiential voice to the narratives of other women incorporated in “The Jam” section of the novel, thereby breaking the disturbing discursive mutedness that envelops her catastrophic life.

A “father,” who is considered as the base of authoritative patriarchal structure, always believes in controlling the sexuality and sexual behaviour of his daughters in order to ‘protect’ them from the animalistic brutality of the world, not realizing that sexual urges are natural and should not be controlled. This becomes comprehensible in the narrative of another female character, Peaches, single kid of Kansas City bricklayer. Her father, Jim, with pride, used to show her delicate beauty off to the public just to make them realize how his pretty daughter “live(s) just outside the limits of your imagination” (100). Through her narrative, we realize that Peaches is erotically caressed by men, since before her adolescence. In fact, even Bailey describes her body as “born to be fucked” (104, 102). However, this objectification devastates her to an extent that she is petrified to even browse through her own reflection in the mirror, thus smashing “the swan-shaped mirror, my tenth birthday



present” (104). Here black feminist analysis permits us to figure-out how the society's doggedness in viewing her as a mere sexual object intensifies her hatred. She is conked out to such an extent that her ultimate yearning for self-invisibilization could be arrested through her brutal act of self-mutilation.

Even though Peaches' act of mutilating her face using a beer opener is pretty excruciating and brutal, yet her narrative is concluded on a promising and optimistic note when she is brought back to her healthy state, both physically as well as psychologically, at Eve's place. In Peaches' case, an experiential attempt by Eve in restoring her selfhood and individuality, from the exasperating and ignominious power structure, holds much guarantee and hope. In the end, through the lens of Black Feminist Standpoint, we see Eve setting a high-price of Peaches, who would accept nothing less than the “freshest” (104) of flowers from her male customers and enthusiasts, so that Eve could weed out those patriarchal males who still see her as an object of sexual gratification, and eventually look for that single male who would appreciate her worth. Even though Eve is neither a doctor nor a conjurer who could bring back Peaches' physical beauty, yet through the power of experientiality, which, according to Margolin is also the “representation of mental activity” (Margolin, 2000: 591-619), she successfully cures the still-gorgeous lady and helps her recognize her own individualism and construct her distinct standpoint, which is evidently seen at the time of George's birth when Peaches spiritually articulates about individuality and self-worth.

Following Peaches' narrative is “Jesse Bell,” in which Naylor spectacularly employs the theme, that is, hazards faced by a black American female after getting married into a class-mindful family. As her narrative goes, Jesse Bell, a lower-class black American gets married into a very influential, class-conscious King family. Although she is disliked and resisted by her husband's patriarchal uncle, Uncle Eli, yet, for some period of time, she is able to positively safeguard her individuality. Unfortunately, Jesse's hopes are short-lived, and she shrivels right after her son's birth. Through her narrative, we are told that the stereotypical-cum-hegemonistic Uncle Eli plays a major role in isolating her in her own house, and eventually expunging her very individuality. This becomes quite evident when Jesse says: “he took my husband and son. And they were all I lived for . . . killed me in my home” (130).

Jesse's narrative confirms how her seclusion and remoteness at the King's house eventually coerces her to seek solace and consolation in lesbian relationships and undue drinking, which becomes evident when she says, “[s]o, yes, I went to...her. And I cried in her arms, never talking much sense and drunk lots of the time. She'd really become, as my husband called her, that special friend” (128). Unfortunately, when she could not find the respective liberation and self-assurance even in lesbianism and alcoholism, she takes up drugs to escape her barbaric reality. Nonetheless, through her experientiality and conjuring skills, Eve succeeds in purging and reinstating Jesse Bell's lost sense of self, and an opportunity to construct her distinct Black Feminist Standpoint, simply by tricking Bell's emancipation vision into a nightmare, and putting her through withdrawal-addiction-withdrawal cycle until she is capable of changing her liberation dream into the one of an aspiring survival.

The next striking narrative is of Miriam's, a retarded Jew from Ethiopia, who has been the victim of female circumcision. Her story is narrated by Eve because of Miriam's linguistic retardedness. Here, we come to know how Miriam's private organs are amputated and her orifices are sewed, just to confirm her sexual innocence and just to make sure that she is valued and respected within her stereotypical ethnicity. Miriam's real sufferings commence when, even after not getting touched by anyone, she gets pregnant. Disgustingly, instead of consoling her daughter, her mother exploits her even more: “[s]he lifts the girl's skirt and, taking two fingers between her legs. Here, she says, who has been there? And here? Here? . . . and when the girl repeats her innocence once again, the woman raises her fist and strikes her” (154). Furthermore, according to Walker and Parmar, nothing can be more harrowing and upsetting than “the damage that women have done to her body in order to ensure she is sexually consent” (Walker and Parmar, 1993). As a consequence of this adultery, she is banished from the society. Unaccustomed and lonesome, she finds Bailey's cafe, and enters the block

with her baggage of sufferings and oppressions. Though Miriam's narrative, Naylor makes a victorious attempt at spreading a memorandum that black Americans must "build self-esteem from the cradle" (Loris and Felton, 1997: 219).

Gloria Naylor in *Bailey's Cafe* weaves an intermingled narrative as a compendium of experiences, narrated by a group of marginalized and exploited Black women who converge upon a place known as Eve's Boarding House. Naylor, through the diverse narratives of the assembled Black women, employs a metafictional, fabulatory glorification of the fact that 'Black Lives Matter.' The evicted women are restored to an honourable status "with what is a womanist reconceptualization of the once-burdensome domestic sphere" (Loris and Felton, 1997: 192). An attempt has been made in this write-up to show in no uncertain terms, how the helpless, powerless, muted, impoverished Black women in America are treated as cattle fodder and banished by the hegemonistic phallogocentric tyranny to the extreme margins of deprivation, sexual abuse, and what not. Yet, paradoxically, this very marginal space gets metamorphosed by these victimized, *ironic* conglomerate of Black women, through the sheer power of their existential-cum-experiential narratives. These women protagonists of *Bailey's Cafe* triumphantly reinforce themselves with a fair modicum of indomitable courage and audacity so as to negotiate and re-negotiate with the mainstream patriarchal power structures. Naylor employs an experiential narrative matrix as an infallible instrument of Black female authenticity to revolt against a system of objectification where these Black women protagonists encounter repression and exploitation, thanks to phallogocentric hegemonistic appropriations, at the hands of stereotypical patriarchy. Eve's boarding house becomes, for these ostracized Black women, an *ironic* Garden of Eden, where the boarders unite as an act of existential symbiosis to enrich their individual and collective lives with purpose, direction, meaning, and respectability.

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## The Blurred Dichotomy of Good and Evil: Community as a Chorus of Moral Voices in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

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### *Abstract*

*This paper analyses the complex relationship with the 'good' and the 'evil' that the community in the town of Bottom finds itself in Toni Morrison's novel Sula. The Bottom community, in the text, has a strong presence and can be seen as a character in itself. It plays a role in shaping the destinies of the major characters and is depicted as a reactionary force to everything that the characters do. Nevertheless, it is powerless and lacking in any resources to protect their lives against the forces of nature. The paper discusses how the Community tries to survive by dichotomizing nature and its different representations, including human beings, through blurred lenses of morality.*

*Keywords: community; dichotomy; evil; good; morality; Sula; Toni Morrison*

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In Toni Morrison's fiction, characters do not dwell in isolation. Whether it is *Beloved* (1987), *Tar Baby* (1981), or *Song of Solomon* (1977), the communities in which the protagonists live have a strong influence upon them. Often, both the characters and their communities affect each other on a reciprocal basis. Discussing the folk tradition out of which Morrison writes, Barbara Christian notes, "Like the ancestral African tradition, place is as important as the human actors, for the land is a participant in the maintenance of the folk tradition. It is one of the necessary constants through which the folk dramatize the meaning of life, as it is passed on from one generation to the next. The setting, then, is organic to the characters' view of themselves" (48). The Bottom community in *Sula* has a vital role to play in shaping the destinies of the central characters and is depicted as a reactionary force to everything that the characters like Shadrack, Eva, Hannah, Nel and Sula do.

The Bottom consists of a poor yet vibrant Black community. What started as a cruel joke from a master to a slave took the form of Bottom in the town of Medallion, Ohio. Throughout the novel, the Bottom community makes the reader aware of its strong presence and can be seen as a character in itself. On the first page of the novel itself, Morrison depicts the Bottom community in danger of being wiped out by the wealthy White people of the valley town of Medallion. The description of the ironic setting of the town, and the knowledge of the fact that the Community will soon be gone, give the reader a premonition of what to expect ahead in the circular narrative of the novel, which ends where it begins, with descriptions of drastic changes in the Community.

The reader catches the first glimpse of the character of the Community in its attitude towards Shadrack, the ravaged war- veteran who establishes the National Suicide Day. The townspeople suspect his sanity but remain tolerant to his antics, and soon he and his eccentricities become "a part of the fabric of the life" (Morrison 16) since Shadrack poses no immediate threat to the Communities' moral well-being. Cedric Gael Bryant notes "Because Shadrack's madness involves only a different way of structuring the community's sense of time and ritual, rather than an actual disintegration of order, he is assimilated more easily into the community's life than is Sula, who, in contrast, challenges the community's collective identity" (734). On the other hand, Eva, despite her fiercely independent existence, is someone that the Community respects. Her house is home to many of the Community's homeless people. She is an imposing matriarch, a self-made woman, in a world of imbecile men who

just hang around the Elmira theatre “waiting for something to distract them” (Morrison 49). Thus, they keep mum over her disability and the possible reasons behind it. Most probably, she became disabled in an effort to make survival possible for herself and, most importantly, for her children in the face of absolute poverty. Thus, she fulfils the traditional role of a good mother and, consequently, of a good woman. She, like Shadrack, despite her uniqueness, is accepted and assimilated into the normal flow of the Community life. In the case of Hannah, even though she “*exasperated*” the townswomen with her sexual promiscuity, they wonder at her absolute lack of possessiveness about the men she sleeps with. She is never threatening, and the men are protective towards her because of this very reason.

Sula, however, is a matter of great interest and concern to the Community. The members of the Community save their hatred for Sula, and it is against her that they group and take a stand as she defies the moral standards held dear to them. Even though Sula is also an outcast like Shadrack, however, unlike Shadrack, she receives sharp reactions from people. In fact, the Community thrives upon its hatred for Sula. Sula is stamped as evil when she comes back to the Bottom and lives a carelessly immoral life; sleeping with each and every man she takes fancy for, giving no consideration to what people of her community say about her behavior.

The people of the Community believe that many bad omens foreshadow Sula's return to the Bottom. In the chapter titled *1923*, we first witness the importance of omens in their lives. The “*first*” strange thing to occur is a series of events foretelling Eva's death, especially her dream of herself in a red bridal gown. At that time as well, we are told about Sula behaving strangely, “her birthmark over her eyes getting darker” (Morrison 74), and her watching interestingly at her mother burning. This connects Sula to her mother's death in the collective psyche of the Community, and they are reminded of this incident when Sula returns to the town after a decade's absence. Just before Sula's second coming, the Community is plagued by Robins. They see this phenomenon as just one aspect of nature, “the evil” aspect as opposed to its other “good” aspects. Thus, dichotomizing nature and its different representations, including human beings, makes it easier for them to survive any onslaught on their physical and moral well being. Being powerless and lacking any resources to protect their lives against the forces of nature, the Community surrenders to its whims. It reads good and bad omens in whatever happens around them. Robins are thought of like birds of harmony and peace, but when they are associated with Sula's return, they symbolize her potential threat to the Community. The narrator comments about the Community and their relationship with evil, “The presence of evil was to survive it, and they determined to survive, floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine, and ignorance” (Morrison 118). So, the community braces itself up to survive Sula Peace as well.

After her return to the Bottom, Sula goes against the social norms by putting Eva in a nursing home, thus dishonoring the older adults who are usually much respected and valued in the Black community. Then, she betrays the sacredness of female bonding when she has an affair with her best friend Nel's husband, Jude. The Community blames only her for breaking Nel's house even though Jude is equally responsible for it. One of the most sacrilegious deeds of hers is sleeping with White men. The reaction of the Black community to this exposes their own embedded racist attitude toward the Whites as a reaction to racial segregation and White racism. It also exposes the patriarchal attitude towards female sexuality common to all communities wherein the female body is controlled and is restrained from “straying” in the name of racial or communal honor. “Her status as a woman without a man and a woman without children simply does not translate into a life that the Bottom understands” (Galehouse 44). Sula's act of sleeping with White men “fingerprinted her for all time” (Morrison 112), and she was symbolically outcast from the Community forever because “there was nothing lower she could do nothing filthier” (Morrison 113). It is, thus, her sexuality, “read through the race relation, which structures her subjectivity within the male-dominated discourse of the black

community” (Henderson 10).

The Bottom's women despise Sula because she will “lay their husbands once and no more” (Morrison 115). In this attitude of theirs, lies the proof of the double standards of their social norms, wherein, in contrast to the community's attitude towards Sula's promiscuity, a male like Ajax has a license to sleep with as many women as he wishes without any emotional or social restrictions or fear of retaliation by the Black community. Sula's independent, feminist attitude makes her refuse to settle for a woman's traditional lot of marriage and childbearing. She wants to “*make my(her)self*” and not remain restricted to making children. The already suspicious community of the Bottom is frightened by the unpredictable behavior of Sula. Her apparent defiance of the physical and moral laws galvanizes the Black community against her. She is labeled as “evil.” In her presence things “bega(i)n to happen” (Morrison 113). They take her birthmark as symbolic of Hannah's ashes, all kinds of ominous occurrences are attributed to her evil presence; for example, when Mr. Finley chokes to death on a chicken bone when he sees Sula, she is seen as the cause for his demise. When Teapot, a neglected, malnourished child, accidentally falls off Sula's porch, Sula is accused of pushing him. A lot of evidence for Sula being the embodiment of evil is contrived, and these beliefs gain credibility because Sula refuses to conform to the Black community's social norms and laws of acceptable behavior. Karin Luisa Badt maintains that “Sula, the errant erotic force who breaks up people's marriages and destroys friendships, reminds the people of the Bottom of their lack of bottom” (571). Fully aware that she is the town's pariah; Sula does as she pleases, when she pleases.

The Black community's reaction to Sula's perceived evilness dramatically unites it, brings order in the chaotic lives of its people and makes it do things it would not do otherwise. As Christian concludes, “Since she [Sula] does not fit the image of a mother, the loose woman, or the lady-wife ... the community relegates her to their other category for woman, that of the witch, the evil conjure woman who is a part of the evil forces of Nature” (54). Sula signifies, for the Community, “the chaos and evil against which it must define and protect itself” (9), Henderson notes. The Community copes with her by living harmoniously with one another. Ironically, Sula's presence as an Evil woman improves their own lives. She, according to Gyetvai, thus acts as a “defragmenter in the life of the Bottom” (6). As a result, “They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes, and in general band together against the evil in their lives” (Morrison 117). Teapot's careless mother begins to care for her son as a result of her hatred for Sula. The efforts to survive and triumph over the evil gave the residents of the Bottom a stronger sense of collective racial and communal identity and strength. It proved to be a blessing in disguise.

Later, when Sula dies in isolation, the Community perceives it as a good omen. The “witch” was finally buried! Furthermore, after this, they start hearing good news like the rumors of Black people being hired at the much longed-for construction site of the tunnel as well as plans to build an old people's home. However, their joys do not last long. Soon their crops and livestock are destroyed by frost; they are plagued by poverty and sickness. They lose their wages because they cannot get out of their houses for many days. Even their love for each other revived due to the “evil” presence of Sula, withers away with her death. The cold that envelopes their lives after the death of Sula is symbolic of the absence of a fierce, scathing hatred they felt for her during her presence amongst them. Without her “evil” influence that united them, the moral righteousness Sula inspired in the townspeople begins to crumble and “A falling away, a dislocation was taking place. Hard on the heels of the general relief that Sula's death brought a restless irritability took hold” (Morrison 153). Ironically, without even realizing it, the town begins to miss Sula. Sula was the standard of evil against which they measured and appropriated their goodness.

The National Suicide Day that year sees a mob of the townspeople rushing towards the tunnel on the New River Road. “...in a fever pitch of excitement and joy”, “old and young, women

and children, lame and hearty, they killed as best they could, the tunnel they were forbidden to build” (Morrison 161). Their pent-up frustration finds an outlet in this symbolic act. The tunnel, which initially symbolized freedom from the grips of poverty and bigotry, betrays the townspeople. It collapses, killing many while Shadrack stands high up on the riverbank, ringing his bell, like a prophet on Judgment Day, as he sees the Community in a scene of sacrifice and judgment. The very act of the townspeople entering the tunnel and tunnel collapsing onto them on a day devoted to death symbolizes the ritualistic sacrifice of the people on the altar of the forces beyond their comprehension. These forces evade definition and refuse to be compartmentalized simply as “good” and “evil”.

The collapse of the tunnel also symbolizes the beginning of the process that leads to the ultimate collapse of the Bottom community as an all-black community. This process is complete by 1965 when we see Nel lament its loss. The whole landscape of the Bottom has changed, “it is a place that began as a 'joke' and will end as a kind of joke-a golf course, in fact, as Morrison states in the very first line of the novel” (42), remarks Galehouse. The Black community living in it, has slowly moved into the once all-White city of Medallion to build homes. They have more civil rights now and have started getting better jobs. However, Nel is also aware of a diminished vitality in people, the same people who previously drew collective strength from their hard times together. Unlike the older times, the sense of community is gone, “maybe it hadn't been a community, but it had been a place. Now there weren't any places left” (Morrison 166), now, people live in isolated households rather than as a collective whole. Nel also realizes that the Bottom's new prostitutes are “pale and dull” (Morrison 164), suggesting that Blacks have blindly accepted the White community's norms and values.

The Bottom community, throughout the novel, seems to play the role of the chorus. Just like the chorus in Greek plays, it takes upon itself the task of announcing and sustaining the moral order. However, it cannot remain neutral like the Greek chorus because of the Community itself being an active participant in the lives of the protagonists and the moral order no longer definable by a simplistic approach. “The Bottom—like the characters who live there—contains inconsistencies, paradoxes, and uncertainties” (27), observes Wilson. In Morrison's world, the concepts of 'good' and 'evil' often resemble and reciprocate one another. She says, “Evil is as useful as good. Sometimes good looks like evil and evil looks like good” (Morrison 216). What may seem good initially may prove to be not so good after all, and what may seem evil on the surface may later prove to be of value. As Deborah McDowell asserts, “We enter a new world here, a world where we never get to the 'bottom' of things, a world that demands a shift from an either/ or orientation to one that is both/and, full of shifts and contradictions” (152). It is in a complicated relationship with good and evil that the Bottom community finds itself occupied. Just as the protagonists living in the community do, the community as well refuses any limiting definitions of itself; instead, it defines and is defined by the characters in the novel.

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## 'The Phenomenology of the Spirit' in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*

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### *Abstract*

*Helen Oyeyemi, a prodigy from the emancipated third generation of African women authors, exuberantly pens a psychic narrative as her maiden venture, The Icarus Girl. This generation of women writers of African origin are referred to as immigrant, diaspora novelists, and include Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Diana Evans and Helon Habila. Their treatment of 'duality' has received great critical attention. The twin myth has featured in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1958) and Buchi Emecheta's Kehinde (1994). Oyeyemi exhibits a strong influence of her precursors over herself. Her Jess is possessed by the invisible spirit child Tilly, and she fights for control over her own body. This research paper attempts to examine the phenomena of spirit possession and its several implications through Oyeyemi's The Icarus Girl, where the spirit seeks corporeality. The title, "The Phenomenology of the Spirit" is borrowed from Jung's, Four Archetypes: Mother; Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster; and it complements Oyeyemi's representation of the spirit possession phenomena. Keywords: spirit possession, biracialism, twin identities, African diaspora, corporeality, psychic narrative, Nigerian myth*

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A narrative which could conveniently be dismissed as ghost story, delves evocatively into displaced identities wrapping in the myths of 'the twins' and that of *ibeji* as a focal narrative device. Gunning argues that Oyeyemi employs, "non-realist strategies...equally refuse[s] to privilege any explanatory model that validates the experience of spirit possession" (Gunning, 120). Carl Jung argues that it is impossible to understand the psychic substance with presently available standpoints. He affirms that, 'only the psyche can observe the psyche' (Jung, 102) Hence it would be wise to refrain from meddling with the questions of substance. The 'phenomenology of standpoints', as Jung terms it, may consider, 'existence of faith, conviction, and experienced certainties of whatever description and does not contest their possible validity' (Jung, 102). The 'scientific sense' according to Jung may contest what psyche experiences, but cannot overrule its plausibility, 'this immaterial substance also as the vehicle of psychic phenomena or even of life itself' (Jung, 102). The phenomena of spirit possession and the consequent psychic upheaval experienced through duality in Jess' persona validates Jung's argument. Oyeyemi's rendering of Jess's consciousness is compelling, apparently influenced by mythical, literary, psychological and cultural implications, and her self-representation and an act of self-narrating evinces itself in the paraphernalia of Jess's biracial identity.

*The Icarus Girl* is an intense psychological drama, entailing 'symptoms of dissociative disorder' (Gunning, 119). Jess, an eight year old girl exhibits a psychogenic character. The function of the child in the narrative is frustrating and obstructing, yet, is 'the object upon which the plot revolves and is able to resolve' (Georgieva, 16), as Gregory Currie in *Narrative and the Psychology of Character* says, 'Character generates questions, expectations, and corresponding emotional responses of uncertainty, pleasure, and disappointment.' (69). The book's intriguing title prods



incessantly throughout its course, as one strives for piecing together the timeworn Icarus myth with this compellingly psychic account. The intrigue gets resolved not till the last sentence of this open-ended narrative where Jess's soul is supposedly shown as soaring higher and higher disentangling itself from her psychosomatic conditions and the delusions which led her to them, '...Jessamy Harrison woke up and up and up and up.' (*IC* 322)

Oyeyemi's conception of doubles does not attribute to a single point of origin, rather, it has a number of practicable influences which include West African beliefs and mythic cultures, the black modernist's 'double consciousness', the Gothic and the Caribbean myth, 'the child in gothic is a "coveted possession", an object over which protagonists fight for control.' (Georgieva, 13) Oyeyemi recreates Nigerian Yoruba myth of wooden carvings, *Ibeji*, which commemorate the deceased twin. The *Ibeji* figure bears the soul of the dead twin as a kind of replacement and maintains the dead twin's connection to the real world. Jung's demarcation of psyche and spirit possession would establish the premise here,

The souls or spirits of the dead are identical with the psychic activity of the living; they merely continue it. The view that the psyche is a spirit is implicit in this. When therefore something psychic happens in the individual which he feels as belonging to himself, that something is his own spirit. But if anything psychic happens which seems to him strange, then it is somebody else's spirit, and it may be causing a possession. The spirit in the first case corresponds to the subjective attitude, in the latter case to public opinion, to the time-spirit, or to the original, not yet human, anthropoid disposition which we also call the unconscious. (Jung, 105)

Roberto Beneduce and Simona Taliani's research in ethno-psychiatry is grounded in interesting observations, 'The connection between migratory events and spirit possession became apparent when several women of Nigerian nationality were referred to our centre by other services because of "bizarre" illness.' (Beneduce, 430) In the words of Niyi Akingbe and Emmanuel Adeniyi, 'their minds always engage in psychological journeys and trips to the nooks and crannies of their home countries in search of solutions to the myriad of problems confronting these countries.' (Akingbe, 47) Referring to the debates during the 1960s among psychiatrists in the United Kingdom, Chinenye Okparanta says that 'alarming rates of schizophrenia and other mental illnesses in immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa who had settled in Britain', were noticed (Okparanta, 191).

Twinship is a symbolic construct which signify protagonist's fragmented identity. Jess feels content with her English father Daniel, who is more sensitive than her Nigerian mother Sarah. Sarah's contradictory perceptions and determination complicates Jess's identity. Jane Bryce in *Half and Half Children* writes, '...merging of two cultural identities, becomes another facet of the twin phenomenon; biracial children, like twins, can be seen as "half and half children," alternately split and doubled.' (Bryce, 60) Sarah decides to visit her home in Nigeria where Jess meets her mother's family for the first time. Gbenga Oyegbebi called Jess 'Wuraola' (*IC* 19), a Nigerian name which adds to her sense of alienation. During her prolonged stay in Nigeria, Jess undergoes 'experiences of perceptions and actions' (Shigematsu, 24) as she meets Titiola, whose name she fears mispronouncing and, therefore renders it as Tilly Tilly. Tilly follows Jess back to London stating that her parents have moved into the neighbourhood.

Jessamy Harrison (Jess) and Titiola (Tilly Tilly) are the parts of that twinship which has served as much favoured argument amongst the researchers exploring facets of psychoanalysis and questions pertaining to diaspora identity consequent to displacement. Being the twin of Titiola, the spirit child, Jess shows signs of aberrant temperament which is prone to psychic upheavals. The narrative of *The Icarus Girl* unfolds through recognizing and understanding of Jess's perception of Tilly's reality. From Tilly's constant presence, the notion of twinship emerges. Tilly has 'human-like qualities of consciousness that mark characters as "real"' (Keen, 64). The Yoruba beliefs about twin identities and the fictional technique of psycho-centric characterization link Tilly to the 'spirit' world.



Tilly's invisible presence is a psychic phenomenon exhibiting itself through Jess. Tilly in Jess' body, 'is versatile and full of ideas, with a brilliant, witty and surprising turn of mind.' (Jung, 103) Jung further says, '...the spirit is quite capable of staging its own manifestations spontaneously.' (Jung, 109) Tilly reminds Jess, 'I came to you in Ibadan because you were sad, and all by yourself... You had no twin any more. And you wanted me to come....' (IC 217), and becomes an alter ego of Jess, which 'Jess actively, if unconsciously, summons ... not only to serve as a stronger version of herself but also to serve as an inspirational muse who can say the things, whether in English or Yoruba, that Jess cannot yet say.' (Mafe, 24) Jess's 'internalised imaginary companion' (IC 276) Tilly, threatens to banish Jess corporeally and the latter succumbs to her demands to lend her body to be possessed by the spirit-child, Tilly. The entry and exit of Tilly from Jess's body causes behavioural changes in Jess and Oyeyemi coins 'Jess-who was-Tilly', or 'Tilly-who was-Jess', to represent this 'twin persona' as a trope. Jess notices, 'There was something about her [Tilly] that was out of proportion' (IC 43), and that Tilly is a girl who has a 'treacherous realm' which frightens and brings anxiety drawing closely to unsettling gothic children. Tilly's actions grow increasingly malicious with every passing day. She imposes punishments and castigates Jess's friends on Jess's behalf.

Tilly is shown to have often assumed power and authority over Jess. Jess consents to exchange her body bewildered by Tilly's tricks. In return of her acceptance, Jess experiences a severe physical and emotional stress, a 'bursting, bubbling hotness' (IC 216), and for Jung it is 'a transcendent spirit superimposed itself upon the original, natural life-spirit and even swung over to the opposite position, as though the latter were merely naturalistic.' (Jung, 106) It is revealed that Tilly was Fern, a dead twin sister of Jess. Fern turns into an *abiku* or evil spirit, who possesses Jess in order to transmit her existence. Oyeyemi's creation of evil child as uncanny, disintegrated, even brutal, alludes to Yoruba myth about the *abiku*-the spirit of a dead twin, 'effectively uprooting it from its natal geography to that of London, while invoking a psychoanalytic reading of the phenomenon.' (Ouma, 188)

Back in London, wary of Tilly's absence and suffering with instability in behaviour 'Jess had been frenzied in her activity' (IC, 79). Her recurrent agony of body and mind is met with outrages by peers and she is haunted by the thoughts of Tilly. Her emotional turmoil deepens her bond with Tilly. Jess yearns for Tilly and grows increasingly listless and wishes to be left alone to "read [Tilly's] books, think [Tilly's] thoughts' (IC 82). Oyeyemi merges the polarities of fiction and reality, 'The thing is, she's not real, but it's a secret.' (IC 160). Jess is literally confounded in 'doubles' and Tilly begins to take over her. Jess increasingly grows into a troubled child because the dead spirit Tilly is identical with the psychic activity of the living child, Jess herself. Jess prays 'O God, please help me to stay friends with Tilly Tilly, please, please, please. Let me keep her. She is my only friend; i have had no one else' (IC 72) Jess, bedazzled by the magical abilities of Tilly, 'who was mysterious and almost magical' (IC 64) loses her own identity, gets enchanted by Tilly's actions, and eventually struggles to govern over her own body.

The two apparent independent human consciousness or two distinguishable identities are confounded. Tilly grows increasingly possessive towards Jess making Daniel sick, with whom Jess is attached, and Jess' closest friend, Shivs, estranged. Oyeyemi's art of 'doubling' might represent the issues of race and nation and how they potentially affect mutual existences. The magic realism in Tilly's existence probes into the plausibility of bizarre psychic transformations, the sources of which are rooted in cultural beliefs which firmly adhere to one's perceptions of the world. It is 'a quest for the meaning of existence; or since it is a quest for the essence of death' (Fai, 46) Jess's body becomes a vessel which houses her own self and Tilly often together. Jung says, 'Spirit has the further connotation of sprightliness. When we say that a person is "spirited," means that he is versatile and full of ideas, with a brilliant, witty, and surprising turn of mind.' (103) Jung's Sprightliness is relatable to Jess's identities. Jess and Tilly are projected as hybrid identities configured as doubles. Jess is vulnerable and transforms herself into the spirit Tilly, whenever the latter becomes demanding

inflected with magical realist and gothic elements. Oyeyemi attempts to show the psychological breakdown entwined with supernatural horror. Tilly demonstrates her magical powers and wisdom repeatedly where Jess is incapable of delivering strong physical action or a thoughtful reaction. Tilly is a spirit who is in 'preternatural, otherworldly aura' (Georgieva, 8) who usurps Jess's identity.

According to Jung, 'spirit is always an active, winged, swift-moving being as well as that which vivifies, stimulates, incites, fires and inspires.' (105) Jess accepts Tilly's sudden appearances and disappearances, her apparent knowledge of everything, her problem solving skills, and her ability to make Jess invisible if she wanted to. Tilly demands a complete fidelity from Jess as she works towards impeding Jess's relationship with others. Tilly laughs and says, 'This is what'll happen: you'll be me for a little bit, Jessy, and I'm going to be you!' (IC 199)

The function of a child in this narrative denotes the opposing forces of good or evil, renewal or revenge. Tilly's battle for the possession of Jess' body and replace her completely is akin to what Illott and Buckley argued, that 'Tilly is revealed not to be a child at all, but a deconstructive force that fails to signify one meaning and leads instead to the absence of identity' (413) Oyeyemi's focus is on the relationship between the two, explore the ensuing anxiety, and shape a black and white binary. Her idea of broader form of existence, of doubles, mirrors the idea of abrasive and mysterious subjects and finds its voice with her indigenous subjectivity.

## Conclusion

Helen Oyeyemi is proficient in translating conversant fictitious discourse into a psychologically rich fiction. The gothic children in *The Icarus Girl* occur as unsettling figures that emerge from the secrets of past, entangled in Yoruba myth, and troubled by the parallel survival in Nigeria and London. Their struggle for survival prompts personal anxieties owing to the question of social legitimacy. She accomplished the treatment of real and spiritual by means of mirror and doubling image 'which are the product of human consciousness and its reflections.' (Jung, 2003:109) Jess's confrontation of uncertain thoughts and images resurrect the existence of spiritual elements and the narrative is shaped by what Jess's minds perceives, infers, remembers, and feels about Tilly's existence and actions. Tilly on behalf of Jess's dead twin brings horrific thoughts in latter's mind, which lead to double identity. She says, 'It's a bad thing for you to have lost your sister. She's half of yourself. That's why.....you needed to be older to understand what it meant.' (IC 301) Cohn rightly said, 'spirit, transport oneself into the characters' (502) The possession of the child in a postcolonial context, plays well in *The Icarus Girl* in the body of Jess who is a child of mixed parentage and struggles to establish her identity with either father or mother. Jess seems to have lost the battle with Tilly. The novel ends unresolved and leaves the characters in perturbing liminal state.

The overwhelming influences of migration and ensuing identity crisis may exert strange psychic behaviour which could yield unusual manifestations like 'spirit possession' which is most certainly rooted in the 'collective memories and myths about Africa', in the context of African diaspora, as Joseph Harris's studies establish (Okaparanta, 188). Oyeyemi apparently maintains this legacy imparting a structural harmony to her narrative through the idea of twinship, duality, Jess's biracial identity, and Tilly's appearance as a spirit.

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## Shylock v. Antonio: Socio-Legal Complexities in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*

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### *Abstract*

*A quest to learn from literature enables us to understand our past and shape our present. Shakespeare's play The Merchant of Venice set in late 16<sup>th</sup> century intrigued literary and legal scholars for its themes, allusions, kinship ties, socio-legal interactions, and governance. The play foregrounds all characters as people of their time affected by social relations leaving none for praise or blame. Working at the intersection of literature and law, one can deduce that quite like Venetians, we too are people of our time. Hence it becomes imperative to closely examine the contention between Shylock and Antonio to understand the socio-legal complexities it unravels, which is the objective of the research article.*

*Keywords: usury; discrimination; bonds; contract formation; "pound of flesh," justice; judicial imbalance.*

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### **Introduction**

William Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, fondly known to legal practitioners as a civil suit--Shylock v. Antonio, despite four centuries, evokes timeless appeal and curiosity among literary critics and legal professionals. Literary critics have analysed the plot centred on themes as greed, love, betrayal, and justice. Legal jurists investigate the socio-legal structures operating in Venice. As a miniature state, Venice, with its imperfections, resembles the state-of-affairs that we inhabit today. The present article aims to understand the play's socio-legal complexities germinating due to the contention between Shylock and Antonio by re-investigating the structural foundations of Venice.

Set in Venice, the plot involves a merchant named Antonio who helps his friend Bassanio to woo Portia. Antonio's friendship compels him to borrow money from Shylock, a Jewish moneylender whom he hates as a Christian. Shylock capitalises on the rivalry and specifies a pound of Antonio's flesh as forfeiture, upon default. Unfortunately, Antonio becomes bankrupt and Shylock drags him to the Duke's court. Portia disguised as a judge intervenes and saves Antonio.

During those times, Venice was run by a formal statute and the Duke acted as custodian of the rule of law (Magri). The formal governance received significant influence from Christian principles explaining the reason for banning usury within the territorial limits. Even the social practices of Venetians were dictated by religious principles. The Duke provided stability in law and order much to the expectation of the Christians. Seligman reveals, as per scriptural account of Jewish custom, to lend money for interest in brotherliness is forbidden under *Torah* [sacred book of Jews] but is allowed between strangers or *of a foreigner thou mayest exact it* and even outsiders. Though Jews were outsiders, aliens and enemy, this status enabled Antonio to seek religious succour and Shylock to seek interest. In the play, Christian-Jewish status ignites a Manichean dichotomy as both demonise each other.

Even the trade practices were guided by religious beliefs--Christianity for Venetians and

Judaism for Jews. Benjamin Ravid explains the discrimination of Jews and social transactions in ancient Venice, “the Jews were subjected to many restrictions, including the wearing of a yellow hat, and from 1516 on, confinement to living in compulsory quarters in the *ghetto nuovo*” (274). The antipathy by the Christians towards Jews germinates from their belief dating back to the crucifixion of Christ, an apparent allusion to Biblical past.

Most kingdoms in medieval Europe inhabited by Christians discriminated against Jews. They were kept segregated because some of Jewish religious principles were immoral according to the basic tenets of Christianity. Conversely, historians note that Venetian authorities realised the value of Jewish moneylenders when they were invaded by the League of Cambrai armies and their treasury became poor (ibid). Therefore, despite the social mores guided by Christian beliefs and its overwhelming influence on Venetian governance, Jewish money lenders received commercial protection with certain conditions proving the Venetian state's economic self-interest.

Antonio capitalises on the economic and religious animosity with the Jews to further his business interest. Richard Weisberg supports this assertion, “The legalistic cruelty imposed by Antonio on all of Shylock's wealth is in the service of the merchant's own narrow commercial interests” (113). Bereft of any respect and citizenship, Shylock and his compatriots lived in ghettos outside the main city limits and were considered as unequals [aliens]. The state of Venice perpetuated discrimination and segregation towards Jewish community. But the laws of Venice allowed interest-based lending by Shylock based on specific charters to regulate 'bonds' between two parties.

As a Christian Antonio gained a competitive edge and openly denounced Shylock, claiming a moral high ground, hardly supporting the principles of equity and justice. Therefore, Antonio through his conduct and Shylock his trade [usury] violated the ethical tenets of fair-trade practice. Historians note that Jewish trade practices then were restricted to “ghetto loan banks [heavily taxed], strazzaria [dealing in second-hand cloth or clothing], general trade, medical profession and printing Hebrew texts” (Ravid). Jews were wronged by Venice on two counts: one, by their exclusion from Venetian citizenship, and another because of economic and trade restrictions.

### **Execution of the Bond**

Antonio was economically spent because of his mercantile investments on seas. Hence when Bassanio needed money, he had to wager his goodwill as guarantee for generating credit. They approached Shylock to borrow 3000 ducats for three months. Shylock agreed to lend without interest, but playfully provoked Antonio for a pound of flesh in forfeiture, if he fails to honour the terms. Gripped by an egotistic impulse Antonio agreed to the terms and sealed the single bond, despite Bassanio's opposition. Later, upon being wronged and realising that Antonio is bankrupt, he files a civil suit for forfeiture.

In fact, the bond violated the basic principles of equity and natural justice. Shylock misused his dominant position, and Antonio, despite being aware about a clause that required him to forfeit his 'pound of flesh' for failure to pay 3000 ducats, entered the [vicious] contract and registered it in Venice. Venetian laws were bound to protect and enforce any bond that is signed and sealed, to promote a market economy. However, failure of a Venetian authority to protect and enforce any sealed bond may invoke impeachment of the laws of Venice. Shylock exploited this clause and took refuge in the state's compulsion to allow him specific performance of the bond. Hence, the legal question arose: Should Venice grant Shylock the forfeiture of Antonio's pound of flesh nominated in the bond as Antonio is unable to pay the principal amount?

### **Proceeds of the Verdict**

Portia, as judge in the case concluded that it “must,” and did award Shylock the

enforcement of his bond primarily because the statute of Venice allows it. In the enforcement, Portia however strictly interprets the bond in its literal sense and informs Shylock that the execution of the penalty should be constrained and specific. Therefore, no amount of blood shall be shed, and neither any amount of 'pound of flesh' shall be taken, neither more nor less, as it is not expressly mentioned in the bond. Since the consequence— drop of blood, during the execution of the penalty is not nominated in the bond, Portia cleverly relies on strict literal interpretation to prevent Antonio's death, and collapse of Venetian legal statute. The judgment should have ideally concluded here as it addressed the legal issue.

Shylock proved his inability to execute the specific performance of the contract as per the judge's literal condition, and instead asked the principal amount, which he earlier affirmed as part of his oath to be unacceptable, equal to committing “perjury.” Shylock's demand for the principal amount was untenable as it went against his oath submitted in the court, and therefore Portia estopped him from claiming the principal amount. Ideally, the court must have allowed the plaintiff— Shylock to reasonably operate the only option i.e. to perform or withdraw from the specific performance of the bond within the confines of specific constraints granted as per the verdict.

### Adjudication by Portia

Portia as [Balthazar], an expert in Latin arrived as a suitable judge for *Shylock v. Antonio*. Venice had no legal counsels then to represent the parties while Portia acted as an inquisitorial judge to render impartial adjudication. Unfortunately, Portia's conduct as an inquisitorial judge erred on multiple counts as she indulged in impersonation and breach of trust [conned the Duke and Venetian justice system]. Therefore, Portia's verdict validated by the Duke of Venice against Shylock can be questioned and deemed unenforceable in actual terms.

Shylock begged the court to enforce specific performance i.e. “pound of flesh” from Antonio's breast. Portia initially aimed to mitigate Shylock's revengeful plea by persuading him to consider the tenets of equity, fairness and mercy in the lines, “The quality of mercy is not strain'd” (Shakespeare, 4.1.179). Ultimately, she yielded to Shylock's plea for enactment of specific performance that is sealed in the bond, rather than damages for breach of contract. E.F.J. Tucker states that the courtroom in the play “is an imaginary hybrid, which draws upon aspects from both the Court of Common Pleas and the Court of Chancery” —(qtd. in Raffield 5657). One wonders why Portia failed to inform Shylock that he could not shed a drop of blood before she delivers the award. Perhaps Portia awaited to see Shylock expose his hidden intention. If he were to be satisfied with the award, he may either be merciful after victory and pardon Antonio to teach him as well as the Christians a lesson, thereby display Jewish humaneness to gain a moral high ground; or be cruel and pursue the sentence to betray his negative *mens rea*. Shylock chooses the latter, to partially allow the audience to absolve Portia of her charge to convert evil Shylock's civil suit into criminal one— wish the death of a Christian, penalise him to bankruptcy: religious and economic— the cause of his evilness. The status quo of anti-Semitism is affirmed wherein Christian mercy is contrasted with Jewish brutality.

### Judicial Imbalance

Shylock became an unfortunate victim of 'judicial overreach' as Portia went beyond the legal issue to pass three verdicts: denial of “pound of flesh,” if it doesn't meet the conditions; estopping him from the principal amount [monetary compensation]; and application of the alien statute of Venice. Daniel Kornstein, an American lawyer calls Portia's denial of pound of flesh as “transparently absurd . . . like granting an easement on land without the right to leave footprints” —(qtd. in Weisberg 109). Similarly, Portia's verdict to apply the alien statutory laws of Venice on



Shylock is legally untenable.

The case was merely to decide whether Shylock's bond can be enforced which she awarded as per the explicit stipulation. But to adjudicate on Shylock's intention to wish the death of Antonio by enforcing the bond, and turn the civil suit into a criminal for which no grievance was registered by the defendant, which was beyond the legal issue, aggravates the judicial imbalance. Portia's decision to extend the ambit of judgment in favour of the defendant exposed her conflict of interest and brought the Duke's court in disrepute. She appeared incompetent to apply the alien statute of Venice on Shylock.

### **Fiddling with Law**

Portia's judgment plays a mischief on Venetian legal system, as it fails to qualify the legal test because it violated “to be fair and appear fair” principle – as she took a personal interest in Antonio's civil suit, apparently because of his proximity with her lover–Bassanio and impersonated Balthazar after producing a dubious letter from Bellario. She equally violated the impartial code of legal ethics and scales of justice which Dennis R Klinck describes as 'the apparent rift between the subjectivity of conscience and the necessary objectivity of law' (qtd. in Raffield 56). The rift is evident when she pushed for his conversion to Christianity, to hammer the ultimate death nail on the Venetian inquisitorial system.

Portia initially appears fair to both sides when her deliberations favour them: Shylock quips, “A Daniel come to judgment;” (Act 4.1.231) that gets hilariously retorted by Gratiano, when the tables turn, “A second Daniel! A Daniel, Jew!” (4.1.347). This appears a subtle Shakespearean dig at his audience exposing their cognitive biases supporting a judge when the deliberations swing in their favour. A closer analysis of Portia's fair appearance brings a converse truth as it reveals her stand aggravated by her passionate speech, “Thou shall have more justice that thou desir'st” (4.1.330.) making apparent the rendering of disproportionate justice.

Portia's play on law becomes evident when she uses her ingenuity to save the life of a Christian, while arguing for the peril of Shylock-- a Jew's life, which Haque calls a “prosaic justice” (qtd. in Haque and Das 87). Portia's justice is disproportionate as it is untempered by judicial restraint that later becomes an arrogance of power to satisfy the majority and save a Christian while deprive everything but the life of a Jew. The mischief in *Shylock v Antonio* continued post the trial when Bassanio's wedding ring was mischievously sought as a gift, betraying the element of self-interest.

### **Various Social Bonds in the Play**

Various types of bonds can be interpreted in this play. Mary and B. J. Sokol note that a “bond” was a common feature in Shakespearean sonnets as quintessential metaphor for love while “In [his] plays the legal meaning of a 'bond' as an obligation sometimes links with the concept of emotional 'bonds' (38). In this play, the idea of a bond encompasses social and legal contract. The social bonds include: friends--Antonio and Bassanio, rich heiress and waiting-maid--Portia and Nerrisa, father and daughter--Shylock and Jessica, lovers--Portia and Bassanio; Jessica and Lorenzo – which display intense emotional attachment; while the legal bond between enemies [Shylock and Antonio] appear dissimilar to the social bonds.

The social bonds here reflect love and affection observed as an unwritten code, some culminating in marriage. Interestingly, in love, when the dilemma of choice emerges, certain bonds appear more prominent and valuable: as in the case of the civil suit, when upon Antonio's persuasion Bassanio and Gratiano feel compelled to give away the ring to Balthazar (Portia) and court clerk (Nerrisa), and in another scene earlier, Jessica's elopes with Lorenzo betraying her father's

commands. In the play, two contrasting narratives emerge: deep male friendship triumphs over marital relationship; while conversely Jessica's love triumphs over parental relationship and religious restrictions.

### **Nature of Shylock's Bond and Essentials of a Contract**

The most fascinating sketch of bond portrayed by Shakespeare is the one with the legal element—between enemies—Antonio and Shylock. The nature of the bond is a legal contract but it fails to fulfil the mandatory requirements to be valid in today's times. The essentials of a contract must include:

- i. Offer and acceptance – the offer of 3000 thousand ducats for three months was accepted by Antonio, however, the terms were unfair and unilaterally decided by Shylock;
- ii. consideration – payment of the borrowed amount was agreed without any advantage to the lender i.e. interest (monetary), conversely the detriment – pound of flesh was present which is an illegal consideration;
- iii. intention to be bound – Antonio had expressed his consent to be bound to pay the sum or the penalty and legally seal the bond, but Shylock's intention was *malafide* (diabolical) in nature;
- iv. certainty of terms – payment of 3000 ducats in three months or a pound of flesh close to the heart appear inhuman and violated the standard of reasonableness, this feature of the contract is ambiguous in interpretation and enforcement;
- v. capacity and competence of both the parties – both Shylock and Antonio were legally and mentally sound to enter into the contract, while Antonio had enough goodwill and credit history to repay the promise he rendered; conversely, the decision to give away his pound of flesh was morally and legally unsound; and
- vi. must be in writing – an apparent fact, that the bond was sealed as a notary in Venice.

Except the writing condition, all the other elements of Shylock's contract failed to stand the test of reasonableness.

### **Bonds during Venetian Times**

Did Venice allow such a bond or contract to work? Neimeyer investigates such a possibility during the feudal eras of 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries - Germany, Scandinavia and Italy that had legally recognised agreements or contracts between two parties, where one can pledge or be bound by the terms of a part of the body in exchange for material consideration (12). In fact, he also argues that the possibility of Shakespeare projecting the play as a reflection of his time is plausible as Pope Sixtus' biographer Gregorio Leti documents that he arbitrated on a case involving a Jew and a Merchant, where the Jew at the vacuous height of his emotion said, "I will wager a pound of my body's flesh that this thing is true" (13). When the Jew lost the Merchant took him to Sixtus who rendered the same verdict in favour of the pound of flesh without an extra ounce of flesh, no less no more. Unlike Portia, Pope Sixtus however, aimed to teach both the parties a lesson by penalising them first and later, condemning them to death. The Pope mitigated his sentence and let them off but sent an example to his jurisdiction to not play mischief or take undue advantage of someone. Neimeyer adds that many such narratives came forth before Shakespeare in the form of stories to draw inspiration from and complicate the juristic application on social imbalances.

### **Relevance of Shylock's Bond in India**

If judged from the perspective of Indian law today--a common law system, Shylock's bond

will be treated as invalid, illegal, or *contra bonos mores*. A general reading of Shylock's bond proves either the ignorance of law among both the parties or betrays the nefarious design of the promisor against the promisee. One can glance upon Indian history, not too far to see contracts between two parties that end in a one-sided vicious contract, like the practice of bonded labour. Pledging the service of one's labour and being physically bound for life for a small sum, was the most gruesome and cunning agreement Indian moneylenders undertook to fool gullible people. However, the situation, here, is slightly different since Antonio entered the contract out of economic compulsion and emotional provocation while bonded labourers enter purely due to the economic compulsion for survival. Literature is replete with texts that expose the predatory rich class exploiting the vulnerable conditions of the poor, chief among them include like *Kamala* by Vijay Tendulkar and *Bitter Soil* by Mahasweta Devi, showcasing circumstances of characters pledging body as a surety for money.

### Arguments in Favour of Interpretation of the Text

Certain critics may object to the application of modern-day literary-legal analysis to examine *The Merchant of Venice*. There are two reasons why such an objection is invalid: first, even traditional conventions have seldom debarred an examination of history since it helps us appreciate our present better and prepare us to undertake any precaution for fear of repeating it. As Marx famously cautions us about world historical facts—*history repeats itself, the first as tragedy, then as farce*. Prevention is better than to bear witness our present as farce, subjecting citizens to unjust societal laws. Secondly, narratives hold the crux of any content, as Spivack argues that both “Lawyers and literature scholars read differently: in a nutshell, lawyers read for the plot. The common law tradition of precedent means that lawyers are trained to read cases to tell them how to conduct themselves, or as Holmes famously said, to discover what the consequences of various courses of action will be—in literary terms, the plot” (495). This is done with an intent to learn lessons from the past.

Judiciary has used characters and literary events as allusions to argue their observations on a case. Henderson notes that judges in U.S. Supreme Court consciously use various sources including fictions by Orwell, Kafka, Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, etc. to enrich the persuasion capacity and legal opinion of judgments (Henderson 178). While in the Indian Supreme Court, *Re Sarda Mines* (2018) case, Portia's character was drawn to criticise an absurd argument of one of the parties based on semantics, “This would be much like the argument put forth by Portia enabling Shylock to extract his pound of flesh without spilling a drop of blood” (4). Legal practitioners working at the intersection of law and literature believe that Shakespeare has left an eternal impression on lawyers through his legal allusions (Mackenzie). In consonance, Spivack supports such intersectional study as they give “much more leeway to question the surface of the text” (500). As scholars have argued, examining our historical sources – chiefly narratives, provide more flexibility to learn distinct cultural mores affecting laws.

### Final Points

The legal establishment and society of Venice shown in the play appeared patriarchal, discriminatory and cruel towards race, sex and animals. Venetian concept of law and logic is subtly castrated by Shylock and Portia. *The Merchant of Venice* when read from its social history and legal conduct enables readers to understand that most legal complaints germinate from social injustice, either at individual or societal level. If not for the persecution of Shylock's “tribe,” Antonio and Venice would not have seen such a suit. Had woman been allowed to involve in adjudicating legal matters, Portia would not be compelled to impersonate Balthazar. Throughout the play we see a possible reason for human beings to behave irrationally explaining why we need laws based on

objective yet humane approach, as well as legal counsels, to objectively temper the two parties and make them face the law. This play perhaps presents the best case study to understand the adverse effects of contesting parties, left to theatrically unleash raw emotions on each other without the intervention of objective legal representation.

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## Albert Camus' Meursault--A Panoramic View

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### *Abstract*

*Absurd Literature has been a medium for writers to explain the inexplicable. But what is it that makes an act absurd? Can a response taken in full awareness be absurd? Albert Camus' The Stranger is an exemplar of absurd literature with profound impact. Meursault, the protagonist commits a needless and insensible murder. Subjected to the jury and the readers, opinions are divided. In this tug of war with the vindicators on one side and condemners on the other, a chasm is created which puts Meursault into two opposite brackets. This article is an attempt to pluck him out of these categorizations, which the critics and readers have imposed.*

*Keywords: Detachment, equanimous, mindful, absurd, conscious.*

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Intrigued by Meursault, the protagonist of Albert Camus' *The Stranger*, I sought some explanation for his actions, inaction, chance occurrences of the novel, his verdict and his response to it. Camus later wrote a *Preface* to the novel wherein he somehow vindicates his hero. This unsettled me all the more. Numerous articles proffer insights on Meursault's character, but those explanations can make one's head spin with their polar oscillations. Consequently, the present article essays to hold that pendulum for some time and create some distance between the reader and Meursault. The interspace thus created, proposes a panoramic view of the situation. With absurd or existentialism as the fulcrum, the critics who tried to explain Meursault, played on the seesaw of labelling Meursault either as a monster or a modern saint. A distant view offers a fresh perspective. Drawing a corollary from Meursault's trial, the article does not wish to draw ideas and inferences from the other works of Camus to understand Meursault. Wouldn't that be akin to the unjust trial of Meursault by the Jury which condemns him not for killing the Arab, rather for not crying over his dead mother. Preconceived notions and presumptions of the normal behaviour overshadow the scene of the crime. Thus, the present write up would refrain from drawing parallels between *The Stranger* and other works of Camus. However, to understand Meursault the article will include the *Preface* to this work written by the author.

Camus, in the *Preface to The Stranger*, vindicates his protagonist. It is interesting to note that how a man sitting in the dock, as a culprit, appears to be a victim. This swing from culprit to a victim does not require any astute maneuvering by Camus, instead it is a casual reaction to the insular legal system. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook Camus' efforts to sway the reader by writing the *Preface*. And therefore, it can be read as a manipulation, which succeeds in upholding Camus' justification some times. The paper argues that to understand the protagonist of Camus' novel, the readers and critics have drawn distinct dichotomies. Meursault has been pigeonholed as a saint or a sinner. And to understand him better we need to un mould his character. To begin with, the paper expresses its disapproval of Meursault being placed on a pedestal. Critics like Vikas Sarang, endow him with qualities that raise him above the ordinary people. One such quality ascribed to Meursault is detachment. Detachment is one of the most esteemed attributes in the Asian world. According to Asian philosophy, no spiritual progress is possible without developing an attitude of detachment. The nobility of a soul is directly proportional to the degree one is detached. In the context of Meursault,

Sarang notes, "how close *The Stranger* is to ideas native to the Indian mind. Meursault's famous 'indifference' is a version of the detachment advocated by Indian philosophy" (Sarang 51).

Camus puts forth the rhetoric of Meursault being the only Christ that we deserve. Leonard W. Sugden goes a step further and garlands Meursault with the title of an Oriental sage. Meursault is projected as a character beyond Occidental understanding. Sugden points out that Camus' hero represents an attitude of mind which lies, in certain respects, outside Western experience (Sugden 197). Meursault is eulogized on one hand and denounced as an abominable human being on the other. Jack Murray does not mince words when he writes that Meursault is a rather denuded sort of person. He is unfeeling, except in basic, sensuous way. He lives from moment to moment in the facts of the world with no sense of continuity in his existence and little responsiveness to the moral content of various experiences" (Murray 370).

The present article proposes that both these assumptions are extreme. Meursault is a reserved man and undoubtedly non-pretentious. To impugn a person for being inexpressive exhibits rudimentary instincts of our society. Conversely, to call him a detached sage will also be overshooting the mark. Let us first understand what is detachment and will it be right to call Meursault a detached man? Detachment is an imposing achievement gained by proving our mettle in the face of adversity. With detachment comes the tenacity to endure. It can never be partial, reflected in compartmentalized situations. It is a part of one's personality. To present Meursault's indifference as detachment clearly shows that one is a 'stranger' to Indian Philosophy and the concept of detachment. Detachment can be understood by lexical scrutiny of the Sanskrit word related to it. "*Vairagya*," a compound word made of *vai* + *raga*. *Vai* means without. *Raga* means attachment, feeling, or passion. *Vairagya* means without attachment. To develop *vairagya* means developing a dispassionate attitude. This dispassionate personality is not an accidental occurrence; rather it is a by-product of mental purity. When one transcends attachments of the senses and worldly desires, he is in the state of *Vairagya*. Here, it is also pertinent to understand that aversion is often misunderstood as detachment. These two are wide apart. Aversion is also a kind of attachment. Though a negative one yet still a very strong one. Aversion is a strong attachment to the belief that you do not like something. A holistic understanding of the idea of detachment can help to understand how detached Meursault was.

The opening lines of the novel announce with a thud a piece of news to which the protagonist is indifferent. "Mama died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: "Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours." That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday" (Ward 1). A matter of fact tone, first-person narration, sets the mood. Meursault on getting the news of his mother's death sets out for the funeral without exhibiting any remorse. A slanted view of Meursault's character, at the beginning of the novel, can make him look detached to some eyes. His indifference is misconstrued as detachment. He cannot put up a face of pretension of being overwhelmed by the loss of his mother. Indubitably, his emotional appearance did not bother him. But he does take care to express conformity in his physical appearance by borrowing a black tie and an armband from Emmanuel's place before he leaves for his mother's funeral. While talking to the director of the home he expresses how he refrained from visiting his mother because she had grown used to the home and his visit would perturb her. Moreover, the visit took a toll on his Sunday. Whether to cry over one's mother's corpse and to see it one last time is an individual's choice. To make it a point of contention seems like a melodramatic exaggeration, but the society loves labelling people. Camus remarks, "In our society, any man who does not weep at his mother's funeral runs the risk of being sentenced to death" (Camus 19).

Meursault does not feel the need to create artificial remorse for his dead mother. They had grown apart, for the good of each other, with acceptance. He perceives that there was no bitterness on either side. Instead of mourning during the funeral procession, seeing the hills and red and green, he claims that he understood his mother better. Done with the funeral, he waits and joyfully beholds the



bus that takes him to his bed for a long sleep. He goes for a swim the next day, picks up a date with an old acquaintance Marie, goes out for a comedy movie with her. He does not bother about maintaining any formal mourning protocol. It is his life, and just like him, the reader is not bothered much by his indifference. He lives in the moment, and his relation with his career shows that he is not in the rat race for earning money. His being non-ambitious, nonchalant, and keeping-to-himself attitude does make him appear to be a simple man with an Oriental mindset. He does not want to sit and brood over the dead mother. All this can provoke a parochial view of his being viewed as a detached person. A reader must not overlook that he is calm and is not affected by his mother's death but at the same time, he found the glare from the sun unbearable. To understand his personality, we need to understand his relation to the sun and its heat. Unknown to him, he is pitted against a pitiless sun. Unable to put up with the heat, Meursault shoots the Arab. If we have to name a feeling that arose in him under that hot intolerable sun, it would be aversion. He feels so strongly attached to that feeling of discomfort that blinded by it he changes the whole course of his life. Though the murder of the Arab is not premeditated, Meursault lacks a calm and composed mind to overcome the aversion caused by sudden discomfort. To maintain composure in the face of adversity one needs strength. Detachment is disregard for one's pain and suffering. It has nothing to do with insensitivity towards another life. It is a quality developed with grit and perseverance so that one responds rather than react to the situations. Meursault's reaction is a temperamental outburst. He creates an unseen complication for himself, as he has no inner nerve to bear any discomfort. He is "a stranger" to the Oriental equanimity. Had he been detached, shouldn't he have remained undisturbed at being exposed to the discomfort caused by the sun? His aversion produces an involuntary compulsive reaction. Whether it is an overpowering thought at his mother's funeral procession or an act of cutting out an advertisement for Kruschen Salts, he is enmeshed with a constant discomposure. At the beach, he could have simply turned around and walked away ignoring the Arab completely. Although this thought occurs to him, nonetheless he succumbs to his inner agitation. After killing the Arab, he is conscious that he has shattered the harmony of the day.

Meursault is intensely attached to his feelings and thoughts. His aversions and not his detachment characterize him. To call him detached is sheer sophistry. A detachment of convenience and not the one developed through emotional well-being marks Meursault. Eastern philosophy projects detachment as the most sublime of all qualities, and it requires a great deal of tenacity to develop it. Detachment, according to *Bhagwad Gita*, is doing the right thing for its own sake, without worrying about its result. One cannot be blinded by attachment if one is detached. The discomfort that Meursault felt at the flashing sunlight blinded him physically as well as mentally, as he was strongly attached to his physical comfort. A detached person can comprehend the situation objectively, without mingling it with passion, rage, or attachment. To make rational decisions, the reins of impulsion should be strongly under command. Meursault was not emotionally detached. To call him detached is a tangential understanding of the concept of detachment. Had he been detached he would not have lost his composure just because the sun felt hotter by few degrees. Detachment cannot be synonymous with carelessness, indifference, or passivity.

The present article opines that Meursault is a man of frail inner strength and low tolerance. And therefore, when thrust in an inconvenient situation he acts unreasonably. The iniquity of his action emanates from his low endurance. The power to withstand inconvenience needs hardiness. Detachment from senses brings sagacity, which Meursault lacks due to his strong attachment to his aversion for the heat of the sun. It requires a great degree of mental control to not act on impulses and to master the unruly mind. Aversion, coupled with muddled thoughts can wreak havoc. The simpler the thoughts, the easier it is to tame the mind. We find repeated references in the text where Meursault is found to be struggling with the thought of being judged. He complicates his world by assumptions, whether it is the thought of being judged by people at the home, "I had the ridiculous feeling that they were there to judge me"(Ward10). Or about being nagged by his boss. His assumptions make him a

stranger to a simple life. The sun and its heat become the objective correlative to trigger the agitation and heat within him to do the unthinkable. Beneath his nonchalant self lurks a lot of complications which could not find a positive outlet. He is indifferent to a great extent, this cannot be denied. But it will be fallacious to confuse indifference with detachment.

This article also proposes to dismiss the exculpation of Meursault by critics like Conroy, who justifies Meursault's murder-act by pronouncing it as a cathartic act. This view, again, is reading too much into the text. Conroy writes, "These four shots constitute a catharsis for the heretofore self-contained Meursault and a demonstration of his feelings for his mother. As such, they appear to be a delayed outpouring of affection and anger that Meursault could not manifest on the day of the funeral, a delayed flow of tears, so to speak" (Conroy 45).

The second part of the novel comprises Meursault's trial. It is an indictment of the legal and social system. Throughout his trial, the judgment on him revolved around the opinion that a man incapable of grieving over his dead mother is capable of murder. The jury, the witnesses, the courtroom, and the prosecutor work together to deduce Meursault's "calm" on the day of his mother's funeral as his cold-bloodedness. If Jury was dangling on one extreme, Camus as an author and quite conceivably in love with his creation holds on to the other extreme. Vindicating Meursault he writes in the *Preface*, "I only meant that the hero of my book is condemned because he does not play the game . . . he refuses to lie. To lie is not only to say what isn't true. It is also and above all, to say more than is true, and as far as the human heart is concerned, to express more than one feels" (Camus 19). The reader is on the same page with Camus and feels that Meursault is condemned because he refuses to play the game. Meursault is an outsider to the society in which he lives for he does not wish to manipulate in any way by presenting himself as what he is not. He has a world of his own, whether good or bad, fenced by his aloofness and indifference. Propelled by his indifference he does not bother to lie to mask his feelings to join the club. To dissimulate his feelings to fit-in appears futile to him. Here, it must be accepted that he is not a weakling without a choice. He could have played the emotional card to gather sympathies, cloaked in the ways of the world; he could have got away with a lighter punishment. He is a stranger to such hypocrisy.

Meursault is unapologetic about being ruled by physical needs rather than emotional. As he has lost the habit of analyzing himself, he is beyond self-reproach. But then, someone's life has been lost. One man's freedom cannot transgress another man's boundaries. Meursault understands that he is a criminal but he fails to understand his crime. If the legal system failed him, he also could not help himself. Not once is he filled with remorse for having committed the crime that could have been averted just by a turn of steps. He is an escapist who is ready to take charge of his actions physically but mentally he dives into a world of distraction rather than facing his thoughts. His swim date with Marie, a movie with her, memories that he feels he is using to his advantage, are all ways to distract the mind. He is not in harmony with his true nature and this sync cannot be developed until the deluge of thoughts in his mind subsides. Had he for once tapped into his inner self he would have been able to locate the source of his anxiety, irritation, and disharmony. It was not in the heat of the sun, it was within him. Instead, he keeps his mind occupied with thoughts and recreation of memories. He confesses, "At first, I didn't sleep well at night and not at all during the day. Little by little, my nights got better and I was able to sleep during the day, too. In fact, during the last few months, I've been sleeping sixteen to eighteen hours a day. That would leave me six hours to kill with meals, nature's call, my memories and the story about the Czechoslovakian" (Ward 79).

Sugden gives the reference of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy to suggest that his sleep is equivalent to the state of *Samadhi* or Absolute absorption wherein any notion of duality is lost (Sugden 204). This article proposes a disagreement with this notion and considers it as a half-baked understanding of such doctrines. Instead, Meursault's sleep can be compared to the sleep of Joe Keller, of the famous play, "All My Sons" by Arthur Miller. Joe oversleeps in this play to smother his conscience. To describe his sleep as absorption is misinformed. It reminds one of a

well-known Nietzschean quote, "They muddy the water, to make it seem deep."

Conversely, there is no dearth of diametrical observations on Meursault's character. The article refutes to regard him as an unfeeling monster. Meursault is not a cold-blooded murderer; he is ignorant, not vicious. He is a man of acute observation. Whether it is the hues of the sky, smell of the wind or fresh earth, or noticing another person's attire or appearance, he has an eye for all (Ward 12). He also has a keen awareness of his likes and dislikes. He dislikes Sundays, he enjoys washing hands, and he hates the overbearing sun. During the funeral procession, he acknowledges, "It had been a long time since I'd been out in the country, and I could feel how much I'd enjoy going for a walk if it hadn't been for Maman" (Ward 12).

Meursault is a stranger to Mindfulness. His mind is invariably full of thoughts, at his mother's funeral, he keeps thinking about what his boss will say or what others think of him. Even when left all by himself, in the jail he does not let the muddy water of his mind to settle, else he could have got the clarity of what lies within. However lopsided the trial was but that's not where the real problem lies. Meursault deep within knows right from wrong and therefore, in the last days of his life he recalls what the nurse had said at Maman's funeral about neither going too fast nor too slow (Ward 17). It is a metaphor for the well-known Buddhist doctrine of the middle path which Meursault has lost track of. The middle path is to abstain from extreme actions and to embrace life with equipoise and harmony. It requires mindfulness to attain this balance. Mindfulness is being conscious of your actions and being equanimous towards the incongruity that life hurls at you. An aware consciousness knows the difference between reacting and responding to a situation. There is a sea of difference between being Mind full and being Mindful. And Meursault is a stranger to this difference. He is a stranger to self-analysis. To get enmeshed in the volley of one's thoughts is not analysis. It is only when we can create some distance between our thoughts and ourselves that we can look at them objectively. It requires an observer's eyes to have a real introspection. It will not be wrong to say, to know yourself, be a stranger to yourself. Only with the objectivity of a stranger can we ever understand our true nature, our thoughts, and our actions. And because Meursault could not create this distance between himself and his thoughts he could not understand his crime. Condemned by the faulty legal system he could not find consolation in self-absolution.

Meursault is a stranger to a way that directs human energies in a positive direction. Even after his verdict, he channelizes his thoughts in a whirlpool of wonder. He keeps thinking about instances of condemned men escaping the guillotine, disappearing before the execution, or breaking through the codon of police. He keeps on blaming himself for not having paid attention to accounts of execution. He is a stranger to moral responsibility. He does not even spare a thought for taking the onus of killing a fellow human. Agonizingly, he contemplates the relentless death machinery and it's working, but not once he ponders upon the lethal pain he had caused to another human. He is a stranger to the well-known Oriental concepts of *Pratikramana* (introspection) and *Prayaschit* (repentance). Indian Philosophy has at its foundation the notion of *Ahimsa*, non-injury. Every life is sacrosanct, whether of an ant or a human being. A few days before his execution, it appears as if he is a stranger to a dignified life and death. Every day he would intensely hear for the footsteps and be happy that twenty-four hours have been added to his agony.

Gerald Morreale tries to find some justification for Meursault's act by terming it as an act that deals with one dimension of the absurd (Morreale 456). Isn't normal of one absurd for another? Meursault's calm reaction at his mother's death appears absurd to the director of the home, the prosecutor, and the members of the jury. Undoubtedly, a reader is moved to the plight of Meursault because he's not a hard-core criminal rather far from it. He does exhibit sensitivity and concern for others throughout the novel. He lives a life free of ulterior motives. Capital punishment for him is undeniably wrong. A murder may not be a wanton act of killing. Nevertheless, someone has been killed and someone killed. This novel decries the judicial system of those times and a significant portion of it also highlights the callousness of capital punishment. In haste to project a man as a saint

pitied against the judicial system, we cannot overlook the fact that why he is in that courtroom in the first place. Whether Meursault is indifferent to his mother's death or not is his personal choice. A reader can concede that he is not being tried in the court of law because of the absence of tears at his mother's funeral. He is there because he committed a murder. At the beach, he was free to choose his course of action, whether to shoot the Arab or turn around was his choice. We are free to choose but we are not free from the consequence of our actions. The law condemns him and his appeal is rejected. Had he once appealed to his inner self, he could have exonerated himself. The novel concludes on Meursault's egotistical delights. While he had time he rambles on playing his memories on loop mode without contemplating on why he is in jail. It is a well-known fact that the world outside is a reflection of the world inside. Meursault also finds the indifference of the world so much like himself. He is penalized for his indifference to another life. The jury is indifferent to whatever is good in him. Abraded by the indifference of the legal system, he snubs the natural human response to committing an odious cold-blooded action. However subdued, he cannot ignore his inner voice in the end and therefore, he wants that people should hate him for his iniquitous deed. The novel concludes as Meursault says to himself, "I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and they greet me with cries of hate" (Ward 123). A detached reader will not fail to see that Meursault is neither a saint nor a monster but a human. And to err is human. The distance between a human being and being human is a tightrope walk..

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## Interpreting the Colonial History of New Zealand's Racialized Subalterns: A Reading of Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries*

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### *Abstract*

*In settler colonies, the indigenous and the migrants from the non-European world were subjected to similar forms of racial oppression by the dominating western tradition that ruled the colonial terrene. Any group of people who are politically, ethnically and geographically outside the hegemonic power structures are recognized as subalterns today. A term that is used to study the colonized people is adapted to denote the indigenous and the ethnic minorities in a settler colonial context. In the Eurocentric colonial history of New Zealand, the role played by the immigrants and the natives, in shaping the nation is often side-lined. Eleanor Catton, in her Booker Prize winning novel, *The Luminaries* (2013), throws light on these lacklustre subaltern lives. The paper analyses Catton's choice to give equal voice to the struggles of the ethnic subalterns in her novel, as a way in which she tries to reimagine the colonial past of New Zealand. The paper further examines language, labour and land as tools used by the domineering Anglo-centric colonialist for oppressing the racial subalterns in the novel.*

*Keywords: New Zealand, Māori, Chinese, Eurocentric, subaltern*

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The term 'subaltern' introduced by Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci, has evolved to denote any person or community deemed as of an 'inferior rank' due to their race, class, gender or ethnicity. The subaltern studies began as an endeavour of rewriting the history of South Asia separate from its colonialist chains in 1980's, with its prominent scholars based there. According to Byrd, Jodi and Michael Rothberg, the post-colonial studies has an “over-reliance on models of colonialism in South Asia and Africa that do not necessarily speak to the settler colonies of Americas, Australia and New Zealand” (1). According to them it was Gayatri Spivak's engagement in the subaltern studies that brought it close to the scholars of ethnic and minority discourses on a global scale.

Gramsci has described that even though the subaltern have a complex history of their own, the 'official history' accepted is that of the dominant classes alone. There was an excessive migration of people of different ethnicities to settler colonies that began with the European settlement, but is often not properly represented in historical discourses. Even in a settler nation like New Zealand, which is essentially a multicultural society today, Phoebe H. Li in *A Virtual Chinatown* has written about the lack of attention paid by the existing scholars to the early history of New Zealand from “the point of view of ethnic minority settlers”(42).

In New Zealand, the British settlement was established with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 between the representatives of the British Crown and the various Māori tribal chiefs. The Treaty has an English and Māori version and the two differ in many aspects especially regarding the meaning of sovereignty and ownership of land. Subsequent years many disagreements regarding the Treaty were made by the indigenous often accusing the British of illegally acquiring the lands owned by the Māori. A series of wars known as Land wars or the Māori wars were fought between 1845 and 1872 over the sales and ownership of lands and Māori's resistance to acknowledge the Crown's sovereignty. The Australian Frontier wars were similar forms of violent resistance by the Aboriginal Australians against the white settlers' unlawful acquisition of native lands. The indigenous



people often degraded as 'uncivilised' by the European 'civilised' colonialists, had historically been the victims of theft of their own land which makes us redefine the notion of being 'civilised' in a colonial discourse. A similar Series of Wars were also fought in China against the British known as the Opium Wars, triggered by the official seizure of illegal opium stocks in Canton, China. The wars ended with signing of many 'unequal treaties,' starting with the Treaty of Nanking (1842), mainly based on British conditions imposing restrictions on Chinese Sovereignty. The British had used similar techniques of unequal Treaty signing with the Māori in New Zealand and with the Chinese in China. Catton in *The Luminaries* alludes to all these injustices done by the British from the point of view of the racialized subalterns--the *tangatawhenua* (people of the land) Māori and the earliest and largest non-European immigrants in New Zealand, the Chinese.

*The Luminaries* set in the colonial period (1866) in the gold mines of Hokitika in the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island is primarily an astrological murder mystery. The novel tracks the European man, Walter Moody, a newly arrived prospector in the goldmines, who gatecrashes a secret gathering of twelve men in the smoking room of Crown Hotel in Hokitika. These men had gathered to discuss a series of mysterious events that had happened in the town--a murder of a hermit, the disappearance of a wealthy man and the town's favourite whore arrested for trying to commit suicide, all happening on the same night. The gathering consisted mostly of White European men, who were directly or indirectly affected by these events. Their different points of view and experiences revolving around the crimes form the thread of the lengthy book. Catton has given ample space for portraying the colonial racism suffered by the two Chinese immigrants and the native Māori man present among the twelve men.

The White colonialist's prejudiced portrayal of the indigenous as barbaric 'heathens' and Chinese as 'yellow perils,' threatening their dream of 'White settler colonies' in the late 19th century are questioned by Catton through highlighting the struggles of the ill-treated Chinese migrants and the Māori stripped off their own land, and by giving them equal voice and status of representation in the novel equivalent to other European characters. Oppression operates at different levels depending on the position of the socio-cultural power hierarchy. In a colonial discourse, discrimination is the mistreatment of migrants and the abuse of the indigenous people by the colonial powers. The two Chinese migrants and the indigenous Māori in the novel are treated as the 'other' and are persecuted for their predicament in an essentially, western white male dominated colonial society. Catton, through the narrative presents history from the point-of-view of these coloured races and offers an in-depth analysis of how discrimination through language, alienation, racial prejudices, exploitation of land and labour, paves way for persecuting the ethnic subalterns in a colonial background.

Language has historically been used as a tool of segregation by the European colonial powers particularly in settler colonies. In 1901 an Immigration Restriction Act was passed in Australia as a foundation for the Australian White Policy which made mandated that a person who wishes to migrate to Australia had to give a test that was only in any of the European languages. A person from China had to learn English, Spanish, Italian or all the European languages in order to migrate to the country. Following the Australian model of demarcation based on language, New Zealand also made an English reading test mandatory for Chinese to enter the country in 1907. Catton's historical novel reveals that such acts of language based segregation had longer history. She portrays how language is a form of oppression, hindering the non-English speaking colonial subjects even from voicing their perception.

The subaltern theory garnered distinction with the publication of Spivak's epoch making essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985). Ian Buchanan explains her answer to this vexed question:

The subaltern cannot speak insofar as he/she remains a subaltern--by definition subaltern is politically mute, unable to voice their perspective. (447)

The magnitude of the 'linguistic and discursive erasure' of voicing one's disconsolate state is intensified when the oppressed is in a foreign land without the knowledge of the foreign language.



Language is a great barrier and a tool of subjection as the non-English speaking people are often unaware of the subjugation they are subjected to without their conscious knowledge. The Anglophone majority takes advantage of the language obstacle and uses it as an opportunity to create dominance over the non-English speaking subaltern, thus ensuring linguistic imperialism.

In *The Luminaries*, the language barrier and communication gap is brought forth when Sook, the Chinese man is wrongly arrested in Sydney for the murder of a hotel worker. Catton writes:

Sook could not make head or tail of the questions that were put to him in English... He was not afforded the courtesy of a translator . . . The case was heard in English, and Sook . . . understood virtually none of it. (456)

He had to face such injustices because he was outside the realm of care or concern of the authority, an 'other' in an essentially white privileged society. Sook leaves China as his family business of tea exports had failed and his father was executed for harbouring opium in their warehouse. He trusted Francis Carver, a Chinese-born White man, only to discover later that Carver had cheated on his family and had used their warehouse for smuggling banned opium into China. Sook's family was a victim of the British harbouring illegal opium trade in China that had historically led to the Opium Wars referred earlier. Carver, a vicious villain, had made use of the Chinese men's trust and of their ignorance of English language. Catton pictures the historical abuse of the subaltern through language.

In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin observe: "Language becomes the medium through which hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated" (7). The 'dominant' settler's language gets to play when Dick Mannering, a gold field's magnet accuses Quee, the other Chinese man of stealing gold. Quee lacks words to vindicate his innocence. The language barrier thus makes it elusive for the Chinese subaltern to speak up and justify their actions or to voice their rights in a colonial setting and makes them vulnerable and neglected as the 'other.'

Tauwhare, the only native Māori man in the novel is fluent in English; but all through the book every Pākehā (European or of European descent) character assumes he cannot read since he is a native Māori, whom they expect to be illiterate and primitive without the luxury of any 'civilised' privileges. The Englishmen are also reluctant to acknowledge that a native Māori man can speak their dominant English language with ease and try to trivialise it. Balfour on hearing Tauwhare speak in English tells him "You've got a bit of English--good!" and the proud Māori man retorts: "I am told I speak your language very well." The white man's innate supremacy doesn't allow a native to earn an equal status by learning his language and so Balfour tries to take credit for teaching the 'heathen' his language asking if his fellow European Crosbie taught him, 'a bit of English.' The Europeans' ignorance of the Māori language or culture is never seen as a 'lack of ability.' Māori "language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power" (Ashcroft 9). The Englishman's limited monolingual intelligence is never made fun of, rather presented as a thing to be proud of in the English-centric colonial setting.

For the Chinese and the Māori, English was only another language, for the British, it was an implement for colonial subjugation and marginalisation of the non-Anglophones. It was also an argument in proclaiming the English-man's precedence over the subaltern, denying them any chance to feel equal to the domineering colonialists.

The Chinese were seen as a threat to the 19<sup>th</sup> century endeavour of "establishing New Zealand as a 'Better Britain' or a 'Britain of the South' in which English class distinctions were preserved" (King 172). Various associations opposing the Chinese immigration had emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century including Anti-Chinese Association, the Anti-Asiatic League and the White New Zealand League. The Chinese were also seen as a danger to the 'White Australian Policy; the anti-Chinese riots at the Lambing Flat goldfield in New South Wales, Australia in 1861 can be seen as the proof of the antipathy for the Chinese, evident throughout the settler colonies. The Eurocentric settler society of New Zealand where "everyone's from somewhere else" (Catton 14), alienated the non-Europeans, even the native of the land, the Māori, were considered outcasts in their own land. The

white settlers have an inherent belief of superiority vis a vis other social and cultural sections as subordinates and inferior. The Europeans in the novel are sceptic and distrustful about the Chinese inhabitants of Hokitika. One of the White characters, Nilssen, is described as firm in his belief that the Chinese men were duplicitous, regardless of any disproof he might encounter. (284)

When Quee is accused of theft, Dick Mannering, physically abuses him and threatens to kill him if Quee doesn't tell him the truth. He tries to strip the subaltern of human consideration by calling him 'yellow devil.' The Chinese are not considered as humans in need of equal rights even in the eyes of law. Mannering tortured Quee in his own house in front of other white settlers who 'witnessed the prosecution' but no one came to Quee's aid, afraid to suffer the wrath of a rich white man. Mannering arbitrarily tortured them with a sadistic pleasure of seeing the inferior hurt, thereby reasserting his superior status over the tyrannized. The humiliation that they were put through was because Mannering was not ready to believe Quee's side of the story and lay blame on a fellow white settler. Quee later sheds light on the menial migrant lives they were living at the edge of the world,

Chinese life is cheap in this country . . . Today you saw a man strike me . . . insult me, and threaten me with death--all without consequence. And there will be no consequence. Every man in Hokitika would sooner take Mannering's part than mine, and why? Because I am a Chinese and he is not Chinese. You and I *must* help each other; Sook. We must. The law is united against us; and we must have the means to unite against the law. (325)

For Quee, finding brotherhood and unity among the repressed subaltern was the only way they could find a voice of 'resistance' against the imperial power. Later in the novel Sook is killed by George Shepard, the gaoler in charge of law in Hokitika, who was also the brother of the man Sook was wrongly accused of murdering in Sydney. Shepard strictly acting 'inside the law' with a warrant, shoots Sook, accusing him of possessing a pistol to kill the White man Carver. Shepard is not ready to believe his wife who had told him the truth of Sook's innocence in his brother's murder. The prejudice against the Chinaman gets the better of him, and he goes against the law to kill the Chinese for revenge. The worthlessness of the lives of the racial subalterns even in the eyes of the protectors of law, is portrayed by Catton through Sook.

Edward Said conceptualised 'Orientalism' as the disdainful way that the Imperialist West had portrayed the 'East,' but in settler colonies, it has been elaborated furthermore to include the native subaltern's misrepresentation. Among the multitudinous cast of characters in *The Luminaries*, set predominantly in New Zealand, there is only one indigenous character, the Māori man Tauwhare. All the men in the novel have a discriminatory view of him as a primitive brute. Nonetheless Catton has portrayed Tauwhare as a competent carver of *pounamu* (greenstone) and describes him as a self-assured man who doesn't need anyone else's validation to know his self-worth:

He possessed a deeply private arrogance, a bedrock of self-certainty that needed neither proof nor explication . . . He simply knew that he was better than most other men. (98)

Catton writes from Māori's standpoint about his aversion in being treated as a subservient. For him these white settlers were on his land and saw no reason to see them as better than himself or his people. Crosbie Wells, the murdered man, is the only person in the story who treated Tauwhare with respect. He admires his indigenous culture, his people and his native language. But even Crosbie is not able to break free from the vestiges of the preconceived notions of racism ingrained in his colonial psyche. In a letter, he calls his newly found friend "a noble savage of the first degree" (792). Thomas Balfour, an English shipping agent, struggles to pronounce Tauwhare's name, tries to forge a new anglicised identity for Tauwhare,

How about I call you Ted? That's a good British name for you. Short for Theodore or Edward--you can choose. Edward's a nice name. (96)

In trying to change a man's name, Balfour is trying, like his fellow imperials, to strip a man of his identity and cast an identity that suits his imperial ulterior motives. Balfour even has the 'big heart' to give Tauwhare options, to choose his own name! Tauwhare, an intelligent man pays Balfour in the

same coin, and calls him 'Tamati' in Māori.

The Western colonial expansion goals were made at the expense of throwing the natives out of their lands either by treachery or by violence. Historical Treaties of injustices and inequalities, signed between the imperialists and the racial subalterns, were the means for it. The reminiscence of both, the Chinese Quee and of the Māori Tauwhare are similar, regarding the manner in which the colonisers had betrayed them and their land. For Quee, the Opium drug that the British had used illegally to gain trade dominance in China was:

. . . a symbol, signifying the unforgivable depths of Western barbarism towards his civilisation, and the contempt with which the Chinese life was held, in the face of the lifeless Western goals of profit and greed. (260)

Quee is a representative of many immigrants who were forced to leave their homeland in search of money under contract to surrender the majority percentage of their hard earned money on the gold fields to a corporate purse in exchange for the cost of his travel.

In 1881, New Zealand passed the Chinese Immigrants Act, imposing a 'poll tax' on the Chinese immigrants' entry and restricting the number of Chinese entering New Zealand in a single ship. The Chinese were held with contempt in New Zealand even if they 'worked like Trojans' as one of the characters observes in the novel. They weren't given proper credit or wages for their hard work in addition to the humiliation they underwent in a work environment with no security as Quee remarks, "you know many Chinese men who make their livings out of tailing piles . . . and then they are beaten, even killed, by those men whose eyes were not as sharp" (323). They were forced out of their motherlands in search of labour to escape starvation but were exploited and victimised even in a foreign land.

The Australian lands were acquired by the British giving nothing to the Aboriginals by proclaiming Australia as 'terra nullius' (nobody's land). They had thus justified their unlawful capturing of native lands without any Treaty or any payment. Māori were similarly betrayed by the Crown as part of its imperial expansion scheme, but, with the Treaty of Waitangi. Māori who were the *tangatawhenua* of New Zealand were spiritually attached to their land. Their concepts of *mana* (spiritual life force) and *tapu* (sacred) hills and rivers were seen as barbaric traditions by the settlers, however for the Māori, it was a way for them to be attached to their roots of Polynesian culture passed along generations through their rich oral tradition. Tauwhare, the only character in the novel, named after a real *Ngai Tahu* person because of Catton's respect for Māori *whakapapa* (genealogy), reflects on how his *iwi* (community) that had commanded the entire western coast of the island had been cheated out of their land by the British who purchased the extensive tract of land for a trifling sum of three hundred pounds, reserving only a patch of the land for the indigenous. Catton here refers directly to the unfairness of the Treaty of Waitangi hailed as the foundation document of the formation of New Zealand. The Crown had taken advantage of the limited knowledge of the natives regarding the monetary transactions. But Tauwhare and his people realised the purchase as 'patent theft' later when they saw diggers purchasing the land for greater price in pursuit of gold "whose aggregate value was so colossal it had not been given a value" (99). The Māori had been demeaned to do 'odd jobs' for the settlers, who were acquiring wealth which ought to have belonged to the natives.

The ending of the novel with the Māori man killing the wicked White man Carver, who had also wronged the Chinese men, could be seen as a form of resistance of the subaltern against the Imperial's injustices. It's only through such a radical violent act that they can make themselves visible and heard, and come out of their silenced nonexistence of 'cultural and linguistic erasure' forced on them.

*The Luminaries* portrays the European characters not as the 'Gentlemen of the West coast' as they are traditionally portrayed in the colonial Eurocentric narratives, but as selfish, betraying and manipulative people. Moreover, Catton doesn't represent the indigenous Māori or the 'Orient' as primitive barbaric heathens, but voices their perspective to present them many a time as better human

beings than the exploiting profit minded oppressive west in the novel. Eleanor Catton, a Pākehā woman writer, through the historical novel about her colonial ancestors, has been successful in integrating the voice of the colonised subaltern in her story. The colonialists, along with deceiving the indigenous and Chinese ethnic minorities of their land, exploiting their labour and by segregating them on the basis of race and language, had also distorted their image in history. As Partha Chatterjee has pointed out in his essay, “Peasants, Politics and Historiography: A Response:”

The task now is to fill up . . . the representations of subaltern consciousness in elitist historiography. It must be given its own specific content with its own history of development . . . Only then can we recreate not merely a whole aspect of human history whose existence elitist historiography has hitherto denied, but also the history of the 'modern' period. (62)

Catton has skilfully and convincingly accomplished the task of representing the subaltern consciousness to rewrite the history of the multicultural modern society of New Zealand. By bringing to light the dark history of social exploitation and cultural discrimination that the racialized subalterns were subjected to in the imperial history of New Zealand, she has reiterated history, thus lending an equal voice and heritage to the multi-ethnicities residing in the country today who were left without a past in the traditional narratives.

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## Dissonance between Art and Religion in Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red*

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### *Abstract*

*My Name is Red*, like some of Pamuk's other novels, is themed around certain vital arguments which define the dynamics of the East-West civilizational clash. However the line of reasoning that defines the essence of the book is how religion and art interact to define the contours of the domain of artistic representation. The novel interprets the complications involved in attempts at freeing art from religious or spiritual concerns in a society which is largely committed to religious values and ideas and is impervious to any change which tends to compromise its position vis-à-vis artistic expression and representation. The Ottoman miniaturists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (the historical period in which the novel is set) had to deal with a difficult situation. They were cognizant of the fact that they were required to practice art within the confines of the idea of acceptability defined by religious perspective. Therefore, there was negligible margin for any slackness in relation to representation of the world of creation through art. Audacity in this regard would be tantamount to challenging divine creative authority which was perceived as unique and inimitable.

The paper examines the strife caused by the confrontational attitudes taken up by art and religion where each struggles vigorously to gain ascendancy over the other. Artistic perceptions which are diametrically opposed make it difficult for the artist to subject his art to one particular style. There is an interminable tussle between miniaturists who conform to the artistic creed which espouses audacious change and the ones who uphold a style which adheres to religious injunctions. This inconsistency, in turn, has a telling impact on the art of representation.

*Keywords:* Art, representation, religion, miniature, figural art.

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Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* is an intriguing murder mystery set in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century Istanbul. As the miniaturist Black, the protagonist of the novel, returns to Istanbul to assist his uncle in illuminating a book commissioned by the Sultan he gets caught up in a complicated situation which is engendered by the brutal murder of another artist named Elegant Effendi. The story engrossingly oscillates between the various attempts that are made at resolving the mystery surrounding Elegant's death and Black's frantic struggle to seek the affection of his charming cousin, Shekure. The narrative also demonstrates the amount of skill and caution that the miniaturists need to exercise in order to ensure that there is not even the barest trace of profanity in their art.

As Black tries to reconnect with Shekure after a long absence, she is very guarded as regards expressing her true feelings for him. Her inhibitions are fueled by the uncertainty surrounding her husband's return from the war he went to fight years back as well as by her brother-in-law's unrequited love for her.

After Enishte's brutal Murder, Shekure, owing to Black's strenuous efforts, manages to get a divorce from her missing husband in absentia. Shekure and Black get married but Shekure is reluctant



to indulge in usual nuptial intimacy with her new husband till the matter of Enishte's murder is resolved.

A serious investigation is launched to resolve the mystery in which Master Osman, the Head illuminator also gets involved. As Black gets the feeling that the investigation is proving to be inconclusive he takes it upon himself to get to the bottom of it. With help of his comrades Butterfly and Stork, he is finally able to find out that the murderer is Olive, one of their fellow miniaturists. Enishte and Elegant are eventually avenged, not by Black but by Hasan, Shekure's brother in law, who impales Olive owing to a misunderstanding caused by the dramatic turn of events towards the end. Black ultimately reunites with Shekure.

The novel illustrates how the Western influences vis-à-vis painting put the originality of the Ottoman art (painting) on the line. Building on this ground it comes to the narrativisation of the problems pertaining to the secularization of art with reference to the Ottoman miniaturists. Elegant Effendi's is put death by a fellow miniaturist who is antipathetic to the Western style of painting and regards adherence to it as sacrilegious. The same miniaturist later goes on to kill Enishte under whose supervision the miniaturists were working on an illustrated book commissioned by the Sultan.

At a city coffeehouse a pert raconteur decides to narrate a series of amusing stories. The stories, which eventually turn out to be ones marked by disrespectful levity and casualness bordering on blasphemy, are drawn from drawings furnished by the miniaturists. Owing to his sacrilegious performances the storyteller is later done to death by a frenzied crowd members of which owe allegiance to a preacher from Erzurum named Nusret according to whom all the afflictions and troubles in which Istanbul finds itself entangled are precipitated by the inability of its denizens to follow the Scripture with purpose and seriousness. Pamuk writes:

A cleric by the name of Nusret, who preached at the Bayazid Mosque and claimed to be descended from Our Glorious Prophet Muhammad, had made a name for himself during this period of immorality, inflation, crime and theft. This hoja, who was from the small town of Erzurum, attributed the catastrophes that had befallen Istanbul in the last ten years—including the Bahçekapı and Kazanjılar district fires, the plagues that claimed tens of thousands, the endless wars with the Persians at a cost of countless lives, as well as the loss of small Ottoman fortresses in the West to Christians in revolt—to our having strayed from the path of the Prophet, to disregard for the strictures of the Glorious Koran, to the tolerance toward Christians, to the open sale of wine and to the playing of musical instruments in dervish houses. (12-13)

The painters too realized full well that they were supposed to demonstrate their artistic prowess within a domain in which it was exceedingly difficult to differentiate between activities which would be considered acceptable and the ones which can prove to be ungodly and therefore ruinous and self-destructive for them. Any laxness or inaccuracy in conforming to the prescribed limits would amount to making an attempt to match the Creator's incomparable creative dexterity. All the aspects of the Persian style of painting reaffirmed replication of the world of creation in its pristine form, that is to say, as seen by the Creator after having brought it into existence. This is precisely the reason why the miniaturists following the Persian style take utmost care to represent objects of creation as if they belong not to the sublunary world but to the celestial realm. Their art magnifies the colorfulness, grandeur and stateliness of these objects as being reflective of devotion and faith. Any deviation, as most of them believed, could make them stray into forbidden realm. Black argues:

“There's much that an artist with a clear conscience has to fear in our day,” ... Indeed, no one has anything to say against decoration, but pictures are forbidden by our faith. Because the illustrations of the Persian masters and even the masterpieces of the greatest masters of Herat are ultimately seen as an extension of border ornamentation, no one would take issue with them, reasoning that they enhanced the beauty of writing and the magnificence of



calligraphy. And who sees our painting anyway? However, as we make use of the methods of the Franks, our painting is becoming less focused on ornamentation and intricate design and more on straightforward representation. This is what the Glorious Koran forbids and what displeased Our Prophet. (632-33)

*My Name is Red* ingeniously discourses about the comparative merits of Western and Ottoman miniature painting and also draws attention to the irreconcilability of Western and Islamic style of painting. Artistic representation of objects of creation while conforming to the essential teachings of Islam is a tight rope walk where the slightest lack of caution can be misconstrued as transgression. Miniature painting is therefore a means of justifying certain artistic excesses which would otherwise been seen as blasphemous. Illustrations that lend poignancy and visual appeal to the narratives which they supplement are seen as seen as secondary even if they happen to bestride the text. Moreover the Islamic style of painting focusses more on bringing the essence of all creation to the fore by impinging on the spiritual self. In "A Pedagogy of Two Ways of Seeing: A Confrontation of "Word and Image" in *My Name is Red*" Feride Çiçekoglu writes:

The tradition of miniature painting, the illumination and illustration of narrative texts, which legitimized itself as the art of the book, may be interpreted as a way of dealing with the iconoclastic tradition of Islam. In this context, images are not seen as things-in-themselves but they are treated as "footnotes" even when the image seems to dominate the written word on the page. Image-making becomes an extension of the text, rather than an independent art. It serves the purposes of the words for a better understanding of the meaning, for a description of the aura of the narration, for the depiction of the images the reader of the story will paint in the mind's eye. Images, it has been said, do not represent real life; they are an externalization of the inner life. Thus, contrary to meaning and interpretation in Western art, the meaning in Islamic illumination is "inwards, converging on a private truth" rather than disclosing itself with an "outwards movement". (1)

There is conspicuous hostility between artists who wish to pursue the Western style of painting and the ones who are quite content to practice their art within the limits set by religion. Artistic prowess, can have a grossly deleterious impact on the artist if it tends to stem from partisan interests or political leanings which are often motivated by adherence to a particular faith. The idea is best exemplified through the perennial tussle between the two aforementioned groups in the novel in question. Things get more troublesome when there is such artistic strife within a conservative environment like the one patronized by the Ottomans. Practice of art is a highly sensitive and intricate matter and the antipathy between artistic ideologies is mainly because of the way in which artistic forms are exploited. *My Name is Red* not only draws attention to the complicated barrier between East and West but also points to state of disharmony vis-a-vis imperial identities which are shaped, more of than not, by conflicting interpretations of religious instruction concerning practice of art. As a writer Pamuk is utterly curious about examining political convictions and opinions which are often pictured as reasons for civilizational disagreements. He believes that identities are forged when cultures come together.

Islam, unlike some other religions, does not encourage representation through painting which makes it exceeding difficult for miniaturists to adhere to the code which governs the practice or otherwise of the art of painting. Artistic representation of objects of creation is considered to be the duplication of the Almighty's creative prowess and is therefore seen as irreverential as well as deplorable. The general reception of audacious artistic representation depended on understanding of the existence and nature of the divine and its relationship to and influence upon other beings. Actual approval of it was linked to the various religious interpretations, coming from religious scholars, which largely shaped artistic appreciation. Notwithstanding these trammels set around explicit

representation, compromises between apparently irreconcilable extremes were often made under the patronage of the ruling emperors. Arguing that the novel is based on the problematization of this disruptive divide between uninhibited artistic expression and religious conservatism, Feride Çiçekoglu writes:

*My Name is Red* is constructed along fault lines of this contradiction and can be read not only as the struggle for depiction and visual representation against the conservative interpretation of religion, but also as a manifestation of the conflicts arising from the interpretation of Islam as to which forms of representation are permissible and which are not. In this sense, although the novel takes place in Istanbul, it is a universal story. (9)

As mentioned at the outset the novel is set in the sixteenth century and brings back to life the bygone Ottoman epoch whose quintessence is enshrined in the many texts illustrated mostly in Istanbul. The emperor known to the Turks as Sultan, would enjoy the dominion granted to him both by religion and by State. The manuscript which is central to the plot is commissioned surreptitiously by the Sultan to commemorate one thousand years of *Hijrah* (Prophet Muhammad's migration from Makkah to Madina). Nevertheless, in compliance with the Sultan's instructions attempts are made to illustrate the book in accordance with the Western style of representation, under the supervision of the seasoned artist, Enishte. Owing to its controversial contents – representations of images which may smack of impiety – the Sultan ensures that the plan is kept under wraps. The Sultan is guarded in his approach also because the project challenges some of the fundamental Islamic tenets vis-à-vis the art of representation. This is precisely why the conservative preacher from Erzurum, Nusret Hoja, launches a scathing attack against the book labeling it as disrespectful and unacceptable. Both Elegant Effendi and Enishte Effendi become the victims of hate engendered by a particular perception or interpretation of pictorial art. The point is reinforced by the fact that the hunt for tracking down the murderer, after finding reliable evidence, relies heavily on the close scrutiny of the illustrations. In his article “Secular Blasphemies: Orhan Pamuk and the Turkish Novel” Erdağ Göknaar, while referring to the duality of Islamic pictorial representation remarks:

The characters must negotiate the contradictions posed by two poles of authority—secular and religious—in order to discover the murderer's identity and complete the production of the book. In a signature gesture of cultural translation, Pamuk adopts the flat two-dimensionality of the Islamic miniature as his formal model for the contemporary novel. By doing so, he inverts the formula of "European" form versus "local" content that dominates some literary understandings of national traditions. (316)

Islamic mysticism viewed the world of creation differently. This unique perception defined the way in which the Ottoman miniaturists perceived the circumambient universe. Consequently, throughout the Ottoman era the art of pictorial representation was surrounded with intricacies which were not easy to negotiate. It required a lot of caution and effort to remain within the confines of what was seen as permissible with regard to religious instruction. The Ottoman appreciation and representation of beauty was a far cry from the Western perception of figural art which believed in graphic and concrete reproduction, through art, of animate objects. Accordingly the representations of Ottoman miniaturists were symbolic and idealized in nature and lacked the direct representation of the typical or familiar in real life. They were conscious of the fact that world of movement and activity, like life itself, was ephemeral. This kept them from dwelling too much on the representation of entities which have a real existence.

The essential values of the Islamic mystical tradition make its adherents see the world perceptible to senses as a manifestation of the reality which is above and independent of the material universe. This accounts for the representation, in the works of many Ottoman painters, of the non-specific, incorporeal and conceptual images. Staunch exponents of the Eastern style of painting found it exceedingly difficult to switch, in accordance with the whims and caprices of the Sultans, from their own style of representation to the one which was noticeably different from it. The marked

discordance between the Eastern and Western styles of painting is mainly because of civilization incompatibility vis-à-vis perception and appreciation style of beauty. This strife between the two traditions, however, does not imply that the Eastern style of painting is unidimensional owing to its adherence to a particular perspective. The novel, *My Name is Red* exemplifies the independence and self-reliance of some miniaturists in the face of a compelling prescriptions seeking allegiance to the idea of representational homogeneity. However the narrative suggests that attempts at diverging from the commonly accepted and practiced style can have disastrous consequences for the miniaturists. Elegant Effendi is a devotee of the style of painting which believes in abstinence from deviational representation. His brutal murder therefore brings to the fore a number of voices that point to the interrelation of different styles and points of view. In their paper Heteroglossic Sprees and Murderous Viewpoints in Orhan Pamuk's "*My Name Is Red*" Author(s): Barish Ali and Caroline Hagood argue that pictorial representation was only thought of as legal and justifiable if it supplemented the text that went with it. They further argue that the narratological proposition of the novel is how these representations created a voice capable of bringing about a stimulating change:

And since the very rationalization for the "lawful" existence of miniaturist art was that they were subordinate to any accompanying text, the narratological premise of *My Name Is Red* is precisely how these images are given voice - and therefore narrative primacy - by the storyteller, how these voices come into contact with one another, and subsequently how they are rendered as written text. (509)

Although *My Name is Red*, like most of Pamuk's other novels, embodies a variety of themes the focus remains on the deeply ingrained virulence between the East and the West which the author accentuates by juxtaposing the two cultures. The socio-religious temperament impacts not only the distinctive character of a place but also its essential aesthetics. In Pamuk's fiction, the city of Istanbul assumes intriguing symbolic proportions as the tussle between the two cultures continues forcefully with one trying to subsume the other. Master Osman, in spite of the inconsistencies, imbalances and imperfections to which the author points, is depicted as the upholder and proponent of the Herat style. Some of his works aberrate from the basic tenets of the tradition to which he adheres and tend to slide overtly towards representational art. The novel comes across as a doorway leading to the process of Pamuk's cerebration vis-a-vis a tradition influenced and defined by religious ethos and the artist's valiant attempts to break free of the traditional shackles. Pamuk examines the coexistence of disparate sometimes antagonistic artistic elements which represent unquestioning faith in religion and a predilection for greater freedom in representation respectively.

Like other novels of Pamuk, *My Name is Red* is observably suggestive of his versatility as a writer. Like James Joyce he perceives the universal in the particular surcharging his own narrations with an overarching character. He brings to the fore the dichotomy between varying artistic perceptions and, in so doing, rejects blind devotion to a particular form of miniaturist art. Pamuk understands full well that there would always be a school, seeking to depart from the traditional ideas vis-a-vis representation, existing side by side with another school which would perpetually espouse figural art and its unquestioning veneration. In spite of the peculiar short comings, both schools have their own principles and convictions but continue remain irreconcilable. And strife between them determines, to large extent, the dynamics of the existing world of representation.

*My Name is Red* is an intriguing novel, not only because it deals with the engrossing subject of artistic representation but also because it is set in a period of history which is significant both in terms of the catholicity of art and the strife caused by the discord between religion and aesthetic. Pamuk looks at the intricacies of the world of representation using a story which has multiple levels and layers of signification. He familiarizes the reader with the very fabric of the world of representation in which images assume surreal proportions.

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## Harem Revisited: An Arab Feminist Writes Back

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### *Abstract*

*The word harem conjures up the image of a space inhabited by exotic, oriental women who are “sexually available.” This image dominates the Oriental discourse perpetuated by the West. Egyptian feminist Leila Ahmed in her groundbreaking essay, “Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem” deconstructs the harem of Western male sexual fantasy as an “orgiastic feast” or of western Eurocentric feminists as a prison and introduces the domestic harem of her childhood. The latter represents a community of women freely exchanging ideas and supporting one another against the whims and fancies of a patriarchal culture, resembling more like today's women's communes. Her argument is supported by her personal experience of staying in a harem as traced in her memoir, *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America--A Woman's Journey*. Harem, far from being accessible to strangers, signified a sanctuary for the women of the family where even the males asked permission before entering. The paper undertakes to analyze Ahmed's essay in dialogue with her memoir. In her essay, she denounces the harem that dominates the Western imagination. The paper takes note of this important intervention from the Middle-East and acknowledges the contribution of Arab feminists in correcting the fallacies and assumptions of the mainstream Western liberal feminism. She rejects such simplistic notions that harem is disempowering or Islam is oppressive. These feminist interventions from the Middle-East form an important part of the discourse by “women of color” and deserve their place in the postcolonial feminist discourse.*

*Keywords: Harem, Arab, Muslim, Post-colonial, memoir, feminist*

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### **Introduction**

Non-western feminist poetics has a peripheral presence in the Western academy. Many feminists/activists/women writers from the Middle Eastern countries studying or working in the West are engaged in preventing the white middle-class Eurocentric feminists from defining their own preoccupations as universal feminist challenges. Tracing the direction of feminist scholarship in broader Middle East, Therese Saliba observes that the last two decades have witnessed the proliferation of the post-orientalist scholarship which consisted of a critique of “exoticized, reductive representation of Oriental and Muslim women oppressed by their culture” (1087). This critique was triggered by the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. “Third World” feminist critics Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanti define the role non-western feminists are supposed to play in this scenario. Spivak shifts the focus from the issue of sexual difference to the reality of cultural difference among women from diverse backgrounds and nationalities. “She rejects the tendency of Western feminists to intervene in/interpret the experiences of 'Third World' women from their subject position” (Mukhopadhyay 91). Mohanty advocates that feminist projects involving women from the non-western countries must address themselves to the internal critique of hegemonic western feminisms. In addition, they must also formulate “autonomous feminist concerns and strategies that are geographically, historically and culturally grounded” (Mohanty 17). The essay and the memoir under examination perform both the functions as these address the marginalization of women in their societies and throw light on the individual modes of resistance they developed over time. At the same time, they critique the undue attention paid by Western feminists to the “oppressive

nature” of harem, veil and Islam. The essay, “Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem” by Egyptian academician Leila Ahmed plays a pioneering role in the Middle East feminist poetics. The author begins her argument by contesting the misrepresentation of harem and its inhabitants in the western discourse. While Ahmed writes back to the west in her essay, an examination of her memoir is also relevant as the latter embodies the purport of her essay. The argument that begins in the essay is completely supported by the kind of harem life shown in the memoir. The memoir is set against a transitional period in the history of Egypt as it moves from colonialism to post-colonialism with a simultaneous emergence of Arab nationalism. Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America--A Woman's Journey* contextualizes the struggle of an Egyptian woman in her home and host countries. She deconstructs the myth of harem as a place of confinement. The text plays out in Egypt, England, the Gulf and finally the USA. She also points out the invisibility of Muslim women in the Western academic circles of which she later becomes a part. The memoir along with the essay forms part of the revisionist feminist discourse by women of color and helps in building an inclusive feminist epistemology. As such they deserve a place in the canon of feminist texts.

### Harem Revisited

Leila Ahmed hailing from an upper class Egyptian family grew up in Cairo when it was trying to throw off the yoke of British colonial rule. Her father, an engineer by profession, was very supportive of his daughter's education. As a result she and her siblings got Western style education in Cairo and Ahmed later moved to Girton College, Cambridge for higher education. The paper proposes to analyze her essay while continuously referring to her memoir, *A Border Passage*. While her essay challenges the Western notions about Arab culture and Islam, her memoir traces her journey across the border. As she crosses many geographical and metaphorical borders, she encounters prejudices against Arabs and stereotypes of Muslim women prevailing in English and American academic circles. Ahmed wrote the essay and memoir to reclaim the position denied to Muslim women in white Eurocentric feminism. She points out the invisibility of women's histories in her own patriarchal culture which she is guilty of internalizing. As a young girl, she was so desperate to throw off the influence of women around her that she thought the only escape was “to grow up to become either a man or a Westerner” (*A Border Passage* 194). She becomes conscious of the contribution of women of her mother's generation later in her life when she tries to recover them. At the same time she feels guilty of assimilating into the culture of the colonizer and believing in its superiority. She makes amends by asserting her identity as a woman of color and pointing out the invisibility of the “third world” women in the Western academic circles.

Ahmed in her essay, “Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem” attacks the Orientalism inherent in the perception that women in the harem are victims of a patriarchal religion and they must be rescued from Islam to be liberated. Ahmed argues that most American women who believe that Muslim women are oppressed actually know nothing about Islam or Middle Eastern societies. But the “powerfully evocative words” like the veil, polygamy and harem are synonymous in the west with female oppression, she avers. Of these, harem has been the source of much fascination and received maximum attention and criticism. In Ahmed's words, “The harem can be defined as a system that permits males' sexual access to more than one female. It can also be defined, with as much accuracy, as a system whereby the female relatives of a man—wives, sisters, mother, aunts, daughters—share much of their time and their living space, and further, which enables women to have frequent and easy access to other women in their community, vertically, across class lines, as well as horizontally” (524). While examining Ahmed's essay, Bernadette Andrea says that harem has been falsely equated with Italian seraglio which is a walled space saturated with sex. Another connotation of seraglio is that of a cloistered space whereas the term harem is derived from *haram* which means forbidden and sacred precinct or sanctuary. “To establish the women's quarters of a



household as harem, then, connotes neither male sexual mastery nor female imprisonment, as in the Western fantasy, but defines safeguards for women's space that restrict the movement of men into, as well as women out of, that space," observes Bernadette Andrea (5-6).

Ahmed's domestic harem celebrates women bonding and sharing. In her memoir Ahmed acknowledges the effect the continuous presence of women around her had on her. She felt safe and reassured under the supervision of older women. In the chapter aptly titled "Harem", she says, "I learned from the women, not the men. The men figured as dominant beings, naturally, but they were more like meteors, cutting a trail across our sky, causing havoc possibly, but present only briefly" (*A Border Passage* 101). She asserts that her life, as well as those of other women of the family, were embedded in women's time, women's space and women's culture during her stay in Cairo. She compares this women's space to the women communes of the West in another chapter "The Harem Perfected." As she sets foot in Girton College, Cambridge, she has a sense of *déjà vu*. She found to her surprise that Girton was a version of the community of women, similar to that of her Alexandria harem. Feminist women communes are just waking up to the strengths of women sharing in America. Ahmed thus writes back to the West by unravelling the harems of the west. She further argues, "To believe that segregated societies are by definition more oppressive to women, or that women secluded from the company of men are women deprived, is only to allow ourselves to be servilely obedient to the constructs of men, Western or Middle Eastern" ("Western Ethnocentrism" 531).

Another startling finding in her memoir is her differentiation between men's and women's Islam. Women had their own understanding of Islam. Ahmed claims that there are two quite different Islams, women's Islam and an official textual Islam which men practice and believe in. The Islam Ahmed inherited from women was "gentle, generous, pacifist, inclusive and somewhat mystical" (*A Border Passage* 121). She reasons out that men and women have different ways of knowing even in gender-integrated societies. The gulf is bound to be wider in segregated societies where both inhabit separate worlds. As Muslim women do not attend mosque and listen to clergy, theirs is an aural and oral heritage whereas men are the recipients of a textual written Islam. Ahmed explores this difference in detail in her book, *Women and Gender in Islam*.

Ahmed's memoir talks at length about the marginalization of the women of color and that of their discourse in the Western academy. When Ahmed moved to England, she could not fathom the source of her growing unease with the academic fare she was being served there. She thought that her life was irrelevant to theory. The questions that she kept relegating to the margins of her consciousness were actually the most pertinent questions. Who will define what constitutes 'true' knowledge? Whose experiences and whose perspectives should be at the centre of their studies? And whose perspective and theories should matter to them. "Neither the questions that we asked nor the theories that we studied seemed to connect much with anything that was real for me or to take up or truly address the concerns that were at the heart of my own life and thought—thought that remained private, unarticulated, relegated to the midnight hours and the margins of consciousness" (*A Border Passage* 235). She realized that what was being fed to them as knowledge and objectivity and transcendental truths were actually the intellectual beliefs and perspectives of white middle class men. She feels greater affinity with the generation of Betty Friedan who referred to the unease of the minorities, and acknowledges "We too were living in a society that insidiously and pervasively undermined our own experience, our own perspective, and our own sense of reality, and in ways that too we did not know how to speak of, and that undermined and denied too, in our case, our own histories and cultures and the foundational beliefs of our societies" (*A Border Passage* 226).

She concludes that Western feminists may have succeeded in deconstructing their culture's myths about (Western) women and their "innate inferiority and irrationality," but they continue to believe and perpetuate the same stereotypes about Muslims, including Muslim women, and about harems. Ahmed attempts to repair by acknowledging the presence of a subculture of women and a matrilineal oral heritage in her home country. Pauline Homsy Vinson thinks of Ahmed's memoir as a

resistant narrative that takes into account the “multifarious ways in which it is possible to be Arab, Muslim, female, and a postcolonial writer in a transnational historical context” (94).

Ahmed credits Edward Said with giving the “third world” a language to talk about their concerns. Said's book *Orientalism* saw through the colonial discourse and changed the intellectual landscape of her times. However, she emphasizes that the Arab identity too was fraught with difficulties. She does not approve of the kind of Arabness thrust by the hero of Arab nationalism, Gamal Abdel Nasser, on Egyptians. Finally, Ahmed rejects both westernization and this false constructed Arab identity. “To justify this position she foregrounds the lacks inherent in both Egyptian and Anglo-American societies, appealing to traditional Sufi trope of the spiritual journey as a vehicle for inner growth” (Nash 174). The title of her memoir *A Border Passage* too suggests the self as a process and not as an end.

## Conclusion

The texts under study resist the notion that Islam is inherently oppressive, its tools of oppression being veil and seclusion, major stumbling blocks in the emancipation of Muslim women. Ahmed, through her essay and memoir, problematizes the representation of Muslim women in Western academy. She argues that this simplified signification does not represent the reality of Arab Muslim women. Exposing the Western colonial attitudes toward the East, Ahmed labels the mainstream feminism as imperial feminism. There is a surge in life writing by Middle-East Muslim women since the beginning of the century. Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, who has extensively examined the intersections of feminism and post-colonialism in the memoirs written by Middle East women, says that these texts form part of the “writing back” discourse and also present an alternative to Orientalism. She is of the view that feminism and colonial discourse should complement and not oppose and be reduced to each other. This writing back is manifested most visibly in the attitudes of women writers toward harem, veiling and religion. These little known texts resist resurging orientalism as well as fundamentalism in a polarized world. They challenge the past and prevailing exotic/victimized Oriental women's representations while highlighting the diversity and differences of Muslim women's experience against the Western Feminism's tendency to universalize it.

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## Magical Realism and Waning Binaries in Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies*

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### *Abstract*

*Jokha Alharthi's second novel, Celestial Bodies proudly bagged The Man Booker International Prize for Fiction for the year 2019. The novel portrays the transmutation in the culture of Oman against its historical background. The lives of three generations are depicted and while doing so, the author engages herself in breaking the conventions of narration, patriarchy, realism, various cultural hierarchies, subverting cultural and religious metanarratives, eulogising native poetry, celebrating indigenous music and mingling history with fiction. The novel successfully preserves its Arabic flavour in its translation by Marilyn Booth. The novel thus conforms to the standards of postmodernism. The present paper will focus on the unconventional narrative technique, the vanishing binaries and the use of magical elements in the novel.*

*Keywords: Postmodernism, binaries, metanarrative, fragmentation.*

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Jokha Alharthi, the 2019 recipient of *The Man Booker International Prize for Fiction* is the first Arabic writer to win the award and first Arabic woman writer to be translated into English. The novel, *Celestial Bodies* (*Sayyidat al-qamar*) is Jokha Alharthi's second novel followed by *Narinjah* (*Mandarin Orange*) and preceded by *Manamat* (*Dreams*). The novel depicts the metamorphosis the Omani society has undergone for decades while portraying the lives of three generations of a family and its slaves. The novel is an amalgam of multiple facets of Oman's history and culture. Narrated in different voices either by omniscient author or by one of the characters, Abdallah, the plot of the novel comprises anecdotes and frequent movement in time and place. The author focuses more on how the events are narrated rather than what is being narrated. Alharthi makes brilliant use of postmodern techniques to explore human relationships, cultural myths and literary output of her native country. Alharthi deconstructs the binaries of master/slave, human beings/jinn (magical spirit), natural/supernatural, lover/beloved, present/past, fact/fancy and reality/nightmare. The conventional edge between these binaries melts away and the author reconstructs them. Apart from these features, the novel puts together the genres of poetry and prose thereby moving beyond the strict periphery of being a prose piece. The novel eulogises lesser known forms of art like Arabic poetry and indigenous songs and music. The characters are depicted as creators of music, poetry and painting. Although the novel is translated into English, yet, it retains its Arabic flavour as there is an abundant use of Arabic words and phrases throughout the text. The author has carefully evoked important historical events of Oman and blended the facts beautifully with the fiction. The novel also poses a challenge to the normative structure of the society by subverting the conventions. *Celestial Bodies*, thus appositely falls into the category of postmodern novels. The present paper focuses on the analysis of the unconventional narrative technique of the novel, waning traditional binaries and the use of magical as well as supernatural elements in the novel.

The Narrative technique plays a vital function in shaping a postmodern text as it is fragmented, comprises multiple voices and shifts frequently into past and present. The text of the novel, *Celestial Bodies* is narrated by omniscient narrator who relates incidents and anecdotes about different characters of the novel. The narrator moves back and forth in time and place, acquainting the readers with various characters and their lives. Apart from the omniscient narrator, the chapters are narrated by Abdallah, Mayya's husband. He uses first person narration to narrate his tale. Moreover,

the style of the font changes as the narration shifts from omniscient narrator to that of Abdallah. Pinto in an inarticulate way articulates about different voices, “This novel uses many varied voices and tones and some of them ring true and the others . . .” The sentence is deliberately left incomplete by Pinto to be interpreted and pondered upon by the reader.

Travelling in a plane Abdallah recalls various incidents of his life. He also throws light on the lives of other characters through his thought process. Abdallah sometimes talks silently to the airhostess in the midst his flow of thoughts. It becomes challenging for the reader to interpret his present meandering through the past. His mind addresses her, “You keep this aura of friendly care but what are you really thinking and feeling, my hostess of the air . . . I was just like you, hanging between the heavens and the earth, when I saw her [Mayya] first” (46). Thereafter, his flow of thoughts ebbs into the past and his narration is chiefly a broken chain of feelings. Throughout the text he travels through aeroplane. He usually begins his narration with his present journey then he switches off to his past. His past and present blend together. He finds himself incapable of linking the events of his past together, “I don't remember . . . I can't tie it all together” (10). He begins his narration by introducing his perturbed state of mind depicted by his narration. He recalls different incidents having no correlation in every new sentence. His narrative patchwork thus begins:

The airplane hurtled forward, pitching into heavy clouds. I could not get my eyes to close even though I knew it would be hours before we reached Frankfurt. When women were starting to have babies in Felicity Hospital in Muscat, those black Singer sewing machines –which everyone called Farrashas because of butterfly design stamped on their sleek back sides –had not yet reached Oman...electricity was only available in a few areas. (10)

It is difficult to draw a borderline between the incidents. Crisostum opines about Alharthi's, “style that can make the reader go through a roller coaster-ride” (2383). Crisostum further quotes Harris who says:

*Celestial Bodies* often feels as though it is a collection of scraps being held together with tape. This is partly due to its frequent and unforgiving jumps through space and time, between characters and moments. Its tone shifts from joy to tragedy at the turn of a page; its characters are given no breathing – or grieving – room before being tossed aside to make room for their sister or husband to take the spotlight for three minutes. It's a rush to keep tabs on what each character is doing, thinking, feeling, burdened with, or hopeful for at any given time (2383).

Abdallah throws light on Mayya's unrequited love, “Do you love me, Mayya? . . . She was startled, I could see that. She said nothing and then she laughed” (11). Her laughter pierces through his emotions as it was, “loud enough to shatter every wall in the new house” (12). His psychological turmoil surfaces as his thoughts recoil towards Mayya's love after short span, “She did not say that she loved me, had ever loved me. She didn't say that all” (25). His need for love and warmth is never fulfilled in life as his mother mysteriously vanishes, father is too strict to understand his feelings and wife is not emotionally attached to him. The author wraps up his set of anecdotes related to father's death, father's slave Zarifa, his daughter London and his teacher with a blend of his present journey and a nightmarish reality of his life—a punishment given by his father. The punishment becomes a leitmotif in the novel and intermingles with his life and dreams alike. Within his narration, the omniscient narrator takes over, “Abdallah, the son of Merchant Sulayman dozes off for a few moments. As he wakes up he is still half talking in his sleep. Don't hang me upside down in the well, don't. Please, no! Dont!” (16). His nightmare overlaps his present. Abdallah enjoys window seat while travelling. He contemplates, “I like to stare down at one city after another, dwindling and then vanishing” (25). His thoughts are analogous to these cities. The thoughts surface and then diminish into another reflection. As he is travelling in air, his thoughts travel in his mind. The fragmentation of his narration reflects his crumbled self. His experiences with cruel father, exploitation by slave boys and molestation by slave women resulted in his fragmented state of mind. He recalls the punishment

that left “the scars of my deep wound” (31) on his body and mind. The sort of strictness observed by his father affected him the most. Jokha Alharthi in an interview with Mohamed Zarrouk during Jaipur Literature Festival acknowledges, “Abdallah is victim as he was expected to live and behave by his father, a very strong character. He injured Abdallah from inside very deeply.” Abdallah's thoughts travel so fast in time that it becomes challenging for the reader to distinguish between the past and present. In one of the instances Abdallah while pondering over Mayya gives a jolt to the reader by communicating with the airhostess about juice and tea at the same time. He reflects:

I wrote her name on the palm-tree trunk. I engraved it with the hot metal onto the gate out at the farms. Mayya. The small world. The large world. No, thanks, I do not want any juice. I want shay. Yes, tea. More tea, please. Why is my head pounding? The stock exchange collapsed and Mayya screamed and moaned. You want to say we aren't building the new house after all? She wailed. Our own three-storey house! (27)

There is a blend of reality and dream when Abdallah in his dreamlike narration experiences headache. His narration has a surrealistic quality where reality seems to overlap his dream. He experiences the submersion of his head during his flight. The punishment of the past overlaps his present. The edge between the two fades away. He narrates his “soul-rattling” (Silcox) dream:

My head is under water. This headache lays into me every time I have to fly. I feel confused and unable to focus, and everything in front of me appears to be submerged in water. Then I sense myself being flipped upside down. I'm in a well, head down, and that heavy palm-fibre rope is wound around my body . . . From my underwater head pour the many coloured plastic blocks that Muhammad plays with. (148)

By incorporating such narration, the writer highlights the fact that women are not the only victims in patriarchal set-up—the men can be victims too. They are also emotionally hurt and the same is depicted by Abdallah's character—a man from master class. He cries for the attention of the reader and allows him/her to form his/her own perspective. Moreover, Alharthi lends a voice to one of the male characters to, “view the same story from different perspectives” (interview with Mohamed Zarrouk) as most of the other chapters deal with strong women characters. The reader is also lent a chance to peep into the depths of the character's past and predict his future as the reader is equipped with the power to feel the character's experience instead of just passively reading about the same. The reader feels that he has become a part of the novel as he/she empathises with Abdallah.

Abdallah's final narration abounds in magical quality as well. People either seem to overlap or inexorably replacing each other. The reader is surrounded by chaos of voices following one another. Abdallah is mystified along with the reader when several generations mysteriously appear and disappear exchanging their roles while he sits on shore of Sib. There is a miraculous appearance of dead infant Muhammad who talks about his wife but calls her Mayya, his mother's name. Suddenly Abdallah finds himself in car, accompanied by his dead father. Abdallah rebukes his father for appearing in this world after his death, “Don't laugh at me, papa. You aren't even here anymore. You died the year Muhammad was born” (242). As he tries to look at Muhammad, he finds his daughter, London with baby Muhammad in her lap. As the car fades away, Muhammad becomes a young man complaining about his wife. Once again, Abdallah chides him, “But you are still little, and you are sick, and you do not have a wife” (242). Abdallah's father appears again and vanishes as he calls him “dead” (242). Finally, infant Muhammad slips into water and Abdallah comes out dry from the water. Abdallah's thoughts condense together and he navigates through a mysterious experience blurring the reality of his life. By incorporating these elements of fantasy, Alharthi sabotages the reality and resorts to an “alternative kind of reality” (Kottiswari 25).

There are scores of other instances in novel where reality overlaps imagination of the characters thereby lending it a postmodern status. The thin margin between the two seems to be blurred and vanishing. In such an incident Mayya invokes God to have a glimpse of her lover. Her imagination becomes so strong that it seems to have transported her self to her lover. She is overpowered by her senses and she unfastens herself from the temporal world and loses herself in the



world of conjuring:

Mayya fixed all her thoughts on her beloved's spirit. She mustered every atom in her being and sent the lot marching into his. Her heart all but stopped beating under the fierceness of her concentration. Mayya bent her will to the task, orienting her being toward his, facing it determined to follow wherever it might go. She sent her spirit into the ether, detaching herself completely from the world. Her body convulsed and she could barely keep herself from collapsing as she telegraphed her whole self to him, transmitting it with every gram of energy she could find. (4-5)

There are numerous other inexplicable elements and happenings. Abdallah contemplates over Mayya's use of Sewing machine, much ahead of times. The machine had not yet reached Oman. He feels surprised how Mayya could use the machine before it even appeared in their country. He keeps on pondering over the mystifying disappearance of his mother. His mother was purportedly gone missing since she had uprooted a basil plant. He is provided with numerous answers to the question related to his mother's death. But, none satisfies him. Dead Zarifa's whispers tells him about his mother, "Your mother did not die my boy, no, Abdallah. Your Your mother is alive. The jinndijinn guarding the basil bush—they took her away, but she is alive" (61). Whereas in reality Zarifa had told him, "she [his mother] had hit the jinni-woman's son in head. That jinni-woman was the servant of the Shaykhs of the jinn" (143). Jinni woman allured Abdallah's mother to uproot the basil plant by saying that it attracts the vipers. The vipers could sting her son. So, she had cut the basil plant. But Shaykh of the jinn was enraged as he lived under the bush. So, he punished Abdallah's mother and she succumbed to a short illness. On the other hand, one of the slaves, Shanna explained her disappearance as an act of witchcraft. Consequently, "She lost her mind. The wizard took her mind away and made her his servant" (144). Moreover, Abdallah time and again comes across Zayd's ghost. Zayd had drowned in floodwater. Abdallah is unable to forget Zayd's swollen body. For a year he feels disturbed by Zayd's ghost. The ghost constantly obstructs his way or shows its presence in Abdallah's dreams. Abdallah acknowledges, "I would find Zayd's ghost looming in front of me all of sudden, blocking my way" (100). It was Mayya's advent in Abdallah's life that exorcises Zayd's ghost without any ritual. He reveals the mystery, "It was only when I saw Mayya, so sad and pretty and pale, bending over the sewing machine as if she were putting her arms around a tiny child, that I stopped seeing Zayd whether in my dreams or on the dark path leading back to my father's house" (100).

The novel also transfers the reader into the world of Zar exorcism and the rituals associated with it. It presents, "woman in direct contact with the jinn" (188). The Zar ritual provides them with strength to walk on burning coals. The participants grab the opportunity to vent out their pent up emotions by shrieking, shouting loudly and saying the unsaid. Habib, Zarifa's rebellious son tries to assert their freedom during such events, "We are free. They stole us, and then they sold us! he would scream in the middle of the night, at dawn, in zar exorcisms: Free! They did us wrong, they destroyed us. Free!" (123). The reader is reminded of Voodoo incantations and exorcism from the novel *Beloved*. In many cultures the supernatural powers, witchcraft and exorcism lend certain power to the characters who are not equipped by the society to exercise their control over any field. Their energies are channelized to use their internal power in order to control others. Franklin believes, "folklore and witchcraft become a source of power for women who are otherwise bereft of it." In another magical ritual, a man communicates with the planet Saturn to create a rift between Azzan, Mayya's father and Qamar (Najiya), his tribal beloved. The ritual is confined to exorcise their illicit relationship. The unnamed mysterious exorcist invokes Saturn, "I entreat you to cut Najiya, daughter of Shaykha, from Azzan... in name of these spirits of the other world; to separate them as darkness is separated from light, and to lead them to despise each other . . ." (201). The ritual was followed by

mysterious disappearance of Qamar (Najiya). Many stories regarding her decay and disappearance spread among the people. The disappearance is similar to that of *Beloved* and similar stories followed her disappearance. The use of magical techniques destabilizes the reality depicted in literature. The writer challenges the notion that literature reality can be portrayed through literature. Moreover, the magic forms an integral part of certain cultures and it suggests that people hailing from those cultures cannot draw a borderline between logical and magical.

Apart from the melting edges between reality and imagination, natural and supernatural, the novel also presents a fading borderline amid several binaries. The roles are reversed through deconstruction of the conventions and reconstruction of the roles. The insignificant becomes more significant and vice versa. The slaves in the text overpower the masters in many ways. Zarifa replaces Abdallah's mother and becomes his father's "sweetheart" (18) and she is proud to announce, "the old bubber [Abdallah's father] only eats Zarifa's bread" (19). Later, she emerges out as one of the most powerful figures in the entire novel. She is the only slave who eats with the women of master class. None among them felt bad about it, "no one had ever objected, or started an argument with her over it" (23). Mayya's mother, Salima is antithesis to Zarifa. She was brought up by her uncle. So she could not enjoy many privileges of the master class. She felt devoid of the pleasures that slave women enjoyed. There is a reversal of the master slave binary as she, "grew up at the foot of the kitchen wall, always hungry, always observing slave women's freedom to live and dance, and the mistress women's freedom to command others . . ." (163-164). Another instance in the novel that supports the reversal of master-slave binary is the behaviour of slave boys, Sanjar and Marhun. They hurt Abdallah, the master physically and mentally. Abdallah reveals:

Sanjar warned me, If you don't get hold of that rifle you're not a man. Marhun added, And if you don't come, we'll roast you instead of the magpies. Anyway, once we were in the desert, they attacked me and held me down. They tried to force me to say it: I am the slave. I am Abdallah, the slave of Sanjar and Marhun (29).

The incident was instrumental in shaping Abdallah's fragmented personality as he was punished by his father so badly that he never forgets the punishment and it becomes leitmotif in the novel. The readers come across the punishment several times in Abdallah's reflections and dreams as well. He sees, "the harsh marks of knife blades and rough-palm fibre ropes" (31). Abdallah recalls and relives the punishment several times in the text. Abdallah is distressed to an extent that he loses confidence. He seems much akin to Morrison's Paul D in the novel *Beloved* who could never assert his identity. He cannot eat in front of his father and always tries to impress him while he was alive. But, the same obsession preoccupies him after his father's death. His first person narration lacks that force which third person narrative in the novel possesses. The writer again melts the patriarchal binary. Wood opines:

But Abdallah is desperately insecure about his masculinity, preoccupied with proving himself to the ghost of his tyrannical, recently deceased father. At the same time, the third-person narration...is so flexible and sensitively alert that you often forget it's not in the first person. So Abdallah's formal priority turns out to be palely ex officio, while the women blaze like necessary suns.

Abdallah's personality is also affected by certain incidents when he was overpowered by slave women. They passed obscene remarks and touched him. Shanna, the slave girl threw him down and his maternal figure, Zarifa forced him to have sex with slave girls. He did not like, "The racy jokes the maids told and the ways their hands wandered now and then onto my body...Shanna chased me...and fell on me...Zarifa was trying to push me into having sex with one or the another daughter of the slave families . . ." (48). In spite of being a man and master he felt helpless at that time. Kottiswari's opinion about Canadian author, Margaret Atwood's works seem to befit Alharthi's work. She says, "Atwood also parodies traditional seduction plot exposing the dynamics of sexual game in

all its duplicity” (Kottiswari 16). Abdallah's decision to marry Mayya yet again infringes the customary beliefs of the society as she doesn't fit into the conventional image of beauty. Contrary to the accepted norms, she is older than Abdallah. He is rebuked by his father, “You mean that skinny dark one?...Boy, what happened to your eyesight, can't you tell the pretty sister from the others? Anyway this Mayya you talk about is older than you” (49-50).

In brief, *Celestial Bodies* embodies the building blocks of postmodern fiction by reversing the traditional mode of narration; socially accepted binaries; deconstructing the conventions and reinterpreting them in unconventional ways; eulogising the vernacular; lauding the literature of the native land; challenging the religious and cultural metanarratives; representing the history by blending it with fiction as hyperreality; incorporating supernatural and magical elements; blurring the border between dream and reality and commending various forms of art. The novel thus, turns out to be a postmodern work in real sense.

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## Representation of Women in *Anandamath* and *Gora*: Redefining the Female Sphere

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### *Abstract*

*Bankim's Anandamath and Tagore's Gora challenge the stereotype of women as powerless and passive. They portray some progressive female characters who represent Shakti and dispel the myth that women are the weaker sex. Bankim asserts that gender is a psycho-social construction. In his vision, a husband and a wife are companions and their relationship is based on equality and mutuality, not authority and dominance. Tagore is of the view that a nation cannot be complete unless women are restored to their rightful place in it. Sucharita and Lolita, who are rational and assertive, stand for women's independence and liberation from the bondage of patriarchy in Gora. Through the character of Anandmoyi, Gurudev drives home the message of universal love and secularism.*

*Keywords: Shakti, Tagore, Bankim, identity, gender*

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*“By a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done  
Independently even in her own house.”*

-- Manu, *Manusmriti*  
(5/147)

### **Introduction**

On the whole, the male gaze depicts a woman as “an imperfect man” (St. Thomas Aquinas) with “a certain lack of qualities” (Aristotle), who “should remain at home, sit still and bear children” (Martin Luther). Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath* and Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* refute the stereotypical view about women and present some courageous female characters who assert their identity as Shakti and redefine gender roles.

#### **'Partner in Virtue' or 'Thorn': *Anandamath***

*Anandamath* is set in those days of Bengal when even the monk believes that women have “the tiniest amount” of physical strength “like the amount of water in a cow's footprint” (Chatterjee *Anandamath*<sup>1</sup> 183), and “[a] woman has no place in the code of the hero” (184). Bankim dislikes such an orthodox attitude towards women and states that the Dharma<sup>2</sup> of a wife is to assist her husband in his Dharma (*Essentials* 152-3). Bankim elaborates on his views on the wife as a Dharmic companion through the character of Shanti in *Anandamath*.

Shanti has immense mental and physical strength. She refuses to change her clothes and decides to meet her husband with “rags on” (Chatterjee 165), probably because she believes in the beauty of the soul, not the body. Later, she does not mind cutting her ankle-length hair and spoiling her Dhaka sari for a noble purpose. She shuns material comforts. When Jibananda momentarily drifts away from the path of the Children, she tells him that her happiness lies in being a hero's wife. She makes him realize his mistake and glorifies the importance of duty. As regards dedication and morality, she outshines him. She shapes her own destiny: “I will do what I have planned to do” (175).

She is strong, determined and courageous; in fact, she takes womanhood to another level with her determination. When Satyananda says that she, being a woman, is not fit for the Code, Shanti retorts, “Surely woman can have strength of arm too!” (183) and passes the strength test by fitting a length of wire to a steel bow, the task passed by four Children so far. The monk astonishingly asks her, “Are you a goddess, or a human being?” (183). Shanti has staunch faith in her capabilities and asserts her identity and individuality by challenging the traditional view about gender roles: “I am a monk, a leader of the *santan* army, a terrific hero, so of course I know everything!” (216).

Shanti is the symbol of Shakti in the novel. According to Hindu mythology, a male form is essentially incomplete and presupposes the existence of a female form (Pattanaik 31). God cannot be incomplete; hence Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva have female counterparts (31). There is Saraswati for Brahma, Lakshmi for Vishnu and Shakti for Shiva. “Together these couples embody the Hindu understanding of the ultimate divine. Brahma creates, Vishnu sustains, Shiva destroys, while Saraswati, Lakshmi and Shakti embody knowledge, wealth and power respectively” (31). The relationship between a particular god and his female consort is so integral that one cannot exist without the other. Frank Morales says that Shakti manifests in the 'i' of Shiva's name (cited in Agrawal 51). According to the grammatical rules of classical Sanskrit, if a consonant is not followed by a vowel, it is automatically assumed that this consonant is followed by the vowel 'a'. Resultantly, without this 'i' in his name, Shiva becomes Shava, or a lifeless corpse (51). Thus, it is the feminine principle which acts as the animating force of life. Similarly, Shanti is the animating force of Jibananda's life. She says to Satyananda that it's a wife's duty to follow her husband in the household as well as in his service to the Mother, even in the battlefield:

“Could Rama have become a hero without Sita?” “Well, who drove Arjun's chariot while he fought with the Yadavi army from mid-air? Without Draupadi would the Pandavs have fought in the battle of Kurukshetra?” (Chatterjee 184)

Shanti vehemently asserts herself:

Is it sinful, Master? The wife follows her husband. Is that sinful behaviour? If the code of the *santans* calls this sinful, then the code itself is sinful! I am his partner in life. He is following a particular code, and I am here to share in it. That's all. (184)

Shanti enthusiastically supports her husband's efforts to gain freedom from the oppressive Muslim rule in league with the British; she acts as a fellow warrior who displays immense potential and feels confident of winning the battle. Satyananda finds “fire” in her forehead “just like Goddess Bhabani!” (185).

Shanti is quite daring and sharp-witted. During her adolescence, she gives her lustful teacher “such a forceful blow on the forehead with the right that he fell unconscious to the ground” (173). When Captain Thomas asks her to live with him, she offers him the option of living in a “hutch like a monkey and eat bananas” (192). She sets off alone in search of her own land and makes unimpeded progress by means of her courage and prowess. She, in the guise of a Vaishnavi, befools the Captain and Major Edwards and collects some significant information which leads to the victory of the *santans* (the Children) in the ending of the novel.

Shanti's character suggests that gender (in)equality operates at the psychological level; it takes its origin in social conditioning. Both men and women can play a significant role in the attainment of a goal such as freedom. Shanti grew up among boys, thus she became like them in the absence of any woman at her home. The author believes that the behaviour of a woman or man is a psycho-social construction. Like boys, Shanti dresses up, smears sandal paste on her forehead and wears the sacred thread across her neck during her childhood. Conditioning through everyday

experiences transforms her personality. Emile Zola's theory of Naturalism also highlights how one's character is conditioned and controlled by one's social environment. At one place, Bankim writes, "But by her physical exercises and other activities Shanti had acquired strength difficult even for a man to attain..." (173). He emphasizes that a woman is made a woman in society. Simone de Beauvoir<sup>3</sup> also believes that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.

Unlike some of today's feminists and Marxists, Bankim realizes that men and women are made for each other; there is a natural attraction between them. At the same time, the novelist hints at the significance of one's control over one's senses and warns that an irresistible attraction towards a female beauty may lead a hero like Bhabananda astray. Bhabananda says, "If I knew that I would ever see such beauty, I would never have embraced the *santan* code" (197). He realizes his mistake and feels ashamed of his immoral behaviour. He sacrifices his life in penance in the ending of the novel (200). When Kalyani goes out to look for her husband, she is warned by a sepoy: "But you've come of age, yes, you have!" said the guard. "That's wealth enough in this world! Even I could be a bandit for that!" (215).

Shanti becomes the epitome of an ideal man-woman relationship by rising above physical desires and material pursuits for a higher spiritual and noble purpose. She tells her husband:

...We are no longer worldly folk. The two of us must remain just as we are, renouncers, forever following the path of celibacy. So let's wander about as pilgrims from region to region...praying for the Mother's well-being. (228)

Thus, Shanti occupies, as Julius Lipner states, an ambivalent status, not indeed of being half-woman and half-man (*ardhanarisvara*), but of being, in a sense, fully woman-and-man (13). She switches from one state to the other- from the male *santan* (the Child) in appearance to the coquettish itinerant singer of hymns (Vaishnavi) in disguise- as the occasion demands (13). Lipner adds that this liminal existence symbolizes her transformation, at the end of the action, into one kind of new woman Bankim envisaged for Mother-India-as-she-would-be.

She preserves the essence of her glorious womanhood; but she does so by reinventing both her husband and herself according to one enduring ideal of traditional Hinduism- that of ascetic renunciation. In Bankim's novel, this is done in the service of the Mother. (Lipner 13-14)

### Voicing Identity: *Gora*

According to Tagore, Nation is a political and economic union of a people to maximize their power and profit (*Nationalism* 38); it is "the organized self-interest of a whole people, where it is the least human and the least spiritual" (41). Gurudev regrets that the West has lost its consciousness under the spell of the nation (38). The nation aims to fulfil mechanical purposes (38). It replaces the living bonds of society with a mere mechanical organization and gives birth to a sort of competitiveness by snapping the natural thread that holds a man and a woman together in harmony (38).

Tagore says that under the influence of the nation, "the very psychology of man and woman about their mutual relation is changing and becoming the psychology of the primitive fighting elements rather than of humanity seeking its completeness through the union based upon mutual self-surrender" (39). Nationalism has attacked the root of social relations, as it has turned men towards professionalism, wealth and power, leaving behind women alone "to die or to fight" their "own battle unaided" (39). The nation disturbs "the harmony of the higher social life" (39).

Tagore knows that women, in general, are marginalized in the patriarchal set up of India.



Irrespective of the fact that the woman is referred to as a goddess in India, she is a victim of widespread exploitation and discrimination in her day-to-day life. Besides, the idea of nation and nationalism has also taken its toll; it has marginalized her in the nationalist discourse. Tagore is aware that “[w]e see Bharat only as a country of men. We don't see the women at all” (*Gora* 106). In his opinion, by disregarding women “as mere women, we also reduce and disregard our country” (107). Binoy, Tagore's mouthpiece in *Gora*, denounces “poetic untruths” about women when they are actually seen “within the narrow confines of domesticity in weakness and immaturity” (168). It pains Binoy to see that all over Bengal, “regardless of whether she was genteel or low born, woman” has no “umbrella over her head” (167). It is important, he feels, to “perceive the feminine principle of our land manifested in the actual women of our country” and unless we see women “fully developed in intellect, power and generous responsibility, we shall never visualize our country as brightly as we should” (168).

In *Gora*, women are viewed from two perspectives. According to the Shastras, Gora says, women are 'pujarha grihadeeptayah' (10), i.e. they are worthy of worship because they light up the house. He adds, “The proper place to worship women is where they are installed as Mother- the altar of the pure-bodied right-minded mistress of a household” (11). He disapproves of the western custom of honouring women for lighting up the “hearts of men” (10). He claims that “effusion about women in English books has its basis in nothing else but sexual desire” (11). Binoy, Tagore's representative, aptly says, “These are merely two different reactions of two different kinds of people. If you condemn one, you cannot excuse the other” (11). He points out, “If all that poetic fantasy produced by the British is false, how do you judge your own excessive stress on shunning woman and gold as evils” (11). Gora's appreciation for the traditional Indian idea of womanhood and dislike for the western view of an ideal woman reflect his own ethnocentric attitude, premised upon self-reference criterion. Tagore believes that women have a spiritual aspect also and they deserve a high pedestal in the Indian tradition. Thus, he visualizes them beyond the confines of domesticity and views them as Shakti, “the living symbol of divine energy whose inner shrine is in the subconscious depth of human nature and outer manifestations in sweetness of service, simplicity of self-dedication and silent heroism of daily sacrifices” (“Women's Place in the World” 676).

Tagore reveals that women are misrepresented through social constructions. Gora's idea of a modern woman is seized by “a low opinion of her dress without having really looked at it” (*Gora* 132). Besides, a Hindu woman is considered to be an irrational being by people such as Krishandayal, who takes a dim view of her potential and believes that an “elaborate discussion” of the religious matter “would be beyond the understanding of women” (32). Tagore satirically portrays the objectification of women in the novel; he writes, “Among lower castes, girls could be obtained for marriage only by offering a fairly large bride price” (434). On the other hand, the condition of women/girls is no better among higher castes; it is equally deplorable and disturbing. Mohim is worried about “the high price of bridegrooms in the marriage market” (79) and his own daughter is a burden to him. To boot, Madhav claims to be into all bad things to save “enough money to be able to afford good marriages” for his daughters (177). It is also notable that Harimohini suffers in her in-law's house for having given birth to a girl.

Sucharita finds that men, in general, are responsible for the miserable condition of women in Bharatvarsha, as Men “don't let them learn anything more” (127). She says that women are confined to home by men, and consequently they remain “undeveloped” (127). In this case, women “are bound to hinder and spoil the work sought to be done by men, pull that down and thereby take their revenge” (127).

In *Gora*, Tagore portrays not only the dejected condition of women in Bengal but also some exemplary female characters who appear ahead of their times, a step ahead 'the social liberation of the 1850s'. These female characters are projected as the archetypes of the modern progressive Indian woman against the backdrop of gender stereotyping. In the Brahmo family, Poresch Babu does not wish to keep his daughters “chained” (301). He respects their individual opinions and faces a barrage of

criticism at the social front for his liberal attitude. Even his wife does not support him. The condition of women is better but not satisfactory in the Brahmo Samaj. Women are allowed to interact with men, but the lack of individual space for them is quite evident. For example, “no one had thought it necessary to consider Sucharita's opinion” about her prospective marriage with Haran Babu (95). Disappointed by the attitude of the Brahmo Samaj, Lolita asks, “Why should the Brahmo samaj intervene, raise hurdles for me, in an area where I see nothing unjust or against dharma?” (299). Lolita asserts her individuality and decides not to perform in the magistrate's house and leaves for Kolkata unescorted. She even supports Gora's refusal to take any legal help as a protest against the British magistrate (187). She faces social criticism and strongly affirms, “I shall never accept defeat” (275). Sucharita and Lolita appear old and mature for their age, though Tagore does inform the reader that Sucharita's mind “matured more than her age and situation warranted” in the noble company of Poresh Babu (91).

Anandamoy is humane and courageous. During the Sepoy revolt, when a memsahib came seeking shelter in her house, Anandamoy's husband, Karishanadayal, was reluctant to help her. However, Anandamoy lied to him and let her stay in the cowshed (31). She is the personification of humanism. In the novel, she is viewed as the symbolic representation of Mother India. Gora finds Bharatvarsha in her, his foster mother. He says:

Ma, you are my only mother. The mother for whom I have looked everywhere all this time she was sitting in my house. You have no caste, you do not discriminate against people, you do not hate- you are the image of benediction. You are my Bharatvarsha.... (477)

Through Anandamoy's character, Tagore glorifies the idea that people are above religions or castes.

Gora finally realizes that a nation remains incomplete without a place for women in it. He says, “I keep thinking now that the true self of Bharatvarsha will not be revealed only to the eyes of men. The manifestation will be complete on the day it is revealed to the eyes of our women...Service to Bharatvarsha will never be sanctified if you stay away from it” (376). He feels that his duty towards Bharatvarsha is incomplete without women. He concludes, “the farther we keep women, the more dismissive we are of their value, and our manhood grows weaker in the same proportion” (330). Gora acknowledges and appreciates the Indian woman's potential and contribution to life:

This image would invest every home in the country with grace, affection and purity. She was the goddess who nourished the children of Bharatvarsha, tended the sick, consoled the miserable-she whose love redeemed the meanest of men, she who never abandoned even the most wretched among us to our misfortune- who, in spite of being an object of adoration herself, worshipped the least worthy of us. The grace-endowed and dexterous hands of this Lakshmi were forever dedicated to serving us and we received her infinitely tolerant and forgiving bounty as Ishwar's blessing. (330)

Tagore's message is clear: “Woman should use her power to break through the surface and go to the centre of things, where in the mystery of life dwells an eternal source of interest” (Tagore “Woman” 414).

## **Conclusion**

Through Shanti's example, Bankim shows that a woman is a partner in virtue or great deeds. Tagore voices his message of humanism through Anandamoyi. He develops the theme of women's

empowerment through the characters of Sucharita and Lolita.

The major female characters in the novels under study are portrayed as three-dimensional characters, who are strong and progressive and who successfully debunk the myth that women are the second sex. These characters are aware of their potential and redefine the female sphere through their active participation in life; they think, therefore they are<sup>5</sup>; they make their spatial and ideological claims in the dominating patriarchal setup. Since it was just the early 70's when the western feminists' ideology reached Asian countries, it can be said that these female characters had been remarkably portrayed ahead of their times.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>All subsequent references to this source in the text will be given with the author's surname and page number.

<sup>2</sup> Bankim's idea of Dharma has roots in Anushilan, which implies a system of culture. It is based on Bhakti (devotion) that implies a combination of knowledge and duty- knowledge about what is good for community and duty out of devotion to a cause or a goal.

<sup>3</sup> Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* beautifully explains that a wife's dependence upon her husband is a big obstacle in the way to gain and assert her independence. She writes, "The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of femininity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways; but they do not easily succeed in living completely the life of a human being. Reared by women within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting still upon solid economic and social foundations."(9)

<sup>4</sup> Lesbian feminists are in favour of abolishing heterogeneous marriage; they see it as an oppressive institution for women. Engels also argues that monogamous marriage is a social institution that has nothing to do with love, and everything to do with private property. He writes that if women are to be truly emancipated, they must be economically independent.

<sup>5</sup>"It may be interesting to know what social liberation meant in the 1850s. In an autobiography written in the 1850s, we read about a rich Parsi young man who would send his servant to wake up his wife, sit with her in the phaeton (tonga) with a driver driving them 10 Km outside Bombay, not talking at all, getting down, the man walking ten steps ahead, the woman walking ten steps behind; not conversing, not holding hands, not even walking side by side, but one ahead of the other, then after some time coming back; again sitting in the phaeton and going back home. This was considered social liberation. And this young man felt that he had acquired a comrade and not just a wife, because they had walked together, though ten steps apart from each other." (Chandra 42)

<sup>6</sup> René Descartes says, "I think, therefore I am."

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# Contemporaneity of Rabindranath Tagore's Ideals of Rural Reconstruction and Ecological Harmony

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## *Abstract*

*India witnessed a mass exodus of migrants to the countryside during the lockdown that was enforced as one of the major COVID-19 pandemic control strategies. With workplaces and transportation shut down, the migrant labourers were forced to walk hundreds of kilometres back to their villages to survive the sudden economic crisis. This COVID-19 induced reverse migration problematizes the fact that rural India, largely, remains economically dependent on income from migration and daily-wage labour in the urban areas. This brings forth the urgency to revive village systems for sustenance. Villages are the soul of India and need to be transformed to initiate the prosperity of humanity in the context of Nature. One of the prominent Indian thinkers to stress Village Reconstruction was the Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore. This study, with the framework of Deep Ecology, Ecological Humanism, and Tagore's own ideologies of ecological harmony, seeks to draw a parallel between Tagore's ideas put forth in his essay "City and Village," (Palli-prakriti) and his Sriniketan Experiment of 1922, in understanding the relevance of his ideas in the current context of COVID-19 pandemic.*

*Keywords: Rural Reconstruction, Environment, Pandemic, Economic independence and Self-reliance*

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The Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, throughout his eloquent discourses in the form of poetry, dance-drama, songs, fiction, and non-fiction, propounds that civilization has grown through the unification of man's intellect with the gifts of Nature. In his essay, "City and Village," from *Towards Universal man* (1961), Tagore reiterates his belief that human civilization and Nature "must always work in partnership" for the prosperity of both (308). The notion that humans are capable of developing their communities in an ecologically harmonious manner is one of the major recurring themes in his works. A century ago, Tagore raised concerns over the unscrupulous human interference with the natural environment on the pretext of development. He warned that "when a passion, like greed, breaks loose from the barrier of social control, it feeds upon the life of society which results in annihilation" (*TUM* 309-310). Tagore was also profoundly disturbed by the fact that the "siren of factory lures men away from the peaceful refuge of their community," (*TUM* 305) to the towns that are "ablaze" with "artificial lights," due to which "the humble lamps of the village are dead" (*TUM* 305). Tagore's apprehension about the then increasing trend of migration from rural to urban India, in the pursuit of employment, gains relevance in the current context of COVID-19 pandemic that prompted a mass exodus of migrants back to their villages ("Sea"). Villages are the soul of India, and have to be rebuilt independently, without the filth and mire of the city, to initiate the prosperity of humanity. In an earnest attempt to experiment with a model of a self-reliant village, Tagore initiated an experiment in village reconstruction at Sriniketan:

We could make a start with one or two villages. If we could free even one village from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance, an ideal for the whole of India would be established. . . . Let a few villages be rebuilt in this way, and I shall say they are my India.

That is the way to discover the true India. (*TUM* 322)

Tagore's empathetic conscience sought like-minded individuals, and in Leonard Elmhirst, a student at

the University of Cornell then, he found an apt proactive mind to implement his ideas. In the year 1922, Tagore, in collaboration with Elmhirst, Rathindranath (his son), Santosh Majumdar, two members from his staff, Kalimohan Ghosh and Gour Gopal Ghosh, established the Institute of Rural Reconstruction in Surul, later named Sriniketan, a village adjacent to Santiniketan (Elmhirst 5). Sriniketan, was pioneering in its time. *Poet and Plowman* (1975) authored by Elmhirst in which he faithfully records the genesis of Sriniketan, is an authentic testimony of Tagore's passionate concern and need for reconstructing the moribund agricultural and village economy of his land.

Currently, India is in the throes of its war against the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has over 1.3 Billion people with 70% of the population in rural areas (Ramanan and Yadav 5). Economic development is concentrated in areas that are in close proximity to trade routes, rivers, and coastal belts. This has led to an increase in the density of population in certain areas, because these clusters generate employment, attracting a significant populace of migrants. Decline in economic activity in urban areas due to the pandemic, has had a cascading effect on rural areas, as a significant proportion of rural household income comes from migration and daily wage labour. In spite of the several initiatives of the central and state governments, rural India remains plagued with problems of unemployment, and lack of basic health and education facilities, thus propelling the villagers to move to greener pastures. Therefore, amidst the challenges of dealing with the pandemic, the need for rural India to be self-reliant comes to the fore. India, as a democracy, needs to make a conscious collective effort to bring about a paradigm shift in rural development. In this context, Tagore's ideology, as discussed in "City and Village," on what a true democracy should refrain from doing gains importance:

What in the West is called democracy can never be true in a society where greed grows uncontrolled and is encouraged, even admired, by the people. In such an atmosphere, a constant struggle goes on among individuals to capture public organizations for their personal ends. Democracy is then like an elephant whose one purpose in life is to give joyrides to the clever and the rich. (*TUM* 311)

Tagore did not see migration as a solution for the problem of India's slow economic growth. He believed that the key to this was improving India's rural economy. He envisioned empowered villages, and for this, he wanted to kindle in the villagers, a quest for self-realization. In "City and Village," he further states:

I awoke to the task of trying to stir the minds of the people, make them shoulder their own responsibilities. . . . To try to help villagers from the outside could do no good. How to kindle a spark of life in them. . . .that was my problem. (*TUM* 318)

Tagore's idea was to organise cooperative communities based on decentralization of economic and political power. Education and providing holistic training to the villagers was an important priority. The IRR comprised separate section heads like 'health', 'education', 'economic improvement', and 'social work.' Several experts worked on devising methods of improving the village economy. Apart from boosting weaving and cottage industries, major reforms in agricultural practices formed an important part of the initiative. Experiments to increase the yield of crops were undertaken. Tagore was one of the prime exponents of 'Constructive Swadeshi', which upheld the principle of self-help through Swadeshi industries. (Dasgupta 282). Thus, it is imperative to note that Tagore's quest for rural development upheld preservation of the village ethos and identity.

The leader of Indian Nationalism, M. K. Gandhi, also proposed his village *Swaraj* on similar lines (Gandhi 96). However, unlike Gandhi, Tagore did not negate the influence of modernism on the development of villages. In the essay, "Gandhi against Modernity," by Rex Ambler in *Gandhi and the Contemporary World*, the author discusses how Gandhi rejected modernity represented by the West as an evil force that was entirely opposed to the real interests of human beings. While the Transcendentalists vouched for an escape from the city, Tagore's approach was inclusive and holistic. Tagore's ideology can be viewed through the prism of Deep Ecology, a notion first developed by Arne



Naess. This school of thought emphasises the essential interconnectedness of all life forms, thus presenting a symbiotic and holistic world-view (Buell 7-8). Tagore, a Deep Ecologist at heart, advocated symbiotic relations between villages rich in natural resources, and cities. The magnanimity of Tagore's thinking and philosophy can be seen in his humanism which surpasses all sorts of boundaries, for the betterment of Humanity.

Tagore further augments his argument by drawing a parallel between the village and woman. He elaborates that like a woman; the village provides people with their elemental needs- "food and joy, with the simple poetry of life...but when constant strain is put upon her, when her resources are excessively exploited, she becomes dull and uncreative" (*TUM* 311-312). Thus, when humans take undue advantage of the resources of the village, there is a change in the equilibrium. Tagore's aim was to "make whole the broken-up communal life, to harmonize the divergence between village and town, between the classes and the masses, between the pride of power and the spirit of comradeship" (*TUM* 306). In "City and Village," he further states:

Our object is to try to flood the choked bed of village life with streams of happiness.

For this the scholars, the poets, the musicians, the artists, as well as the scientists have to collaborate, have to offer their contribution. Otherwise, they live like parasites, sucking life from the country people, and giving nothing back to them.

(*TUM* 316)

It is high time that the human race broadens its vision, and lays its focus on projects nurturing ecological harmony. Several authors have tried to do their bit in raising awareness about ecological issues. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) is an iconic pioneering work that formally brought this concern to the fore. Apart from Tagore, a conscious engagement of ecological concerns is seen in the works of Indian authors like Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Ruskin Bond's *A Bond with the Mountains* (1998), Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), etc. Such works, when examined through the lens of Ecocriticism, highlight ecological concerns by deliberating on its treatment of Nature. Ecocriticism is a school of thought that takes an 'earth-centered approach' to literary studies. (Bertans 226)

Tagore's deep connection with Nature, made him glorify its beauty and grandeur in his writings. His *Gitanjali* (1912) overflows with images of trees, clouds, birds, flowers, butterflies, etc. His pantheism differs from that of the Romantics. The Romantics connoted spirituality to Nature only, though linking Nature with Humanity in certain ways, but Tagore goes deeper experiencing divinity in all creatures of the universe more intimately. In his works, there is a manifestation of his deep belief in a 'supreme divine being' in every aspect of creation, including humans, thus advocating an intuitive and spiritual bond between Man and Nature, about which he speaks in his *Creative Unity* (1922). In an attempt to celebrate Nature, Tagore introduced two new festivals in Bengal - *Vriksh Ropan* (Tree Planting Festival) and *Navanna* (New Rice Festival), which continue to be celebrated even today. This notion can be seen as an essence of Ecological Humanism, which propelled him to work towards sustainable development. "Ecological Humanism is an affirmation that human beings are capable of transforming their societies to enhance the flourishing of both humanity and nature" (Morris 98). Tagore's ideologies on Ecological Harmony and Village Reconstruction are in synchronization with Ecological Humanism. Meena Khurana draws our notice to the theme of tree planting in Ruskin Bond's fiction: "The theme of tree planting recurs in several of Bond's essays and stories" (Khorana 137). Khorana stresses on Bond's awareness of the indispensable role played by trees in the life of humans. Thus, Bond can be considered a natural successor of Tagore in this regard.

Pandemics and pestilences have ravaged humanity throughout its existence, often changing the course of history. Some of the worst epidemics and pandemics are the Plague of Athens around 430 B.C.; The Black Death in Europe from 1346-1353; Great Plague of London from 1665-1666; Spanish Flu (1918-1920); etc. (Jarus 2020). These deadly pandemics wiped off several people from

the face of the earth. Since literature mirrors society and records the events that shape the social fabric, experiences of plagues and pestilences have been recorded down the history of human civilization. For instance, Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) is a heart-rending account of a single man's experience of the year 1665, in which the bubonic plague struck the city of London. In Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1948), an unknown narrator narrates the story from an absurdist point of view of a plague sweeping the French Algerian city of Oran. In the Indian context, Rabindranath Tagore, in his works discusses pestilences like smallpox, cholera, and plague that killed millions during his lifetime. In his novel *Chaturanga* (1916), a rich man converts his home into an infirmary for the homeless, and eventually succumbs to the disease. Composed in 1895, Tagore's *Puratan Bhritiya* discusses the virulent smallpox epidemic in Vrindavan- India. Literature on pandemics gives its readers a peek into what is non-existent in historical texts, and other statistical data. Such writings also inspire the human race to remain united, and to have resilience during encounters like that of the current COVID 19 pandemic.

In "City and Village," Tagore expresses his unease that the anthropogenic attitude of humans towards the natural environment, coupled with greed, could eventually destroy the earth, further leading to existential catastrophes:

Like a fruit whose pulp has been completely eaten by insects which it sheltered, the moon at last became a lifeless shell, a universal grave for the voracious creatures who had consumed the world in which they had been born. (TUM 314)

The 21<sup>st</sup> century philosopher Toby Ord proposes his 'Effective Altruism' movement on similar lines, thus advocating reason and evidence to determine the most effective ways to benefit others. His concern lies in the fact that humans are capable of abusing their knowledge-power which he calls 'The Precipice' to destroy their own civilization with man-made risks; like climate change, engineered pandemics, etc. Ord considers COVID 19 as a "warning to humanity" (Ord 7).

The current COVID 19 pandemic has had a cascading effect on countries all over the world. As the lockdowns enforced closures of boundaries of societies, the stark reality of the unpreparedness of humanity to deal with emergencies has been exposed. One of the main pandemic control strategies all over the world has been to shut down most economic and social activities to enforce social distancing with varying degrees of strictness. In the last week of March, India enacted its most stringent lockdown. With workplaces, and transportation shut down, the supply chain came to be non-functional. Those working in unorganised sectors, like the migrant labour force were compelled to return to their homeland in the countryside for their sustenance. However, in the absence of employment and education facilities in rural India, they are faced with significant challenges. Sustainable development of village communities is the need of the hour. Projects nurturing economic and educational activities within the village, without affecting the natural environment; were initiated by Rabindranath Tagore a century ago. Tagore's philosophy of Ecological Harmony manifested in his writings is a direct appeal to humankind to share a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment to enhance the thriving of both, Humanity and Nature.

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## Changing Paradigms of Marital Relationships in the Selected Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Gurdial Singh

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### *Abstract*

*India has many languages and forms of literature signifying varying ideologies with different sets of traditions, beliefs and socio-cultural practices; literature mirrors these differences in subtle ways. The man-woman relationship is a prominent theme in the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Gurdial Singh. The marital relationships depicted in their stories do not only bear the imprint of their respective contemporary societies but also stand witness to the psychological makeup of the writers and the land to which they belong. The article evaluates the differences and similarities in the diverse cultures of Punjab and Bengal through the depiction of the husband-wife relationship in the selected stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Gurdial Singh.*

*Keywords: culture, ties, society, man-woman, Bengal, Punjab*

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A piece of literature, overtly and covertly, is influenced by the land where it is born. Although Bengal in the east and Punjab in the west of India are two states of one nation, their cultures are diverse and different in many respects. However, they are unified by Indianness. This paper aims to analyze the delineation of the man-woman relationship, a subject discussed worldwide, in some selected stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Gurdial Singh in order to study the differences and similarities in their treatment of relationships on the literary canvas. It endeavors at the same time to study the impact of diverse cultures, different eras and shared national bonds on their works. Both writers have written in their indigenous languages. In this article English translations of all of Tagore's stories except "The Lost Jewels" are cited from Tagore's *Selected Short Stories*, edited by Sukanta Chaudhari. "The Lost Jewels" is taken from *Collected Stories*, published by Projapati. On the other hand Gurdial Singh's all the stories, except "Kath Ki Putli" (a rag doll), are taken from *Earthy Tones* which is translated from Punjabi into English by Professor Rana Nayar. "Kath Ki Putli" is taken from Gurdial Singh's first anthology of short stories titled *Saggi Phul* (1962).

Under the influence of western philosophy and thought, modern thinking in the folds of Brahma Samaj, contemporary schools of philosophy and different institutes of higher learning led to the modernization of Bengal in the nineteenth century. Bengal had, at one time, indulged in the indigenous practices like those linked with tantric beliefs. The major influences on Bengal in the past had been that of Buddhism and Sufism, but it readily embraced the modern outlook under the colonial influence.

Rabindranath Tagore, fourteenth child of Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi was born at Jorasanko in Calcutta on May 7, 1861. He did not only witness the unfolding of a new era in his lifetime but also participate in the progress of the region towards transformation. He found his whole life amidst his affluent family of gifted members who recognized his talent and encouraged him right from his childhood. Being a voracious writer he composed, directed many a play and even acted in some. Besides, he painted thousands of paintings, composed music and established a unique center of learning – Shantiniketan. Although his short stories were shadowed by his poetry, novels and plays, they found place in the literary magazines of the day and were so much appreciated that critics traced

Maupaussant's wit, O'Henry's inventiveness and Chekhovian pathos in his story writing skills. Tagore became the first non-European to win the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature (1913) for his anthology *Gitanjali*<sup>2</sup>, which he transcreated from Bengali into English. He wrote his first story, "Bikarini"(beggar woman), in 1877 and wrote more than 100 short stories during his lifetime. He continued writing till the end of his life, i.e. till August 7, 1941. Bandyopadhyay observes, "Whatever may be Rabindranath's position as a novelist there is no doubt that he ranks among the greatest short story writers of the world" (59). Rabindranath Tagore wrote in his mother tongue- Bengali, but almost all of his works have been translated into English, French, Russian, and many other foreign languages so prolifically that we come across multiple translated versions of most of his stories. He set to translate his own works in the last years of his life, but he could effectively attempt only a part of the multitude works.

On the other hand Gurdial Singh belonged to Punjab, a state that has a strong self-defensive streak woven into its culture; this streak is due to the continuous attacks on the state by Afghans, Mughals, Central Asians and even Greeks at one time. These self-defensive compulsions were responsible in the past for the inclination of its people towards violence. The land of Punjab, howsoever enriched by the spirituality of Sufis and Sikh gurus, has always had a strong penchant for self-preservation. During the time when India was caught in the whirlwind of the changes on account of independence and partition, Gurdial Singh was born amidst this great upheaval in a small village Bhaini Fattah in Sangrur district of Malwa region of Punjab on January 10, 1933. His father was a carpenter and the economic condition of his family was not satisfactory. The latent desire in Singh to win his existential state made him fight his fate, and eventually he took up the medium of pen to voice his concerns about the society he knew so very well.

Gurdial Singh began his career with short story writing in 1958 and proceeded to write as many as dozens of short story collections, Children's Literature, plays, critical articles and his autobiography besides his iconic novels which brought him international recognition. His works reflect the voice of the marginalized in Punjabi society as well as his strong belief that "a writer is not a passive observer, living in his own little world, but is rather an activist, a catalytic agent of change" (Nayar, "Interview"). The short stories by Gurdial Singh are appreciated because of the wide range of characters and human situations in them. His stories have been translated into English as well as in many other Indian as well as foreign languages. Gurdial Singh's writings have marked a new era in the Punjabi literature for which he has been awarded Padma Shri (1998), Jnanpith (1999), Sahitya Akademi Award, Nanak Singh Novelist Award (1975), Soviet Nehru Award (1986), and an award from Punjabi Sahitya Akademi, Bhasha Vibhag among many other awards. Death took away this 'son of the soil'<sup>3</sup> on August 16, 2016, thereby creating a vacuum in Punjabi writing.

Relationships are the basis of human identity. Our sense of the self is relational because it gets formed and shaped by our interactions with other people in both positive and negative ways. The relation of a man with woman is the most natural relationship of a human being with a human being. Even the colossal edifice of society seeks the stable and firm relationship of marriage for its solid foundation. In Hinduism, gods are depicted with their spouses, who are presented as their 'ardhangani'<sup>4</sup>. It remains, however, a romantic notion because, in the patriarchal world, man always comes first. "The historical roots of the male-female relationship are thousands of years old and are embedded in a patriarchal system which has shaped our institutions, our thinking, and the patterning of our relationships" (Bergman 1). Marriage as a basic concept is quite similar in all societies and cultures, generally projecting a man as the head of his family. The man is the protector, the provider and the framer of the family rules. He is to be respected and obeyed by the wife, who is the 'Annapurna'- the maker of the meals; she is to follow the rules, remain loyal, and always stay in the shadow of her husband. "Bearing children, bringing them up, and maintaining the home – these form the core of woman's natural vocation, in this ideology" (Mitchell 106). Still, from the nineteenth



century to the present time, with the advent of Radical Feminism, women have become more progressive and alert to their self-identities. They defy some absurd traditions imposed on them and refuse to compromise with their self-respect.

Both Rabindranath Tagore and Gurdial Singh touch upon the socio-cultural, economic and psychological aspects during their delineation of the man-woman relationship in their stories.

### **Rabindranath Tagore's Stories**

Rabindranath Tagore presents a dismal situation faced by two wives- Anila in the story "House Number One" and Mrinal in "The Wife's Letter". Both of them find their respective married lives filled with spiritual barrenness and emotional isolation, resulting from the lack of communication with their respective spouses. The actual purpose of a marriage lies in "the consciousness of a permanent and unbreakable friendship" (Urwick 137), but this purpose is hardly actualized in the conjugal relationships depicted in Tagore's stories. Anila and Mrinal are unable to reach an understanding that is required for their relationships to progress.

Anila's husband, Adwaitya Babu, in "House Number One" is a self-centered husband, who is most of the time engaged in vain academic sittings and pretentious intellectual discussions on philosophy, art, and literature with his friends. He is ignorant of his wife's problems. In a patriarchal set-up, man is socially conditioned that the male is better of the two sexes. Adwaitya Babu is quick to drop Anila's company on getting the company of scholarly males. He has a strong belief in the "Institution of Male Solidarity" (Facio 2013), a brotherhood among men, as a form of modern Patriarchy. Anila is left to take care of the home and kitchen, the role assigned to her as per her traditional identity as a woman. It is in the "perceiving of other person" that lays the foundation of a relationship (Heider 30). No wonder she feels so alienated from her husband that she does not even share the news of her brother's death with him. She performs her wifely duties like providing untimely meals for him and his group of intellectuals, but closes her heart to him.

Tagore's characters are "assertive, self-reliant, and conscious of their identity. They are unconventional in the sense that they are no longer passive, suppressed suffering women of the traditional type and herald in every way" (Banerjee 278). Marriage as a lifelong companionship entails a mutual emotional and psychological support at every step. Anila refuses to share her emotions with him because she knows that she will not find the understanding of a friend in her husband and ultimately decides to leave him and his house. Mrinal in "The Wife's Letter" does the same, but she doesn't do it quietly like Anila. She, in a letter to her beloved husband, depicts her pain that her dignity and individuality are being compromised in the name of traditions in her husband's 'respectable home' and she also expresses her disillusionment with her husband over his cowardly refuge in the stories of the past about "how a wife carried her leper husband herself to his whore's house" (Tagore, *Selected* 215) to validate his argument about the womanly trait of her wifely devotion. Her agony and disgust are loud and clear when she writes, "you had shrouded me over in the darkness of your habit and custom" (218). She cannot continue to live with him as she dies inch by inch "in this petty shelter of brick and wood" (218).

Tagore knew that Indian women were the victims of inequality; therefore, he called upon them to assert creatively:

It is not that woman is merely seeking her freedom of livelihood, Struggling against man's monopoly of the business, but against man's monopoly of civilization where he is breaking her heart every day and desolating her life. (Tagore ed. Das. 414)

Women's subordination continues in the power-obsessed patriarchal society in the interests of the ruling class. Deacon in his analysis of the Foucauldian concept of power sums up that "power is heterogeneous in that it is always born of something other than itself" and "is interwoven with all social relationships" (114). A wife is seen as a thing and not as a person, and the relationship of a husband and wife becomes that of the possessor and the possessed. In Rabindranath Tagore's "The



Exercise Book,” Uma's clumsy efforts at writing are ridiculed and repressed by her husband, Pyarimohan. The husband is at a power position and is the one to lay down the rules and his theories. Uma, the child bride, is trapped in a “circular relationship” (Nayar *Thesis*), unproductive and meaningless. It is a violent assault on the emotions of this child bride by the egoistic husband, who believes that “If a woman began to read and write, novels and plays would soon make their way into the home, and it would be difficult to uphold the household virtue.” (Tagore, *Selected* 48)

“The Lost Jewels” and “The Haldar Family” also examine the problem of miscommunication and misunderstanding in married life. Mani Malika, the wife of Phanibhushan, in “The Lost Jewels” receives everything – jewels, Dacca muslin saris, bangles, etc. from her husband, but fails to recognize this as an expression of his love. She, considering it a manly prerogative, waits for the husband to take the initiative to approach her. The suave and educated husband, on the other hand expects his wife to come to him with her own wish. Kiranlekha in “The Haldar Family” is also unable to appreciate her husband, Banwari's dedicated love for her. She receives the expensive gifts he lavishes on her, but considers him impractical, and his nature over-romantic and improper. This lack of communication fails to make their union meaningful. In Tagore's short story “The Golden Deer,” Baidyanath, is also starving for a word of praise by his wife, Mokshada, but he gets criticized by her for his inability to provide her with vibrant silk saris. Finally, all these male characters come face to face with the reality of their shriveled relationships.

Tagore's “Punishment” catches a similar feeling of helplessness in Chiddam and Chandra, who are caught in the dismal web of poverty. Chandra is heartbroken when she finds that her husband has preferred to lie and save his brother at the cost of his wife. She refuses to protest and speak the truth so as to redeem herself from the law despite many a request by Chiddam, her husband. By opting for death she succeeds in punishing the man, her nemesis, whom she, as a wife, had thought to be her protector.

Tagore presents yet another aspect of the man-woman relationship as that of two equals with an intense mutual understanding in his story “The Laboratory.” The story reveals his excellent knowledge of the importance of humanity and compassion in human relationships. In the story, Sohini and Nandkishore is one such couple which has attained a perfect understanding. Nandkishore does not see Sohini as his possession but as his partner, and Sohini also keeps his dreams alive even after his death.

### **Gurdial Singh's Stories**

In the Indian psyche woman is conceived as both larger than life and trivial than life. Some attribute to her the simile of *Devi* (goddess), whereas some use the second sex as a piece of the property which can be purchased and sold. Women's condition has many dimensions, but her position and influence depends on her economic state. The society, ideologies and institutions sustain the male domination and female subjugation. Juliet Mitchell says that patriarchy is all pervasive because “men are dominant by habit (the effect of psychology, socialization and ideology) and when necessary by force (they control the economy, the state and its agents...) (65). Hence, the autonomous reality is substantially determined by the economic factor.

Gurdial Singh's understanding of relationships is generally seen in the background of economic hardships. His female characters, however, are not silent in their protest. In his story “The Career Branch”, protagonist Balwanto endures all the mental tortures inflicted by the shameless father-in-law and the drunkard brother-in-law simply because she belonged to a poor family. Her husband, a spineless coward, has asked her to bear everything silently. Nevertheless, if a woman's esteem is vituperatively and obscenely denuded, no promises will stop her from retaliating. She, just like Balwanto, in all likelihood becomes as destructive and unstoppable as the mythological goddess Kalka Devi. Goddess Kalka, or Kalika or Kali, is symbolically a Shakti (power) or Devi, who is born out of the anger of the Goddess Durga, the devoted wife of Lord Shiva. When her womanhood is

insulted by the Asuras (devils), she fights with ferocity. Balwanto also protests violently when she finds it unbearable to listen to the insults her brother-in-law and her father-in-law throw at her in the presence of her adolescent daughter. By disregarding the promise given to her husband she has as good as rejected him and his hold on her as a husband.

In Gurdial Singh's "A House with Two Rooms," a strange situation is presented in an urban setting through some characters, whose names are not mentioned. A husband and a wife living in economic constraints are alienated from each other. They seem to have lost the zeal for living in the rut of routine life. The old ailing bedridden father occupies the second room; hence they are forced to put up in the other small cramped room with their children. Both, the husband as well as the wife, are suffering from a spiritual loneliness. The husband wishes to have a romantic interaction with his wife, who, experiencing a monotonous and overworked existence in a cramped household, responds with harshness. The story is a fascinating study of how the economic conditions define the conjugal relationships.

In "A Haunted House," Gurdial Singh paints a picture of another household where the relationship deteriorates when Santi realizes that her partner is never going to be the man of her dreams. Her husband, Banta, an opium addict, has never appreciated her beauty. She gets attracted to Bhajji, a young and attractive man who is newly appointed as the priest of the village gurudwara. The fragile marital bonding, unfortified with love, breaks easily. Santi elopes with the priest, leaving her little son Melu, who becomes the actual victim of this severed relationship.

Singh's story "Kath Ki Putli" depicts the pathos of the shattered expectations and dreams of a young girl. Kuljit has been weaving an image of the new exciting city life she is going to enter after her marriage for the last two years since she got engaged. But all those romantic dreams are crushed as her husband turns out to be an overtly religious person who has even converted his bedroom into a holy temple. He spends the very first night of their togetherness reciting God's name and initiating her as a Gursikh<sup>5</sup>. When she changes from her wedding finery to simple white clothes, ties her hair as per his insistence and joins him on the asana<sup>6</sup>, he, remaining completely oblivious of her tears of disappointment, praises her transformation. A wife is a possession in the patriarchal world; she is to abide her husband and forget her dreams.

Santi, in Gurdial Singh's story "A Price for Bride" reacts strongly when her husband pays nightly visits to his brother's house. His brother has bought a bride and both the brothers along with their two nefarious friends indulge in shameless orgies. She protests strongly for which she has to endure his callous beatings. But under no circumstances will she tolerate his waywardness silently for it is an attack on her identity, both as a woman and a wife. Walby poses a question, "Is the household then, a major site of the oppression of women? If so, why do women marry and enter into such exploitative relations?" (86). Beauvoir's statement seems to answer this "She must shed her old skin and cut her own new clothes. This she could do only through social revolution" (681). There is a subtle desire to transcend the ordained gender roles by questioning the fault-lines that govern the gender stratification.

### **Points of Convergence and Divergence**

Both women and men supplement each other to attain completeness. A catastrophe occurs when they are unable to communicate and reach a mutual understanding, or when their expectations from each other are eroded. In Tagore's stories the disillusionment that follows is borne with a silent but a strong protest. In Gurdial Singh's stories, it is accompanied by a violent outbreak, which is more or less a self-devastating one.

A fundamental difference in the cultures of Bengal and Punjab is well endorsed by Tagore in his short story "Laboratory" written a year before his death. Sohini, a Punjabi woman, points out to Professor Choudhuri, her Bengali friend:

If anyone touches my laboratory, I'll defy your fate. I'll defy your doctrine of immutable cause and

effect. I am a Punjabi woman. I can wield a knife quite readily... I am not a Bengali woman, to do nothing but weep her eyes out for love. I can give my life for love and take life too. (Tagore, *Selected* 287)

The short stories, written by Rabindranath Tagore, reflect the changes in the contemporary society. Tagore weaves his tales with a dream-like romanticism, yet he shows a profound understanding of human nature and examines the inherent follies and foibles of humankind, sometimes with a deep sense of pathos and sometimes with sympathetic humor (Quayum 67). Gurdial Singh, a tale whisperer, (Nayar A Tale) exhibits an uncanny realism and simplicity in catching a moment, a feeling, and sometimes a character. Both the writers reflect the pulse of the times in their character delineation and their rendering of stories. Both carry a conception of the future with an intense subtlety in their short stories. They belong to the different eras, and as a result, the definition and parameters of relationships are likely to differ in their stories.

Tagore's is the age of turning over of a century, resounding with a loud outcry of self-recognition, and a strong protest for the reassertion of the self-dignity as a free citizen. Social activists were fighting with the blind superstitions and malpractices of the Indian society. Amidst all this, a soft effort by the writers went in the direction of recognizing the dignity of the women in their relationship with men. Tagore's stories are primarily concerned with the recognition of women as equal. Gurdial Singh's era is a time of introspection, and "literature is meant to voice social concerns" (An Interview). The streak of violence in the background of the helplessness, rendered by poverty and social pressures, is a tragic reality. Gurdial Singh highlights the dehumanizing and adverse impact of class oppression on these relationships in his stories. The man-woman relationships in the works of these two writers, though resonating with universality and timelessness, are defined by their respective regions (Markusen 33) as well as their contemporary eras.

### Notes

1. It is a piece of ornament worn on the center of forehead in the traditional Punjabi way of dressing.
2. A divine offering of songs
3. A phrase used by Mr. Parkash Singh Badal, the then Punjab Chief Minister of Punjab, while paying his tribute to Gurdial Singh on his death.
4. A composite word formed by the combination of two root words-'ardh' means half and 'angini' means body implying that a woman has an equal share in the life of a man after their marriage.
5. A gursikh is a Sikh who is fully devoted to the true guru. One who calls himself a gursikh of the true guru wakes up in the early morning hours, meditates and treads faithfully on the path shown by his guru.
6. A raised place for meditation

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## Navigating the Self through Memory: A Spatial Discourse on the Trauma of Partition

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### *Abstract*

*Just as their homeland became a contested space of war with the tragedy of Partition, the 'partitioned' individual was first rendered homeless. This departure from the 'home' creates a narrative of grief and glory, however now long gone, continually conditioning and imploring the refugee to conjure, and transcend from, reality of both the Self and the space that is the 'home.' The homeland then imagined becomes a construct of memory, imaginaire, and its topology— an ideational reminiscence that contests futile boundaries that speared through a million hearts in 1947. The paper ventures into select literary narratives that attempt to locate, through memory, the Self in the dimension of the home—lost and never found.*

*Keywords: Partition, Memory, Home, Space, Time*

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Amidst its mundane festivity and euphoric frailty, human life is but a long journey of separations. Each separation abandons a narrative behind by the bylanes that lead up to the 'home.' The individual departs, only to arrive nowhere, but the narrative remains—stranded in the homeland, for the grief-stricken human fails to carry in his caravans the landscape of the home and the identity he draws from the closely knit cultural praxis of the homeland and community, where its nuances construct the Self. And due to its spatial incongruence, the very present of the migrant becomes a montage of the past, paralyzing the individual to conjure up a spatial narrative of his incomplete romance with the land and its history. Especially for the Partition migrant whose understanding of nationhood is now as partitioned as his being, the sense of identity that one derives from the culture and language of their land is now conflicted as the migrant veers from one land to another in pursuit of a place to call home. The individual, in his attempt of being dislocated and relocated, transmutes the home of the map in the mind in order to grapple with the nonlinearity of his sorrow.

The day of independence for colonial India brought with itself the tragedy of the entire nation, where feet dancing to the euphoria of independence were crippled by the religious Other and homes and hearts gambled in the political fanaticism called Partition. The August storms swept all life and love, and the individuals fell victim to their own religion. It was then decided that hearts had to be abandoned in the homeland for they were heavier than the trunks the refugee carried over his head. Thus began the exile that even seven decades hence innumerable refugees are still banished in. This article reads the identity of the Partition migrant vis-à-vis the Home—and constructs a literary estimation of what it means to be a Sindhi without Sindh, a *muhajir* (A Muslim Emigrant) in Pakistan and a Punjabi in a splintered Punjab—as the gap between nationality and nationhood increases. The 'home,' an enclosed space of communion, a world within the world—a *heterotopia* (a concept elaborated by Michel Foucault) in approximation, carries cultural and ideological contours that



shape, impact and interrupt one's identity. Literature thus written as a temporally mediated reflection on the partition of India attempts to locate the migrant's Self in the dimension of the homeland— lost and never found.

### Maneuvering the Site and Sight of Memory

Partition as a tragedy does not limit itself to the physical brutality that the body of the abducted woman scarred or her mourning patriarch slashed by the sword of the Other. The violence of butchery and geographical displacement metastasizes to psychological displacement too. “The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,/And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,/And the armies that remain'd suffer'd” (Whitman, “*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*” lines 179-185). Leaving and being left behind constitutes the magnitude of the entire civilisation's tragedy of Partition. Home for an individual transcends from its topology and serves as a liminal space of sociological and psychological confluences. Mitigated by spatially impressionistic boundaries, the land derives its poetics from an interwoven fabric of history, culture and mythology, bound to the demarcations of 'inside' which is personal, and 'outside'—the public. Migrating to a present located “elsewhere” (Rushdie 12), however, renders the uprooted migrant in a state of homelessness in constant negotiation with his private which is now exposed to the public.

Space as a sociological construct derives as much from its past as it does from the present. Bound by the complexities of spatiotemporal curvature lay the dynamics between the land and its natives, relational to the expanse of development and decadence. Not only does the land follow through the historical changes of its people where kings and kingdoms and their regimes come and go, its inhabitants too correspond with the land as it unfolds to a different time than the one the migrant belonged to. The inability, then, to claim or live in the space's present results in a state of homelessness and 'homesickness', distorting reality to create an illusion of what Salman Rushdie terms as 'imaginary homelands.' The Self metamorphoses into the Other just as the Home becomes a contested space, where identities get fractured in the conflict between the land and faith. The uprooted individual, living amidst the silent chaos of the land he continually fails to call his own, transmutes the 'home' in his mind. Even the mundane of the non-violent pre-Partition days gets transcended into utopian fragments and the migrant preserves such shards of memory to weave his myth often to repress overwhelming episodic violence. The multicultural Self then tries to reconstruct the Home not as a habitat but as a topological negotiation that also creates the desire to write the empire back.

“They say people come and go, places stay where they are. But, in this case, the *mohajirs* had transported an entire city within the folds of their hearts” (Paul 13). The essential nature of memory and recollection is nonlinearity, breaking all grounds of spatio temporality and fusing the difference between the present and the past. Joginder Paul's Deewane Maulvi (in *Sleepwalkers*, 1991) not only does always make a journey “from Lucknow to Lucknow” (15) in the Karachi that the *mohajirs* reconstitute, but also loses his sanity in doing so. Literary contemplation on the partition of India has put forth several of its Bhishen Singhs and Deewane Maulvies where the reality lies in the inversion of this madness where the reader is compelled to think whether they were madmen or those political preachers, who triumphed over their trauma.

As the individual is uprooted from his land, the discourse of his Self becomes a spatial narrative. While Sikander Mirza (in Asghar Wajahat's *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya O Jammeya E Nai*, 2006) receives compensatory accommodation in a *haveli* with twenty two rooms upon migrating to Pakistan, the essence of his existence lies back in the smaller home and Lucknow he is exiled from. “[. . .] tilting their caps in the Lukhnavi style, several streets converge upon the square all at once, as if the whole world were flocking here” (Paul 13), and in a space called Karachi was reconstructed the Lucknow that each *mohajir* carried in their caravans. The maps of their memory that the migrant conjures in imaginaire, as much of a heterotopian approximation, serves as a metaphor to the experiential reality of uprooted individuals, forming a Collective woven through the dialectics of

trauma and displacement—a world within the world, but ceaselessly a mirror reflection the illusion of which the migrant clutches on to for his exiled perpetuity.

The agony of nationhood for the individual arises with any disruption in the time-space curvature—not only when he is distant from the space in the given time, but also when the space remains but the time changes. The land Ratan's mother maintains as she says “*jis Lahore ni vekhya oh jammeya e nai*” (“he who has not seen the city of Lahore is yet to really be born”) refers to the space of Lahore in time past, sans the maddening communal violence. The space of Lahore that she belongs to, not as a Hindu *kaafira* (An Infidel) living in Pakistan but as one of Lahore's many dreamers, is now transmuted in her mind—and so are the tombs of the ancestors placed by Deewane Maulvi in the 'next gully' in Karachi. Maulvi remains, the space changes. The idea and understanding of Home become for the migratory Self as much a cognitive factor of his being as do race, sex and caste.

### **Becoming the 'Other'**

While the idea of a new nation that promised to integrate people of the same faith in a Collective created a mirage they endlessly chased, it was the elderly who refused to go. To abandon the graves of their ancestors or the land their roots bear creates a disjointed psyche which incessantly the elderly opposed. The individual refuses to be banished from the land of *ganga-jamuni tehzeeb* (an integrated cultural coexistence of the Hindu and Muslim communities) to a nation that puts the Chenab in conflict. Ismat Chughtai's short story “*Jaden*” (“Roots”) sketches out the gradual narrative of how with the shift in time, one becomes an infidel in their own space. The story sketches out through the character of Amma, reluctant to leave India for a distant dream with cultural supremacy and religious autonomy and economic rightfulness. Like many of Chughtai's works, the narrative proceeds as a spatial symbolism of the tragedy of Partition. The soil in which the seed is planted is a testimony of what was once a fragile sapling, and patiently waits to see it bearing fruit. To desert the land for a mirage then ruins both the soil and the tree. The tree wilts if it is uprooted and replanted elsewhere, “*kya pataa un paudhon ko nayi zameen raas aaye ya na aaye. Kumlaa to na jaayenge*” (literally means 'who knows if the plants will wither in the new soil'— indicative of every mother's concern about the children immigrating to Pakistan for new opportunities). All that remains with Amma when one by one, all of her 'home' is emptied of its laughter and shrill cries of doting children, is memory. The dynamics of her space change as its inhabitants pack their trunks, leaving Amma behind where “the mother suffer'd” (Whitman 180) and clutches to each of its rooms to fill their empty spaces with her memories.

*Aadha Gaon* (A Village Divided) by Rahi Masoom Raza is one such novel that goes beyond fiction to become a testimony of each individual for whom their loyalty towards land notes more significance than a faith and nation that divides the village altogether. People in the village Gangauli carry a local identity bestowed upon them by the village that rips them off their national or religious identity. People make the land and its topology. The village works as a microcosm of the nation where feudal disputes and clashes between Shias and Sunnis is a common occurrence, the village follows a state of bafflement as the new nation is imposed on its people. The village is 'divided' for it amputates its people into halves—those like Hakim sahab who reject political fanaticism and refuse to abandon their roots for the 'paradise' called Pakistan and those like Uncle Wazir, wavered by the idea of fundamental militancy and religious identity. Hakim Sahab, whose life turns into nothingness with the abolition of zamindari and the onset of modern medicine, but refuses to be wavered by the assurance of Qaid-e-Azam, “Eh bhai, our forefathers' graves are here, our tazia platforms are here, our fields and homes are here. I'm not an idiot to be taken in by your 'Long live Pakistan!'” (Raza 149). The space of their belongingness abruptly becomes the land of the infidel where they reason their departure by weaving the myth of their faith. “Arre bhai sahab, it's the fate of Muslims to be separated from their homeland. After all, didn't the Prophet of God himself have to leave Mecca for Medina?” (327), uncle

Wazir rationalises his refuge as a spiritual redemption. The village gets divided into the binaries of black and white, leaving no greys for the individual to arrive at any point of coexistence away from the political dejection called Partition. Ustad Daman integrates the binary on the shared basis of their trauma:

Is mulk di vand kolon yaaron  
 Khoye tussi vi oh, khoye assi vi aan.  
 Bhave muhon na kahiye, par vichon vich he  
 Khoye tussi vi oh, khoye assi vi aan.  
 Ehnaa azadiyan hatthon barbaad hona,  
 Hoye tussi vi oh, hoye assi vi aan. [...]  
 Jaagan waleyan rajj ke lutteya ae,  
 Moye tussi vi oh, moye assi vi aan.  
 Laali akhiiyan di payi dassdi  
 Roye tussi vi oh, roye assi vi aan. (lines 1-10)

(Because of this nation's divide, you are lost today and so am I. We may not speak it ourselves, but we know, both of us are lost in the world today. We both have been wrecked by the dream of freedom. We were in deep sleep, in the illusion of riches, those who were awake to the fire of hatred have stolen and taken everything that was ours. Your desolate, red eyes tell me, you have cried as much as I have.)

This parallel pull of experiential reality and memory creates a crevice in the psyche of the individual, suspending his cognition and thus burdening his existence. Literary responses to Partition bring to surface the problematized Self and attempts to negotiate the fissure between time past and present. Bearing the difference between pluralistic identities, the one the individual is born with and the other imposed upon his exile, the Self and its own Other perpetually struggle to coexist in the given space of the new nation.

The home travels, its memory remains constant. Rushdie establishes the need for creating 'homelands' in the mind where the migrant's imaginary truth permeates him into living in the debris of the new nation with debated poetic truth and citizenry. The body and psyche of the individual live not in the present, but remain in the past in the memory of social harmony and solidarity. This migrant, a victim of his own faith, lives in his past in a home otherwise 'irreclaimably' lost in time. Literature then mediates trauma to provide an organic frame to various such narratives written in the language of loss, punctuated with violence, where it is the silences that provide meaning to words. In any episodic violence, especially of a greater magnitude like Partition, the body of the victim does not create an idiom to represent its trauma but 'irrationalises' a memory to extend itself in nonlinearity. The victim's body and psyche thus is often not only narration of the trauma but trauma itself—memory turns the victim as the sight while its postmemory sustains the scarred body as the site of trauma. The sufferer then turns to art, where suffering turns into art.

Whether migration takes the form of diaspora or is the exodus imposed on a people, topographical dislocation compels the individual to alter and adjust their spatial poetics to negotiate with their pluralistic reality. Literature, while monumentalizing memories of a place, becomes a place of memory itself. It reads displacement through spatiality, and space through memory. The narrator's grandmother in *The Shadow Lines* (1988) wonders if borders are visible from the sky, but it is not “a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in a school atlas” (Ghosh 151). Contesting the political fanaticism called Partition, she questions and defies the need for mass killings and violence where there weren't any visible borders for people to see, only shadow lines:

[I]f there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then - Partition and all the killing and everything - if there isn't something in between? (151)

Memory necessitates the refugee's present where it then becomes essential to recreate the harmony of the 'home' as the individual looks in the face of suffering to derive meaning to a fractured and layered identity. One's identity is a composite weave of psychological and sociological threads that create as well as necessitate the cultural fabric of the land. The home as a buried possession defies its coordinates; the individual's hybrid culture caught "in molasses" (Whitman) involves a rewriting of his location, dislocation and relocation. Cultural destitution gives shape to the form of imagination that goes beyond the empirical understanding of exile. This gap between what Edward Soja terms as 'lived' and 'conceived' spaces (*Thirdspace*, 1996) further increases as the cartography of the physical spaces changes when the migrant fails to arrive at any points of convergence with his plural identity.

### Weaving Tattered Identities

"The first loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world" (Bhalla ix). Moving to a nation that preconditions hostility and hatred towards his land that now belongs to the Other results in a 'cultural failure' where the migrant is also compelled to appropriate his loyalties towards the homeland and the new nation. The Urdu of *nawabs* (refined) and its *nafees* (precious) lacing becomes the language 'of the enemy' and the five rivers slit now refuse to honour the divided man. Rendered without a space and place to inhabit and devoid of any physicality and reduced to an idea is placed in the space of the psyche as nostalgia. Academia views memory and postmemory as organic spaces in themselves, relying on no temporality to assert their occurrences. Memory is a map that leads to the lanes of the lost lover. The Lucknow that Paul's refugees reconstitute upon reaching Karachi casts a shadow on the reality of the city's presence. Metaphysical reconciliation with the 'home' defies the narration of the nation and Deewane Maulvi's comfort in illusion takes a jolt when the bombings take place.

Our existence serves as the *safe space* that securely rests our frailty and possession. They approximate mirror illusions of utopia to provide a safe haven for the kin to coexist, wrecked by the unprecedented tragedy of Partition, resulting in its members in a state of placelessness. The individual, defeated by his circumstances, falls in this split for "their civil spaces have lost coherence, their time has become fragmented, and they do not know how to retrieve their lives again and remake their homes" (Bhalla 12) and succumbs to the past to take the garb of silence. The myth of the family that superstructures on the premise of silence involves selective forgetting as much as selective reminiscence; continually altering their psyche to quieten their experiential reality that stuns them into silence, while it is also conditioned to fit the master narrative of the nation. The aesthetics of memory reside in the braiding of forgetting and remembrance, which the Collective across the border remembers. The memory of Partition lives in legacy as a partition of memory.

Memory of the 'home' thus remains a constant-unattainable dream for the desolate migrant. A 'transcultural map' that provides an alternate cartography in the psyche of the individual allows the migrant to locate the Self in the dimension of memory, opening a liminal *thirdspace* for the Self to walk by the lanes of the otherwise prohibited streets of his town, speak his Urdu language with its nawabi *nafaasat*, and stumble upon dead remains of his brethren in the streets. Memory, and its freeplay with space as an imagined construct, serves as an act of rejection and resistance to the trauma of Partition that enables them to re-envision spaces. Living in memory then subverts the interpellated reality and dislocation of the migrant. While this ruptures the unity of time and space across the curvature, it reconfigures the narration of the nation in postcolonial South Asian subcontinent that derives its fractured identity through displacement and dislocation.

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# Portrait of the Artist's Self in Ismat Chughtai's 'The Mole' and Kamala Das's 'The Flight'

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## Abstract

*The paper examines the representation of the artist's self in Ismat Chughtai's 'The Mole' and Kamala Das' 'The Flight.' The two stories project the emergence of the sense of self in the artist, different from her or his usual awareness of one's self, while engaged in creating an artistic imitation of the human model. Referred to as the other-self, this unfamiliar self is seen arising due to the individual's sense of vulnerability when socially interacting with others. The paper traces the emergence of this other-self within the artists in the two short stories and establishes it as an outcome of their susceptibility when interacting with their models during the process of artistic creation. Consequently, this other-self is described in the paper as distinct from the subconscious self which the artist is said to attain by distancing oneself from society.*

*Keywords: Artist's self, other-self, model's body, subliminal self*

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## Introduction

In his essay "The Artist as Individual" Herbert Read writes: "The artist, the individual endowed with exceptional sensibilities and exceptional faculties of apprehension, stands in psychological opposition to the crowd—to the people, that is to say, in all their aspects of normality and mass action" (382). Read's description of the artist as a brilliant and an unconventional figure distanced from society further entails the artist's quest to look inward. For Read this quest culminates in the realization of the "subliminal self" attained by the artist by renouncement of society once he reaches the "threshold of his potentialities" cultivated through social and cultural contact (391). Read's scholarly demand from the artist to achieve a detached self by reaching into one's subconscious, primarily attained by distancing oneself from people and societal conventions, stands in opposition to the other-self which emerges as a result of the artist's susceptibility when interacting with people. The paper then attempts to map this emergence of the other-self within the artist in Ismat Chughtai's 'The Mole' and Kamala Das' 'The Flight' as he or she comes in contact with the body of the model for using it towards an artistic end.

## The Artist's Self and the Body of the Model

Both Chughtai and Das, in their short story, portray the artist while engaged in the process of capturing the human body with all its vivacity. There exists, in the minds of both artists, a direct relationship between the model's body and the artwork which, in their opinion, benefits or suffers because of the external appearance of the model. The unnamed narrator sculptor in Kamala Das' 'The Flight' identifies the lack of outward radiance in the bodies of her city models as the foremost cause of invariability in her sculptures. According to her, the lack of ethereality as well as the standard appearance of these models, signalled by their pale face on a dusty, scarred, and lanky body, affects not only the outcome of her artwork but also her artistic skills (Das 131). Similar is the case with canvas painter, Ghasiram Chaudhary, in Ismat Chughtai's 'The Mole,' for whom the continuously altering complexion of his fifteen-year-old model, Rani, is the main obstacle in his inability to paint



her. Rani's chameleonic skin tone and the ever-changing colour of her pupils arouse his frustration as he fails to work out her exact complexion for his painting (Chughtai 116-117). This hurdle, according to him, delays the completion of his masterpiece.

But the narrator sculptor's complaint of the likeness of her sculptures and her waning skills can also be seen as an outcome of her dissatisfaction with her life in the city which, it can be conjectured, she unconsciously reads in the bodies of the city models. This dissatisfaction is perceptible from her admission of the long harboured dream of living in a house by the sea, away from the city limits (Das 134). Likewise, Ghasiram Chaudhary's growing sensitivity to Rani's appearance is the central reason that impedes his every attempt to paint her body. Finding himself entangled in the web of his newly found emotions and desires for this young model, as his mind and heart unwillingly reciprocate to her seductive stratagems, Chaudhary finds it hard to even paint the small black mole on her body. The mutiny of colours that he encounters on his canvas when painting Rani's mole is the outcome of the conflict between his old distanced self and the new desiring self (Chughtai 123). This conflict takes birth after his encountering, a day prior to painting it, the thick bulging mole on Rani's naked body, the sight of which fills him with an uncontrollable burning passion (120). It is this complex interaction between the self of the artist and the body of the model as opposed to the external appearance of the models (as believed by the artists) which ultimately decides the direction taken by their artwork.

The interaction between the artist and the model, in the two stories, brings to the surface a sense of self within the artist of which he or she is never conscious of before. The emergence of this previously unencountered self is the result of the artist's failed attempt to exercise full control over the model's body in the relationship between the two. In this sense, for the artists, the bond between them and their models can be defined by what Hegel calls the "victor (the master)" and "other (the slave)" relationship which is characterized by the conflict arising due to "the encounter of two self-consciousnesses" as one consciousness tries to establish supremacy over the other (Atkins 62). This conflict is seen within the Hegelian perspective as an outcome of the need to "satisfy one's desire for the (certainty of) self" and "the desire of *recognition*" (62). Both narrator sculptor and Ghasiram Chaudhary place themselves at a higher level when approaching their relationship with the young models and try to restrain their bodies through the direct or indirect display of power. They accord themselves the authority to accept or reject the body of the model on account of their professional and social standing and also demand the recognition of the same by expecting from their models to passively submit their bodies to the artistic demands.

In 'The Flight,' irked by the bodies of her city models, the narrator sculptor rejects them when she decides to leave the city. She sees her statues improving after a young village girl of seventeen, named Sridevi, agrees to model for her and gets the ultimate satisfaction in relaying "to stone the little highs and lows and eddies of that body," but this contentment comes at the cost of the body's exploitative use by the narrator sculptor who notices with apathy how Sridevi, wearied from the artistic process, had started to show "the utter exhaustion of a woman who had given birth six times in quick succession" (Das 135). Rani too in Chughtai's 'The Mole' is subjected to violent treatment by Ghasiram Chaudhary. Chaudhary's viewing of her as an "illiterate chit of a girl" belonging to "the filthy gutters" conceals within it the self-consciousness of his exalted moral, social and financial stature in comparison to her (Chughtai 116). He takes it upon himself to tame Rani using verbal or physical abuse and constantly expects her to be meek in order to show her gratefulness for being chosen by him as the model of his masterpiece despite her lowly background.

These artists eventually fail to impose their will on the models and, in turn, find their conception of self as better placed endangered. This happens because of the threat the models come to pose to the artists' assured sense of self by moving beyond the restricted experience they are confined to. Perceived as an object to be gazed at and rendered into a work of art which brings the artists material gain and fame, the models in both stories shun this limited understanding of themselves as

they go on to create their own experiences thus liberating their body in the process. Both Rani and Sridevi refuse to have their “entire being identified with the body” as they “inhabit and negotiate sets of ideas about who they can be” which allows them to undercut the overbearing attitude of the artists towards them (Frost 43, 52). Rani refuses to abide by the rules of decency that Ghasiram Chaudhary set for her by subverting his condescending self through her playful and flirtatious manners. To this end, she uses the black mole on her breast, her provocative talks, and teasing manners to entice him and, in no time, holds the power to transform him from an impassive man to a “mad fox” or a ravenous vulture or a “defeated dog” (Chughtai 116,121). Seventeen-year-old Sridevi also manages to break away from the labels the narrator sculptor comes to define her body with. She uplifts herself from being a mere exhausted body, collapsed at the end of the sculpting process like a “lifeless doll,” when she enters into a sexual relationship with the narrator sculptor's husband (Das 134). These young models break away from the hegemonic control of their bodies by the artists as they take charge of their body's experiences and, as a result, destabilize the artists' world that adds stability and certainty to their sense of self. The challenge faced by the artists to their self-awareness as to who they are and how they feel, in the two stories, is marked by their realization of the other-self which emerges in the course of their interaction with the models.

### **The Other Self of the Artist**

Catriona Mackenzie claims that it is through socially interacting with others that individuals gain knowledge of their self and it is only when facing “crises” or a demanding situation in a social relationship they find their preconceived and implicit knowledge of self entirely questioned (291). This crisis or situation faced by an individual in a personal or non-personal relationship which challenges his or her determined knowledge of self gives rise to what Sami Schalk calls the other-self which, she claims, can be perceived when “one behaves differently than one would typically act” as a result “causing the self to appear as other to the self” (Schalk 198). She relies on Judith Butler's concept of social, physical or emotional “vulnerability” of one's self to the other to explain the emergence of the other-self as she concludes: “It is the vulnerability of the self and other, the permeability of our boundaries that allows for the possibility of the other-self” (200). Both narrator sculptor and Ghasiram Chaudhary experience a blow to their indubitable sense of personal and professional self as they find themselves susceptible to the unfettered acts of their models, and are, in the process, made aware of their other-self.

In the case of Ghasiram Chaudhary, this other-self can be discerned from his shift from an unyielding aloof artist to one who is highly emotional and volatile. His transformation into a “new Chaudhary” is an outcome of the decreasing gap between his and Rani's world as he finds himself turning away from his earlier poetic self, distanced from the world, only needing his canvases to see the reflection of his body and soul (Chughtai 120-121). Chaudhary falls off the pedestal on which he places himself as he struggles in vain to suppress the rising carnal desire and jealousy within him because of Rani. Never conscious of feeling in this manner before, these unpleasant emotions not only pervade Chaudhary's moods and actions but also dramatically influence his artistic self. His increasing vulnerability to Rani's playful manoeuvrings of his heart is also signified by his artworks as he switches from painting bright and colourful landscapes to dark ones, influenced from his depressing obsession over Rani's black mole, for which he is ultimately rejected by his audiences (124). Similarly, in 'The Flight,' the narrator sculptor is made aware of her delusion in thinking herself to be harbouring an unconstrained and empowered self because of her position as the sole earner supporting her unemployed, ailing husband. She expects from him an unconditional loyalty in return of her financial assistance despite claiming to have untied her mind and body from marital obligations that had earlier made her a slave to his desires (Das 132-133). This silent, parasitic arrangement between the two gives her contentment and contrasts with her positing herself as one free from domestic entanglements that chain a wife to her husband. Likewise, she expects subservience from

Sridevi on account of her position as a sculptor endowed with professional right to use Sridevi's body to fulfil her own artistic ends. But it is after Sridevi's arrival, marked by the narrator sculptor's awareness of her husband's appreciation of Sridevi's beauty and genuine concern over her ill-usage, which shatters the narrator sculptor's misconception of her sense of self as independent yet wanted by her husband leading to the emergence of her other-self as obsessive, jealous, and still psychology chained to her husband. This is evident from her decision to sacrifice herself after discovering her husband's affair with Sridevi in order to control his life through her death by making him feel economically helpless and spiteful of the beautiful girl for whom he rejected the provider of his basic amenities (136).

This other-self is distinct from what the scholars have identified as an isolated, spiritual self needed to be attained by the artists through maintaining distance from the human world. W.B. Yeats calls this inner self an "additional self" which, he claims, allows the artists to keep "aesthetic distance" from the social world (Caterson 48). Herbert Read refers to it as the "subliminal self," an "another reality, profounder and more extensive than any known to our daily perception," which the artist cultivates by moving inwards, that is, by reaching one's subconscious after distancing oneself from society once its role in building the artist's capabilities is over (391). On the contrary, the other-self realized by the artists, in the two stories, is the product of their failure to maintain distance. "A life of piety and honour trampled upon so easily!" is the ultimatum on Ghasiram Chaudhary as his senses like his colours become "jumbled" and get "reduced to nothing" (Chughtai 124, 125). This happens because he fails to detach himself from Rani who, he knows, is a threat to his established personal and artistic self and eventually transforms into a canvas on whose mind and body Rani's mole is imprinted. Even though the narrator sculptor in 'The Flight' escapes the unfortunate fate Chaudhary is subjected to in Chughtai's 'The Mole,' and lives to write the first-person account of the events, she still has to endure the breakdown of her conception of self as superior on account of it being essential for her husband and Sridevi to sustain themselves economically.

## Conclusion

Ghasiram Chaudhary's masterpiece in Ismat Chughtai's 'The Mole' remains unfinished and the narrator sculptor's statues in Kamala Das' 'The Flight' come alive unnaturally, that is, at the cost of the life of her human models. The unnatural and doomed fate of the artworks in the two stories, as the paper establishes, is the result of the complex interaction of the artists' self with their models. It is further shown in the paper, how the artists witness the breakdown of their conception of self in this interaction as their models exercising their agency impair the artists' self-knowledge regarding 'Who they are?' and 'How well situated their self is?' Both Rani and Sridevi challenge the restricted value placed on their bodies by the artists and redefine themselves by exploring 'Who else they can be?' in this relationship, as a result, launching a silent attack on the artists by bringing them face to face with their other-self. The discussion on whether this other-self is an already present but latent aspect of an individual's self which is revealed during a social relationship or is it an entirely new self which is created in the process of a social interaction is beyond the scope of this paper. What the paper maps is the emergence of the other-self within an individual when his or her consciousness of self is undermined by challenging acts or situations due to others in social relationships. This happens to both Ghasiram Chaudhary and the narrator sculptor as they fail in their endeavour to assert their assured sense of self as socially and professionally dominant on their models and eventually find themselves showing an obsessive and jealous other-self due to their vulnerability to their models' liberating acts during the course of their interaction for artistic purposes.

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# Re-envisioning Nation through the Trajectory of Subnationalism: A Select Reading of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988) and Carl Muller's Trilogy

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## *Abstract*

*In the context of South Asia the 20<sup>th</sup> century is known as the age of nationalism. The nationalist discourses postulate the idea of a homogenous nation without taking into consideration the contentious social and political process characterizing the nation. The subjective, collective perception of the “nation” re-constituted by the discontented communities complicates the ontology of nation. My paper attempts to focus on the idea of nation and its otherness through a politically engaged reading of the texts. The paper problematises Benedict Anderson's notion of an “imagined community” in the Subcontinental context through the politics of subnationalism as depicted in the two exemplary texts, Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* and Carl Muller's *Trilogy*. Nation emerges as a site of struggle as it intersects with questions of political and ethnic isolation and complicates its seamless imaginings.*

*Keywords: Nation, nationalism, subnationalism, imagined community.*

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Written in an interventionist mode, the paper attempts to reveal how the grand narrative of nation is a misnomer which is staged by subsuming the identity of minority communities. The two South Asian Anglophone novelists namely Bapsi Sidhwa and Carl Muller create a postcolonial discourse which positions itself against the official history to enunciate the nation-space as a site of struggle governed by the history of subnational politics. This article's argument is twofold – first, that the subnationalist aspirations as depicted in these historical novels function as a critique of general theories of the homogenous nation. By offering the dissonant narrative of a nation, the novels posit an alternative and more inclusive vision of nation. Second, these two historical novels can be described in Frederic Jameson's terminology as “national allegories” that complicate the seamless imaginings of a nation as an “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson 6) characterised by “horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7).

Aijaz Ahmad in his book *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* regards nationalism as a complex ideology. He states:

Nationalism is no unitary thing, so many different kinds of ideologies and political practices have invoked the nationalist claim that it is hard to think of nationalism at the level of theoretical abstraction without dealing with the experience of particular nationalisms and distinguishing between progressive and retrograde kinds of practice. (Ahmad 7)

Ernest Gellner offers his views on nationalism in *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). According to him nationalism has its own amnesias and selective principles which might be distortive and deceptive by nature. Nationalist ideology also suffers from false consciousness. Nationalism preaches cultural diversity but in reality it imposes homogeneity. In the book *Indian Nationalism: The Essential Writings* (2017) S. Irfan Habib, the editor, regards nationalism as a double edged sword. It is the strongest driving force in politics and the most malleable one. It causes strife around political, cultural, linguistic

and religious identities.

Sanjib Baruah in his book *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (1999) explores the idea of subnationalism arising out of a disjuncture between supposedly mainstream nationalist politics and the peripheral communities of a nation. He defines subnationalism as another type of nationalism mobilised by “a small but vocal political faction” motivated by “the romance of independence” (Baruah xi). He explores the idea of subnationalism especially in context of Assam. He says that the subnational challenges do not receive much attention because they propel the growth of centrifugal forces and contest the notion of national identity. Ernest Gellner states that subnationalism is “the crystallization of new units...admittedly using as their raw material the cultural, historical and other inheritances from the pre-nationalist past” (Gellner quoted in Baruah 7). Subnationalism may be interpreted as a search for a community identity different from the identity offered by the nationalist historiography of an existing sovereign state. In some cases, it may take the form of separatist movements seeking autonomy and in some cases it may result in the resurgence of linguistic and religious tribalism.

The Theorists such as Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner have emphasised nationalism as a movement to create a nation state based on a specific vision of nation. Benedict Anderson defines nation in his influential book *Imagined Communities* as “an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). He considers nationality, “nation-ness” and nationalism as cultural artefacts capable of being transplanted across the world as a modular form to merge with a wide variety of socio political systems. However, if a community is not imagined as equal owing to their ethnic identities or the history of their migration, there might be an internal conflict, a separatist movement to assert their identities as evident in the texts *The Ice Candy Man* and *The Burgher Trilogy*.

Bhabha in his essay “Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation” questions the organic theories of holism of community which constructs the national unity through discourses of “out of many one” (294). According to Bhabha nation is a liminal space occupied by minorities, migrants, contending histories. So, a holistic representative vision of nation could only be situated in a discourse that includes the voices of minority, marginalised, emergent community. Bhabha regards their discourses as melancholic and alternate history. These people “articulate the death-in-life of the idea of the 'imagined community' of the nation” (315).

Partha Chatterjee in his book *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* argues that numerous fragmented narratives and resistances are essential in order to dismantle the “normalising project” (13) of nationalist historiography. In the essay titled “In Defence of the Fragment” Gyanendra Pandey lays emphasis on the importance of fragmentary narratives in order to resist homogenisation and develop potentially “richer definitions of the nation” (559). Taking cue from their views, the paper delves into the repressed history of minority community thereby demystifying the paradigm of national imagination.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* deals with the trauma of partition affecting the subcontinent. Most of the critical studies on the novel have focussed upon the Parsi minority and their struggle to cope with the dominant community. What remains relatively unexplored is the relentless pursuit of the Sikh minority engaged in redefining their religiously informed identity at the time of Partition. The decisive role played by Sikhs during the partition of Punjab Province has received little attention as compared to that of Parsi community. According to Ayesha Jalal, “the myriad subaltern contestations of an emerging mainstream nationalism” (2183) remain unexamined thereby thwarting alternative visions of nationalisms. Probably, the inclination of the readers to see connections between the writer's Parsi identity and her work colours their interpretation to a certain extent.

In the years leading up to India's independence Hindu, Muslim and Sikh community lived in harmony with each other in northwest Indian province of the Punjab. They tried to keep afloat the fabric of India's secular nationalism by burying their differences. The rallying cry for *Swaraj* or Home Rule kept them united. That is why when Mr. Rogers, the Inspector General of Police attempts



to incite animosity amongst the religious communities by stating that Nehru and the Congress and Jinnah and the Muslim League will never reconcile with each other, Mr Singh retorts: 'Hindu, Muslim, Sikh: we all want the same thing! We want Independence . . . You always set one up against the other . . . You just give Home Rule and see. We will settle our differences and everything!' (63).

After the departure of the British, the synthesis of religion and politics in India turned out to be profoundly inimical to the self-reliant and prosperous Sikh community. Unlike the Parsis, the Sikhs failed to fraternise with the majority community in Lahore. So, they were uprooted from their homes and subjected to unimaginable atrocities by majority community. The Sikh community expected some kind of autonomous status for themselves but the government failed to concede such autonomy for them which resulted in Sikh unrest. The grievances drove a section of this prosperous people to form a party known as Akali Dal. These discontented people ventilated their pent up grief by indulging in violence against their opponents and sometimes against Sikhs too who offended them. Fears of being exterminated by the Muslims in Lahore compelled them to adopt a policy of intolerance against the majority community.

In the novel, Mr Rogers describes Akalis as a “bloody bunch of murdering fanatics!” (63). When Dost Mohammad, questions Jagjeet Singh regarding the presence of blue turbaned strangers with staves and kirpans in Pir Pindo, the granthi's face turns solemn. He reveals in a submissive tone that the Akalis have sinister designs. He too is annoyed at their presence because they have disrupted the communal harmony existing in the Indian society. They congregate around the Golden Temple at Amritsar to devise their strategy. Jagjeet Singh states that the Akalis are troublemakers: “They talk of a plan to drive the Muslims out of East Punjab . . . To divide the Punjab. They say they won't live with the Mussulmans if there is to be a Pakistan” (107). On the contrary, Jagjeet Singh's amiable relationship with the Muslims of Pir Pindo is reflected in the way he and the Sikhs of Dera Tek Singh escort Dost Mohammad and others to the safety of their homes. A few days later, the Akalis launch brutal attacks upon Muslims villagers near Amritsar and Jullunder. The villagers in Pir Pindo are also forced to evacuate the village without their belongings.

Again in a conversation between different communities at Queen's Park, the bitter reality of partition emerges. The Masseur warns that Lahore will go to Pakistan after the division because there is a Muslim majority in Lahore. The Sikh zoo attendant however claims that the Sikhs own more farm land in Punjab than the Hindus and Muslims put together. The Masseur advises Sher Singh and other Sikhs to arrive at an agreement with the Muslim League in order avoid trouble. The wrestler warns the entire group regarding the Sikh “tradition of violence” (130) and their plan to drive the Muslims out of East Punjab. He states “Don't fool yourself . . . They have a tradition of violence . . . Haven't you seen the portraits of the gurus holding the dripping heads of butchered enemies?” (130).

The Sikh soldier saint delivers an intense speech outside the Assembly Chambers. He ruthlessly attacks the Muslims “We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan! We will show them *who* will leave Lahore! *Raj karega Khalsa, aki rahi na koi!*” (134). The audience respond to his speech with thunderous applause clashing their swords, kirpans and hockey sticks “Pakistan Murdabad! Death to Pakistan! Sat Siri Akaal! Bolay se nihaal!” (134). The Sikhs decide to join hands with the Hindus in order to drive away the Muslim. The speech aggravates the growing hostility between the two communities. Having overheard the Sikhs and their motives, the Muslims roar back that they will play holi with the blood of the Hindus and the Sikhs during the festival. From the roof of the tenement Ayah watches Delhi Gate, Lahori Ghat, Mochi Darwaza in flames. A mob of Muslim *goondas* also creates terror in the entire area by shouting slogans “*Allah-o-Akbar! Yaaa Ali* and “*Pakiatan Zindabad!*” (135). The Sikh fanatics attack at least five villages around Dehra Misri and commit atrocities upon the Muslims. These instances reflect how religious insecurity fuels the growth of subnational aspirations.

In the Sri Lankan context too the fear of being exterminated by the Sinhalese community at the advent of independence lends impetus to Burgher and Tamil subnationalism. Ambalavaner Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies* (1997) and Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994) portrays how

exasperated wish for freedom triggered a group of rebel Tamil organisation The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to demand a territory and carve a separate identity for their community. Similarly in Carl Muller's *Burgher Trilogy* the main driving force of the Burgher subnationalism springs from their shared desire to preserve their distinct and unique culture which, in a way justifies their right to claim Sri Lanka as their land. Minoli Salgado's in her book *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place* (2007) states that Carl Muller's *Burgher Trilogy* attempts to “deconstruct models of a unitary, homogenous nation and do so by re-locating national space as exilic space through mobile structuration of home and belonging” (19). The gap between alienation and accommodation of the Burgher community in the island nation helps them to articulate alternative narratives of nation.

Carl Muller's *Burgher Trilogy* (*The Jam Fruit Tree, Yakada Yaka, Once Upon a Tender Time*) can be considered as celebration of the Burgher community and their determination to keep intact their group consciousness through their varied cultural and social performativity. The Von Bloss family at Boteju Lane in Dehiwala is presented as repository of Burgher culture and identity. Their house offers scope to explore the household dynamics of Burgher family. The title *The Jam Fruit Tree* (*JFT*) aptly indicates the proactive spree of the Burgher community. The main role of their womenfolk is to bear children for their hardy and lusty men. The tree represents “the ever-bearing” tendency of Burghers and their “never-dying” spirited nature and rich culture.

Muller devotes several pages to delineate the enduring legacies of Burgher culture. In fact, he capitalizes the word Burgher in his statement “A burgher wedding can only be described as a BURGHER wedding” (*JFT* 50) to highlight the enormous spectacle of food, clothes and music characterising their wedding. The luring aspect of their wedding is the selection of delectable dishes and celebration of their kinship bonds in the form of their drinking culture. There are elaborate floral decorations, arrangement of crackers and fireworks apart from huge investments in the clothing department. Their community bonding emerges in the way their Burgher neighbours in Boteju lane involve themselves in all sorts of culinary arts. Maudiegirl herself refers to the preparation as “monumental business of the wedding lunch” (*JFT* 52) which involves quite a few days of cooking. Their rich music and dance also form inevitable part of the wedding celebration.

Critic Ravishan in his article “Those 'Burgher Buggers': Revisiting Carl Muller's *The Jam Fruit Tree*” refers to Burgher wedding as “an homage to gluttony” and Burgher Christmas as “an homage to sloth.” The book ends with a Burgher Christmas which also involves laborious preparation of Christmas cake stuffed with brandy, arrack, seedless raisins, mixed glace fruit and various ingredients. The entire family of Cecilprins participate actively in the kitchen during the occasion. Grounded and potted mustard, salt beef, the rich Dutch yeast cake (*breudher*) and Dutch Lampries form a part of the enduring legacies of Burgher food:

Making a real Dutch *breudher* is another art Maudiegirl excelled in and passed on to her daughters (who were also shown how to make excellent love cake and that intrinsically Portuguese sweet- the many layered cake which was a Burgher speciality: *the bola folhado*...when Maudiegirl had a mind to, she would produce such marvellous things as the true Dutch Lampries... (*JFT* 186)

The novel artistically weaves the life of the Burgher Railway men, their bitter relationship with the Sinhalese at the time of independence, their short tempered nature and their firm belief in committing offence in order to survive in Railway service. It is through Sonnaboy's journey in his steam engines that we come to know about the corruption prevalent in the railways how the sleepers are siphoned, how the drivers complain about lack of fuel and stop their train at will to consume arrack, how they disrupt the time table and neglect their duties to enjoy delicacies at Railway bungalows. Sonnaboy is suspended for a week and transferred to Trincomalee for being involved in firewood related corruption. The narrator exposes the immoral nature of the Burghers in the statement:

He belonged to that celebrated Burgher clan who were quick with their fists, quick with

their drinks and woefully lacking in any penchant for patient legal debate. The easiest way to drive home a point or win an argument was to poleaxe the opposition. There were, in the Railway, many of his stamp and calling. (*Yakada Yaka* 20)

The first book of Muller's trilogy *The Jam Fruit Tree* depicts Burghers as essentially apolitical community in the island nation "The Burghers were too engrossed with their madcap, merry lifestyles to worry about who, for instance, steered the ship of the State" (YY 114). Their "overabiding sense of living together" (137) and their amazing tolerance helped them to merge with the fabric of the island nation. But with the spread of British education in Sri Lanka, the Burghers no longer remained the preferred lot. The Sinhalese, Tamils and Malays too competed for various ranks along with the Burghers.

The independence of Sri Lanka and the departure of British generated discontentment among the Burghers. Sinhalese was declared as the official language of the Republic of Sri Lanka and even engine drivers were required to qualify examination in Sinhala. Many of the Burghers who claimed Sri Lanka as their own land and never imagined to be rendered as outcasts in the island nation fled to England, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and USA in order to start afresh their life. Even Sonnaboy emigrated to England rather than qualifying Sinhala exam. Under British rule there was no scope for widespread political participation, so the Burghers kept out of political arena in the island nation. After independence, with the surge of a new nationalism, the Sinhalese came together and tried to oust the Burghers with their policies favouring only the Sinhalese speakers "It took just eight years after Independence, for the cosy world of Sri Lanka's Burghers to collapse. Once again the choice: adapt or leave...and most left." (*Once Upon a Tender Time* 219). It was not possible for them to form their own political parties and contest elections owing to their small numerical strength. Their only alternative was to appease the majority community by joining them and learning their language. The Burghers fell victims to a nationalist movement which was largely religious by nature.

What emerges from the analysis is that the Burghers were liminal people, inhabiting Sri Lanka. The hegemonic ideologies under the garb of homogenous nation made it difficult for the Burghers to survive in the island nation. Their firm determination to keep intact their exclusivity and eccentric traits within their own created Burgherhood kept them united in the struggle for their community identity. Towards the end of the trilogy Muller draws attention to the predicament of a minority group, at once made estranged by the historical changes characterising the nation.

They lost a home, but never their identity, and even those who did stay back remained Burgher and will be so to the last drop of their blood...The Burghers will never be outcast in this, their country, or in any country they adopt. They have always been the ultimate survivors. They were and still are, the most unique in this island or wherever. (YY 229)

The subnational aspirations as depicted in the novels repudiate Anderson's theory of modular nation that it is capable of being transplanted across different nations. My argument is that probably the rethinking of the modular form of nationalism itself as diverse and dynamic in the context South Asia as enunciated by Partha Chatterjee will help to foster a composite and fluid variety of nationalism. From a critical analysis of the novels it emerges that from nationalism we have passed to parochialism. The ideals that inspired freedom from colonial rule in South Asia nation states seem to be cracking under the pressure of ethnic conflicts. National identity instead of ennobling the mind of the people has turned out to be the potent divisive agent. The study of subnationalism in ethnic riven South Asian nations elaborates the paradox of the sovereignty of a nation. Both the novels memorialise the anguish of the community termed as "outsiders" by the national framework as well as smaller nationalities within the nationalist paradigm. The writers probe into several fragmentary instances of subnationalism to debunk the grand narratives of nation.

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**The Rhetoric of Body, Disease and Disability in Indira Goswami's  
*Under the Shadow of Kamakhya***

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*Abstract*

*Body becomes a site for control, oppression and a mechanism to regulate hegemonic power discourses and also aids in understanding the various manipulative forces that work against it. This article critically examines Indira Goswami's Under the Shadow of Kamakhya to interrogate the nexus between body, disability and disease that pushes one to the margins. The protagonist Padmapriya suffers from leprosy and she uses her body as a tool for negotiation with self and society in order to fight the constructed mechanisms that exist in the system. The body allows her to think her subjectivity and turn the body as a site of power, resistance and counter narrative. Through the fictional representations of Padmapriya and the midget Saeng, 'the disabled' who do not conform to the received perception of 'normalcy', this article investigates and interrogates the rhetoric of body in terms of disease and disability and situates the text as a dialogue to deconstruct hegemonic discourses of normality.*

*Keywords: Body; disease; construct; normalcy; disability*

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Dr. Indira Goswami, popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami was an acclaimed Indian novelist, short story writer, editor and an academician from the state of Assam. Although she primarily wrote in Assamese, majority of her works are available in English Translations. Her works usually portray the sufferings of women in a rigid social framework and through her writings she questions the underpinnings of patriarchal dogma, constructed ideologies and other power structures that limit women's freedom. Apart from looking at her oeuvre in terms of psychoanalytical, socio-cultural and eco-critical perspectives, scholars have trained their lenses on feminist concerns, marginalization, and issues pertaining to female sexuality, the body and resistance to oppression. One unexplored aspect that informs Indira Goswami's writings is the representation of disease and disability that feature in her powerful short story, *Under the Shadow of Kamakhya* that this article attempts to examine through various critical and theoretical modes. Drawing inferences from the text, the paper looks into the dynamics of body politics so as to situate and problematize the constructed ideologies produced and proactively disseminated in the social order. An exploration of the text from the critical perspective of bodily ailment and disability studies, merits examination, hence the relevance of the present appraisal.

Goswami's *Under the Shadow of Kamakhya (USK)* is a short story which appeared in an anthology of eight short stories titled *The Shadow of Kamakhya* first published in 2001. The story revolves around the protagonist Padmapriya who suffers from leucoderma, a kind of leprosy which causes white spots on her body. As this study focuses on the aspect of body, it is interesting to note that



the story revolves at the backdrop of the historic temple of Devi Kamakhya where the Goddess's body "has the heavy menstrual flow." The Assamese title of the story, *Devipithat Tej* refers to the blood; the menstruating blood or the bloodshed through animal sacrifices as a religious practice at the shrine located at Guwahati, Assam.

Padmapriya's bodily ailment prompts her husband Bhuvaneshwar to disregard and send her to her parental home. This causes psychological trauma to Padmapriya and her parents. She feels betrayed by her body as the diseased condition uproots and dislocates her, causing much agony and silent suffering. Although the white spot is visible only at the back, the body has become a site for Padma's exclusion from marital life. She is looked at as an object of 'burden,' 'pity' and 'gaze' for the predatory onlookers. Padma's acute sense of isolation and marginalization is captured through the repeated image of Padma confining herself in a dark room and looking through the window, symbolizing escape and hope. The story moves with her engagement in picking white flowers in the forest to keep her occupied. She takes the help of Saeng, the midget to accompany her through the forest and the priest Sambhudev whom she encounters in this process. As the narrative unfolds, there is recurring description of bodily images; the diseased body of Padma, the deformed body of Saeng and the masculinity of Sambhudev. Preconceived social constructions of identity, normalcy or normality regulate binary divide and related norms and affect patterns of social behaviour and attitude. As Lennard Davis observes in *Disability Studies Reader*:

We live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavours to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. We consider what the average person does, thinks, earns, or consumes. We rank our intelligence, our cholesterol level, our weight, height, sex drive, bodily dimensions along some conceptual line from subnormal to above-average. We consume a minimum daily balance of vitamins and nutrients based on what an average human should consume....There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated. (1)

This determining factor makes one dwell in a constant engagement in processing the bodily fulfil the constructed norms of normal body, beauty and health ideals. The recurrent image of Padmapriya's constant effort to erase the white spot and get back to normalcy and to be accepted, is sprinkled across the text. "She shivered as the cool breeze touched her bare skin. Then she twisted around, with the mirror held out behind her, and strained to catch a glimpse of the small spot on her back" (USK 42). The effort to erase the white spots becomes a routine unconscious process. "Padma returned to her dark and lonely room. Her hand unconsciously returned to that spot on her back. And the nails returned to their futile task of trying to erase the mark" (46). Padma's constant negotiation and dialogue with self and the body shows her desire to escape from that body which has devastated her life:

Often, she would stand before the mirror and try to examine the white spot on her back.... In that dark room she could hardly see anything at all, but still she would persist...The white spot appeared to have remained unchanged. It had not increased, nor had it decreased. Slowly, rhythmically, she began to rub at the spot, her nails bit into her skin . . . (USK 55).

The repeated image of erasure and looking through the window is suggestive of her desire to escape. In the later part, she transcends from her silent submissive behaviour and appears bold and confident. She uses her body as a site for vengeance and resistance to fight against the atrocities. She captures her husband's attention as directed by her friend Lawonya who says "Men are like wolves. Once they taste flesh they turn into man-eaters . . . Human flesh is intoxicating. And the craze for human flesh is even more powerful in humans than it is among animals" (USK 48). Lawonya arranges for a secret meeting with her husband and whispers her "Don't use words. Try to speak with your body. When a young girl speaks to her lover in this way all his pride, anger, rage, everything disappears. The tiger gets transformed into a sheep" (USK 69). Padma's husband Bhuvaneshwar is in a state of belief that she carries his child in her womb and therefore seeks reconciliation as the 'other woman' cannot bear him a child. It is interesting to note how a woman's



body gains significance only if it can procreate. But the narrative has something dramatic to offer. At the end, Padma transforms into the ferocious goddess; resembling the Devi, the symbol of power. She seeks revenge and vehemently says "This child isn't yours" (*USK* 75). Her husband who comes to take her back, falls like the buffalo that is prepared for the sacrifice. Symbolically, Padmapriya represents the Goddess, the Devi "who feeds on buffalo blood" (*USK* 48) in her wild form of anguish and Bhuvaneshwar, the sacrificed one.

Padmapriya speaks for what it is to be a woman with a diseased body. She becomes a talking point for the community, an object of mere pity, shame, sympathy and gaze. With the rebellious attitude at the end she spurns sympathy and acceptance, and makes her body speak against all atrocities. She realizes her subjectivity, reorients herself to be not just accepted for her bodily responses to procreate and hence declares that the child belongs to Sambhudev. Thus, it is understandable that a woman's body becomes a site to exert manipulative power structures determined by the various institutions of the society. The body of woman is subject to scrutiny, discussion and object of gaze and this worsens if the woman suffers a bodily disease. Padmapriya's body becomes an object of gaze for the guests who visit her father. As she comes to collect the brass tumblers she "could feel the two pairs of eyes staring at her. She felt as if she was being stripped naked. Exposed. Their eyes seemed to scrutinize every inch of her body, searching for the white spot. Yes, they were searching her naked body for the white spot" (*USK* 43). Padma suffers in silence at her double marginalization; as a woman and a woman having a diseased body. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak expatiates on the dilemma:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced...the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (Spivak 287)

Padmapriya speaks with the same body that betrayed her. She converts her body as site of power and weapon to fight. The victimized body becomes a tool for resistance and thereby transforms into a speaking, fighting one. As Catherine Belsey has succinctly stated: "To speak is to possess meaning, to have access to the language which defines, delimits and locates power. To speak is to become a subject. But for women to speak is to threaten the system of difference which gives meaning to patriarchy" (16). In this context Helene Cixous' observation is pertinent:

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve- discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word 'silence' . . . (Cixous 886)

Having Padma's body at the centre and the deformed body of Saeng at the axis and referring to Sambhudev's masculinity, the text has much to explore from the lens of disability studies. The disabled figure is dictated and relegated to a limited function within the realist fiction and often become objects of witness, pity and sympathy by the normal characters. Disability studies interrogate received notions of disablement, the processes of identity formation and the subjectivity of disabled people. Rosemarie in her treatise *Extraordinary Bodies*, attributes gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability to products of same social processes and practices that construct bodies according to ideological structures. With the recurrent portrayal of 'normal' and 'disabled' bodies, Goswami seeks to question the very norms that constitute normalcy which defer the other. A thorough observation of the text makes it clear that Saeng's repetitive appearance to cater to the needs of Padma is a strategy to bring the disfigured to the centre and make him appear active; not a passive being relegated to the margins. In fact, Saeng's deformed/unnatural body gets more literary space in this text. The hierarchal binary divide of beauty/ugly, what is normal, natural and unnatural gets represented in the description of Saeng, the midget, the deformed being. There are multiple descriptions of Saeng's body in the narrative and in fact, he gets introduced through his body.

A middle-aged man was slowly walking up the slope using his folded umbrella as a walking stick. Behind him followed the bent, misshapen form of the midget-Saeng. (USK 42)

. . . Saeng just stood there, grinning broadly with his big yellow teeth. His head was far too big for his body, she noted. (USK 44)

'Who is that following them? The disproportionately large head. (USK 48)

Saeng is described as 'the hair on his head stood up like quills. His face was completely disfigured by pockmarks. (USK 48)

Padmapriya saw Saeng the midget standing atop a huge boulder, the size of an elephant's belly. (USK 57)

Saeng's recurring body images, calls into question the centrality of the notion of disability. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in *Extraordinary Bodies* writes “[d]isability is . . . the attribution of corporeal deviance—not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rule about what bodies should be or do” (6). She contests that disability is the reading of bodily difference in the context of socio-powered relations. The short story, *Under the Shadow of Kamakhya* lays bare the bodily differences against rigid norms and hegemonies of power. Although Saeng is disabled, it is only through him that Padmapriya seeks help and support to hunt the white flowers in the forest. Social exclusion and oppression under the notion of 'desirable' and 'undesirable' in the normative world gets emphasised through Sambhudev's masculine framework against which the diseased and deformed bodies gets 'othered.'

Sambhudev was a well-built man. He was strong and muscular. His muscular body rippled when he moved. It was as if the very idea of masculinity had crystallized and lodged itself within his body. He had the shoulders of a lion. His arms appeared to have been cast out of iron. The hot blood pumping inside him could almost be felt even at this distance . . . (USK 52)

Padmapriya becomes an object of gaze and constructed notions of feminine body. For Sambhudev, the “tiny slip of a girl had been transformed into this breathtaking beauty. It was almost as if another body had been lying dormant beneath the old one and one day the girl had shed her old body and metamorphosed into this” (USK 52). Susan Bordo, a modern philosopher who works on body studies, asserts in her essay titled “Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body” that female body was “a socially shaped and historically 'colonised' territory.” She further adds that “Feminism imagined the human body as itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped and marked by histories and practices of containment and control” (250). Padma's diseased body is 'constructed' 'colonised' 'controlled' and becomes an object of gaze for others but a matter of disillusionment for her. She has a complex and troubled relationship with her own body, a body not considered 'normal' in the eyes of the society. Dislocation and disapproval from the social structure, Sambhudev admiration for her feminine body and her engagement in using the body as a mechanism to fight; all reverberate in complex networks of body politics. A careful examination makes us understand that Goswami uses the diseased body and disfigured Saeng to represent the 'diseases' that operate and control under the facade of social order. Disease thus becomes a metaphor in the text which symbolizes external manifestation of our internal maladies. The deformed body of Saeng acts as an allegory to such maladies that require erasure.

Goswami's *Under the Shadow of Kamakhya* thus raises complex questions about feminine subjectivity within the purview of diseased body and disability and its implications at large. The narrative seeks to question the constructed notions of diseased body and disabilities as imperfection and speaks aloud to alter such perceptions. Padmapriya's diseased body and Saeng's deformed body do not conform to standard norms of 'normalcy,' and therefore, relegated to the margins. Davis says, “The 'problem' is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person . . . One of the tasks for a developing consciousness of disability issues is the attempt, then, to reverse the hegemony of the normal and to institute alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal” (*Enforcing* 4). Leonard J. Davis further elaborates,

“This divine or ideal body is not attainable by a human. When ideal human bodies occur, they do so in mythology. For example Venus and Helen would be the embodiment of female physical beauty. Similarly 'grotesque' is taken in contrast to 'Ideal.' In other words, if 'disabled' body is in binary opposition to 'normal' body, 'grotesque' body was in dichotomous relationship with ideal body (*Enforcing* 5).

A disabled condition comes under the purview of deviance and this arrives when the concept or norm of normal body or normality gets perpetuated in social discourses. The socially constructed binaries of beauty/ugly, normal/deformed, masculinity/femininity are questioned through the representations of Padmapriya, Saeng and Sambhudev. The text critiques such social views and determinants about normality and normalcy. The diseased condition of Padmapriya seems to echo the diseased social framework that operates on constructed ideologies. Disability as a constituted phenomenon is deeply rooted in the structures of power that label normalcy as ideal in social order. The short story *Under the Shadow of Kamakhya* deconstructs this notion and brings out the various cultural processes that enable categorical othering and degenerate them. Thus, the narrative seeks to question disease and disability as imperfection and makes an appeal to reorient and restructure our thoughts. The narrative is a saga of bodily representations, agonies and stigmatization in a 'diseased' society. The bodily representations thus speak in an effort to move to the centre and the text becomes a paradigm for theorising and articulating resistance and struggle against such dominant structures of power.

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## Verdant Verses: The Duality in Presenting 'Nature' as Illustrated through Indian Poetry

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### *Abstract*

*This paper titled Verdant Verses: The Duality in Presenting 'Nature' as Illustrated through Indian Poetry, aims at studying four Indian poems to explicate the dexterity with which Indian poets portray nature. Under Nature, ONV Kurup's A Requiem to Mother Earth and A.K. Ramanujan's A River are studied. Both the poems break all the conventional characteristics attributed to Romantic poetry and lack pleasant, natural imagery. Here, Nature becomes the medium of expression where the literariness of the ecology appeals to and provokes the reading public. The Natural as a mode of representation signifies the growing insignificance of Nature in a human domineering universe. In Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon's The Son of Sahyan and Keki N. Daruwalla's Wolf the semiotics of animal imagery—the tusker and the wolf respectively—embodies the plight of the natural world. Rooted in ecocentrism the present paper aims at highlighting the inherent sign systems of the taxonomy of Nature.*

*Keywords: Indian Nature Poetry, Expression, Representation, Ecocentrism.*

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“Ecocentrism is more compelling as a call to fellow humans to recognize the intractable, like-it-or-not interdependence that subsists between the human and the nonhuman and to tread more lightly on the earth than it is as a practical program” (Buell 102).

Ecocentrism dethrones the anthropocentric school of thought and encourages empathetic, accommodating, egalitarian existence amongst organisms. Ecocentrism engendered a radical shift in the approach towards mainstream literature. Ecological responsibility was foregrounded alongside literary aesthetics. Angus Fletcher's concept of 'environment-poem' elaborates that poems inherently possess an ecological value laced with politics. “Nature's economy calls not for a House of Burgesses, of Lords, of Commons, but more radically for “representatives” with whom we interact in a system of mutual co-representation” (Fletcher 124). This study evinces the different approaches towards nature and its functionality in Indian poetry and in the average Indian society. The study considers two Malayalam poems—O.N.V. Kurup's *A Requiem to Mother Earth (Bhoomikkoru Charamageetam)* and Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon's *The Son of Sahyan (Sahyante Makan)*--and two Indian English poems--*A River* (AK Ramanujam) and *Wolf* (Keki N. Daruwalla).

“Ecocriticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it” (Nayar 242). Amidst the ensuing ecological chaos, ecocriticism is the need of the hour. This paper, however, is not overtly Eco critical, instead focuses on crystallizing the expressive forms of Nature. In this study, the umbrella term 'Nature' gives an ecological perspective and is used freely to describe the reality of our planet. The poems, *A Requiem to Mother Earth* and *A River* elaborate on the two facets of our ecological reality and appeal to our guilty conscience. The term 'Natural' serves as a subset to the all-encompassing term 'Nature.' The poems, *The Son of Sahyan* and *Wolf* imagine social reality through distinct animal imagery. *Nature* and *the Natural* together concludes the different approaches the poets adopt towards Nature in their verses.

## **Nature as a Medium of Expression**

The ecological emergency that we face and the stark social reality surrounding us are foregrounded through the natural imagery. This constant, convenient reliance on Nature elevates it as a medium of expression. A medium with utmost clarity and efficiency. This practice gained popularity during the Romantic Age and was sustained as the ecological deterioration strengthened exponentially. Having spearheaded many environmental and social movements, Nature continues incredibly to serve its purpose as a medium of expression.

### ***A Requiem to Mother Earth: A Disconcerting Warning through Nature***

*A Requiem to Mother Earth* is the title poem in O.N.V. Kurup's 1984 collection. One of the major 'Pink Poets' of the Communist Era, Romanticism in his poetry was not merely a celebration of Nature, it pinpointed the immediate sociopolitical problems faced by mankind. His poems received universal acclaim for their humanitarian undertones. *A Requiem to Mother Earth* is a poignant poem of remembrance written in advance for Mother Earth by one of her beloved children. The poet--the son--feels it necessary to compose a requiem in advance, as he fears that his Mother would die a premature death. Kurup says,

When tomorrow you lie benumbed  
in the enveloping shadow  
of the dark poison-flower of death,  
none will be left here,  
not me either,  
to mourn, to moisten your dead lips  
with our tears! (9)

By assuming the voice of a pained son, Kurup brings the issue of environmental decay into the personal realm. The reader is driven through the pangs of pain and hurt endured by the Mother and son. Kurup renders new dimensions to the clichéd metaphor of the Mother Earth. He draws freely from the folklore of Kerala when he compares Earth to Parayi<sup>1</sup>. Kurup extends the metaphor to reflect the social decay prevalent in the society. He attributes the deteriorating health of Mother Earth to the incessant conflicts between her children.

Through the powerful language of Nature, Kurup heralds the bleak future that awaits mankind. He blends imagination and facts with natural imagery. A series of graphic images explicates the cruelty perpetrated against Mother Earth by her children. He laments, "They tore it to shreds/ They clawed at your bare body/ They feasted on the gushing blood!" (Kurup 10). The violent imagery refers to Man's unquenchable thirst and hunger to feed off the resources of Mother Nature. Her sons unflinchingly, unfeelingly attack her for food and fuel.

*A Requiem to Mother Earth* became an anthem for the Green movement in Kerala. A sincere prayer for the trees resonated the need for protecting the environment. Kurup once said that the poem was penned on a single thought—What if Earth became a wasteland like moon? "ONV Kurup had not thrown away a single paper or struck out a single word by the time he finished writing *Bhoomikkoru Charamageetam (Requiem for Earth)*. The poem came into being without the poet knowing it, he once said. So was the title" (Perumthachan).

Kurup condemns the selfish, utilitarian motives of the human race. The poet agonizes over the escalating destruction of Mother Earth when he says, "O Mother Earth, not yet dead, / in the imminence of your death, / may your soul rest in peace!" (Kurup 12). This refrain, points a finger at the ludicrous actions of humanity. The commodification of land and unfettered consumption of resources has brought this fate upon her. He imagines Mother Earth, with a tonsured head hung low in shame, orbiting the Sun. Mortification bestowed on her by the children she bore, symbolic of the dual

exploitation perpetrated on both women and nature—the assumed weaklings.

Kurup cleverly contrasts these distressing imagery with the verdancy of Nature hoping to appeal to our conscience. He talks about the orchards, the groves, the cuckoo's song and the colour of the sky. However, the incessant exploitation has shattered the rhythm of creation. Winter and Monsoon has lost their essence. Life has been snuffed out of Nature. Through the soothing language of Nature, Kurup confesses to the sins of humanity. He says, “I, who took shape from you/ And from you took life” (Kurup 10).

### ***A River: The Malicious Face of Nature***

A.K. Ramanujan in his poem *A River* disregards all the Romantic connotations of Nature. He unveils a rare episode, an often ignored, callousness of Mother Nature. A Modernist poet, Ramanujan uses remarkably simple language to present a stark, social account in the poem, *A River*. The poem is set in Madurai, the seat of Tamil culture. It revolves around the flooding of the river Vaikai in monsoon and the response of the public towards the phenomena.

Ramanujan exemplifies the impact of the floods through basic, mundane imagery of everyday life. Every year the river runs a destructive course and new poetry is composed giving a journalistic account of the incident. Exceptional attention is paid to the death of the cows--Gopi and Brinda. And, the poetic fire of the village poets extinguishes once the water level recedes and the river achieves normalcy. Ramanujan condemns the insensitivity and lack of imagination of the poets who only see the flourishing side of the floods. The poetic imagination precisely captures the inches rising and the number of steps covered in water. Human lives are not mourned.

The new poets still quoted  
the old poets, but no one spoke  
in verse  
of the pregnant woman  
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,  
kicking at blank walls  
even before birth. (Ramanujan 11)

The river, Vaikai, is intimately linked to the Tamil culture and way of life. The poets are fascinated by the river's aridity in summer and the capacity to flood during monsoon, a vicious cycle beyond human control. The poets are obsessed with the magnificence of the unknown. They write repeatedly about the temples and the river. They fail to deliver the truth and mourn the countless lives lost in the floods. They are unable to break out of their Romantic complacency.

Here, the river, a natural symbol of life, abundance and fertility becomes a destructive force. Ramanujan, through the unsentimental rendition, attempts to elaborate on the less-discussed concept--Death at the hands of Mother Nature. Ironically, innumerable deaths happen unchecked in the land of temples. Ramanujan employs Nature as a medium of expression to unveil the truth and to challenge the indifference of the poets.

### **The *Natural* as a Mode of Representation**

Representation involves the employment of signs to signify ideas. Here, in this study, the *Natural* refers to anything that shares a secondary relationship with Nature. Animals who stand the closest to both Nature and Man are often employed to carry ideas. Therefore, animal imagery can be considered a mode of representation functioning within the contours of Nature, appealing to the older and younger generation alike. The obsession with the natural imagery can be explained as, “The message is that in crucial ways we are the animals and they are us, and that what we are as humans is mostly what we were for the longest time”<sup>2</sup> (Kowinski).



### ***The Son of Sahyan: The Elephant as a Signifier of Nature***

Vailoppilli interfered with the Romanticism in Malayalam literature and ushered in the Modernist phase. *The Son of Sahyan (Sahyante Makan)* was originally published in 1944 and later included in *Kannikoythu (First Harvest)*, his first collection of poetry. *The Son of Sahyan* documents the ruminations of an elephant caught amidst the chaos of culture. Here, primarily the elephant stands as a symbol of Nature, incessantly devoured by Man. This allusion shocks the modern imagination as elephants are widely accepted as symbols of strength, power and peace.

The poem opens at a temple ground where decorated elephants are lined up to offer reverence to the deities. The procession is led by a restless, musth elephant who begins to terrorize the people gathered. Distressed, the elephant remembers the happy childhood days he spent in the forest of Sahyan. The thoughts of the tusker alternates between fantasy and reality. He fumbles through reality and imagines the hot blood oozing out to be the milk of the paala tree: “The milky fluid oozes/ With a bloody stink” (Menon 47). However, reality shrouds him as “The varied instruments/Clamouring in the festive ground” (Menon 49). But, the tusker conveniently substitutes this awful din with the croaking of wild toads. He continues rummaging through the forest, even after darkness falls, hoping to find salvation. He imagines being reunited with his herd, “The beauteous offspring/Of the Sahya ranges!” (Menon 50). He soon begins to break out of the trance and is plagued with doubts. His increased aggressiveness, being musth, encourages the authorities to shoot him down. The elephant dies, calling out to Mother Nature, helplessly. Ironically, the elephant is mercilessly killed on the temple grounds, the seat of the Gods. Vailoppili laments,

Still the voice echoed  
In the heart of Sahyan  
Unable to endure the pain  
Of his son's tragic plight! (Menon 53)

Towards the closing of the poem, the poet tries wistfully to catch a glimpse of the tusker's imagination. Vailoppili believes that Nature would be able to sympathize with the elephant. He believes that perhaps Nature held the answers to his questions as it had experienced similar agony. Nature had been defiled and tortured by humans, the same way the tusker is now being hunted. The tusker runs amok as it is removed from its natural habitat while being musth. The poet condemns this insensitivity and selfishness of human beings. The initial resistance and eventual succumbing of the elephant is symbolic of the gradual annihilation of Nature at the hands of its Nurture.

The elephant is emblematic of the torment of Nature. *The Son of Sahyan* is resplendent with vivid imagery celebrating the sumptuousness of Nature, taunting the inhumane cruelty perpetrated by Man. Vailoppili intricately juxtaposes fantasy and reality, as the confused tusker struggles to find an explanation for the pain inflicted upon him. Naturally, it is equated to the confusion of Mother Nature as she struggles to make sense of the sufferings granted to her by humanity. Therefore, the tusker, is an effective mode of representation to discern the desolate state of Mother Nature.

### ***Wolf: A Piteous Crumbling of the Natural***

Indian poetry in English is very much indebted to Keki N. Daruwalla. His poems are socially realistic and are rooted in the Indian way of life, providing satirically laced social commentary. The poem *Wolf*, however, is centered on a single, vicious image. The grim image of the Wolf passed on from generation to generation. Daruwalla describes the Wolf through – his perception of the wolf as a child, his mother's description, the wolf in his daughter's world. In the opening lines Daruwalla says, “the wolf circles my past” indicating that as an adult, he is still haunted by the concept. The strong vocabulary employed in describing the wolf gives him a deadly appearance. The poet admits that the fear is irrational and psychological when he says, “Black snout on Sulphur body/ he nudges his way/ into my consciousness” (Daruwalla).

“Prowler, wind-sniffer, throat-catcher,” (Daruwalla) are some of the words used to describe the wolf. He frightfully remembers his mother's description of the wolf:

his ears stand up  
 at the fall of dew  
 he can sense a shadow  
 move across a hedge  
 on a dark night;  
 he can sniff out  
 your approaching dreams; (Daruwalla)

This daunting portrait painted by the mother is essentially a strategy to keep the child's behaviour in check. An all-powerful wolf, lurking in the dark, capable of sensing dreams could easily be a persona constructed to condition the behaviour of unruly children. However, he is oblivious to the fact that the wolves were being hunted down at night. This shows how the mainstream representation encapsulates the horrific truths pertaining to the environment. The effacement of the once vigorous wolf is symbolic of the slow deterioration of Nature.

In the closing lines, the poet mercilessly destroys the ferocity of the animal when he says, “The wolves have been slaughtered now/ A hedge of smoking gun-barrels/ rings my daughter's dreams” (Daruwalla). The wolf has lost its glory by the time the poet's family had entered the third generation. It is no longer a symbol of strength and courage, instead, it has been reduced to a frail creature hunted down by Men. In fact, his daughter seems to be more scared of the 'smoking gun-barrels'.

Daruwalla's poem is an illustration of an unwarranted, fall from grace of a mighty figure. As a child, though the poet fears the wolf, he is at the same time captivated by its magnificence. His bemusement is captured in the lines, “Fire-lit/ half silhouette and half myth” (Daruwalla). In the poem, *Wolf*, the relationship between the child and the wolf is drawn parallel to the symbiotic relationship shared by Man and Nature. The child is equally scared of and is in awe of the wolf, just as we are of Nature. We carelessly exploit Nature despite being cognizant of the grave consequences we would suffer.

## Conclusion

The literary imagination of the Indian writers was able to intertwine the Natural and the Human seamlessly. They proved influential enough to instigate multiple Green Movements in India, both national and regionally specific. The duality in the depiction of Nature is classified as *Nature* and *the Natural*. *Nature* refers to the superior, independent force, and the *Natural* functions as a part of the larger whole. The diabolic, social reality is written through the language of Nature. *The Natural* incorporates the secondary devices or objects employed to bridge the obvious gap between Nature and Humanity.

It can be argued that modern civilization indulges in the exploitation of Nature, lacking a personal correspondence with it, unlike our forefathers. Consequently, our relationship with the environment have become a mutually opposing, dialectical association. However, it is the need of the hour to let Nature heal her wounds. Literature has always reprimanded the instrumental approach adopted towards Nature. The opposing ecological discourse is imperative in containing the anthropocentric exploitation as evinced in Third World environmentalism. It is appalling to realize that poems reciting environmental decay and disaster outnumber celebration of the Natural. Humanity should halt its disparaging behaviour. Ergo, every individual should strive to maintain a therapeutic, symbiotic and organic relationship with Nature.

## Notes

1. Parayi is a low-caste woman who bore to Vararuchi, a Brahmin, twelve children representative of the

various vocational based ethnic groups and castes. Parayi's sufferings are symbolic to what Earth is suffering. See Odayam Misbah, *Pain of Parayi* (America Star Books, 2013), for a fictionalized elaboration of the myth.

2. For more details on the influence of animals on the human imagination see Paul Shepard, *Thinking Animals: Animals and the Development of Human Intelligence* (Georgia: Georgia UP, 1998).

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## Mapping Bombay's "Dead Center" Through Architectural Narrative in Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis*

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### Abstract

*Readers always fit spatial representations of narratives into some spatial-temporal context. These architectural narratives help in mapping the spaces presented in the literature. They act as mapping the story, not merely telling the story by the narrator. The narratives are not only the interplay of language, sign, and symbols but conjure up maps of the real and imaginary places. The present paper is based on Bertrand Westphal's theory of Geocriticism, which emphasizes the cartographic endeavor of author Jeet Thayil in *Narcopolis* (2012) to present the changing social space of Bombay concerning its history, spatialization, reconfiguration, and crimes. Apart from examining six categories of narration discussed by Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse* (1983), the paper focuses attention on how authors use 'mimetic' and 'diegetic' narrative mode to figure out real and imagined spaces to tell the story which offers details of a character or space. The narrator's voice or persona, the time, the frame narratives, and the use of different languages in the story where space becomes dialectic and its effect on readers, have been analysed. The blending of spatial criticism in narrative strategies takes readers one step further in the research area of the literary text.*

*Keywords: Mapping narratives, Architectural narrative, Spatialization, Crime, Geocriticism.*

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Jonathan Charley in his edited book *The Routledge Companion on Architecture, Literature and The City* (2018) establishes the nexus among architecture, literature and the space. Architectural narratives play a vital role in establishing the relationship between space, architecture, metropolis, and human beings. Architectural narratives are actually the narratives maps, that part of literature which concerns geographical details of a place. In Architectural narratives, generally, a space or a city becomes the protagonist. Jeet Thayil plotted the story of Bombay from the 1970s to 2000s in *Narcopolis*, comprising spaces made up of slums, roads, sea, opium dens and brothels and draw the story of humankind with all its rise and fall. This research examines how the variety of historical, cultural, psychological, modernist, and postmodernist narratives in the novel *Narcopolis* depicts the changing social spaces of Bombay and offers an insight into the society and social structure where the lives of characters are revolving around.

In his edited book *Literary Cartography* (2014), Robert T. Tally talks about "mapping narratives," which is a fundamental aspect of storytelling and the methods used to map the real and imagined spaces of human experience. He avers that when the spatial description and historical storytelling merge, it emerges as part of broader literary geography that makes the ground for writer's own literary cartography. He says:

Narratives- like maps, for that matter- never come before us in some pristine, original form. They are always and already formed by their interpretations or by the interpretative frameworks in which we, as readers, situate them. (3)

Set in 1970, *Narcopolis* is the story of a ruined metropolis Bombay which can be mapped through the lanes full of garbage, debris and open gutters to the slums of poverty, to the cages, cubicles and brothels and inebriated opium dens which is actually the original, dark and ugly side of a

doomed city which is ruled by glamour, power and money. Thayil's presentation of Bombay as a wasteland, cannot be seen, felt or mapped in the cartography of Bombay. Bombay is the city where the identity of the people is known by their religion, not by profession. They believe in freedom of religion yet kill the people on the name of religion. It is the city of chaos and contrasts, the city that is home to thousands of people who immigrate, bring with them different religions and cultures.

Thayil calls Bombay as *Narcopolis*, the city of drugs and intoxication. The story is told with the internal focalization of narrator's life, which takes place at the opium den, cubicles, and brothels in Shuklaji Street of Kamathipura, Bombay. Thayil presents himself as dramatized narrator Dom Ullis who has been educated in Hong Kong, New York, and Bombay, has been a drug addict and has learned about and witnessed and even participated in the events of the story where the characters are marginalized or "the lowest of the low." The motive behind presenting Bombay as a focaliser of the story is a conscious one in order to retrieve the history from a geocritical perspective. The first line of the novel states:

Bombay, which obliterated its own history by changing its name and surgically altering its face, is the hero or heroine of this story. (Thayil, 1)

The prologue reveals that the protagonist of the novel is not a human being; it is a space, 'Bombay,' and from the very first line narrator presents Bombay as 'Focaliser' of the story. The focalization in the novel lies in what the characters feel while living in Bombay. The prologue in *Narcopolis* produces a repeatedly blurred boundary between the fictional and the real that is a major structural and thematic feature of the novel. Thayil by choosing the phrases like "to light the lamp," "open the window," "broken city," "draw the smoke" and "lungs," "nostrils" and "mouth" gives the blurred image of khana. The diegetic move very quickly takes us from the darkness and smoky khana to the broken city shining in the moonlight from outside the open window. There is a contrast in both the spaces, outside from the window and inside the khana. The combination of light and darkness, the night is dark, but the city is visible through moonlight in the same way the darkness of the khana is lightened up by the light of the lamp only. Moreover, the smoke of the opium pipe enhances the intensity of darkness in mental space. Such narratives mingle the sensory and spatial images stimulate the senses of the readers; to vision, smell, taste, and touch; moreover, it doesn't let readers slip out from the novelistic world. *Sunday Times* reviews the novel in the following words:

The sense of the place is intoxicatingly horrible, and the author's poetic style makes something iridescently lush and nightmarish out of the squalor of recent Bombay.

The novel is full of such instances where narratives move from blurred images to geographical, political, personal, and temporal details and give the reader an unforgettable account of the historical geography of Bombay. Thayil chooses Analeptic details that mean the narratives which take us in the past. The plot is constructed in a flashback where Dom Ullis, the narrator, deliberately deconstructs his narratorship. He says he is not the narrator of the story; it is Bombay who tells the story. He says:

The I you're imagining at this moment, a thinking someone who's writing these words, who's arranging time in a logical chronological sequence, someone with an overall plan, an engineer- god in the machine, well, that isn't the I who's telling this story, that's the I who's being told, . . . trying to remember what it was like, the past, recall it as I would the landscape and light of a foreign country, because that's what it is, non- fiction or dead history but a place you lived in once and cannot return to. (Thayil, 1)

Herewith the mesmerizing mimetic mode of narration, it can be observed that *Narcopolis* is not merely a narrative; it is indeed a mapping narrative that narrates a story of a space Kamathipura. After land reclamation and immigration of marginalized communities, Kamathipura was transformed into a red light area of Bombay. Rashid khana, where Dom met with most of the novel's characters, was located in Shuklaji Street of Kamathipura. Shuklaji Street had been a very famous area for opium dens and brothels during the 1970s. But due to religious riots and political conflicts after 1992-93 Bombay bomb blasts, opium dens and brothels were closed. When the real estate market transformed brothels and dens into skyscrapers after 1999, the poor and the marginalized were deprived of home and

wished to die.

In *The Empire of Signs* (1970), Ronald Barthes claims Tokyo's Imperial Palace as "empty center," he says:

The city I am talking about offers this precious paradox: it does possess a center, but this center is empty. The city turns around a site both forbidden and indifferent, inhabited by an emperor who is never seen, which is to say, literally, by no one who knows. (qtd. in Ikegami 10)

In an article "Mapping Tokyo's 'Empty Center' in Oyama's *A Man With No Talents*," Barbara E. Thornbury calls San'ya "an empty center" of Tokyo and rejects Ronald Barthes' claims to treat Tokyo as "an empty center" or "an empty city." Shiro Oyama in *A Man With No Talents* (2000) presents San'ya as a ghetto city with its wilderness. Oyama depicts the trauma of the poor, marginalized day laborers living in windowless bunkhouses during 1966. The existence of the city comes to an end "during the decades of postwar rebuilding and seemingly endless boom-time economic growth that finally did come to an end in the early 1990s" (*Literary Cartography*, 167-68). People left San'ya, and it was called an abandoned city because no one lived permanently there. Still, people have been coming and going. Now San'ya is the space of social displacement, isolation, and alienation.

Thayil's Shuklaji Street is like Oyama's San'ya, socially forbidden, isolated, and alienated from roads and skyscrapers of glamour and money. Like San'ya, Shuklaji Street is also occupied with marginally unemployed people, but here marginalized are not the day laborers; they are opium-induced, drug, and sexual addicts. It is the dark and smoky place, fills nostrils with the smell of bitter opium in dens, used condoms in brothels and debris on the road. It is better to call opium dens as "dead center" rather than "empty center" (which symbolizes bunkhouses of San'ya) because now opium dens do not exist and the brothels will be soon treated as "hidden or disappeared centers" because of real estate market transforming slums and brothels into huge buildings.

In Thayil's depiction of the Shuklaji Street the center is not where the famous places are situated but where the poor and marginalize live. The narrative reveals that the marginalized migrated from different parts of the country do not exist on paper; they are people with no identity and are homeless because they live in slums, and slums are meant to be dismantled. The notion of the home is identified with revolving circle which does not have fixed center. The article "Kamathipura Facts," reveals that the poor who earlier worked on construction sites in causeways during 1793, developed Kamathipura. Subsequently it is Indo- Chinese opium trade during the early 19th century which transformed the laborers into drug dealers and women into prostitutes. Thayil claims that the opium trade is the foundation of Bombay made by the marginalized, and the history of these people deliberately has been forgotten. It has been the opium dens and *khanas* which have run the economy of Bombay. However, due to the politics of Shiv Sena and arrival of the new cheap drug heroin, opium dens have been closed, and the "center" of the city becomes "dead center." The dens shut off physically and psychologically so does the life of characters in the novel. In an interview with *Times of India*, Thayil tells that he witnesses the characters as true characters "born out of empathy" and degraded by the society. He says:

All information, detailing, figures, characters, compositions of chemicals were the byproducts of what I would like to call 'embedded research'. The novel grew out of that period of embedded journalism, of my own days into addiction and intoxication.

Opium dens of Shuklaji Street reveal Bombay's real or imagined stories of the night time. The real happens in physical space, and the imagined on mental space or in dreams of the characters. The story starts from Narrator Dom Ullis's arrival at Bombay in 1970 and his experience at Rashid's khana/opium den in Shuklaji Street. The story evolves against the backdrop of Hindu-Muslim riots and drug trade from Pakistan, and gets intertwined with the lives of marginalized main characters as Dimple, Rashid, painter Newton and Mr. Lee. They have their own stories of the struggle for survival



in Bombay, which serve as meta-narratives in the main story. By focusing on Shuklaji Street's opium dens and brothels, Thayil irrefutably asserts that it is not possible to know Bombay in general without knowing Kamathipura.

The four points can be observed while reading *Narcopolis*. The first is "a cartographic impulse in writing," where the emphasis is given to spatial, subjective, and cognitive nature of mapping the spaces while writing the novel. Thayil maps south Bombay starting from Shuklaji Street of Kamathipura to Grant Road, Nagpada, Worli, Mumbai Central, Church Gate, Nariman Point, Marine Drive, and Colaba and gives a mimetic description of the places. One of the best examples of both mapping narrative and architectural narrative is when Dom shares taxi ride with painter Newton. Here Thayil not only maps the spaces but also gives subjectivity to them. Thayil writes:

He [painter] stared out of window as the taxi sped past Hutatma Chowk and the tiered breasts of Flora and her friends, toward the sodium lights of Colaba Causeway and the Victorian ruins piled one on top of the other, once- grand facades behind which squalor lived, and more squalor, cobbled alleys lined with cots on which the better-off pavement sleepers settled for the night, as the speckled water, the septic seething water, the grey- green kala pani, the dirty living sun- baked water lapped against the sides of the broken city. (37)

The second point is, by mapping the fourteen lanes of Shuklaji Street through women in cages and the cheapest room and in the number houses, he exposes the "psychological invisibility of the place." By placing Shuklaji Street and its opium dens in the centre stage of the narrative, Thayil affirms the inclusion of the marginalized in the historical geography of Bombay.

Thirdly, Thayil presents Shuklaji Street as a "metaphor of poverty and crime." With Westphal's idea of Geocriticism, to examine the literary text with an interdisciplinary approach, it can be observed that the certainty about reality is an illusion. Bombay seems to be a dream city, a growing city, a rich city and a beautiful city, amidst this image of Bombay, Thayil presents Shuklaji Street as heterotopia which reveals the dark and ugly truth of the city, stands for poverty, alienation, crime and neglected by society. The place is marked by a growing gap between those who get ahead in life, earn money, and have family and those left behind become drugs addicts with no family, and left to die. It seems that readers' pre-knowledge about Bombay before reading the novel suddenly becomes fictional as the mimetic mode of the narrative being fictional in nature appears real to them. Moreover, the geopolitical observation, spatialization of *khana*, and the political conflicts leading Hindu-Muslim riots affecting drug trade (because politician were making money) present Kamathipura as a place of crime and chaos and later as "dead center."

The fourth point is, Thayil presents *Narcopolis* as "a landscape of memory." The people in the "dead center" moan for everything but can't do anything. They are wasted. They live in oblivion and dreams, don't afraid of the consequences of future and death. The marginalized are immigrants; women in the brothels are being bought and sold. They are no one and nowhere in government records. They are observed by the narrator and so live in the landscape of his memory. The flashback and flash-forward switching of the narrative and Dimple's and narrator's frequent dreams and their ability to talk with the dead friends remind the narrator that he is to do something for those who are no one and nowhere, hanging between the real world and the alter life. *Narcopolis* is the identity and the tribute to them and a place where they live happily and will be remembered forever.

The forceful voice that emerges from *Narcopolis* jolts readers who had thought they knew Bombay. By taking readers into the socially alienated territory of Shuklaji Street and exploring its otherness and making its deadness visible, Thayil conceptually re-centers the city. Kamathipura is presented as a dead center from the perspective of modern society since the slums have been wiped out with the emergence of apartments. The 'Other' or the heterogeneous characteristic of opium dens denies its recognition on the map of Bombay city and reflects an ideology of social exclusion. Thayil maps Shuklaji Street and Kamathipura through the narrative of his life there. By making opium dens visible in Shuklaji Street, Thayil infuses life in the "dead center."

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## Rape and Trauma: A Study of Pinki Virani's *Aruna's Story*

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### *Abstract*

*Trauma plays a significant role in the life of a rape survivor whose psychological injury takes much time to heal. Sometimes a rape victim is never able to come out of the trauma that results from sudden violence and has serious consequences for the victim. The present paper attempts to study Pinki Virani Aruna's Story (1998) in order to understand the trauma that Aruna Ramchandra Shanbaug, a junior nurse hailing from Haldipur, Karnataka working at The King Edward VII Memorial Hospital, Mumbai suffered after she was raped by a sweeper named Sohanlal Bhartha Walmiki who was working in the same hospital. Aruna remained in a vegetative state for the remaining period of her life following the sexual assault. The present paper approaches Virani's Aruna's Story through the lens of trauma studies. While focusing on Aruna's trauma post rape, the insights from feminist theorist Susan Brownmiller and trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth and Domnick La Capra have been taken into consideration. In Aruna's Story, Virani realistically recreates the trauma that Aruna went through in her life following the violent sexual assault. Being unable to speak, her weeping, screaming, crying and mood swings became indicative of the trauma that Aruna was going through after her rape. From her actions, it can be inferred that she was suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is very common among rape victims. Moreover, the family who could have supported her in her trauma, abandoned her to her fate in the hospital where she used to work and her fiancée also left her to marry some other girl. The paper concludes that rape has serious psychological consequences for the victim who faces sudden violence and force during the rape. It also suggests that the support of the family can help rape victims to come out of such critical or traumatic period of their life.*

*Keywords: Trauma, Rape, Rape Survivor, Pain, Vegetative State, Violence, Force, Victim.*

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Trauma is a psychological injury that can result from the experience of violence as well as victimization including sexual abuse, physical abuse, severe neglect, loss, domestic violence, terrorism or disasters. It can refer to a negative psychological effect such as an emotional shock caused by stressful events. Trauma can also result from wound and injury caused by some financial or physical factors. It usually occurs when brain is unable to cope with unexpected or non-normal experiences. Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (2016) defines the term trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). Trauma is a medical condition that results from experiencing any catastrophic event and degree of intensity with which it affects the victim, varies from event to event and from person to person. There is a close relationship between trauma and rape. Rape, a violent and forceful act causes serious psychological injury to the victim. Susan Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will* defines rape of a woman as “a sexual invasion of the body by force, an incursion into the private, personal inner space without consent – in short, an internal assault from one of several avenues and by one of several methods – [which] constitutes a deliberate violation of emotional, physical and rational integrity and is a hostile, degrading act of violence that deserves the name of rape” (376). Virani through her non-fictional work *Aruna's Story* attempts to voice the trauma experienced by the rape survivor Aruna who was left silenced as a result of sudden violence and

brutality that ruined her whole life and hence, communicate to the larger audience the seriousness of the crime like rape. The present paper studies trauma and PTSD in Virani's *Aruna's Story* by taking into consideration the works of the trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra. While discussing trauma and PTSD, Susan Brownmiller's views on rape are also taken under scrutiny.

The origin of Trauma as a field of study goes back to the early twentieth century, when Sigmund Freud developed his theory of psychoanalysis. It was Freud who changed the meaning of the term "trauma." The Greek word "trauma" means the wound inflicted on the body but Freud changed this notion. According to Freud, "the term Trauma is understood as wound inflicted not on the body but on the mind" (Caruth 3). In the mid 1990s, trauma theory had a revival with the theorists such as Cathy Caruth who used Freud's theory as a basis to build their own ideas on trauma. Other important names associated with the field of trauma theory are Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman.

According to Cathy Caruth, the victim is not aware of the trauma at the time of occurrence. Due to the unexpectedness of the event, the brain is not ready or able to process the shock immediately, thus creating the gap between the occurrence of the trauma and the return to full consciousness. The victim is never able to forget the incident because he or she did not experience the event in the first place, due to 'dissociation.' According to her, trauma does not register at the moment of impact but rather, it hits with greater force later on. This delayed reaction to the traumatic incident is called as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Dominick LaCapra in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2014) however, comes up with the concepts related to trauma like "acting out" and "working through." According to LaCapra, "acting out" is the stage where the trauma victim is unable to get out of the traumatic past happenings. In this case, the victim is being stuck in the trauma that happened in the past and keeps on repeating the same painful incident through flashbacks or other compulsive behaviour. On the other hand, "working through," is the stage when the victim seems to have found a way out to overcome the trauma. Here, the victim accepts trauma as a part of his or her life and mourns the destruction and starts reconnecting to everyday life experiences. In this case, the survivor is able to differentiate between what has happened in the past and how the present is different from that past experience. The "acting out" and "working through" seems to be completely opposite responses to an incident of trauma, but these two stages play an important role in a survivor's recuperation from the impact of trauma.

Pinki Virani is an Indian writer, journalist and human rights activist. She was born in Mumbai on January 30, 1959 to Gujarati Muslim parents. She did her schooling from Mumbai, Pune and Mussoorie. She completed her Masters in Journalism from United States of America on the Aga Khan Foundation scholarship. When she returned to India after her scholarship, she worked as a reporter and went on to become India's first woman editor of an evening paper. She is well known for her books *Once was Bombay* (1999), *Aruna's Story* (1998), *Bitter Chocolate: Child Sexual Abuse in India* (2000), *Deaf Heaven* (2009) and *Politics of the Womb -- The Perils of Ivf, Surrogacy & Modified Babies* (2016). Virani's *Aruna's Story* (1998). Virani's *Aruna's Story* forms part of a fifty two minutes documentary, produced by the PSBT, titled 'Passive Euthanasia: Kahaani Karuna Ki.' Arvind Gaur, the theatre director scripted and directed it as solo play 'Aruna's Story.'

In *Aruna's Story*, Virani realistically describes Aruna's trauma post rape who was left without speech after the brutal and violent sexual assault. In the 'Author's Note', Virani writes, "In the course of my investigation I discovered how exactly Aruna had been raped. I also discovered to my shock, that the rapist did not serve a sentence for it. This is when I decided that Aruna's real story had to be told" (x). In 1973, Aruna was raped by a sweeper named Sohanlal Bhartha Walmiki in King Edward VII Memorial Hospital, Mumbai where she used to work as a staff nurse. Sohanlal Bhartha Wamiki was going to carry on his lustful desire on Aruna in the hospital's basement area where lab for

dogs existed. While hiding in darkness and fantasizing of raping her, Sohanlal Bartha Walmiki was waiting for Aruna to come in the dogs' lab where she used to change her uniform after her duty hours. The basement of the hospital was supposed to be the experimental cardiovascular dog-surgery laboratory with an attached nurses' duty room. The nurses were assigned this lab, so they reported in the basement and then went to the terrace.

Sohanlal wanted to take revenge from Aruna as she had insulted him several times. Aruna was very particular about her job. She was a bold and an outspoken girl. Sohanlal was not serious about his job. He was always late in coming to the hospital and moreover, he also used to steal dog's food. Seeing his negligence towards his duty and stealing habits, Aruna had warned him many a times and even insulted him in front of others. So, Sohanlal decided to take revenge on her for the insult by sexually assaulting her. He wanted to rape her in order to punish her for being bossy and crossing her limits as a woman and insulting a male. Being a man with patriarchal mind set up, he could not forget being insulted by a woman and decided to teach her a lesson. Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) writes that men rape women for numerous reasons but most often as "punishment for being uppity, for getting out of line, for failing to recognize one's place, for assuming sexual freedoms, or for behaviour no more proactive than walking down the wrong road at night in the wrong part of town and presenting a convenient, isolated target for a group of hatred and rage" (254-55). Further, Sohanlal's sexual assault on Aruna was more a violent rather than a sexual act. It was an act to exert his power or control over her to show that as a male he was more powerful than her. Through the sexual assault, he also wanted to create fear in her and teach her a lesson of her life for insulting a male as it is clear from his thoughts before the sexual assault on Aruna:

Holding it up, he will swing one end of the dog chain in front of her. Those eyes which have looked at him with contempt will fill with fear. That mouth which has belittled him, time and again in front of people, will beg for mercy. He will undress the bride, slowly, as she implores him to let her go. He will take her once, that's all, she will learn her lesson from it forever. (4)

During her sexual assault, Aruna tried to save herself but she could not as he was very strong. After raping her, Sohanlal Bhartha Walmiki wrapped the dog chain around her neck and pushed her towards the dog surgery room. He tightened the dog chain around her neck and she choked. The dog chain acts as a symbol of power with which he tried to exert his power and carried out violent act. After satisfying his lust, he unwinded the dogs' chain around her neck before he left and stole her money, wristwatch, gold chain, pendant and sari. It becomes evident that his sexual assault on Aruna was violent and cruel to create fear in her. Brownmiller in her book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975) writes that rape has little to do with sex and it is more about violence. All rape is an exercise in power. She writes that rape is:

man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principle agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of her superior strength, the triumph of his manhood. . . It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (15).

Next day Aruna was identified by the staff nurse and immediately a doctor was called in. Her condition was critical and when the doctor turned her over her eyes were wide open. Her hair was covered with blood, vomit and mucus. There was blood all over her face and she was taken to casualty. Matron Belimal and Sister Premila rushed towards the casualty to ask her to tell what happened but she could not utter a word. Her trauma can be inferred from the fact that she was conscious all through the night, "Aruna Shanbaug's spirit has kept her injured body conscious through a long, cold, pain-wracked night, all by itself. A full fifteen and a half hours of strong will" (15). When Belimal talked to her, she attempted to focus as her eyes followed the direction of Belimal's voice. She tried to speak to tell her what happened but could not and tears started flowing



from her eyes. Her tears are indicative of “acting out” her trauma. As she could not speak, she acted out her trauma through weeping. She tried to speak again but produced only “a low feral grunt.” According to LaCapra, “acting out” is the behaviour of the victim of trauma where he or she is unable to come out of the traumatic past. The trauma victim, being stuck in the trauma of the past, keeps on repeating the same enigmatic incident through flashbacks, visible in his or her behaviour or through nightmares. Virani writes:

Aruna's eyes seek out matron Belimal, they dart in her swollen bloodied face. Matron talks to her in a low voice assuring her all will be well, and not to worry. Her eyes try to hold the matron's. Those tears, they just will not stop their silent course. Through their wetness, with her untold story locked within them, her eyes roll back to show their whites. (15)

As the news of Aruna's rape spread in the hospital, The Dean of the hospital, C.K. Despande instructed the hospital's security guard to call the police. The medical treatment of Aruna was started and doctors tried their best to save her. When she was brought in for treatment, she was “acting out” her trauma through groaning, vomiting and convulsions. She went into spasms periodically. Soon, after Aruna's rape the staff nurses of the KEM's hospital decided to go on a strike against the hospital authorities to protest against the rape of their colleague and to demand better safety measures for the nurses during the working hours in the hospital. It was for the first time since India's independence that nurses stopped work. Nurses from the other hospitals too joined them to support their demands. The police investigation started and the nurses pointed towards Sohanlal Bhartha Walmiki responsible for Aruna's condition. Inder Gulamashi Bait Walmiki, sweeper who closely knew Sohanlal also admitted that Sohanlal had made his mind to sexually assault her. He told police as Virani writes:

A few months back the attendant in the dog lab, Laxman, went on leave. Sister Aruna Shanbaug told Sohanlal to do Laxman's work. He resented it. She reported him. He told me he would take revenge by molesting her. I never took it seriously. Later when another altercation took place Sohanlal again repeated his threat of molesting her. (34)

Finally, Sohanlal Bhartha Walmiki was arrested. As no one from the hospital came for the complaint of rape or even outraging of modesty because it would spoil the reputation of the hospital, so Sohanlal was arrested on the charge of Attempt to Commit Murder and Robbery. In court, he was held guilty of Attempt to Murder and Robbery only because Aruna was menstruating at the time when Sohanlal attacked her so he was constrained and got only seven years of imprisonment for spoiling the whole life of Aruna Shanbaug. Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) writes that “there are many acts of rape, few arrests and still fewer convictions, a huge gulf of unavailable information unfortunately exists” (174).

For several days she continued to scream which shows that she was not able to come out of the trauma. Unlike previously, she began to recognize pain very well. There were marked deformities at both the elbows and wrists, so when attempts were made to straighten them, she cried. Virani vividly brings out Aruna's trauma as she writes, “She cries aloud and in a protracted manner when disturbed. Occasional spontaneous, and apparently irrational outbursts of laughter are also noted” (68). Cathy Caruth explains that it is not possible for the human mind to register an incident of trauma as soon as it occurs; rather its impact is more severe when it haunts the mind much after it has taken place. Moreover, as Caruth asserts that it is not the traumatic neurosis in a traumatic event but the typically disturbing survival that the survivor goes through. It disturbs him/her more than anything else. For Aruna, not only her rape was traumatic but surviving it was equally traumatic. Cathy Caruth says, “the fact that for those who undergo trauma, is not only the moment of the event, but passing out of it that is traumatic; that survival itself in other words can be crisis” (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 9).

Aruna's speech therapist suggested that her family should spend time with her. She noticed that she had some comprehension of spoken words and recommended that her family should train her for speech. The speech therapist promised to train her which was a difficult task for her in the face of the physical and mental trauma that Aruna was going through. At this traumatic phase of her life, Aruna



needed her family the most. Her family abandoned her and was not ready to bear her burden. After one year, the hospital authorities contacted her family and advised them to take her home but both her sister as well as her brother were unwilling to take her. Her sister who lived in Bombay refused to take Aruna to her home as she could not bear the extra burden of her sister. The Dean of the hospital said that Aruna did not need any more treatment but instead needs home, Aruna's sister held the hospital responsible for her rape and pathetic condition as she said, "It is your responsibility to look after her because this happened to her during her duty-time in your hospital because of one of your employees" (61). She demanded that the hospital should pay her monthly salary with bonus and to give her a bigger house in the BMC quarters on permanent basis. Even when her brother came from Shimoga, he too refused to take Aruna back home. She was completely left at the mercy of hospital, nurses and staff.

The protagonist was in love with a doctor named Sundeep Sardesai and soon they were going to be married. She was saving money for his clinic and few days back she shifted to her sister's home from the nurses' hostel so that she could save her hostel fee for his clinic but fate had something else in store for her and she got raped. Sundeep Sardesai was a good person and he too loved her. When he came to know about the Aruna's tragic accident, he came to meet her in the hospital and kept on regularly visiting her and spent time with her. But he too after some time left her alone in the traumatic phase of her life to marry some other girl. So, her family's and lover's support that could have improved her, was not given to her and she never got better. As Aruna's family was unwilling to take her home, so it was decided by Bombay Municipal Corporation to take her to the convalescent home in the far flung suburb of Bombay. Arrangements were made to move her there but the nurses protested against the BMC decision. The nurses were of the view that Aruna's condition would deteriorate in the convalescent home as nobody takes proper care over there. So, nurses suspended their work immediately and BMC had to revoke its decision.

Aruna had become sensitive to the touch of strangers especially male. Whenever ward boys used to touch her, she would cry loudly. LaCapra defines "acting out" as a condition of the victim of trauma where "one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes. Acting out is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene" (21). Aruna's trauma is visible when Dr. Rajesh Parikh from another hospital came to KEM hospital who had heard about Aruna and her traumatic story to see her. As he entered her room, Aruna sensed his presence and became restless which shows that she was still haunted by the traumatic experience and living in a continuous state of fear and tragedy. Virani describes her restlessness and fear as she sensed somebody in her room in the following way:

The curtains are drawn across the only window. When his eyes adjust to the gloom, he sees a small twisted body lying on a crumpled bed. The head is bent to one side of the dented pillow, the eyes are open. He holds his breath, he does not want to disturb her, he does not want her to panic if she senses him in any way. The body moves, the knees rise at angles, the hands flex at the elbows and the wrists, the fingers clench, the head moves restlessly on the pillow, it lolls alarmingly, the eyes look straight at him. . . She laughs. Long sustained, rising, mirthless laughter. . . She stops laughing as suddenly as she had started, mid-note, as if someone has abruptly turn of a radio. He whispers 'I'm sorry' and leave the room. . . from the room is heard the sound of a woman weeping; heartbroken, heartbreaking. (83-84)

With the passage of time, Aruna's condition continued to deteriorate and the trauma that she was experiencing as a result of rape became more and more evident in her behaviour. The force and violence that Aruna experienced during her rape had taken over her mind completely and as a result she suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is very commonly found among rape survivors. One of the main feature of the PTSD is that the victim is unaware of trauma at the occurrence of the event but it strikes with greater force later on. In case of Aruna, the trauma that she had gone through during her rape developed into PTSD. Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed*

*Experience* describes PTSD as:

As it is generally understood today, post-traumatic stress disorder reflects the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that it cannot control. As such, PTSD seems to provide the most direct link between the psyche and external violence and to be the most destructive psychic disorder. (58)

Aruna became too difficult to handle and kept on laughing and screaming like a madwoman which shows that she was reliving the traumatic incident of her life. The new staff nurses were fed up with taking care of her. Instead of sympathizing with her, they got irritated when she wailed and moaned. Bownes, Gorman and Sayers in their article titled "Assault Characteristics and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Rape Victims" writes that people who have been raped by a stranger, raped using force or weapons, and raped in a way that results in greater physical injury are at even greater risk of developing PTSD. Virani describes her traumatic condition and "acting out" her trauma in the following way:

She lies in bed with hands and feet flexed. Splints are being used to assist her in keeping her limbs straight. Sometimes, she goes into a foetal position. Cries loudly, weeps softly. Laughs manically. Alternates between laughing and crying. Also has spells of screaming which can last upto two hours.

Cannot see. Takes feed by mouth. Eats when given, stops when apparently full. Depending upon moods responds to commands. Sticks out tongue for some doctors only. Difficult to control when restless as she becomes rowdy. (58-59)

After a year of her rape, she could open her eyes and stare. She could swallow fluids and semi solid food that was given to her and she also moved in her bed on her own. At times, she understood what was being said to her but there was no meaningful response from her side. This was the only improvement in one year. She was unable to attend to her needs on her own. She had to be clothed, fed, changed by somebody else. Her position was changed every two hours so that she did not get bed sores. Virani describes her condition as:

Aruna Shanbaug is not blessed. She is partially brain dead. She is blind. She cannot speak. She has atrophying bones, wasting muscles. The joints at her fingers, her wrists, the knees, her ankles are bending inwards. To try and straighten them is to cause her pain. She feels pain, this part of her brain is a sly survivor, it continues to be healthily alive. (194)

The damage done to Aruna's brain during her rape was irreversible and she never reached the "working through" stage as put forward by LaCapra where she could overcome her trauma and tell others about it and hence, recuperate. With the passage of time, her condition continued to deteriorate. She developed bed sores and her bones became very weak. The nurses used to speak in low voice in her room as she would start moaning on hearing unfamiliar voice. The undamaged part of her brain still reacted and she screamed, yelled, wept and laughed which shows that even after so many years she was still under the grip of the traumatic memory and "acting out" her trauma through her actions.

## Conclusion

In her non fictional work *Aruna's Story*, Virani has taken the bold step in breaking the silence that surrounded the violence that Aruna was subjected to at the hands of a sweeper and as a result remained traumatized thereafter for her lifetime. Her rape was a violent act on the part of the sweeper motivated by power and control rather than sexual gratification. Left without speech, Aruna, the trauma victim was reliving her trauma and it was visible through her traumatic actions. Her unusual actions like screaming, crying, weeping and laughing becomes indicative of the grip of the traumatic incident that took place in her life. Virani also brings to light the fact that Aruna's rape was a crime but the person responsible for spoiling and traumatizing her whole life never got the right

punishment as he was not found guilty of rape and therefore Virani is critical of such judicial system. Further, the support of her family could have made Aruna's life better but was never given to her and hence she remained traumatized for her whole life.

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## Envisioning Multiculturalism in Lakshmi Raj Sharma's *The Tailor's Needle*

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### *Abstract*

*The paper endeavours to discuss multiculturalism in the light of *The Tailor's Needle* (2009), the debut novel of an Indian writer Lakshmi Raj Sharma, considering the historical perception of the British Raj. The complex Indo-British relationship is analysed, assessing the action and reaction of the characters in the novel, where human life is presented in extraordinary situations and the unification of binaries is aimed at. Sharma traces the love and respect shared by the people living in India despite cultural differences, missed by many writers who recorded only the conflicts and tensions of the British Raj. The paper addresses the multiplicity of actions and reactions of the individuals involved in different relationships and the treatment of the author to the characters as equals denying the labels and categories, makes the novel an embodiment of multiculturalism.*

*Keywords: culture, multiculturalism, British Raj, society, identity*

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Multiculturalism occupies a vital place in historical and cultural studies since the last several decades and has engaged thinkers across disciplines. Said's, *Orientalism* relatively stressed: "the actuality of what was later to be called multiculturalism, rather than xenophobia and aggressive race-oriented nationalism" (336). It examines the power relations and power tussles among communities and advocates a diligent space for minority communities as well. Multiculturalism at times is positioned as an insipid right for all or a live and let live situation and aims at "the maintenance of a cohesive national state capable of recognizing multiple identities" (Nahaboo, 597). It recognizes differences of varied kinds instead of propagating a singular ideology and addresses different parameters that constitute an identity. In the modern complex societies, multiculturalism has effectively contributed in defining and redefining the scope of cultural and historical studies as James Trotman in his, book *Multiculturalism: Roots and Realities* (2004) states:

Multiculturalism is valuable because it uses several disciplines to highlight neglected aspects of our social history, particularly the histories of women and minorities...and promotes respect for the dignity of the lives and voices of the forgotten. By closing gaps, by raising consciousness about the past, multiculturalism tries to restore a sense of wholeness in a postmodern era that fragments human life and thought (66).

The present essay attempts to discuss multiculturalism in the Indian context in the light of *The Tailor's Needle*, the debut novel of the Indian writer Lakshmi Raj Sharma, first published in the U.K. in 2009 and subsequently in India in 2012. Lakshmi Raj Sharma, a Professor of English literature

at Allahabad University is a popular Indian novelist who has been writing literary fiction for the last two decades. *The Tailor's Needle*, a Raj novel, is a metonymy of the larger cultural and political process, set in the first half of the twentieth century, covering the time from 1917 to 1944. The novel operates against the backdrop of the Indian freedom movement and celebrates the complex hybridity of Indian social life through characters both Indians and the British. The story centers around Sir Saraswati Chandra Ranbakshi or the 'Rai Bahadur,' a Cambridge educated influential public figure of the time who oscillates between tradition and modernity. His three children, the elder daughter Maneka, the only son Yogendra and the younger daughter Sita engage in many tussles, thereby addressing the varied issues of multiculturalism. Sharma represents Indian multiculturalism similar to E.M. Forster in his popular novel, *A Passage to India* (1924) and Paul Scott in the *Raj Quartet* (1966-1975) as he has himself said in an interview that *The Tailor's Needle* is "by and large a political novel that is multicultural within an ethnic setting" (Dwivedi, 4).

*The Tailor's Needle* presents a panoramic view of India in the first half of the twentieth century. The Raj-era, during which the novel is set, camouflaged with hyperactive social, political and economic developments, bears integral testimony to the history of modern India. Historians and writers captured this tumultuous phase of history in their writings, highlighting the conflicts and tensions which make the phase distinctive. The binary polarization of the imperialist British and the native Indians stood as a tumble in the understanding of human life where events mattered more than individual. The novel highlights the existence of multiple cultures in India which stands as the true hallmark of Indian tradition. Sharma depicts the realistic picture of the era, presenting human life in extraordinary situations and shows the relation between the British and the Indian people in the historical backdrop of the Indian freedom struggle. He does not designate labels to the characters and gives equal importance to plove, fear, sympathy and hatred that prevailed in the Raj era. The novel is about the time when breaking the barriers and shackles of caste and class was considered a daunting step (Mishra, Book Review) but amidst all the limited freedom, the characters embark the traits of multiculturalism acknowledging the politics of difference.

*The Tailor's Needle* is a tale of the juxtaposition of cultures and different mindsets of people. Perhaps, it is the central interrogation of a national narrative. It is a complex of stories, of a society where characters range from the Viceroy of India to the common domestic attendant. Individuals agree to disagree but they are witty enough to resolve the differences and quickly come up with a unified ideology if needed. No two characters in the novel are alike and nowhere in the course of the novel have they represented the same ideology. Sir Saraswati Chandra Ranbakshi is a visionary who is ahead of his time and transforms thoroughly in the course of the novel from a strict disciplinarian to a compassionate father. Savitri, the devoted and faithful wife of Sir Saraswati represents a typical Indian woman who believes more in keeping her husband and children happy than remaining herself happy. She seems to worry more about the afterlife and is always concerned about her family and the marriage of her children. She is an epitome of traditional Indian values and customs, which is latent in the India of the early twentieth century, engulfed with modernism and nationalism.

Sir Saraswati, a Cambridge educated Indian looked up to the education pattern of the British and believed that the British education is more pragmatic than the education imparted in India. He does not hesitate to openly praise the British education and has also made up his mind to impart British education to his children. He believes that

British culture stood for whatever was best in the western world...His British education convinced him that the British were the best, the most cultured and refined people around; it was difficult to improve upon their thoughts, their manners, and their conversations (Sharma 42).

Except for their presence in India, he admired almost everything about the British. He wants his children to live up in the true tradition of an Indian but through British education. He has his unique perceptions of education

It should free one from prejudices. It should make one capable of independent thinking and prepare one for the life ahead. It should make one adapt to his world without being difficult with others or miserable himself. It should make one positive and sociable. It should make one, what he called, 'The tailor's needle' (Sharma 20).

Multiculturalism, often compared to a 'bowl of salad' where every piece maintains its taste and adds to the total, expects to maintain bridges and understanding among cultures. In his book *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (2000), Bhikhu Parekh says; "It is neither a political doctrine nor a philosophical issue but actually a perspective on as a way of viewing human life" (59). *The Tailor's Needle* epitomizes the principle of viewing human life and regards every life significant in its merit. The title *The Tailors Needle* advocates positive relationships among all, like the needle, which does not make choices among clothes; rather it passes through all clothes without making any distinctions. By the title, *The Tailor's Needle* Sharma attempts to suggest a flexible person (Mishra, *Interview*) who is ready to accept the virtues of all cultures instead of being adamant with one's culture alone. Sir Saraswati aimed to make his children like the tailor's needle but he failed in making her elder daughter a true tailor's needle. His younger daughter Sita and the son Yogendra, succeeded in becoming the tailor's needle, by being flexible in their action and reaction with the other characters in the novel.

In line with the notions of postcolonial theory Multiculturalism also advocates equality for the marginalized. As Leela Gandhi says: "Postcolonialism has found itself in the company of disciplines such as women's studies, cultural studies and gay/lesbian studies" (42), multiculturalism cherishes the collective goal of the society and aims to take forward the society as a unified whole. *The Tailor's Needle* upholds the feminist voices and addresses issues of feminism in true essence. Maneka, the strongest and exceptional among all the female characters, is quick to raise her voice against ideas, which she does not approve of. She is against the idea that a female should follow the path made by men, rather she believes in defining a path for herself. She is unique in her approach to life but there is meaning in her singularity. She is ready to accept challenges, quick to understand things and even bold to accept her mistakes. She boldly says, "Traditions are made to be broken" (Sharma 174). She is against the docile attitude maintained by her younger sister Sita and at the same time, she is ready to help the helpless like Nimmi. She even rises above the prevalent clutch of the caste system and openly supports the love affairs of her brother to a girl of a lower caste.

The concept of marriage, which is a significant harbinger in the context of multiculturalism, is picturesquely represented in *The Tailor's Needle*. There are five marriages in the novel and four out of five marriages are distinctly romantic. To have an inter-caste marriage in pre-independent India with the consent of the parents is to rise above all social odds and to derive new meanings by breaking the established conventions. It shows the zeal and determination of the characters to move forward and to accept the differences to achieve the uniformity among communities. The characters are happy with the marriages they have chosen and are ready to accept the change they have to undergo after their marriage.

There is an instance in the novel where Lord Mortimer Edmund Griffin-Tiffin, His Excellency the Viceroy of India, is writing a page in his diary on December 21, 1917. He begins; "India is a unique land. You can live here almost in anonymity. The Indian mind is anything but critical" (Sharma 5). He is happy to be in India where you are loved for whatever you do. The Viceroy even goes down to write, "You kill a Hindoo and are loved by a Moslem, cheat a Moslem and you are admired by a Hindoo. How simple the mechanism is for the ruler in this country" (Sharma 6). There are endless struggles among the established structure of the caste system and no Indian character can remain away from it. Sir Saraswati who is under the pangs of the caste system at the outset acts as a unifier and appeals to the characters:

Other countries of the world progress faster than us because the barriers of caste do not divide them. We spend much of our time getting divided on several lines. Our efforts and our



sympathies are not for India but for our small caste bound communities. The British who are our rulers, pride themselves in being a united nation; we may not realize it, but we actually pride ourselves in being divided into castes and sub-castes. (Sharma 322)

Therefore, if multiculturalism is the practice of giving importance to all cultures in a society, Sir Saraswati seems to be a true embodiment of multiculturalism. He is successful in making the other characters believe that the caste system is doing no good to the society. His appeal becomes a prayer and everybody is ready to follow his prayers without questioning him. He feels it is a form of contribution to the freedom movement and this step will contribute hugely to nation-building. Sharma harks back to the past to show the diversity of ethnic groups even before the independence of the country and before the adoption of the Indian constitution not only to romanticize the glorious past of the country but also to derive meanings from the past, relevant to the present. As Meenakshi Mukherjee writes:

A multilingual country like ours expresses its identities through layered representations variegated by caste, class, language, religion and region and a range of literary traditions. The writers who matter to me, whether they write in English or in any other language, do not simply hark back to the past for romanticizing the local; they engage with the present with all its complex pulls. (Mukherjee 55-56)

Will Kymlicka argues, “The basic premise of multiculturalism is that membership in a cultural community is essential to our personal identity and provides individuals with the necessary framework to exercise their true liberty” (82-83). *The Tailor's Needle*, a tale of pre-independent India, not only talks about the membership of the individual in a society but the characters do have a distinct identity, they are either Indian or British. The narrative of *The Tailor's Needle* in some respect, acts as a reaction to the concept of the so-called superior culture and it in no way succumbs to the established notions of the superior and inferior culture, rather it points out the true spirit of every culture. As Terence Turner in his book, *Anthropology and Multiculturalism* (1993) points out: “Multiculturalism is one manifestation of the postmodernist reaction to the de-legitimization of the state and the erosion of the hegemony of the dominant culture in advanced capitalist countries” (423). Sharma is careful in examining the losses that the British have caused on the vast treasure of the Indian culture but he takes an apolitical stand and suggests that there is both good and bad in almost every culture. He feels one should be careful in adopting the positives of every culture to maintain the true tradition of a multicultural society. He says, “that for the right-minded there is little difference between people of different races, genders, and nationalities and one must be able to play a role in connecting a variety of people without being judgmental (Tiwari 2). For him, different races, communities, and groups can collectively contribute to multiculturalism as proposed by Thio who says, “the coexistence of numerous subcultures can develop into multiculturalism, a state in which all subcultures are equal to one another in the same society” (44).

The notion of language in cultural studies becomes important in generating meaning. There is Sir Saraswati who can speak like a distinguished British citizen and “even the Viceroy seemed less British than him” (Sharma 10) and again there are characters like Mehmud who reads people as 'peeepull' and says “you is actually quite different Sir” (Sharma 5). This is why the Viceroy Lord Mortimer Edmund Griffin Triffin in the novel warns, “the English language is not to be fooled with” (Sharma 7). Again when Mehmud addresses the mother of the Viceroy as 'Lord Mem Sahab' and 'she's twicely a mother', the Viceroy scolds Mehmud, “Mind your language...You've worked at the palace of two English Viceroy's and you haven't been able to learn the simple use of English” (Sharma 32). Sharma quietly addresses the conflict of language through the discussion between the Viceroy and Mehmud and it is through the voice of Mehmud, he advocates the importance of a common language in a multicultural society.

Sharma addresses the situation before the independence of the nation and presents the Indian form of multiculturalism, which is similar to the age-old concept of 'unity in diversity.' The

novel unfurls varied aspects of Indian society engulfed in different cultural setup through the presentation of different characters, harking back to the past. He recollects the essence of understanding among the people living in India irrespective of race, class, caste and gender and presents the relationship among the Hindus, Muslims, Indians, British and the Eurasians in extraordinary situations. He represents a new India engulfed in the trauma of the Second World War and awakened in the wake of freedom struggle, thereby lending a new dimension in restructuring the concept of fragmented India. Sharma does this through his formulaic enterprise engaging individuals who experienced the British Raj in diverse patterns and by treating all characters as equals without assigning any labels and categories to them.

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## Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*--A Critique of Crime Against Women

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### *Abstract*

*The challenge faced by women, and society at large, in contemporary times is the increase in number of crimes that involve brutal sexual violence against women. Women have been subjected to violence in the socio-cultural domain to an extent that it has been considered as a part of being a woman. Representation in canonical texts, folklores, legends and myths strengthen the link between women and diverse forms of crime and violence to which they are subjected. This connection between the two has been deeply assimilated, evolved and propagated through popular culture. As a result, it is deeply ingrained in the cultural memory and is reflected in the form of social norms, attitudes and values of the Indian society. There have been efforts in the contemporary times to counter such an advocacy and address the social issue of violence against women. Indian Women's drama, in urban spaces, brings about a fresh approach to counter such a negative culture and voice various social issues with an intention to spread awareness. The present paper attempts to analyse the representation of society's response towards social issues such as brutal violence and crime against women, particularly manifested in the form of gang rape, through a critical reading of Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*. It further aims to study how Indian women playwrights, writing in English, use the alternate cultural space of theatre as an effective means to communicate and raise social awareness in the mindsets of an urban population.*

*Keywords: Violence, popular culture, women's theatre, social change.*

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The modern Indian playwrights and dramatists in urban spaces are concerned with presenting the social and political reality of the times on the one hand and psychological reality on the other. The representation is deeply connected with the relationship between urban spaces and an individual's survival and reaction to the happenings. Beena Aggarwal while analysing the relationship between reality of social empathy and human predicament highlights that the "fusion of the social realism and psychological realism has anticipated new horizons in Indian theatre" (216). It is a relationship between the outer forces of society and the inner forces of man. And therefore, Aggarwal comes to give the analogy that "theatrical representation has become a mechanism to discover man in relation to his environment" (216). Modern Indian playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Poilie Sen Gupta, Manjula Padmanabhan, amongst many others, use this space to critique various forms of exploitation and crime against women by giving diverse perspectives and using theatre as a medium to raise awareness amongst urban readers/ spectators. Women dramatists working in urban and metropolitan cities highlight this fusion especially from the perspective of women. They use theatre as an alternate space to introspect, investigate and interrogate the gender specific issues from the point-of-view of women.

C.S. Lakshmi in an essay, "And Kannagi Plucked a Breast," informatively charts down multiple references from various Indian cultures to highlight the point that violence inflicted on women is inherent and ingrained in our society to an extent that it becomes an acceptable notion in the cultural memory of its people and thereby a part of everyday people's everyday life. The process of eradication of this violence, she suggests, will begin through means of expression of the same. She

writes, “A first step would be to give it a tongue—a tongue that would boldly express its occurrence and nature; a tongue that would rise from a choked throat” (xii). This tongue has been given to bring out diverse and complex experiences of women in the works of Indian women playwrights.

Women playwrights across the world have raised their voice on the issue of sexual violence. They have perceived the issue in different and dynamic ways. Two of Sarah Kane's plays, *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love*, and Mahasweta Devi's *Dopdi*, deal with the subject of sexual crime against women. Through the cultural medium, both, Kavita Kane and Devi, have actively raised their voice of subversion on the issue of rape by highlighting intricate details. When their works are projected and performed, they bring out the violent, cruel and ugly side of reality through direct means of spectacle. The present paper attempts to study another aspect of cultural representation of sexual crime against women through Manjula Padmanabhan's *Light's Out*. It further aims to analyse the representation of society's response towards social issues such as brutal violence and crime against women, particularly manifested in the form of gang rape, through a critical reading of the play. It also aims to reflect on how Indian women playwrights writing in English use the alternate cultural space of theatre as an effective means to communicate and raise social awareness in the mindsets of an urban population. The paper, through a critical reading of the play, attempts to address some of the important questions, such as, who becomes a part of the crime that takes place. What is the role of the spectator on ethical, moral, social and legal grounds.

Manjula Padmanabhan, an eminent woman playwright in English, focuses on the issue of violence in most of her plays including *Harvest*, *Hidden Fires* and *Lights Out*. Her play, *Lights Out*, can be seen as a response by the playwright while sensing the insensitivity of the urban population. Through the play, Padmanabhan “unveils the presence of crime in the society.” (Shiva 274). It is based on the factual details narrated by an eye witness of an incident that resulted in brutal physical assault and subsequent gang rape of a woman which took place in Santa Cruz, Mumbai, in 1982. During the incident, a group of middle class people witness the brutal act but do not take any action. The play, *Lights Out*, highlights the much relevant issue of sexual violence against women in a dramatic structure of three scenes. It projects the frequent occurrence of gruesome and brutal sexual violence that takes place repeatedly over a span of two weeks. It projects the act through the responses and reactions of various characters who live in the same neighbourhood. The play records the responses of six characters, including Bhasker and Leela, their friends--Naina, Mohan and Surinder—and their maid, Frieda, to the brutal activity which takes place continuously for days.

The playwright structures the plot and sets the play in a strategic manner. It is significantly set in the drawing room of a multi-storied society which suggests that the focus is on the stagnant, narrow and isolated behaviour of urban middle class. Scene I opens in the drawing room of Bhasker and Leela's apartment, who live on sixth floor of the building. In the very beginning, Padmanabhan attracts attention and raises curiosity of her reader and audience. At first, Leela is shown to be fearful and worried about something. It is gradually revealed that a crime which is taking place in very close proximity, and about which most of the inhabitants are aware, is bothering her. She requests her husband to call the police and justifies the same by saying that the screams are terribly bothering and torturing her. It is significant that Leela never witnesses the crime through the window in her house that directly makes the site of crime visible. A point of discussion is initiated between the husband and the wife that raises an important question, which is, who becomes a part of a crime taking place? The wife gives reference to one of her friends, to highlight and substantiate her point of calling the cops, and says that even those who hear the screams have a social responsibility to try and stop the crime.

Opposing such a view, Bhasker, who is shown to be least bothered in the conversation, simply shuns both, the idea of social responsibility and of contacting the cops. Bhasker explains to his wife that the cops will ask for a proof that a crime has taken place and that the screams which they hear do not prove that a criminal act is taking place. Through his character, Padmanabhan intends to

highlight some of the loopholes prevalent in the system which ensures law and order. But instead of finding a solution to them, like most people in society, Bhasker, firstly associates Leela's reaction to her feminine nature and calls her too sensitive, and rather asks his wife to adjust to the situation by means of ignorance because nobody is interested to enquire and investigate the cause behind her fears.

In Scene II, the couple is joined by Mohan and the two men are shown to be seriously interested in the crime, but for a different reason. Mohan has come over to discuss and more specifically to see the crime take place live in front of his eyes. He is of the opinion that to watch such a rare occurrence, from a position which is “just far enough to get involved, just close enough to see everything clearly” (15), is a matter of chance. He is curiously and eagerly waiting to an extent that he cannot control his excitement to watch the thriller scene tonight. His response of being a visual spectator, and thereby an eye witness to the crime, represents voyeuristic form of sexual harassment. Through Mohan's response, Padmanabhan also attempts to hint at another form of crime against both women and men in which the spectator's interest is more in observing the sexual act rather than the individuals involved.

The three once again discuss about their role in the crime. Some of the important conjectures are raised by Leela and Bhasker in the following exchange:

Bhasker: They are there and you are here. What's the connection!

Leela: Sushila said— if you can stop a crime, you must— or else you're helping it to happen..

. (16)

The only natural and sensible point to look at the site of crime is to go and help the victim. But the playwright makes it clear that none of them have any such intention. Thereafter, through a wizard of dialogues, they reach a point where they attempt to decipher what the screams could mean. Instead of agreeing and believing on the very first thought that the screams are for help, they waste time in discussing obscure reasons for the screams. Throughout this scene, Leela's detailed description of the woman's screams as “rasping, gurgling, crying” (19) assert her empathetic response, although her primary concern is a desperate need to get rid of the sounds which are polluting her domestic space. Based on Leela's description, Mohan and Bhasker come to conclude that the screams are genuine, but whether they are calling out for help is a still to be proved and is under conjecture. Mohan hints toward a catalogue of bizarre possibilities of the woman's screams, such as nightmare, sheer pleasure, domestic fight and exorcism. Another detail about the happenings of the crime is revealed which relates to the title of the play. The couple informs Mohan that the window of one of the residents was smashed and thereafter, considering it as a threat by the victimisers everyone kept their 'lights out'. Mohan raises two pertinent points, firstly that the incident must have been reported because it was an act of personal outrage and secondly that it might be a signal given by the victim for help. The dramatist is critical of society's reaction of willingly keeping the their lights out, which is further an expression of closing one's eyes to reality and truth. The Scene clearly highlights that Mohan and Leela at some point agree that the victim through her obvious screams and apparently through breaking a window has raised a call for help at various instances. Yet, they unwilling to accept it. Mohan's view on taking this as a sign of help by the victim raises great questions on the significance of the screams and society's unwillingness to participate in saving a victim even after they have sensed a brutal and violent act.

Meanwhile, in Scene III, as they hear the unpleasant sound and Mohan calls watching it “a sociological concern! A duty!” (30), they are surprisingly joined in by Naina. Naina's first reactions on hearing the sounds are “it sounded like someone calling for help!” (33) and “it sounds as if it should be stopped” (34). Naina is the first one to see the spectacle through the window and is immediately taken aback as she realises, but couldn't speak what is happening outside. She fumbles various times as the two men silently watch as the victim screams terribly. Later, the two continue to discuss the situation in a completely vague and bizarre direction. They are of the view point that the woman might be possessed by the devil and that is why she is being kicked and hit upon while two men stretch her legs. Leela shouts out with finality that “It's a rape, isn't it?” (38) and for the first time the exact nature of the



crime is mentioned. Naina further adds that it is a gang rape which is accompanied by physical violence. There follows another proposition by the men that since the woman is with four men, she must be a whore. Naina, quite like a feminist argues that even if she is a whore, she must be protected against crime and violence, and that even a whore must have the freedom to choose her customer. The play importantly defines what rape is through the character of Naina, she says, "Rape is . . . when a woman is forced . . . to have sex" (40). It further raises pertinent questions such as who is considered to be a rapeable woman. The responses are divided between the two men who are of the opinion that only decent women can be raped and Naina, on the other hand, contends that any woman can be raped. But the whole idea which the dramatist ironically wishes to convey is that all these arguments could have been held later and immediate action must have been taken first and foremost.

Surinder is the last one to enter the scene and has the most radical proposition. He is of the idea that an immediate action must be taken and seems to be most intolerant towards any such crime. This character represents the view that violence is the only solution to violence. He says, "they're screwing this whole bloody colony, dammit! They know that we're all standing here shitting in our pants. Too scared to do anything but watch. They're making jackasses of us!"(47). He is deeply interested in taking action against the assaulters, along with the other two men. The motive behind his interest is not out of concern for the victim, but to prove his masculinity. This idea of masculinity being associated with heroic values of bravery and saving a damsel in distress has resonance with classical romantic ideals, which is why Surinder believes the rescue operation has nothing to do with women. Although, they finally plan to act but it proves to be a futile effort and altogether they only remain spectators to a crime being committed. In fact, the entire process to show that that they are going for a rescue operation is indeed farcical.

Although, the other spectators also reflect gendered approach to the situation but each one had their own reasons to either stay passive or delay the required intervention. Between silence and screams of the victim of the brutal crime, the spectators in the play indulge in different kinds of interpretations and comments about the pains of the sufferer. However, it cannot be denied that Padmanabhan has depicted a gendered response in the responses of the characters. The women though were clear about the nature of crime and empathetic towards the victim, their opinions were either trivialized, mocked or contested by the three male counterparts. Deep cultural conditioning made Leela feel incapable and under confident to take concrete action. Naina speaks reasonably and Leela since the beginning wishes to act sensibly and responsibly, but they also become a part of the group, along with the three men, which is unnecessarily engaged in proving Mohan's hypothetical proposition. Sonu Shiva is of the opinion that by emphasising on the inactive behaviour of the ones observing it, Padmanabhan perhaps "intends to focus the point that our society has failed to cope up with the problems faced by women or the incidents of violence that happen every now and then" (282). He further adds that through this play, Padmanabhan "demands for an urgent need of social concern . . . as well as an awareness that is necessary for the people to follow new social laws." (282). The recent amendments in various laws are a proof that Padmanabhan is a writer who is ahead of her times. The 2013 amendment in the Indian Penal Code holds the mere spectators as participants in crime. Padmanabhan hints through the use of dialogical inferences that both, the ones who watch and listen to an act of violation, are equally responsible and are expected to act in a direction to stop the crime altogether.

The focus throughout the play is on huge window which is curtained. On the other side of the window is a building which is under construction. It is also the site where crime of sexual assault takes place. This window operates as a tool for the dramatist to highlight the segregation between the domestic and public spaces. The contemporary reality in urban settings is that an individual has become alienated and separated from his surroundings to such an extent that he becomes unconcerned and ignorant to even the horrifying screams of an individual. Padmanabhan is critical of the social reality where in the urban middle class has fragmented its existence from the outside world and limited it to the private spaces.



Towards the end, Padmanabhan blurs the distinction between art work and the immediate reality by combing the use of digital slides and lights to bring the readers and audiences attention to the curtain which was drawn over the window that gave a spectacle of the crime to the characters. These slides vehemently emphasise and convey that the characters are fictional, but the incident is a fact. They communicate to the audience at the outright that the group chose to remain passive “and in real life, as in the play, no-one went to the aid of the victims” (53). Through such an end, Padmanabhan innovates a means of connecting with her audience and adds to how dramatic art functions. In this regard, Saoli Mitra brings out her views. She says, “you will have to discover your own ways to save and serve society. I try to make my audience think and to remain faithful to myself. If I am able to remain so, it will be my greatest reward” (224). Similarly, Padmanabhan's strategic presentation of brutal crime of gang rape and the spectators' responses in the play act as an eye opener to society. This presentation also acts as a mirror to the society which in the play is represented through the spectators.

Padmanabhan has found her means of serving the society by making her audience a part of the experience. By doing so, an attempt is made to raise consciousness of men and women in urban spaces and society in general. Since incidents that involve gender specific violence are deep rooted in cultural memory, their eradication will also involve new ways of perceiving them as inhuman and unacceptable. The relevance of raising such issues is therefore relevant till the time society realises its collective responsibility and duty to act and face the issue. Through this play, can be understood the role of a spectator, both during the dramatic act and the brutal acts of crime that take place in society. The spectator should act in both the social situations responsibly. The delayed responses and actions of the observers, presented through the characters, must sensitize the spectator to participate actively in real life situations where someone needs help. Further, the spectator, in the form of the audience and the six characters in play, experience the crime taking place primarily in the form of screams. Hence, an equal level of expectation is made from the audience. The thought that this chain where the spectators chose to remain inactive needs to be broken by the audience/ reader in future. The aim of social dramaturgy is to raise consciousness among its spectators. The way Padmanabhan interprets the entire concept of violence and gender in public space results in a conscious learning experience.

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## Singing Symbiocene: Eco-spirituality in the Poetry of Kabir and Bulleh Shah

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### *Abstract*

*The quest for essence of human existence with respect to interdependence and interconnectedness of ecological cosmology is what we call 'eco-spirituality'. In both Bhakti and Sufi traditions the intrinsic sense of existential essence lies in the belief that the environment is not a lifeless entity but a living organism, where each element is potentially meaningful and promotes the close relationship between humans and nature. It is a philosophical reversal of the culturally constructed idea of Anthropocene. Fundamentally, spirituality has two requisite constituents-- experiential and praxis, experiential stands for numinous experiences of earth and universe and praxis is to live these experiences in everyday life. The present paper aims to analyse selected poems of Kabir and Bulleh Shah to scrutinise their beliefs on the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of nature as God and human beings. Their poetry appears to echo the prophetic note of Symbiocene wherein ecological harmony is called for through spiritual embrace of poetic imagination. Drawing upon the contemporary cultural discourse, the paper applies Eco-spirituality as an approach to inspect the human-nature relationship from bhakti and Sufi perspectives and brings out their deep concern with environmental sensitivity.*

*Keywords: Eco-spirituality, Bhakti, Sufi, Nature, devotion, and love.*

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The notion of 'eco-spirituality' amid Covid pandemic, is the inception of a new world where a desperate need taking place to associate human being with Nature or Ecology spiritually. Present-day world is facing natural disasters, increasing by leaps and bounds, over the past years all around. The worsening climate crisis has given alarming signs through a series of disasters such as tempestuous wildfires in California, heat waves across Europe, dam catastrophes in China, historic and calamitous hurricanes in the southern United States, and the recent outbreak of COVID-19 affecting people in different ways. Materialistic and scientific advancement in the beginning of the twenty first century have shown us the portrait of a planet on the verge of climate catastrophe. Thomas Berry, a geologist, rightly asserts the shabby state of the twentieth century as a "crisis of cosmology", the crisis which is getting worse, more so over, in the twenty first century. The ongoing wraths brought upon the creation (Nature) has forced us to pause and contemplate over the relationship between human and nature and their interdependence. Generally, it is believed that it entails a sense of responsibility on the part of science to mitigate the eco-crisis effectuated by it in the name of materialistic development or scientific progress. Without disregarding the scientific approach altogether to get back on track, a complementary high-priority spiritual manoeuvre is required for resumption of qualitatively better life for all forms of existence. A collective devotion for a peaceful co-existence can pave the way for an awakening and transcending the human greed.

Mahatma Gandhi states, “Just as the body cannot exist without blood, so the soul needs the matchless and pure strength of faith” (Gandhi 51). Eco-spirituality is diversely deeply rooted in the every religious belief whether it is Hinduism or Islam. In the spiritual traditions of the Indian subcontinent, people have believed and practiced eco-spirituality differently such as *Bhakti* and *Sufi* traditions. These mystic traditions, while interrogating the cosmic design, have logical explanations of a holistic way of life. They overtly or covertly, apprise us of biosphere/ecosphere which is occupied by all living organisms. The countless heterogeneities of flora and fauna are the constituents of cosmology. Valerie Lincoln in his article 'Ecospirituality: A Pattern that Connects' opines, “An intuitive and embodied awareness of all life which engages a relational view of person to planet, inner to outer landscape, and soul to soil” (Lincoln 227). Therefore, eco-spirituality is the amalgamation of human sensibility and harmony towards the all-inclusive ecology.

The term 'bhakti' has its origin in the Sanskrit word *bhaj* which stands for 'to serve, honour, love, revere, adore', and the devotee or the lover of God is known as 'bhakta' who regards Him as a Source of all sort of existence. This relationship had many dimensions and one of those is cosmic ecological one. The human world is just a tiny part of his Creation; there are other forms of life, such as Nature, which lie utterly within the realm of Supreme Being. Kabir's poetic corpus itself known as *Bijak*, its root word is *bij* which literally means seed, life at its earliest stage that leaves one with a vast canvas of Ultimate Truth or to say in the end a seed turns out to be a jungle of spiritual thoughts. In Kabir's quest for the Real One, there is no distinction between 'natural' and 'supernatural' worlds; everything is the part of Divine Creation and reveals Him in its distinct life forms. The poet says, “Kabir, sow such a seed that its tree will flourish perennially” (Dharwadker 177). Likewise, Sufis propagates love and respect for the Real One in all forms of existence or His Creation. Bulleh Shah's *pir* (spiritual teacher), the Qadiri Sufi Shah Inayat Qadiri, who was the chief gardener of Shalimar gardens at Lahore lessoned him, “O Bulleh the secret of God is this; on this side God uproots and on the other side God creates” (Smith 8). Therefore, both the poets are part of two different traditions which adore Nature as God or Creation of Divine Being.

The free-floating term 'spirituality' is generally believed to be the attribute of being concerned with the human spirit or soul. In Indian *bhakti* tradition, the term used is *adhyatma*, which states a search for fundamental connection with cosmos/universe without the intervention of any organised religion. *Adhyatma* denotes transcendence within the living world, means it contains neither things pertaining to the other world nor spirits. In fact, one's very own nature and going beyond the self is real *adhyatma*. The human relation with cosmos is conscious but inorganic, whereas on the part of animals it is organic but unconscious. Human beings locate themselves as a part of cosmos yet are aware of the difference. In the same vein, Sufi mystics believe that God exists in all and all exist in God, the lover of God after realizing the relationship between the self and Pure Being merges with Him. Thus, one can say that human beings are conscious of their existence and associate themselves with other forms of existence. Bhakti saints and Sufis express this conscious human relationship with the cosmos and ecology in their mystic poetry. They believe that the plants, animals, river, mountains, and seasons are the inextricable parts of ecology and the whole ecosystem mystically reflects the Divine Being, which is inorganic in itself but relatable to organic 'Nature.' Kabir and Bulleh Shah's mystic poetics envisages comprehensive human-nature relation as the cardinal constituent of the eco-spirituality. Mystics-cum-environmentalists enunciate the analogy of inner (spiritual) and outer (nature) ecologies, the perplexed path to the abode of Ultimate Being is sought through the beauties, fears, calmness, and havoc of nature. The spiritual turmoil goes inside human body reciprocates with the outer environmental changes and, thereby, to venerate nature is to commune with God.

Interestingly, the same notion of human identification with nature, consciously, is propagated by several movements such as Bioregionalism, Deep Ecology, Eco-psychology, Dark Green Religion, Paganism, and Gaiicism. Appurtenant to eco-spirituality, the word pagan, derived

from Latin term *paganus*, means 'rural' or 'rustic' and signifies the polytheistic belief system. Precisely, it denotes a religious belief staying aloof from the formal religion. Adrian Harris in his 'Sacred Ecology' gives a different insight into paganism, "For paganism puts us back in touch with the body; by reconnecting our wordy analytical culture with the physical self, Paganism brings us back to the Earth. Through that healing of ourselves we may come to heal our relationship with our planet" (Harris 149). Likewise, Jim Lovelock, the propagator of the Gaia theory, in the preface of his debut work *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, enunciates, "It was not the biosphere alone that did the regulating but the whole thing, life the air, the ocean, and the rock. The entire surface of the Earth including life is a self-regulating entity and this is what I mean by Gaia" (Lovelock 2). An interdependent and interconnected organic system and inorganic human consciousness are the constituents of eco-spirituality. In 1972, Arne Naess, Norwegian philosopher, propagates the idea of Deep Ecology which talked about the inherent value of nature in the cosmology and later Warwick Fox, an ecopsychology theorist, expands this belief stating that deep ecology should help persons develop an 'ecological consciousness' and 'expansive self' that 'embraces outward self' (Taylor).

The material-spiritual connect is very subtle and facilitates a holistic explanation of human experiences. In other words, the spiritual journey felt by a human being occurs at micro level and is very intricate, whereas to experience it or getting reflected in ever-changing nature simplifies the understanding. At broader level, while unravelling the mysteries of nature and Supreme Being's existence in it, a mystic poet endeavours to transcend the self and enter the larger cosmic ecology. Eventually, merging with the cosmic ecology, the cycle of birth-death (bloom-wither) culminates in a state of no beginning and no end. While engaging with a mortal being as the earthly apparatus that grows and eventually goes back to its cosmic-ecosphere, the poet in Bhakti/Sufi tradition elucidates a cosmic-ecological clock. Its cyclic temporal frame ultimately synchronizes everything to form an eternal state where things co-exist in an interconnected and interdependent state. There are four Sufi spiritual stages delineated to be one with the Supreme Being/Creation such as *Shariat* (Sharia or the code of conduct based on the teachings of the Quran), *Tariqat* (manner or observance), *Haqiqat* (the realization of truth), and *Marfat* (the merging into the Divine Reality). Drawing upon Sufi philosophy, the third and fourth stages are seen as a site for interconnectedness. Bulleh Shah seeks God/Truth in ecological order or natural surroundings in these stages, as being in the state of 'haqiqat' signifies the acceptance that Ultimate Being exists in everything around us including flora and fauna and geographical and climatic changes and the 'marfat' opens the possibility of human-nature connection. Shah's eco-spiritual thoughts are quite obvious in his poetic form *baramah*, he allegorizes the pangs of separation (from the beloved, God) and becoming one with Him associating with every month (*assu*, *kattak*, *magghar*, *poh*, *magh*, *phaggan*, *chet*, *visakh*, *jeth*, *harh*, *savan*, *bhadon*) and their idiosyncratic seasonal changes. Primarily, Bulleh Shah, like an ecologist and spiritual guru, discerns the spiritual stages in the continuously changing seasons. This uninterrupted cycle of spiritual journey and seasons signifies death and resurrection. Like micro-organism, decay of the cells is productive since it sows the seeds of a new life. In autumn and spring, he is pining for Him and not able to bear the separation from his Beloved. Bulleh Shah states in his *baramahs* (*jeth* and *harh*) how the seasonal barrenness is reciprocating his separation. The months of *jeth* and *harh* signify the agonising burning of his 'self' and a desire for rain drops from the 'dark lord' (clouds, i.e., Supreme Being) to quench his spiritual thirst, such as, in *jeth* (May-June) Shah says:

I burn with a fire like the heat of the Jeth, since I became  
separated from my beloved

.....  
Hot winds blow and the sun is fierce in Jeth. The gathering  
assembles in the shade of the gardens

.....  
Oh, my heart is on fire. My bridegroom is not at home, and I do not

have any food to live on. (Shackle 287)

And in the month of *harh* (June-July):

On fire with love, I enjoy Harh early in the morning.

Anyone who has experienced love understands its  
burning powers, like the moth that destroys its  
allotted life in the flame.....

I make entreaties before the dark lord. Messengers take  
my letters and run. They departed black and have  
returned white. Bullha has no power of endurance  
without the lord. May the dark lord come to my aid. (Shackle 289)

When a Sufi or a saint undergoes spiritual metamorphosis he/she finds a sequence of wonderfully synchronous seasonal changes as a part of cosmic-ecology. It also encapsulates the reflection of Ultimate Being in an ecological continuum and the experience of Infinite. In similar fashion, the union with God takes place in the months of *savan* and *bhadon*. In *savan* (July-August), Shah states:

The clouds look lovely in Savan, the creator looks lovely  
in the heart. "In every place Inayat dwells," calls the  
*papiha* bird.

he songs of the rainy season sound lovely throughout  
Savan. My enemies suffer pain and depart. The boys  
play and the girls sing. My house is filled with delights.

My hopes are fulfilled. (Shackle 289)

In the month of *bhadon* (August-September), the arrival of clouds (Beloved God) urging the poet to take the path of love and compassion to seek nirvana, as the time of spiritual harvest has reached. Shah celebrates the Divine Union:

Come now, Bhadon has made my fortune bright. Through  
his divine power, the lord has come. He is contained in  
everything. I behold Shah Inayat, when he lets himself  
be seen...

Whatever happens is determining by God. Bullha, nothing is  
good without the lord. I have tasted the delight of  
love. (Shackle 291)

The idea of 'symbiocene' stands for 'companionship', the state of being together where different life forms are juxtaposed to create a sense of shared ecological understanding and at the same time aware of their own distinct self or existence. It suggests that life (existence) is not all about cut-throat competition or hierarchal subjugation among different species, i.e., 'the survival of the fittest' but it is interdependence and interconnectedness of each creation that makes the living possible. In mystic poetry of both Sufis and saints, this mutual beneficial association is allegorized through the lover-beloved archetype. In fact, there is transformation across gender binaries. This cooperation and mutual aid between human and nature is elucidated through two opposite genders (female lover and Male Beloved) who together create new life. The Seeker (male lover) while seeking Divine Being (Beloved) turns himself into female lover wherein the aim is to animate the female sensibilities of Mother Nature to inspire compassion, sacrifice, generosity, and productiveness. The lover embodies feminine attributes, alike nature (Mother Earth), while pleasing the Beloved (God), peculiarly the poetry dealing with garden or orchard is profoundly passionate at times while delineating the dire straits of the separation. As Bulleh Shah compares his heart with orchard and says:

The orchard where my Ranjha lives,  
Nothing like it in the world I find.  
Don't you go to the jungle, my Love



Leaving your dear Bulleh behind. (Duggal 253)

Kabir's quest for the Beloved is also expressed with the equally profound sensibility. The intensity of deep connection is reflected in love experienced by two separate entities:

It is like the lotus, which lives in the water and  
blooms in the water: yet the water cannot  
touch its petals, they open beyond its reach.

It is like a wife, who enters the fire at the bidding  
of love. She burns and lets others grieve,  
yet never dishonours love. (Tagore 20)

Like Sufi stages of Divine attainment, Bhakti poetry can also be understood through four levels of spiritual understanding or experience such as *Vikar*, *Sanskar*, *Subhav*, and *Swabhav*. *Vikar* is an elementary stage where human being is engrossed in worldly pleasures or slavery to sensory satisfaction, *Sanskar* stands for civilization, *Subhav* is compassion and solicitude, and *Swabhav* is 'own-nature' or realizing one's own self and becoming one with the Real One. The attainment of *subhav* and *swabhav* in Kabir's poetry is *Shahj Samadhi* (the idea of *shahja* is extracted from Buddhism and Vaishnavism), *shahj* is an unforced and natural state of becoming one with God where distinction of selves vanishes. The conscious divine meditation can be understood through the split personalities of the poet associating one with different natural objects such as animals and plants. The self undergoes a spiritual transfiguration; it gets reflected in different forms of existence such as dogs, tiger, crow, swans, sparrows, peacocks, hawks, snakes, etc. and is seen as the part of cosmic ecology. The compassion and effortless merging with cosmic ecology is an inherent part of the Vedantic philosophy, 'Tat Tvam Asi' (That art thou) (described in *Chandogya Upanishad*) in the words of Advaita (one of the Vedantic schools) 'tat' stands for Ultimate Being or Brahman and 'tvam' is the self or atman. In other words, nature is the reflection of True or Pure Being and Kabir experiences Him in its objects and forgets himself (the human self). In this state of transfiguration, the natural objects are the reflections of the seeker's different selves incarnating the divine experiences of living the 'otherness' of all beings. As Shah states, "Dance, Bulleh, dance, your love has come to you. Whatever you touch takes on your hue" (Rafat 86). The articulation of inexpressible divine experiences through the analogy of nature and cosmic consciousness can be understood as the notion of *Turiya*. As the *adhyatma* suggests transcendence by 'being conscious of one's own being', the concept of *Turiya* (from *Mandukya Upanishad*) asserts the same with further extension. It is a state of mind in which one can notice one's spiritual transmutation into other creatures while remaining conscious of his/her own existence. Both Shah and Kabir see this internal spiritual transformation through external sensory world of nature, including birds and animals. This is a state of realizing Supreme Being where both the poets see 'nature-self' nexus as a perfect blend of eco-spirituality. For instance, Shah pines for His Company like a desolated fowl, "You'll cry like the forlorn fowl, Without the wings you sit and scowl" (Duggal 91), the being devoid of love and compassion cannot achieve Him- "What use loving the one without heart! It's like sparrows getting shot For the fun of the fools" (Duggal 69). Similarly, Kabir sees the relationship between himself and God as analogous to that of *hamsa* (swan), a migrant bird which represents atman/soul that ultimately goes back to True Self or Immortal World. Kabir says:

Dear Swan.....

What country have you come from  
what shore will you alight on?

Where have you stopped and rested,  
what goal have you set your heart

It's now the morning of consciousness,  
let's leave together.

We won't be filled with grief and doubt in that lace,  
the fear of death won't strike us there. (Dharwadker 199)

Bulleh Shah too spiritually transmutes in swan and finds Eternal Bliss by relinquishing



worldly desires. The swan symbolizes grace, devotion, and love towards Divine Being whereas the crow signifies the materialistic ways of life. Human greed of using nature as a resource is replaced by veneration towards it. In Shah's words:

He, then, Himself gave me a glimpse,  
In a spell of ecstasy I took His vows,  
Witnessing the manner of the swans,  
I've forgotten the ways of crows. (243 Duggal)

Similarly, *Abbodiat* of the Sufis and the *Seva Bhav* of saints stand for 'selfless service' for connecting humanity with compassion rather than control. In the verses of Bulleh Shah the recurrent use of the allegory of dog, elucidates the notion of compassion and altruism. In Sufi tradition, dogs are mentioned as being the perfect examples of *malang* or dervishes (a Sufi mystic who lives an austere lifestyle). They do not care about selfish materialistic pleasure but just remain faithful to and happy with their pack. The poet, by such allegorical depiction, not only subverts the hierarchal pattern of species but also suggests a reversal of 'anthropocene.' Shah utters:

Perhaps the dogs are better than you!  
To say prayers you wake during night  
but, the dogs stay awake all through!  
Dogs during night don't stop howling  
as upon mound of rubbish sit, they do!  
They would never leave door of master,  
even if beaten all of the night through!  
Bulleh Shah... time you learnt this too,  
or the dogs might be better than you...  
perhaps the dogs are better than you! (Paul Smith 61)

Making boundaries and differentiating things may be one of the significant faculties of human mind, yet it simultaneously digresses from the larger reality. The word *bhed* means 'mystery' or 'innermost secret', likewise *abhedata* stands for merging with the Real One or a uniting force which demolishes the illusive walls of separation. When the dissimilitude between subject and object fades away, the self also comes to an end. Like Sufi idea of *Marfat*, the notion of *abhedata* in bhakti tradition signifies merger with Truth/ Ultimate Being, wherein one realizes the presence of Divine Being in every form of existence, the nature does appear as a reflection of the Divine Reality, and what mystic changes one goes through are also reflected in the constant changing environmental cycles. Kabir surprises with his strange poetic style features like *ulatbhamsi* (upside-down language); his riddling poems are full of paradoxes and enigmas which ask, "Is it two or one?" It illustrates the fundamental notion of *Advaita Vedanta* (non-dualism), the Eternal Soul is the same as constantly changing empirical world. Thus, the point is that as *bij* having no form still carries form, *bhed* holds uniformity in its segregation. The plant imagery is illustrative of this notion, Kabir says:

The neem tree  
becomes the mango tree,  
the mango tree becomes  
the neem,  
the banana plant  
spreads into a bush-  
the fruit on the coconut palm  
ripens into a berry. (Dharwadker 119)

And likewise animal imagery:

A lion keeping watch

Over pasturing cows;  
 Fish spawning  
 On treetops;  
 A cat carrying away  
 A dog;  
 A buffalo going out to graze,  
 Sitting on a horse;  
 A tree with its branches in the earth  
 Its roots in the sky;  
 A tree with flowering roots. (Mehrotra 3)

These riddling poems propagate the notion of mutual inhabitation where one organism shelters another, and two organisms exchange resources. It is not self-focalization, which may leave no space for other species, but an extension of the self. Other species being acknowledged and harmonized in a displaced hierarchy, animals also play critical roles in influencing the physical properties of ecosystems and shaping the environment. Both bhakti and Sufi mysticisms seek Divine Being with 'union-in-separation' suggesting that the whole creation is an eternal play of living, evolving, and transmuting.

Both *Bhakti* and *Sufi* saints propagate devotion and love towards the Supreme Being and its creation (nature). Kabir and Bulleh Shah make the fundamental statement that one cannot be spiritual if one is not human in the sense of revering nature or creation in its fundamental forms, i.e. all five essential elements earth, water, air, fire, and void. Shah says- "Born out of earth, you must go back, No effort can save you nor of you keep track" (Duggal 205). The Vedantic and Upanishadic philosophy of '*panchamahabhuta*' (space, air, fire, water, and earth are the structural entity of the universe) gets reflected in the poet's belief that human body is a minuscule fragment of the cosmic-ecology but at the same time it is formed of the same five elements. Human being's interconnectedness and interdependence within ecology is an embodiment of a single cycle. Man is incomplete without nature; the practice of transmutation of spiritual experience into cosmic ecology takes the poet in a state of self-oblivion, where like a spiritualist and ecologist he perceives the universe as manifestation of Supreme Soul, a self-sustaining holistic mechanism, being consistent, cohesive, coexistent, interconnected and independent in the cosmos. Shah says:

The horse is clay; and so is the rider-  
 how strangely clay runs after clay,  
 And clay kills clay with a clay sword;  
 the more clayey one will be the one to slay,  
 What's the garden but clay? And its flowers?  
 Clay has come to it in a season of clay,  
 Four elements spin the world, but a fifth  
 overrules them, while the rest betray. (Rafat 150)

Kabir's view on five elements is also an illustration of his deep ecological understanding:

As the seed is within the banyan tree, and within  
 the seed are the flowers, the fruits, and the shade:  
 So the germ is within the body, and within that  
 germ is the body again.

The fire, the air, the water, the earth, and the  
 aether; you cannot have these outside of Him. (Tagore 33)

## Conclusion

Kabir and Bulleh Shah lived through two different mystic traditions, milieu, and cultures

while sharing the similar eco-region of the Indian subcontinent. Both the poets are universal in their approach while dealing with the theme of cosmic ecology. The recurrent profound use of ecological objects, such as vegetation, forest, river, sea, animals or creatures, birds, and seasons, as well as spiritual dimension of their creative corpus are woven together. Natural objects, as forms of Divine Existence (*parmatma*), are perceived and mediated in connection with the individual self (atman). Each 'self' inculcates the notion of interconnectedness and interdependence within a larger operative system. In an unorthodox approach, they subsume ecozone under Divine Creation and with the elucidative metaphors to show human-nature nexus, they propagate the idea of eco-mysticism. The Real One is no longer an external entity in Kabir's and Shah's poetic works; hence, the traditional ritualistic approach of formalistic religion is inadequate and therefore an adequate and superior way of worship 'Divine' is to associate oneself with nature, i.e. Cosmic Ecology, and its dynamic energies. Here, in pragmatic sense, the aim is neither salvation nor immortality but to transfix human existence into natural objects while being conscious of one own self (the sense of being human); a displacement of anthropocene with symbiocene. Therefore, the notion of eco-spirituality or eco-mysticism suggested in the poetry of Kabir and Bulleh Shah can guide the present civilization, especially amid the times of eco-crisis to re-establish human relationship with nature with the help of spirituality. Their poems centre stage collective environmental emotions and sing symbiocene. Ecological spirituality makes one aware of one's existence that we are all amalgamation of earth, water, air, fire, and ether and whatever we do to our biosphere, we do to our soul or inner self. A Sin against nature is a sin against God, therefore, eco-spiritual approach can link us again to the Divine Creation and lead towards a harmonious existence, which is interdependent and interconnected, for all organisms.

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# Rethinking Boundaries: Indian-Nepali Feminist Writing and Third World Feminism

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## *Abstract*

*The present paper is an attempt to define and configure 'differences' between the feminist perspectives from western feminist to Indian-Nepali feminist discourse by rethinking boundaries and to find out the impact of western epistemological framework (First World) upon Indian-Nepali women's writing (Third World). Tracing how the social reality can not only be different from men but among women as well; the paper will focus on how feminist agenda and aesthetic difference can make the binaries between the first world and the third world as situated paradigms. The dangers of essentialism that first world feminism come armed with can result in serious misunderstanding in the literatures produced by women who are non-white; and in case of Indian-Nepali feminist writing there can be tendencies of not recognizing the difference between writings from India and those coming from their closest culturally and linguistically similar neighbour country Nepal.*

*Keywords: Feminist Epistemology, Third World, Indian-Nepali Feminist Writing.*

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## **Introduction**

Feminist Epistemology stems from locating and situating women in positions different from men. Uma Narayan (1989) writes “Feminist Epistemology is a particular manifestation of the general insight that the nature of women's experience as individual and as social beings our contributions to work culture knowledge and our history and political interests have been systematically ignored or misrepresented by mainstream discourses in different areas” (332). This approach will lead to a wholly different way of approaching knowledge. This is because feminist epistemology is based on a fundamental premise that each woman's experience will be different depending on the socio-cultural, geographical and racial context. The homogeneity and universality of Western feminist theorizations coming from the first world gives little space to alternative epistemologies which are different by virtue of racial ethnic religious cultural and historical traditions. After the Second World War, feminism began to be classified into three categories of convenience: First World Feminism which involved the rich and predominantly Western Nations of Europe America and Australasia; the Second World Feminism consisting of the Soviet Union; and the Third World Feminism comprising of the former colonized nations of Africa and South Asia. Chandra Mohanty, Trinh T. Minh-ha, bell hooks and Gayatri C. Spivak have analysed the limitations of Western epistemological frameworks for articulating the experiences of women outside the Western domain which have rendered the “Third World” women invisible. These postcolonial feminists questioned universal theorizations and problematized their own position in knowledge production. Within this rubric of Third World feminism, the paper will be locating Indian-Nepali discourse as a distinct branch of epistemology.

It is not uncommon to hear that the term 'Third World' is a debatable category. It is supported by the rationale that such categorization of the worlds has an economic origin and through this surmise the 'Third World' implies a position of being underdeveloped and underprivileged. This Third

World structure entails a movement of capital ideas and cultural artefacts from centre to periphery; but it is difficult to see it as a unilateral movement. This symbiotic power politics can be found in the treatise of Trinh T. Minh-ha named *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* where she categorizes the third world as 'special' in the sense of 'a serious lack' left behind to be filled (403). Third World feminism primarily stems from this concept of 'difference'. It aims to interrogate essentialised readings of 'women' and 'sisterhood' revealing the inadequacy of western epistemological framework which sought to homogenise diverse cultural and historical experiences. Indian-Nepali Feminist discourse is a distinct branch of epistemology because the social and lived reality and experiences of the Indian-Nepali women are distinctly different from the Pan-Indian women. The Indian-Nepali women's experience shares more affinity with women from Nepal rather than the women from the Indian mainland. This could be due to the use of a common linguistic script, similar cultural, religious and traditional ties between Nepal and India. Many prominent Indian-Nepali women writers like Banira Giri, Radhika Raya, Dev Kumari Thapa, Parijat, Maya Thakuri and Indira Prasai migrating to Nepal receiving patronage from King Mahendra of Nepal through His Royal Academy of Fine Arts. This kind of incentive was not provided in the other side of the border as Indian-Nepali Literature was basically a male domain. Indian-Nepali women writers like their Nepali sisters were traditionalists which was perhaps the result of their being deeply rooted in the Hindu tradition. The result of this was the presence of a strong devotional strain in their works. In spite of their rich literary acumen, and diversity of experiences, they are hardly a substantive force to reckon compared to their male counterparts.

The start of feminine writing in Nepali literature can be located in 1882 with Lalit Tripur Sundari's prose composition on statecraft *Rajdharm*. Lalit Tripur Sundari was followed by other women writers like Ambalika Devi whose first Nepali novel from the Indian soil on an Indian theme was *Rajput Ramani* which was published in 1932. Such writing by women on statecraft and politics as opposed to the traditional religious and devotional strain found in the earlier writings by women was a new turn in Nepali feminist writing. Although there is a dearth of Nepali women's literary historiography, it was with the modernist wave that the feminist writings began to be recognized. It was after the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) that the influence of feminism can be felt in modern Indian-Nepali feminist literature. Other reasons like socio-cultural changes, political changes, women's education and legal awareness have also led to the emancipation of these women.

### **Third World Feminism and Indian-Nepali Feminist Writing**

Global sisterhood movements of the 1970s failed to address the issue of heterogeneity of the condition of being woman. Sisterhood was a leitmotif of First World feminists suggesting commonality among women; sisterhood not only excluded men but the poorer sisters from the Third World. Third world feminism was not just meant to be a hierarchical arrangement or a spatial binary, but to evade the politics of universalism by subverting tradition and questioning the boundaries of genres and narrative by focussing on memory, memoirs, oral narratives, autobiographies and life histories. The modern day Indian-Nepali feminist movement from the 1960s saw new beginnings not only in terms of subject matter and also in their treatment. Most of the writings that were produced during this period focused on the identity of women and their personal narratives. They no longer required to be inspired by men literary critics and theorists; they seemed to have formed their own literary tradition. Here mention must be made of important names of Indian-Nepali Feminist writers like Kamala Sankritayan, Lakhi Devi Sundas, Shanti Chettri, Bishnu Kumari Sharma, Shobha Kanti Thegim, Kabita Lama, Bindiya Subba, Pushpa Sharma, Radha Sharma, Rajkumari Dahal, Shanti Thapa and others. These contemporary women writers and critics focused more on forms and trends. Their styles veered from impressionistic technique to being more objective. There can also be seen ample use of theoretical and analytical approaches. Lakhi Devi Sundas is a formidable force in Indian-Nepali literary criticism with works like *Upanyas ma Darjeeling ko Jivan* published in 1979 and *Agam Singh Giri Kaviko Rupma*

*Nepali Kavitriharu ko Vishai* in the year 1984. She received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2001 for her collection of short stories, *Ahat Anubhuti Katha Sangraha* in 2000. Another important Indian-Nepali feminist critic was Kamala Sankrityan who was awarded the Bhanu Puraskar in 1982 and Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityan Award in 1993 for her collection of essays *Bichar Tatha Biwechana (Thoughts and Criticism)* in 1992. She has also written *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia* (1975) and *Nepali Sahitya* in 1999. Sanumati Rai is another prominent Indian-Nepali feminist writer whose fame rests on her collection of short poems *Udgar (Influence)* in 2009.

However, when a patriarchal structure had repressed the voice of women for long, the novel becomes a “voice” and “agency” of the middle-class women. Novel-writing became a form of cultural power, the power to control one's body and sexuality. If the first Nepali novel by a woman was Ambalika Devi's *Rajput Ramani* (1932), the next novel by a Nepali woman is Pawan Kumari Devi's *Pratigya* (1959). The publication of *Pratigya* as a love story, interspersed with Hindi and Sanskrit is found to be published nearly after three decades. The 1960s saw a rapid growth of novel as a popular genre among Nepali women writers. Shanti Pradhan's *Karuna* (1965) was one of the earliest novels from an Indian-Nepali women writer. This novel was strongly Christian in tenor with a didactic theme of forgiveness and love for God. Born in Darjeeling, Parijat is the pen name of Bishnu Kumari Waiba. She is one of the most prolific and formidable feminist Nepali woman writer. In the year 1958, her family moved to Kathmandu from Darjeeling and despite suffering from depression, her literary acumen remains formidable. Partially paralyzed since her youth, unmarried and childless, Parijat is a writer who seldom ventured out. Her writings convey a gloomy outlook, bordering on neurosis, morbidity, atheism and existentialism. Her cynicism is brought in lines like “love does not die, you have to kill it,” from her famous poem *Lahurelai Ek Rogi Premikako Patra (A Sick Lover's Letter to her Soldier)*. Parijat's critically acclaimed novels are *Sirisko Phul (The Blue Mimosa, 1964)*, *Mahattahin (Trivial) 1968*, *Baisa ko Manche (Man of Youth in 1977, Toribari, Bata ra Sapanaharu (Mustard Field, Road and Dreams) in 1976*, *Paribhasit Ankhaharu (Defined Eyes) 1980*; *Antarmukhi (Introvert in 1982)*, *Usle Rojeko Bato (The Chosen Path in 1984)* and *Anindo Pahadsangai (Sleepless with the Hills in 1987*. Her works make use of the psychoanalytic framework to explore female sexuality and brooding on existential issues, perhaps a result of her physical disability. Parijat's first novel *Sirisko Phul (The Blue Mimosa)* is a path-breaking progressive modernist novel narrated from the male perspective Suyog Bir Singh, a soldier who fought against the Japanese during the Second World War and his love-hate relationship with the rebellious Sakambari. Using the authoritative male persona as the narrator, Parijat delves into the construction and understanding of the 'other' in a manner very similar to what Simone de Beauvoir observes: “In order to be a complete individual, on an equality with man, woman must have access to the masculine world as does the male to the feminine world, she must have access to the other” (*The Second Sex*, 761). Like Parijat, Banira Giri too moved from Kurseong, India to Nepal to experience success in her literary career. Banira Giri has published three volumes of poems along with acclaimed novels like *Karagar (The Prison) in 1985* and *Nirbandh (Unbound) in 1986*. Similarly Bindiya Subba's *Athaha (Unfathomable, 2000)* desires to escape the structures of a patriarchal society through the image of the madwomen. Bindiya Subba narrates her experiences of dealing with women patients in a mental asylum. The association of madness with women when women seek to assert their feminine difference is not uncommon in literary histories and Bindiya Subba deals with the issue of madness as a site of both resistance and subversion of the patriarchal structures through her various women characters Priti, Sandhya and Aparajita. This use of madness as a metaphor to escape the symbolic phallogocentric system by Bindiya Subba is similar to what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's observations of women writers dramatizing their own self-division and expressing their own “uniquely female feelings of fragmentation their own deep sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be” (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, 78) All four novels of Bindiya Subba *Phoolharu, Pahadharu, Dharsaharu (1986)*; *Ataha (1998)*; *Nirgaman (2006)* and



*Simanta* (2016) are intensely psychoanalytical in nature. Similarly it is Pushpa Rai who again makes a mark with two great novels *Bholi ko Pratiksha* (1990) and *Madhyantar* (2007). *Bholi ko Pratiksha* is absurdist in nature questioning the true identity of a woman and *Madhyantar* is about breaking the shackles of a patriarchal society. With the foray of novelists like Bindiya Subba and Pushpa Rai, Indian-Nepali feminist writing becomes a formidable force in Indian-Nepali literary landscape

Women writing in Nepali from both sides of the border share a cordial relationship in terms of themes and technique, but each have been able to maintain a distinctiveness of their own. The porous Indo-Nepal border felicitates the cordial exchange of ideas between the two countries. A new desire to write for themselves as opposed to being written by male writers; their subject being extremely female personal experiences, has garnered both visibility and audibility to Indian-Nepali women writers. Besides which, after 1930, Nepali women were also influenced by Indian women writers writing in Hindi like Mahadevi Verma, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Maheshweta Devi, Durgesh Nandini, Sumitra Kumari Sinha, Ramanika Gupta, Lata Sharma, Amita Prajapati, Mrinal Pandey, and Sushma Bhatnagar. These Indian-Nepali women writers are repositories and transmitters of culture. Their experiential writings have forged close binding with sister writers from other Third World nations. No longer do they look towards the West to emulate their literary practices but they seem to have found their own voice.

## Conclusion

Indian-Nepali feminist literary movement is still in the process of development, both in terms of theory and practice. In spite of the tremendous growth of Indian-Nepali feminist writings from the post-1960s, there is still more serious engagement to come with reference to the major literary practices. The West is in a post feminist moment where it has realized that one interpretative paradigm for all cannot work. Under such a historical positioning, it is time Nepali women wrote their own histories by breaking the shackles of patriarchy. The Nepali patriarchal set-up naturalizes the subordination of women within the family through myths of feminine passivity and normative heterosexuality. Women are seldom regarded a sites of/for interrogation which can challenge the masculinity ideologies. Much of the works produced by Indian- Nepali feminist writers have been academic and research oriented, displaying a certain literary scholarship. Most women writers belong to the educated middle class and their writings are a reflection of an essentialist view of women belonging to the same class from the academia. Chandra Mohanty reads this retreat to the boundaries of the university as a symptom of a “predominantly class-based gap between a vital women's movement and feminist theorizing in the U.S. academy” (*Feminism Without Borders*,.6). There is a need to understand that there is a need to accept the “intersectional” quality of every woman's location. As in the West, the origins of the novel in Nepali literature too were masculine. The rise of Indian-Nepali feminist writing can be linked to women's access to higher education, jobs, political voice, and public participation. Due to the rapid development of technology resulting in the 'opening-up' of the Nepali society to the rest of the world; and the First World universalizing agenda seems to have had impact upon them too. Chandra Mohanty deconstructs the Western feminist discourse by producing a singular, homogenized “third world woman”, and in the process constructing an image that subsumes “the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world” (53). But in the process of trying to include this third world “difference” within one political framework, it has the effect of replicating the imperial history whereby this third world “otherness” sustains the first world as the norm: “Without the over determined discourse that creates the third world, there would be no (singular and privileged) first world” (74). Similarly when a patriarchal structure had repressed the voice of women for long, feminist writings by women become a “voice” and “agency” of the middle- class women. The male patriarchal structure having repressed the maternal origin for long, it is time that these women writers must seek out their own

space by rejecting the “male imaginary”.

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## Debunking the Myth of Postcolonial Indian Modernity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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### *Abstract*

*The present paper is an effort to study how Amitav Ghosh has looked at and critiqued the received or official notions of Indian postcolonial history and national narratives of modernity and progress in his *The Hungry Tide* (2004). At the same time, by foregrounding his views about the postcolonial modernity as represented in his *The Hungry Tide*. This paper also studies the fallout or negative consequences of unmindful progression of modernity in the Indian postcolonial context. Ghosh exhibits an astounding understanding of the socio-cultural and historical conditions in the postcolonial Indian subcontinent. Ghosh's description of the Sundarbans is a brilliant blending of fictional elements with accurate scientific knowledge of the natural world accumulated through rigorous field study. *The Hungry Tide* through its wide array of concerns seems to bring out the problematics of the Indian postcolonial modernity and plead the case of the richest ecosystem in the world.*

*Keywords: Modernity, colonialism, postcolonialism, subaltern, marginalisation, environmentalism,*  
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The *Encyclopaedia of Postcolonial Studies* (2004) defines the term 'modernity' as a departure from the past towards being modern marking the "beginning of the Enlightenment" and having "implied progress in all areas of human life" (301). Underscoring the importance of reason and logic in modernity, it further states that the life in modernity depends on the need of truths "to be found, described, and established" regardless of being "already clearly defined" (301). Broadly speaking, modernity refers to the "social, cultural, political, and economic changes that took place in Western Europe from the sixteenth century onwards" (*Rethinking Modernity* 02). While modernity is viewed in terms of advancements in technology such as invention of printing press and steam engine which put European states ahead of the rest of the world, it is also associated with the phenomenon of rapid industrialisation of Europe. Having direct bearings on the colonial and postcolonial conditions throughout the world, modernity has become "inseparable from the postcolonial context" (*Encyclopaedia* 303).

Modernity in the colonial context can be understood as an integral component of Western imperialist enterprise prompting the Western Colonial powers to expand beyond their political borders in search of resources in their quest to vie for economic and military supremacy among the rival European states. This rivalry for hegemony and explosive mechanized industrial growth can be explained as the major force behind the colonization of distant lands across Asia, Africa, Americas and Australia. Ghosh argues that India, China and Japan all had their native versions of modernity prior to the colonial intervention that did not "follow the Western model" (*Great Derangement* 152). He further records that the European modernity supported by various repressive and hegemonic colonial laws "incorporated and appropriated" the native variants of modernity into what is now "a single, dominant model" (146) of modernity. Thus, the Eurocentric modernity or the 'civilizing mission' remained to a large extent, a vehicle of colonial enterprise that had nothing or very little to do with the betterment of the colonial subjects except pillage of their raw material and wealth.

Modernity in postcolonial environment can be seen to have remained as a predominantly Eurocentric. The decolonization process as Aijaz Ahmed argues largely witnessed the transfer of power “not to revolutionary vanguards but to the national bourgeoisie poised for reintegration into subordinate positions within the imperialist structure” (*In Theory* 28). Understandably, the colonial power structures and governance tools were largely inherited and adopted intact by the majority if not all postcolonial ruling elites, who neither displayed the will nor capability to replace the colonial hegemonic and repressive structures for the betterment of the natives. Postcolonial nation, it can be argued, was expected to negotiate the “difficult balance between individual and community, region and nation, diversity and homogeneity” (Nayar 82) along the path of modernization and emancipation of the native subaltern. However, the “exclusionary, oppressive nature of postcolonial nation states” (80) based on the colonial repressive power structures rapidly led to marginalization of the native “women, 'lower' castes, and classes, ethnic minorities” (100). *The Hungry Tide* appears to interrogate these postcolonial Indian conditions on the sidelines of modernity and progress.

Approaching the notions of modernity and globalization in the context of *The Hungry Tide*, the text appears to be suggestive of their negative fallouts that brought widespread poverty, deprivation, marginalization and displacement of the populations that were rendered as “redundant” (*Wasted Lives* 12) or “human waste” (13) throughout the Third World. Being a Bengali and an anthropologist, Ghosh's postcolonial perspective is deeply entrenched in historical settings in the Indian Ocean, particularly the Bay of Bengal tracing cross connections between regions and cultures. *The Hungry Tide* is set in the Sundarbans that forms the backdrop of Ghosh's story. The text addresses multiple issues such as modernisation and progress, environment, politics of conservation and dispossession, resistance, the life of refugees, wildlife, divergent cultures and languages, history and the legend.

Sundarbans or the tide country, as it is often called, is a massive mangrove forest in the coastal region of the Bay of Bengal which is split between India and Bangladesh and is home to thousands of wildlife species, birds and reptiles such as the Bengal tiger, chital, crocodiles, snakes and river dolphins. Narrating the process of colonial intrusion and occupation of the Sundarbans in an effort to establish a sea-port in the midst of an apparently inhospitable and hostile Sundarbans ecosystem, the text explains the historical reasons behind the ongoing struggle for survival among wild predators and human beings. The narrative reveals that hundreds of human beings perished during the process of colonisation of the Sundarbans apart from disturbing one of the most delicate ecosystems in the world. The rapid deforestation in the wake of human colonisation of the Sundarbans brought both human beings and the wild animals in a fatally close proximity that raised the animals' “threshold of aggression by washing away their scent markings and confusing their territorial instincts” (*The Hungry Tide* 241). During the process of inhabitation of the Sundarbans, dozens of people perished in the “dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles” (08). On the other hand, the disastrous struggle for survival between human beings and the wild animals that ensued due to this cataclysmic event prompted sir Daniel Hamilton to “give out rewards to anyone who killed a tiger or a crocodile” (52).

Through an analysis of the lot of the marginalised and the dispossessed and widespread poverty prevailing in the tide country, the text exposes the discriminatory nature of Eurocentric discourses of modernity and progress. The Sundarbans offers a metaphor of cultural contamination in a terrain of “always mutating” (07) boundaries where “the Arakanese, the Khmer, the Javanese, the Dutch, the Portuguese, the English” (50) had settled throughout the history. However, it becomes clear that the partition and drawing up of political boundaries midwived by modernity across the Sundarbans and its people, have resulted in a rupture in the fabric of culturally diverse but syncretic native population as well as ecologically rich environment. Thousands of people were displaced from their homes in the wake of creation of new nation states of India and Bangladesh. These people were the poorest among the poor, who were “oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and

by Hindus of the upper caste" (118). As no nation claiming sovereignty on their erstwhile homes came forward to claim this "human waste" (*Wasted Lives* 13), these refugees had to migrate to the Indian side of the Sundarbans in search of a new home. However, the Indian state's refusal to allow these refugees to settle at Morichjhapi and the subsequent brutal clampdown on them resulting in hundreds of deaths went un-noticed in official history and press. Even the Bengali intellectuals remained silent about it. All this exposes the discriminatory, apathetic and inhuman facets of modernity.

By uncovering these omitted events from the national historical discourse, Ghosh seems to restore agency to the victims of modernity and fill the gaps in history. Narrating the state sponsored repression of its own people, he reveals how the settlers were compelled "to eating grass . . . drinking from puddles and ponds" (260) after the destruction of the clean water sources during the siege that went on for days. Many died of cholera and other diseases that erupted during the blockade. The gruesome happenings that Ghosh exposes have been testified by many other historians and commentators also. Revealing the facts about the Morichjhapi carnage that were largely cloaked in invisibility and even suppressed by the authorities, Malik Ross (1999) comments that "several hundred men, women, and children" were said to have been killed during the clampdown and "their bodies dumped in the river" whereas the "Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission" of inquiry declared that there were "no atrocities against untouchables" (111). Pointing out the invisibility or disposal of such wasted lives during the onslaught of modernity, Bauman argues that human leftover of modernity is disposed in such a radical manner that "we make them invisible by not looking and unthinkable by not thinking" (*Wasted Lives* 27).

The text offers a critique of exclusionary aspects of modernity and progress that seem to have bypassed the 'tide country'. The text reveals that the region lacks access even to the basic amenities of life such as roads, hospitals, education or even electricity and that the natives are considered "less than dirt and dust" (*The Hungry Tide* 261) and resigned to their fate of "hunger and catastrophe" (79). Tigers kill human beings on routine basis while the government covers up many such killings and thus "nobody knows exactly how many killings there are" (240). On the contrary, if a tiger is killed by the locals after it intrudes into human settlements, there happen "arrests, fines, beatings. Who knows what else?" (297) because "these people are too poor to matter" (300) or to be visible. By giving more importance to the tigers than to the human beings and their rights in order to "curry favour with their Western patrons" (301), the state according to Annu Jalais (2009), seems to have reduced the natives to "tiger food" (*Dwelling on Morichjhapi* 1761).

On the other hand, the text also demonstrates Ghosh's concern for the animal rights which seem to be equally vulnerable to human intervention and greed. Piya's difficulty in obtaining permit for her research and forest guard's complicity with the boat owner, his abusing Fokir and looting Piya of her money speak volumes of the bureaucratic functioning of the forest department. The forest department is also exposed to be hopelessly ignorant about the wildlife and local environment in comparison to Fokir's knowledge of complex waterways and the wildlife in the Sundarbans. By highlighting the killing of a "newborn calf" (*The Hungry Tide* 350) of the Irrawaddy dolphin by the forest guards motorboat and authorities' turning a blind eye to the "nylon fishing nets" that even "catch the eggs" (134) of the fish endangering the whole ecosystem, Ghosh seems to suggest official indifference and lack of holistic approach towards the other wildlife species and the ecosystem as a whole. Even tigers appear to be the objects of exhibition just to "curry favours with their Western patrons" (301). Thus, the narrative, while exposing apathetic and exclusionary approach of the western modernist and environmental discourses towards the marginalised and the nature, is also suggestive of an inherent contradiction between the declared and undeclared aims of the modernist approach.

At the same time, the text also reflects on the issues of marginalisation of women and women trafficking that seem to rupture the underbelly of emancipatory feminist discourses professing progress and empowerment of women. It appears that modernity has excluded and pushed the women of the tide country outside of the margins of equality and emancipation. The text depicts

that most of the women in the tide country are widows as their husbands have either been drowned while fishing or killed by predators. The untimely death of the male members puts the onus of earning livelihood on the shoulders of the women and in most cases their search for work ends up in brothels after falling prey to the pimps traffickers. The narrative highlights the women in the Sundarbans to be the victims of manifold marginalisation in the midst of high sounding modernist discourses concerning women.

After a detailed analysis of *The Hungry Tide*, one may conclude that by building his argument around the all-inclusive and cross-cultural legend of Bon-Bibi, Ghosh seems to offer the indigenous knowledge, cultural practices and legends as counternarratives to the exclusionary and decontextualized Eurocentric narratives of modernity and progress. At the same time, he also appears to corroborate Mahatma Gandhi's renunciation of Western modernity in favour of native socio-cultural practices ensuring social justice and equality for all. Cutting across political and cultural divisions, the syncretic legend and its deity in the legend are revered across Indo-Bangladesh borders and are considered to be responsible for a just division of resources between man and animals. After reading the text, the reader may painfully realize that there is a very little evidence that the efforts at retracing and reviving native histories and cultural practices have been successful in liberating the indigenous cultures from the hegemony of colonial modernity or global capitalism. It also poses a question if cultural difference can endure the explicitly unstoppable onslaught of Eurocentric modernity sourced by necessity and enticement. Being an artist and informed by his deep understanding of anthropology and history of the Indian subcontinent, Ghosh seems to underscore the need to recognize the failure of political decolonization in securing cultural and intellectual decolonization, social justice and equality for all. The text appears to put forth an urgent need to recognize the Indian needs and reconsideration of the future course in Indian postcolonial contexts and search for a nativised functional model of modernity.

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## Socio-Political Commentary and Existential Dilemma in Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte*

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### *Abstract*

*Salman Rushdie, born and bred in Bombay (now Mumbai), an expatriate writer, Booker of Booker's Award winning author, is adept in capturing the human follies and fancies in his literary works. This quality of his writing on the one hand brought him wide acclaim and on the other hand he was accused of blasphemy. In spite of the ordeals, he never surrendered his literary ideals and interests that centered on socio-cultural-political concerns. Quichotte (2019) is Salman Rushdie's latest publication. This paper is a modest endeavour to study the major thematic concerns i.e. socio-political situation and existential dilemmas that define and alter the outlook of the protagonist during his journey to win her love.*

*Keywords: expatriate, racial, alienation, diaspora, , loneliness, politics. Existential, blasphemy, luminal.*

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Salman Ahmed Rushdie, born in a Muslim family in 1947, is a celebrated expatriate writer of Indian origin. One of the most successful novelists who attained international esteem, Rushdie has immensely contributed to the corpus of expatriate writing. His works are interspersed with fond memories of homeland that come to life, overpowering the lapse of time. Rushdie recalls in *Imaginary Homelands*:

Two or three times a year, at the big Eid festivals, I would wake up to find new clothes at the foot of my bed, dress and to go with my father to the great prayer-maiden outside the Friday Mosque in Bombay, and rise and fall with multitude, mumbling my way through the uncomprehended Arabic much as Catholic children do-or used to do-with Latin. The rest of the year religion took a back seat. (*IH*: 377)

He had a Christian nanny and he attended an English school at the age of five, and grew up to be a lover of books.

Rushdie travelled extensively through the United States and Canada and Europe owing to his occupation as a “Professional advertizing copywriter.” Hailing from the oriental Indian life and adopting the accidental British or European living, Rushdie is a product of “multi-ethnicity,” which is the creative matrix of his fiction. Rushdie started his writing with the fictional work *Grimus* (1975). His second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), winner of the best of the Bookers, focuses on the simultaneous independence and partition of the two nations. His novel *Shame* (1983) depicts the political and social scenario of Pakistan. He came into a thick of controversies because of his novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

Rushdie was a victim of social discrimination since his childhood. At the age of thirteen, his father sent him to the “British Public School Rugby”, where he faced racial prejudice as an Indian. He was termed as an outsider who belonged to an inferior class. This unfortunate experience of racial discrimination meted out to him was documented by Rushdie in his paper “The Terminal Report”. After his education at Rugby, Rushdie went to Pakistan where his family had migrated ever since he had gone to England for studies. After partition, his parents sold the house at Bombay and shifted to

Karachi. In Pakistan too, he was considered an outsider and a foreigner. Rushdie's early years thus provided him with the experiences that became the subject matter of his future works. As an outsider to the three cultures, the place of his birth, that of his study and finally of the adopted country, Rushdie inadvertently became the recipient of a unique educational experience that has stayed with him all his life. Hence Rushdie has always considered himself as an outsider, a displaced citizen of the world. On the official website of British Council, Salman Rushdie's biography page has the following statement of the author:

It seems to me, more and more, that the fictional project on which I've been involved ever since I began *Midnight's Children* back in 1975 is one of self-definition. That novel, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses* strike me as an attempt to come to terms with the various component parts of myself - countries, memories, histories, families, gods. First the writer invents the books; then, perhaps, the books invent the writer. But whenever I say anything about my work I want to contradict myself at once. To say that beyond self-exploration lays a sense of writing as sacrament, and maybe that's closer to how I feel: that writing fills the hole left by the departure of God. But, again, I love story, and comedy, and dreams. And newness: the novel, as its name suggests, is about the making of the new. None of this is quite true; all of it is true enough.. (Web Source1)

While writing *The Satanic Verses*, for example, Rushdie was positioned uncomfortably between overlapping and diverging cultures emanating from both Britain and India. He is a liminal figure, with a foot in both cultures, but appears unable to gain sure footing in either at times. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie uses the image of the gander as a means of expressing this dualism and hybridism. His protagonist, Saleem, is like the gander. Former Prime Minister of India, late Indira Gandhi had ordered to prosecute Rushdie in U.K. court as his book *Midnight's Children* has been alleged to distort her politics. *The Satanic Verses* had been banned for religious controversies. Rushdie is of the opinion that no fictional work can become perfect without elements of politics because politics is the most dominant factor today.

Rushdie's novels are acknowledged for their twists in narrative, social commentary, and political satire. Critics across the globe continue to emphasize the nation as a primary thematic focus and ontological category for Rushdie. Since the publication of *Midnight's Children* (1981), Rushdie's novels have been celebrated and debated as much for their portrayals of politics as for their adventurous refashioning of the Indian novel in English.

*Quichotte* is the story of an ageing travelling salesman who falls for a TV star. With the desire to win her love he sets off to drive across America on a quest to prove that he is worthy partner for her. The tragicomic tale delves deep to give insight into the father-son relationships, sibling quarrels, racism, cyber-spies, and the end of the world. *Quichotte* marks Rushdie's triumphant and exciting return to existential dilemma. The result is an epitome of reality, glaring in the face with evident pursuit of love; quest for identity and efforts to shape destiny. Difficulties arise when one's response to uncertainty is inflexible. The more one tries to avoid or control the anguish uncertainty brings, the less will be the ability to effectively handle the situations. This inflexibility can prevent one from having positive experiences that might pave the way for potential or positive prospects. Indeed, rigidity, which is the contrast of flexibility, is the cause of unhealthy psyche. In the novel, the relationship between Quichotte, his imaginary son Sancho and Salma R meander through public and private; real and reel has turned them to be open to embrace the twists and turns.

And in the Age of Anything-Can-Happen, well, anything could happen. Old friends could become new enemies and traditional enemies could be your new besties or even lovers. It was no longer possible to predict the weather, or the likelihood of war, or the outcome of elections. A woman

might fall in love with a piglet, or a man start living with an owl. A beauty might fall asleep and, when kissed, wake up speaking a different language and in that new language reveal a completely altered character. A flood might drown your city. A tornado might carry your house to a faraway land where, upon landing, it would squash a witch. Criminals could become kings and kings be unmasked as criminals. A man might discover that the woman he lived with was his father's illegitimate child. A whole nation might jump off a cliff like swarming lemmings. Men who played presidents on TV could become presidents. (11)

The novel under scrutiny is a powerful satire on the fallacies of modern life filled with an overload of media exposure. The novel is readable and enjoyable. It is also interesting for Rushdie's experiment with narrative method and language. The use of local dialect makes the dialogue natural. Again the impact of cyber age is obvious in the story as well as language. The timely story told with the daring and panache that make Salman Rushdie a force of light in the age where many strive to be politically correct. It is the new Dark Age. "However, at a certain point in early middle age the Interior Event changed everything. When he came to his senses after the Event he had lost all personal ambition and curiosity, found big cities oppressive, and craved only anonymity and solitude" (13&14).

Rushdie, who has experienced the colonial encounter, developed a literary consciousness that is an amalgamation of his experiences of the legacy of British colonialism and his experience as a British citizen. As one critic puts it, "Rushdie is the kind of cloven writer produced by migration, inhabiting and addressing both worlds, the East and the West, the world of his mother country and that of his adopted country, belonging wholly to neither one nor the other" (Akhtar 111).

In one of his interviews with *The Globe & Mail*, Rushdie explained that "the novel is about human beings in a time of insanity." Whatever the time or place, Rushdie's humanity comes through, in his books as well as in his live speaking events. Set against the bizarre, surreal, and often frightening backdrop of current American culture and politics, Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte* takes the reader on a gusty ride through a country on the verge of insanity owing to socio-political crisis. There seems to be thread of moral and spiritual collapse in the typical Salman Rushdie way. The novelist expresses the pain of migration and the brutality inflicted upon the migrants by the natives. The racist attacks of real life are depicted through the character of Quichotte and Soncho (father and son in the park). The seemingly fantastic tale makes a searing criticism of the prevalent dynamics of politics, particularly pertaining to the events of pseudo nationalism. Rushdie, as a diasporic writer, critiques the postcolonial political and social arrangements in his works. He occupies a prominent position among the writers who write about the third world countries. He is often condemned as an outsider.

Rushdie like other Diaspora writers, lives with the agony of the wounds caused by rootlessness, alienation and the treatment as 'other' and 'outsider.' This misery of being other kindled the blazing fury within him, which was split open in his novel *Fury*, has been extended in *Quichotte* with the description of a murder of an immigrant in a park. It is a passionate rendering of his disillusionment with America in a fictional paradigm. Rushdie's articulation of 'fury' is as impetuous, uncompromising and original. He attempted to highlight the 'insanity of discrimination' as a universal phenomenon that is not limited to one country or region. In spite of the uproar against the 'others', in one of his recent interviews with Dolen Perkins, after the publication of *Quichotte*, Rushdie out rightly claims that the literary canvas of America is enriched by the American writers of Colour and the Immigrant writers.

In *Quichotte*, he uses the mastodons to talk about the growing acts of fascism, in the name of protecting the national interest. The use of the word *terrorists* inflamed everyone, above all the young man:

These are not terrorists, you fool," he yelled. "These are American patriots". "Mastodons are creatures from the faraway past," he said, "and I

don't think many of us, especially the younger people, are interested in a return to the Stone Age. Back then the mastodons became extinct—this young woman in the lab coat tells me—because early humans hunted them down. So that's one solution. Hunt them down. (157)

There are apparent seams that hint at the autobiographical element in the novel. The stream of fury that engulfed the precious years of author's life fills the anatomy of *Quichotte*. The author's personal fury seems to have crawled over his literary space, contextualizing it for wider appeal. In the process of delineating the suppression, he adopts a psychoanalytical as well as sociological approach. *Quichotte* exposes the roots of the evil as deeply ingrained and are related to ego—whether an individual or a nation. This discovery brings with it, the multilayered implications—social, psychological, philosophical, cultural and political. He says,

I am fairly a political animal. I do not think that when you include political material in fiction, it creates special problem. I think a lot of what I have written to do with public affairs and I am interested in that. But it must also be possible to write books that have nothing to do with politics. It is getting harder, I suspect, because politics invades our lives these days in a way that it once didn't". (*Gentleman; An Interview*, Feb.1994, Bombay).

In *Quichotte* too he explicitly portrays the ambiguities, cruelties, pleasures and miracles of contemporary life. *Quichotte* is a multilayered, multi-textured tale, teeming with topos and characters, rich with illustrations and allusion that are drawn from everywhere – ancient and contemporary, drawn from classics and popular culture, referring to the eternal and the ephemeral, the real and the imaginary. Rushdie has conjured up a striking new genre by mixing free-flight fairy-tale with savage political indictment. His political antagonism to the unfortunate shape that freedom took in the subcontinent of his birth, making him and his family unwilling victims, and the despicable developments of the two nations that followed have been transformed into miserable laughing stocks by this curious medium of attack through a fictional family story intertwined with dismal political history in a comic strain in his novels.

The subject-matter of Rushdie's novel is fairly varied; it is neither stereotyped nor predictable. Dilip Fernandez comments: "There's nothing like a consistent theme that has emerged in his work so far.... There are signs, however, of certain key ideas shaping up, of a perspective developing in his writing" (Fernandez, 11).

Rushdie uses much of his fiction as a means of expressing his particular view of the world. Rich with wordplay and references, *Quichotte* contains stories within stories, told by a narrator who is both real and imaginary as is the case with modern life of pseudo reality. Quichotte rose swaying to his feet, whiskey glass in hand.

I see now that we are at the very end of the fourth valley," he declared, "for here reality as we believed it to be has truly ceased to exist, and our eyes are opened to this new and dark revelation of how things may actually be. I understand that this has been shown to me because it is an essential part of the Way. I will go through this veil and as a result may come to the place where the path to the Beloved is revealed. (185)

Quichotte's journey, along with his imaginary son Soncho, from one valley to another continues. This journey is used figuratively to introduce the various facets of existential dilemma confronting the human lives in contemporary America. The city (pop. 8,623,000) greeted them with a sudden autumn storm: thunder that said *I see you, and who do you think you are?* Lightning that said "I will fry the flesh off your bodies and your skeletons will dance to my tune, rain that said I will wash you away like the rats on the sidewalk and the bugs in the gutters, and like all the other fools who came here on quests in search of glory, salvation, or love" (189).

Rushdie in a pattern of disclosing the realities, the fragilities, the falsities and the adversities makes a momentous subtle yet stirring depiction of a shrunken world and its aftermath:

Once,” he said, “people believed that they lived in little boxes, boxes that contained their whole stories, and that there was no need to worry much about what other people were doing in their other little boxes, whether nearby or far away. Other people's stories had nothing to do with ours. But then the world got smaller and all the boxes got pushed up against all the other boxes and opened up, and now that all the boxes are connected to all the other boxes, we have to understand what's going on in all the boxes we aren't in, otherwise we don't know why the things happening in our boxes are happening. Everything is connected.(162)

Quichotte agrees in that the statement made by him was not easy as he was a “disconnected man, keeping my own counsel, living with the glowing company of my T.V. friends, but with little real human companionship” (162). Rushdie very cleverly and adeptly posits the intricacies of the homogeneous society. The explicit depiction of the lust being catered to, in the land of opportunities, with a price tag in Blue Yorker hotel was indicative of the lifestyle of the people. The minute details presented by the author makes the readers wonder about the ugly reality and the ingenuity of information from closest corners!

... cash money required per night in advance, and only when they entered their Oriental Delights-themed room did they understand that they were in one of the city's numerous no-tell motels, with six free porno stations on the TV. There was adjustable mood lighting. There were strategically placed mirrors. The bellhop, a sleazy old Korean gent wearing an ancient pillbox hat, said that for fifteen dollars they could upgrade to the Arabian Nights room with Jacuzzi and steam bath, and if there was anything else they wanted, maybe good massage, deep tissue massage, massage with happy ending, anything, you understand, he could arrange that too. There were twin double beds in the room, for double the action if you want it, the bellhop said (160).

The one 'truth' that holds the society intact in spite of the ups and downs is the feeling of belonging amongst family members. This desire for a family is universal and is very intricately interwoven by Rushdie in *Quichotte*. Family aids in creating a stronger emotional bond between parents and children. One depends on family members for emotional and practical support in all the ups and downs of life. Quichotte too expresses how he desires a family:

Quichotte often wished he had married and become a father. How sweet it would be to have a son sitting beside him, a son who could take the wheel for hours while his father slept, a son with whom he could discuss matters of topical worldly import and the eternal truths as well while the unfurling road beneath them brought them close, the journey uniting them as the stillness of a home never could. Deep bonding is a gift the road alone gives to those who honor it and travel down it with respect. (17)

As the novel progresses Quichotte who is on a journey with his imaginary son travels many places in pursuit of his love and purpose of life that are narrated as frame within a frame. In one such story of his travel to Manhattan, the reader can understand the ripe maturity of the protagonist that matches his lived years – “Quichotte realized that a moment came in all families when fathers and sons had to talk about these things” (161).

It is a political satire depicting the existential dilemma where he used framed story as the literary technique. It is a critical piece on the political situation of the times. The occasions and events depicted in the novel are evocative of the contemporary socio-political situation. *Quichotte* is a story

of time, set in a more extensive background, utilizing an aesthetically fulfilling blend of science fiction, fantasy, realism and prediction. Rushdie takes up his favorite racial, political and existential issues in the novel and sees them through the spectacles of politics and thereby elevates the novel.

Inspired by the Cervantes classic, Sam DuChamp, mediocre writer of spy thrillers, creates Quichotte, a courtly, addled salesman obsessed with television who falls in impossible love with a T.V. star. Together with his (imaginary) son Sancho, Quichotte sets off on an adventurous quest across America to prove about his courtship to his ladylove. There is much of the action, both comic and tragic, that unfolds during this entourage of Quichotte and Soncho. Just as Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote* to satirize the culture of his time, Rushdie takes the reader on a wild ride through a country on the verge of moral and spiritual collapse. And with the kind of storytelling magic that is the hallmark of Rushdie's work, the fully realized lives of DuChamp and Quichotte intertwine in a profoundly human quest for love and a wickedly entertaining portrait of an age in which fact is so often indiscernible from fiction.

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## Interconnection of Food and Memory: An Appraisal of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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### *Abstract*

*Themes related to food are common among all types of writing, and they are often used as a literary device for both visual and verbal impact. The stories we associate with food and culinary habits become food narratives. The writers use food and eating to symbolize cultural issue, resistance, and preservation of culture, as well as symbols of memory, emotions, narrative history, relationships, power, and consumption. The taste, smell, and texture of food can be extraordinarily evocative, bringing back memories not just of eating food itself but also of place and setting. Food is an effective trigger for deeper memories of feelings and emotions, internal states of the mind and body. Salman Rushdie has used food and food imagery in most of his literary works. The remembrance and visualization of the image of "chutney" in *Midnight's Children* is very insightful. Food has the capacity that makes one think or even recall the past with nostalgia. Food has been employed as a cultural pattern to trace the growth from primitive to exotic culture.*

*Keywords: Food, Memory, Taste, Emotions*

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Eating is a fundamental human activity necessary for survival and is inextricably connected with our social being. Eating habits and rituals, the choice of dining companions, and the reasons behind these behaviors are fundamental to fostering an understanding of human society. Recent psychoanalytic theory suggests that eating practices are essential to self-identity and are instrumental in defining family, class, and even ethnic identity. Although food and related imagery have long been part of literature, psychological theories have led to the examination of food and eating as a universal experience. Themes related to food are common among all types of writing, and they are often used as a literary device for both visual and verbal impact. The stories we associate with food become food narratives, as they are converted through discourse and behavior into what Roland Barthes calls cultural myth. For example, food-related images are commonly used to create a mood or convey an idea. Food is also a significant theme in literature.

Food is the most essential requirement for sustenance of human life. Food narratives are potent literary tools through which the post-colonial assertion is vocalized. Food does not imply certain edible articles only. It has larger socio-political undertones as the recent controversies regarding food substantiate. The colonial powers captured and reigned in our country on the pretext of procuring spices. In fact, Indian spices (food) helped them colonize the country for centuries.

Historians have also acknowledged the importance of food in understanding the development of civilization. Food has been employed as a cultural pattern to trace the growth from ancient to modern culture. Anthropologists like Claude Levi-Strauss and Mary Douglas also use food as an illustrative tool in their analyses. In fact, food and fiction pairing is as old as the *Bhagwad Gita*. Food was brought into play because of its elementary place in human life and culture. Literary writers have used food – its production, growth, distribution, consumption etc., as backdrop to evoke themes, to weave plots and to delineate characters. Food habits, food rites and rituals help a writer to knit a

pattern which highlights not just literary trends but also the culture of a place and time. Food and its labellings are a constant reminder that we live in a specific type of community.

Although food imagery has been used in literature throughout the ages, scholars have just recently initiated the study of texts for hermeneutics and significance of food and eating. As food studies grow, literary theorists are increasingly seeing the value of studying literature on food for various reasons, as food serves several different purposes in literature. At the very literal level, food related images, particularly when used with rich details and descriptions, appeal to the senses of the reader, enhancing the realism of the work. Some sensory images like sights, smells, and tastes that may be familiar are being provided by the food imagery and readers can even relate to it. They may also evoke curiosity to know about hitherto unknown cultures through their cuisine. Food is usually used in literature as a metaphor because it is a commonplace, universal substance that is recognizable and understandable when used as representation. Food is naturally rich with symbolism, and has been since ancient times, because of its centrality to life.

Foods provide quick and rapid visual image in different cultures, foods may have different connotations that create instant mental connections. Food-related language uses these associations by providing concrete wording to describe experiences, events, people, and emotions, often abstract ideas that seem to be completely unrelated to the food itself. Alan D. Wolfelt once truly said, "Food is symbolic of love when words are inadequate" (n. p.). Food has the capacity that makes one think or even recall the past with nostalgia. In fact, food can relate to a specific identity at once.

Food images are also used liberally in such tales as Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1961), where food denotes coziness and plentifulness. In addition to reflecting social order and civilization, food is often representative of the limitations imposed upon a child's world. For example, Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen* (1963) uses food as a vehicle to express strong childhood emotions, and like in many other children's texts, uses rituals of eating as metaphors for the power struggle inherent in family dynamics.

Salman Rushdie has used food and food imagery everywhere: the grandmother's pantry in *Midnight's Children* (1981), Sisodia's feast in *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and Pyarelal's saffron pulao in *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children* not only treats food and food metaphors to invoke readers' imaginations and connections to the narrative, but also to open textual gateways to the magical nuclei of the narrative's unfolding in non-causal sequences. Saleem says, "And my *chutneys* and *kasaundies* are, after all connected to my nocturnal scribbling...by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks" (44). So food has a direct impact and can be paired to evoke personal memories. For that matter every one of us associates food with our long lost memories. We excitedly get up on looking at few food items and start narrating past stories associated with the same. Food narratives simultaneously connect people physically, sociologically, psychologically, emotionally, and historically. This multiplicity of meaning makes it seem like people are more reflective with food than they actually are. Food narratives work as multi-dimensional meaning makers without any intellectual or reflective effort necessary, and people use them to make meaning, although they do not acknowledge that they are doing this. Furthermore, the engagement with food narratives is not only at a surface level and but also operates on an ideological level.

Saleem Sinai, the protagonist in *Midnight's Children*, was born on the exact moment of India's independence. The fortuitous timing of his birth gave him unique telepathic powers which, along with the enormous cucumber nose he inherited from his grandfather, made him exceedingly sensitive to olfactory sensations. Saleem's life also seems to be filled with a never-ending list of delicious descriptions of Indian foods: mango pickles, *samosas*, *sweetmeats*, *cucumber kasaundies*, *lime chutneys*, *coconut milk*, *masala cheese pakoras*, and *parathas* (to name only a few). Within the overlying metaphor comparing Saleem to India itself, Rushdie has penned the thirty chapters using vibrant food imagery. Working in a pickle factory, Saleem combines speech with taste and smell as he

matches, “thirty jars with chapter headings for names” (645). In the text, the word chutney actually is very important as it refers chutnification of language as well as of history. The process of *chutnification* of English provides a tasty flavour to Rushdie's works, which is obviously made possible through the abundant blending of Hindi and Urdu words with English. Such words, phrases and expressions form a long list, including 'ekdum,' 'angrez,' 'phut-aphut,' 'nasbandi,' 'dhoban,' 'feringee,' 'baba,' 'garam masala,' 'rakshasas,' 'fauz,' 'badmaas,' 'jailkhana,' 'baap-rebaap,' 'jalebis,' 'barfi,' 'bhel-puri,' and many more. At one instance, Padma says to Saleem Sinai, “Now that the writery is done, let's see if we can make your other pencil work!” (11). All such words and phrases give us an insight into the usage of language that has been a major factor in authenticity of the novel.

Food imagery helps the readers to understand the true identities of characters, because in many ways, food defines people and cultures. Food can serve to signify the belief systems, religious rules, and complex ideologies of a particular person or character, or that of an entire community or culture, that may not be explained explicitly in a text. Claude Fischler gives a convincing argument in “Food, Self and Identity” where he states that food constitutes the self.... The saying, “Food is central to our sense of identity . . . You are what you eat”, bespeaks not only the biochemical relationship between us and our food but also the extent to which food practices determine our systems of beliefs and representations (276). He states in one of his well known quotations, “If we are what we eat, and we don't know what we are eating, then do we still know who we are?” (277). Therefore, in a way we can infer that our food is directly linked to our identity. Memories about food simultaneously place us in the past and the present and often can create situations for recollections in the future.

“Things - even people - have a way of leaking into each other” (44) Saleem explains further taking up food imagery which is easier to explain with “like flavours when you cook” (44). So the past, present and future merge into each other very softly. Saleem tells us about Reverend Mother: “The twin hearts of her kingdom were her kitchen and her pantry” (48). Korma was a favorite dish in *Midnight's Children*, too, but in a less heartwarming, more threatening context: “This, whatsitsname, is a very heavy pot,” that grandmother says on being asked by Adam Aziz, “and if just once I catch you in here, whatsitsname, I'll push your head into it, add some dahi, and make, whatsitsname, a korma” (49).

There are references to pickles in almost each chapter. Narrating an instance Saleem says, “Reverend Mother sat at the head of the dinning-table . . . Mary Pereira took time to prepare some of the finest and most delicate mango pickles, lime chutneys and cucumber kasaundies in the world” (190). Saleem has such association with the chutney that once when he is about to narrate the traumatic life events, he needs the security of the childhood chutney and he states, “Because I sniffed the air; and scented. . . I intended to defend myself; but I required the assistance of chutney . . .” (290).

Saleem links his all-time favourite *chutney* with his personal and India's history and gives us the, “Symbolic value of pickling process . . . Every pickle-jar contains therefore, the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! I, however, have pickled chapters . . . long winded autobiography; in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories. . .” (642). Thus, gustatory and olfactory imagery leads to a fusion of the personal, the political and the historical. This conflation of food, nation's identity and personal identity becomes a paean to the mongrel self of Saleem and that of the nation.

Saleem's childhood memories are revived a lot by pickles. Mary's “bright green – green as grasshopper”(290) chutney is a unifying memory for Saleem and a trigger for his exploration of the past, “The taste of the chutney was more than just an echo of that long-ago taste – it was the old taste itself, the very same, with the power of bringing back the past as if it had never been away... Once again an abracadabra, an open-sesame: words printed on a chutney-jar, opening the last door of my life” (637). Tasting the chutney, brings back his memory of ayah who now owns a pickle factory. And it is Mary's *chutneys* that ring familiar to the grown up Saleem and bring him back to her after years of separation - where he becomes pickler-in-chief.

On the whole, an avalanche of memories and feelings is evoked through food writings as food involves all the other senses besides taste and smell. “There is also the matter of the spice bases. The intricacies of turmeric and cumin, the subtlety of fenugreek, when to use large and when small cardamoms, the myriad possible effects of garlic, garam masala, stick cinnamon, coriander, ginger . . .” (644). The writer draws on the visual, auditory, kinesthetic senses and conveys images, feelings and sounds in a way that render immediate effect.

It is clear from the text that the pickling of chutney is a metaphor for an attempt to preserve history. Salman Rushdie states in his novel, “. . . to pickle is to give immortality . . . the art is to change the flavor in degree, but not in kind. . . One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes . . . they possess the authentic taste of truth. . .” (644). Chutney, a spicy mixture, mixed with emotions of the stirrer, and pickled food is preserved as stories are, remaining stagnant within the characters who tell their tales. The green chutney serves multiple purposes. When Saleem is scared, a familiar food item can transport him to a time when the exact food, and the love with which Mary administered it, makes him feel safe. He then tries to pass on this comfort to his own audience as he encourages them to savour the chutney His speech is woven within the smell and taste of food. The use of food imagery and metaphors represents complex ideas and deeper meaning in the text.

Saleem finds himself at an exclusive club as his friend Picture Singh competes for the title of “Most Charming Man In The World.” While waiting for Picture Singh to recover from fainting after the contest, Saleem has the ultimate gustatory association. He remembers:

“... one of the blind waitresses brought us a congratulatory, reviving meal. On the thali of victory: samosas, pakoras, rice, dal, puris; and green chutney. Yes, a little aluminum bowl of chutney, green, my God, green as grasshoppers... and then I had tasted it, and almost imitated the fainting act of Picture Singh, because it had carried me back to a day when I emerged nine-fingered from a hospital and went into exile at the home of Hanif Aziz, and was given the best chutney in the world... the taste of the chutney was more than just an echo of that long-ago taste—it was the old taste itself, the very same, with the power of bringing back the past as if it had never been away. (637)

Saleem's description of the chutney gives it supernatural powers; it can “revive” and “bring back.” Of course, not any chutney would do. Variations may spark a degree of recall, but in this case “it was the old taste itself, the very same”, and that flavor is the most potent (525).

Rushdie connects the senses with food, and eating with emotion, with the transference of the cook's feelings to the consumer; thereby changing whole identities of family members simply by projecting their hatred, envy or guilt onto another and changing the entire mood of the spicy, delicious meal. The importance of food and its association with the character is clearly visible in the descriptions that Salman Rushdie has given: “Amina began to feel the emotions of other people's food seeping into her... She ate the fish salans of stubbornness and the birianis of determination” (190). Even Saleem grew up eating such curries of guilt made by his ayah. “What my aunt Alia took pleasure in: Cooking. What she had, during the lonely madness of the years, raised to the level of an art-form: the impregnation of food with emotions” (459). Moreover “Saleem's nose could smell stranger things than horse-dung” (592). We cannot even ignore the fact that throughout the novel, Saleem had chosen to live by his “olfactory gifts” (592). The writer gives us a clear hint in the first half of the novel as he writes, “. . . I, Saleem Sinai, possessor of the most delicately-gifted olfactory organ in history, have dedicated my latter days to the large-scale preparation of condiments” (44).

The Postmodern culture has been greatly influenced by food images, the usage of food as metaphor and the psychology of food. Literary food studies analyze food symbolism to reflect on cultural identity which includes various issues from social position to sexual desire to gender relations. Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta remarks in this context, “The choices individuals make everyday regarding how and what to eat and cook, therefore, are directly related to how they view and engage with their national identity” (25). It is our identity that we form, makes us stand apart from

others. In three postcolonial Indian novels, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), food carries multiple meanings that happens to drive the action of the plots, characters, and reflects upon aspects of the Indian culture. The writers use food and eating to symbolize cultural issues, resistance, and preservation of culture, as well as symbols of memory, emotions, narrative history, relationships, power, and consumption. The taste, smell, and texture of food can be extraordinarily evocative, bringing back memories not just of eating food itself but also of place and setting. Food is an effective trigger of deeper memories of feelings and emotions, internal states of the mind and body. However, psychology considers food as one of the things in the environment around which memories are formed and focused. There are so many examples in the novels of Salman Rushdie which bring out the interconnectivity of food and memory. The *chutnified* use of language and the blending of history with the story have made it a special text.

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## The Vicious Cycle of Violence and Feminist Discourse: A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "The Bats" and Shauna Singh Baldwin's "A Pair of Two Ears"

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### *Abstract*

*Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shauna Singh Baldwin are the well-known writers of diasporic literature. In their short fiction they beautifully present the socio-psychological conflict and a perpetual struggle of women in the diasporic setting. Divakaruni explores new lives of Indian-born women living in America along with the depiction of marriage and man-woman relationships in patriarchal discourse. She represents the experiences and difficult circumstances of the Indian immigrant women with balanced perspective of life. Being an immigrant in the USA, Divakaruni gives voice to the marginalized in juxtaposing the cultural differences between East and West through the female point of view. In her famous short story collection *Arranged Marriage* (1995) the women characters feel torn between the values of ancient and modern world. Likewise, in her writings Shauna Singh Baldwin also portrays identity crisis, violence and social disparity, particularly in the case of gender and portrays women characters who overcome the pressures of patriarchal society. Baldwin presents vignettes of Indian culture to the world through her famous short story collection, *English Lessons and Other Stories*. The present paper attempts to analyse varied experiences of Indian women as they grapple with the patriarchal mindset against the backdrop of diasporic dilemmas of identity crisis in the cultural displacement and migration.*

*Keywords: perpetual struggle, patriarchal discourse, violence, social disparity, identity, displacement, home and belonging.*

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Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is America based Indian writer who has done pioneering work on South Asian women located in the Bay Area which offered her new insights into their existential dilemmas of Indian immigrant women, their depression, frustration, emotional isolation and adjustment in different diasporic conditions. Her work, *Arranged Marriage* (1995) projects the journey of first and second generation immigrant women who remain dislocated and expatriate from their homeland. The stories offer a probing leap into the diaspora consciousness of the protagonists whose lives are characterized by the memories of Indian villages and cities vis a vis the trials, glories and uncertainties of modern American life. The story "The Bats" from *Arranged Marriage* presents the physical and psychological sufferings of a lower middle class woman within the imprisonment of an abusive marriage.

Similarly, Shauna Singh Baldwin also raises the concerns and various shades in characters or themes with artistic ability in her writings. But her foremost idea is to show up female identity from different perspectives as diasporic Indians as well as other diasporic communities. This concern of identity comes into view from Shauna Singh's personal space and point of view. More importantly, she endeavours to give voice to the liberty of women against the domination and narrow mind-set of the patriarchal society. The story "A Pair of Ears" is from her well-known story collection *English Lessons and Other Stories* which portrays the life of an old deaf widow who has to face domination at the hands of her two sons named- Jai and Balvir.



Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's story "The Bats" is written from the point of view of a little girl child who witnesses all the violence and pain of her mother and also becomes psychologically a fellow sufferer though her mother puts her to sleep before the arrival of her abusive father. "Since she usually put me to bed before he came home, I didn't see him much. I heard him, though, shouts that shook the walls of my bedroom like they were paper, the sounds of falling dishes. Things fell a lot when Father was around, maybe because he was so large" (*Arranged Marriage* 2). They put up with the trauma of unbearable pain, aggression and humiliation of the father and often escape from the house and then return in case the mood of the man changes. In this story, the mother is the protagonist and the daughter is a storyteller who narrates all the incidents of domestic violence towards her mother through her gentle and innocent expressions.

The story unfolds at a house in Calcutta where these three persons used to live and then it moves towards the village, Gopalpur. The lady of the house does not have any relative there except her daughter to whom she could express her agony. This gives a picture of the conservative male dominated society wherein the husbands used to beat up their wives even on the petty issues. One shocking incident of her battered and bruised mother shocks the little child. She tells: "A couple of days later Mother had another mark on her face, even bigger and reddish-blue" (*Arranged Marriage* 3). After becoming fed up with the physical tortures of her husband, the mother decides to leave the house with her daughter and live in the mother's grandfather's house in Gopalpur. When she tells that they both will go to the Grandpa's house by train, the little girl becomes very excited as many friends of her had Grandpa. Besides, she feels repressed within the small confined space of the city house. But the mother warns the girl not to shout about it in excitement as it was a secret between them.

A woman's complete economic reliance on her husband emasculates her will power to voice her sorrows. So for a long time the mother secretly pools up some money to depart from the house as "she never had much money, and whenever she asked for any, Father flew into one of his rages. But maybe she'd been saving up for this trip for a long time" (*Arranged Marriage* 3). The move from Calcutta to the village where the girl's grandpa lives, offers a new lease on life to the harried mother and traumatized daughter. Finally, the house made of mud walls and straw roof gives them the much needed breather from the aggressive, abusive and the merciless father.

The little girl feels bonded with her grandfather who was caring, considerate and affectionate to her, and "the ideal notion of a father is presented in the figure of the grandfather who is gentle, supportive and protective toward the mother and daughter" (Biswas 164). She used to go with her Grandpa to the *zamindar's* orchards where the bats destroyed almost hundreds of mangoes. The Grandpa used poison to get rid of the menace of marauding bats and as they died the grandpa and the little girl would pick them the next day. All this was fun for her and she enjoyed each and every moment with her Grandpa in the village. One evening as they return home, the mother tells her father about her resolve to go back to her husband as his letter "promises it won't happen again" (*Arranged Marriage* 11). The little girl is angry, detests her father's rude behaviour and does not want to go back to Calcutta but the old man advises her to be a good daughter. In morning at the time of departure the Grandpa gives the girl the silver ring wrapped in a piece of cloth. During the journey, the girl somehow infers that there was no letter from her father, "That was when I knew she had deceived me, that nothing was going to happen the way she said it would" (*Arranged Marriage* 14).

The girl wishes good things to be happen because of the magical silver ring, but nothing happens. One day the Father beats the mother till the blood comes out of her body. The girl says, "I pulled at her hand to hurry her along, my own shoulder still throbbing from when Father had flung me against the wall as I tried to stop him" (*Arranged Marriage* 16). Later, when they return after few weeks, the ring has gone forever. The recurrent move of the mother and daughter from their house to grandpa's house and again to their house exposes the constricted outlook of the conventional Indian society where husbands humiliate their wives all the time and women face it without any question as they don't have the courage to separate from their husbands. By this Divakaruni perfectly depicts the psychology of a girl child.

Apart from offering a peep into the psychology of a girl child, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni debunks the domestic violence in an Indian marriage. In spite of bearing the bruises and hurt to her self esteem, the woman, bound to the yoke of tradition, respects her husband. The reason behind it was that in the societal traditions the identity of a woman is considered only when she is with the male member as the mother in the story says, "I couldn't stand it, the stares and whispers of the women, down in the market place. The loneliness of being without him" (*Arranged Marriage* 11-12). Divakaruni portrays the authority and power of a male through the character of the father while there is also wonderful emotional relationship between the girl and her very old great uncle or Grandpa-Uncle.

Through title of the story Divakaruni presents a comparison between the life of the bats and the life of the mother. Bats don't identify the real secure place for their lives so they move from one tree to the other. The same thing is with the mother: "I guess they just don't realize what's happening. They don't realize that by flying somewhere else they'll be safe. Or maybe they do, but there's something that keeps pulling them back here" (*Arranged Marriage* 8). In the darkness of night bats can visualize but can't see throughout the day. In the same way, the wife perceives and tolerates the brutality in the night without speaking against it and unable to see her own importance. It is due to the society around her that she stays back with her husband. Thus, the story reveals an estrangement within the married life as a result of the internal strife between husband and wife. It is presented in a distinctive conventional approach. Moreover, it is an excellent study of the psychology of traumatized childhood and the pangs of lost innocence along with the male ego which sets the tone for the rest of the collection wherein it is amply clear that life is not easy for women in India. However, it is also gradually revealed that women in America too face numerous problems on account of their gender, albeit at a different level.

Like Divakaruni, Shauna Singh Baldwin's story, "A Pair of Ears" dwells upon the feminist discourse within the patriarchal society. As the narrative unfolds, it is through the character of an old deaf widow who plays the role of an emigrant mother of her two sons named--Jai and Balvir. Jai, the elder one, is an astrologer living abroad and Balvir, the younger one works in Bombay. The mother is in a secluded position and is looked after by an old maidservant Amma who has been the family servant of the household for over thirty years. The mother is emotionally attached to the house as she and her husband have built it after migrating to Delhi during the partition of India and her memories are intertwined with the house. In spite of a tenant in part of the house and the resultant rental income in her old age, she is haunted by the loneliness, therefore requests her younger son Balvir to come with his child to live with her in Delhi: "It will be nice to have company. I have felt so alone since your father left us" (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 81)..

Balvir, being greedy and self-centred, thinks about his benefit and persuades his mother to allow him to build the upper floor, "Balvir's "concern" is like a kisan's for a crop of jute--how much can be harvested and how much will it bring?" (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 74). As the mother previously discloses its cause to Amma, "Amma, money--the very prospect of money--is changing my sons" (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 75). The mother grudgingly allows her son to construct one more floor but candidly tells Balvir: "Your father told me never to move from this house. You know, we built it together, selling the jewellery we escaped with during Partition. I can still see him walking with me through these rooms the first time, telling me this house would replace all we had lost . . . your father always decided everything for me. (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 80). Instead of being sensitive to the feelings of the mother, he says to her that she should live in a small house and no longer requires such a big house for herself. Without thinking about his dead father, Balvir speaks in a drunken state before the photograph of his father, "What does a widow need with all that money?" (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 83). Instead of giving protection to her mother in old age, Balvir is only concerned with his life which depicts male domination over female.

Though Amma is a servant of the family, she sacrifices her life in playing the role of a surrogate mother to raise the two boys of the deaf mother. She also becomes the "pair of ears" that

interprets everything for her deaf Mem-saab. Due to her loyalty to the family, she reminds Balvir his duty towards his mother along with her position in a patriarchal society. She reprimands him to “be more respectful” and look after his mother as, “She is an old woman left without a man to protect her.” This is to shame him. A son whose duty it is to protect her. But he looks at me as though I am only a pair of ears for his mother” (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 73). After seeing the humiliation of her Mem-saab helplessly Amma desolately speaks, “I think the old custom of burning widows on their husbands' funeral pyres spared widows like my Mem-saab from the dangers of living unprotected” (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 87). This reveals the trajectory of patriarchy through the age-old traditional beliefs of the narrator. Amma feels the change in Jai and Balvir's attitude due to their exposure to Western cultural modes.

Amma feels sorrow at the loss of her Mem-saab's dignity and position in her own house at the hands of her avaricious son Balvir who ridicules her maternal love in order to usurp her house and property, thereby taking undue advantage of her deafness and widowhood. Through his filial ingratitude, Balvir uses his mother's account at the market for paying the phone bills, whisky and a new bangle of gold for his wife Kiran. To cap it all he orders her to give the whole house to him and Jai before her death so that they both could be free from the taxes. The mother soon becomes conscious about her identity in the family when at her order to call the driver to bring her car, her grandson Manu replies, “You can't order me around. Daddy says you're nobody” (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 85). It torments her as she obtains a stay-order from the court to stop the construction of the house. The unscrupulous son threatens her, “I'll never try to help you again, Mama. You just wait and see”. (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 87) and he secures orders from the court which stops renting the lower floor, thus depriving his mother of her only source of income and making her dependent and disillusioned. Insolence heaped upon humiliations, the hapless widow ultimately ends her life by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. Fulfilling the wish of her Mem-Saab for showing her attachment with the house after her death, Amma cuts her hand straight away to fill the silver glass with her blood so that she could sprinkle it all over the house.

Afterwards Amma leaves the house and decides to go to her daughter Leela's home to live instead of going to her son Shiv who lives in Delhi. By doing this she defies gender division and the traditional pattern of the patriarchal society which expect that only a son can look after his mother. In going to her daughter, Amma feels that “a woman will understand” (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 95) as she knows that a daughter is able to perform her duty as a woman and as a daughter with lots of compassion but it is unthinkable that she will pass her life there cheerfully. Although Baldwin doesn't give much hint about Amma's life, it seems that she is also disappointed by her Mem-saab's children and exploited by her own son Shiv also, as it is clear through the speech of Amma, “We were taught that widows such as we cannot claim our men's wealth . . . men have forgotten *their* duty to be kind to their mother, or to me, who also raised them” (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 91). The author here portrays gender prejudice and unbridgeable chasm of the patriarchal society where women are still liable to perform duty and self-sacrifice whereas men are impervious to their duty and provide no protection to women. In this way Amma is also marginalized because of her age, class, and gender but she is the only person who remains loyal to her employer to the extent possible. Thus, Baldwin points out the isolation, loneliness, disenchantment and marginalization of women through the calculated, imagined or composited stories of the characters and especially by the increasingly troubled and stressed relations between a mother and a son.

Through the feminist discourses Divakaruni and Baldwin portray the existential dilemmas of the female protagonists as they have to contend with complex issues of identity and abusive marriages and negotiate the turns and twists of disenchantment, loneliness and sexual and racial exploitation. Their stories powerfully raise many questions related to the sufferings of immigrant women in following their culture, customs and traditions in the foreign land along with many other feministic issues. Thus, “The Bats” and “A Pair of Ears” explicate dual forms of violence to women, one in the garb of abusive marriage and the other under the facade of filial ingratitude of children. In both the

cases, the violence is perpetrated by the male whose psyche is coloured by the patriarchal modes operating in society and the erosion of moral values engineered by new modes of being.

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## The Duality of the Diasporic Identity in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*

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### *Abstract*

*Diasporic experience reconfigures one's sense of 'being' entailing a dualistic identification with the hostland and the homeland. As a result, it shapes an ambivalent and oscillating condition for the subject leading to some excruciating spheres of existence viz. cultural duality, rootlessness, fragmentation, a sense of exile (chosen or forced), and finally identity-crisis caused by the dialectics of dislocation and othering. Contextually, the present paper attempts to evaluate the hyphenated diasporic existence in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971) using insights of Diaspora and postcolonial theory.*

*Keywords: Dualism, ambivalence, rootlessness, hyphenation, diaspora theory.*

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We thought . . . that there would be room in this new world for people like us, people who did not quite fit into the picture. We thought the world was growing wider, more inclusive. And now it seems it was actually drifting in the other direction.

—Jamal Mahjoub in *The Drift Latitudes*

'Mama, see the Negro! I am frightened! Frightened! Frightened!' Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but the laughter had become impossible.

—Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*

### I

Anita Desai is one of the foremost writers to assign an inward orientation to Indo-English Fiction. Her fiction cuts through the fragmented, bordered and uneven trails and peripheries, ominously wavering between and exploring into the existential truths. She chooses to narrate the inward flow of her characters like some of the Western novelists. Her contribution is interpreted diversely by the different critics. She is in "...the vanguard of a new generation of Indian writers who are experimenting with the themes of inner consciousness" (Ann Lowry Weir 154). Her fiction highlights the indications of "...the new direction that Indian fiction is taking in the hands of the third generation of urban writers" (Meena Belliappa 51). Further, she is "...an uncrowned queen of the inner emotional world, who dexterously transcribes the subconscious" (Madhusudan Prasad 139). On a condensing note, these views highlight the multi-layered depth of Desai's fiction. Apart from this, her major Western influences include Dostoevsky, Kafka, T.S. Eliot, Camus, Marcel Proust, Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, Malcolm Lowry, etc.

With her thirteen novels and two collections of short stories, she finds a place of esteem among the other contemporary Indian English novelists. She portrays the panorama of our duality immersed lives, the ignorance of which can hamper our sense of the maze of this world. Her fiction also deals with the issues of migrant existence which draws a strong parallel with the existential condition of the modern man. Contextually, a large number of the Indian-English writers have also dealt with the diaspora issues: Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Sunetra Gupta, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Hari Kunzru are some of the finest writers in the

tradition of Indian Diasporic writing.

The present paper aims to explore the duality of homeland and hostland in Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. The novel reveals a dualistic pattern which projects Adit, Sarah and Dev falling apart and losing the integrity and unity of their identities, alongside the trajectory of varying responses to assert a negotiated sense of being towards the end of the novel. *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, Desai's third novel, is set in England and has a tripartite structure: arrival, discovery and recognition, and departure. The three main characters are Dev, who has recently arrived in London from India when the novel begins, his friend Adit, with whom he is staying, and Adit's British wife, Sarah. All three characters are in conflict with their environment. Sarah is playing two roles, that of an Indian at home and that of a Britisher outside; all the while, she questions who she really is. Dev and Adit are, in a sense, doubles like Nirode and Amla. Dev is the more cynical and aggressive of the two, while Adit, though essentially the same, is muted at the beginning. Later Adit, who thought he had felt at home in England, returns to India, while Dev, the militant cynic who has reviled Adit for staying, takes Adit's place after his departure, accepting a job in Adit's firm and moving to Adit's apartment.

In this context, the novel describes the duality of the diasporic identity underlining the problematics of hostland and homeland. Exposed to the onslaughts of racism and existential humiliation, the characters—Adit, Sarah and Dev—experience double consciousness: an in-between, irreconcilable and contingent condition that unsettles their sense of a stable and coherent identity. Racism "...fractures the ability to engage with others at a fundamental level by substituting a 'corporeal schema' with a racial epidermal schema..." (David Richards 10). Further, it "...is the racist who creates his inferior" (Sartre 93). In such circumstances, the homeland haunts the subject even more and causes intense bewilderment by altering one's sense of identity. However, the diasporic experience also opens up the possibility of transcending such kind of duality/crisis. Such a possibility allows the immigrant to 'write against the empire' and thus co-opt a rejuvenated, negotiated and hybridized sense of identity deconstructing racism, difference and inequality of the hostland/homeland. It creates what Homi Bhabha calls the 'Third Space' for diasporic subjects.

This conceptual framework informs the critique of the present study decoding the varying responses of Adit, Sarah and Dev as they journey through diverse levels of diasporic subjectification to negotiate their socio-cultural realities/identities. The diaspora and postcolonial teleology of the paper—referencing an application of hybridity, double consciousness, ambivalence, etc.—adds a new dimension to the existing corpus of scholarship on the novel.

## II

*Bye-Bye Blackbird* is a novel about the diasporic realities of Indian immigrants in England. The diasporic space creates an ambivalent and oscillating condition for these characters encompassing agonizing spheres of existence viz. cultural duality, rootlessness, fragmentation, a sense of exile, and finally a newfound identity. The dialectics of dislocation and othering play a pivotal role in creating the thematic conflict in the novel. Thus, the novel epitomizes their cultural dilemmas and the disappointments and agonies that ensue. Interestingly, the way characters respond to their diasporic realities involves a lot of complexity and variation. Adit, Dev and Sarah make different choices to carve a way out of their existential conundrum: Adit retrieves to the homeland, whereas Dev and Sarah choose to de-essentialize their identities to mark a discursive position in the diasporic space.

Adit Sen, an Indian immigrant, is married to Sarah, who is English by birth. Adit represents other Indian immigrants as he has learnt the art of pocketing insults that are characteristic of an immigrant in the hostland. Since Adit comes from an English colony, he has developed an identifying overture towards the hostland; however, he still longs for the homeland along with its food, music, customs, relatives and friends highlighting his diasporic hyphenation in the hostland. Interestingly, his repressed and oblique longing for the roots gets louder with the arrival of Dev—a college time friend. Adit and Dev "...are the two poles of the thematic globe of enchantment and disenchantment with



England” (J.P.Tripathi 45). Dev comes as a counter-point to Adit; he resists the humiliations and indignations at the hands of the natives. His counter-narrative to the racist discourse acts as a catalyst to deconstruct Adit's sense of compromising complacency. Having been baffled, Adit's mental tumult reaches its climax when he visits Sarah's parents; the visit reconfigures his dualistic consciousness and enables him to see through the holes of his immigrant existence. Now, his yearning of the homeland grows substantially and torments him deeply; he negotiates this duality by choosing to return to India. On the contrary, Dev—the staunch nationalist and anti-English—becomes deterritorialized and stays back in England asserting a cosmopolitan outlook in the diasporic space.

Though published in 1971, the novel highlights the scum of the colonial teleology that is carried out by way of overt racism in England. The racist discourse highlights the pervasive colonizer-colonized polarity, implying slanted relations between the immigrants and the natives. The responses, compromising or resistive, to such dominant discourses, vary from character to character with the following patterns: Adit's agonizing complacency to racism, Sarah's sense of shame and discomfort for being married to a brownie (Adit), and Dev's resistance to racism.

Delving deeper, it is imperative to succinctly assess the problematics of 'the imaginary hostland' from the standpoint of an immigrant. The non-native conceives 'the imaginary hostland' in terms of its sparkle, glamour, splendour—all signifying the promise of an idyllic existence. However, the encounter simultaneously reveals that such hollow imagination is fraught with inherent complications—a dystopic and dis-unitive reality of the hostland—causing frustration and anguish. The dystopic diasporic experiences of Dev, Adit, Jasbir, Sameer and other Asian immigrants are the mouthpieces of the immigrant fraternity in England. Interestingly, the diasporic experience is also site of subject formation; it is "...a site of contestation: a discursive space where different and differential subject positions and subjectivities are inscribed, reiterated, or repudiated" (Avtar Brah 208).

Contextualizing this discursive space, Adit-Sarah marriage is a site of contestation. It also describes Sarah's inverse duality double consciousness in the novel. In dealing with the problem of Sarah, "...stuck with duality and uncertainties, the novelist projects a comprehensive view of the dilemmas of an alienated self" (Usha Bande 120). This marital knot manifests the conjunction of two cultures/nations; however, her marriage with an 'Asiatic' alienates Sarah in her own country, and thus displaces her to the liminal margins in her own country. She is otherized and peripherized by the society for a socio-cultural transgression on their part. However, her marriage is also symbolic of her rebellion against the dominant socio-cultural codes of English society. Now, she is a victim of social prejudice; the experiential in-between, irreconcilable and contingent condition emits agony and chaos and thus unsettles her sense of a stable and coherent identity. Nonetheless, such a hyphenated being re-inscribes her subjectivity to see through the fissures, holes and gaps of her own culture and society. While answering a question about leaving India, Sarah responds, "...when I think of all the Millers of England, I could leave at once" (Desai 84). This discursivity highlights a dialectical reconstruction of her idea of the homeland; enables her to nurture the idea of a liminal spatiality/interstitiality, and grants her a subject position. Thus, she negotiates the duality of homeland and hostland and accepts Adit's decision to return to India towards the end of the novel. It highlights her assertion for a deterritorialized and hybrid identity. This is how Sarah opens up for 'reinscription'; she performs cross-cultural fertilization to negotiate her duality in the diasporic space.

Adit and Dev are two outsiders in-the-midst of a hostile hostland; they are subjected to racial discrimination for their difference in the hostland. The narrative describes that the initial survival of such outsiders relies on mimicking the natives before they proceed on the dialectics of reconfiguring/hybridizing their identity in some other terms. Viewed in this context, this notion of mimicry occupies the centre in the diasporic space. Homi Bhabha considers that mimicry expands the creative tension between the native and the migrant. However, such mimicking comes at the cost of transmutation of migrant's own cultural identity. However, Bhabha develops a positivist view of the notion of mimicry in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man". Here, he brings out the subversive power of the idea; if a migrant, desiring to mimic a native, is obsessed with the idea of complete identification with

the host, such a tactic makes the native anxious revealing the hollowness of the codes of superiority on the part of the native.

It is in this context, Adit, Dev and other immigrants are also made to realise that they need to act as mimics by way of respecting the socio-cultural stereotypes to survive in the hostland. At the same time, such stereotypes also describe the codes through which migrants are otherized in the hostland. Contextually, a native designates Adit and Dev as 'Wogs' in the public place; there are separate lavatories for the Asiatics. However, such racial imputations influence Adit and Dev in different ways. Dev and Adit present "...two contrasting pictures of self-assessment and self-acceptance in a discriminatory host society" (Amit S.Saha 2). Adit, being a mimic and "...a romantic admirer of England" (K.V.Surendran 67), readily ignores such slurs and says: "It is best to ignore those who don't deserve one's notice" (Desai 18). On the other hand, the infuriated Dev lambasts that "...I would not live in a country where I was insulted and unwanted" (Desai 19). Such a dismal plight of the immigrants' highlight "...the issues like homelessness and cultural collision resulting in the narratives of nostalgia, mixed loyalties, alienation, ghettoism, loss or renewal of identity, faith nationality etc" (Gurupadesh Singh, "The Epico-Mythical Terms of Diasporic Studies" vi).

Apart from this, it also highlights a contestation between the two migrants consolidating duality in the diasporic space. Dev is a sharp counter-point to Adit; he questions his hollow defense with his razor-sharp observations. The problem of immigration "...achieves its appeal and dramatic intensity through the juxtaposition of Dev and Adit's points of view, increasingly divergent forming the complex reversal of the situation in the end" (R.M.Verma 104). Interestingly, Adit's veneer show of well-being in the hostland is a sham. It is this perceptual hollowness that makes him a dangling diasporic identity. In spite of this apparent attraction for England and (apparent) repulsion for India, "...somewhere deep down Adit continues his attachment for the motherland" (G.D. Barche 55). Adit once proudly takes Sarah and Dev to the Millers' mansion in Harrow with a desire to flaunt that they hold him in high esteem. However, the way they receive Adit, Sarah and Dev reflect "...either annoyance, regret or embarrassment" (Desai 78). This is where Adit's veneer of well-being begins to crack; it unsettles him deeply signifying his rootlessness in the diasporic space. As a result, his relationship with the hostland turns out to be ambivalent. Bhabha considers that ambivalence cuts through the coherent and organic position of the mimicking migrant by way of introducing a disruption in the relationship of the two parties. In this way, Adit experiences an element of insecurity; this encounter turns out to be a site of contest between the native and the migrant, and thus disturbs Adit's monolithic orientation towards the hostland.

Moving forward, in the third part of the novel titled "Departure", the visit of the trio to the Roscommon-James—Sarah's parents—further consolidates his ambivalent and hollow relationship with the hostland. It is here that "...the self-satisfied expatriate gradually finds himself estranged" (Asha Susan Jacob 170). It chisels the dualism of the hostland and the homeland in his consciousness. The racial slurs, the counter-narrative of Dev, the sharp-edged Millers', and the Roscommon-James along with the imbalanced socio-economic structure of the hostland demystify Adit's predicament in the hostland. The existential tremours perturb him to the core, and he is now haunted by the homeland. He longs for the Indian landscapes of wilderness and vastness. His nostalgia develops an ache for the homeland vis-à-vis the dialectics of dislocation, and othering in the hostland. Such a predicament "...fractures the ability to engage with others at a fundamental level by substituting a 'corporeal schema' with a racial epidermal schema" (David Richards 10). Now, he experiences the diasporic hyphen, and thus yearns for the homeland, its language, culture, folklore and its inhabitants. Such perilous, porous and dualistic existence alters his understanding about the homeland and also lures him to look back for solace. Now, the diasporic space of the in-between connotes irreconcilability, fragmentation and identity-crisis. Having been failed in co-opting a hybridized, deterritorialized and transnational identity, Adit takes the ultimate decision to return to India—his land "...where none would call him a Wog or Asiatic" (Sumitra Kukreti 47). This is how reinscribes his identity to negotiate the duality of the hostland and the homeland.

Moving forward, it is now apt to assess Dev's response to the challenges of the diasporic space vis-à-vis duality of the hostland and the homeland. He represents distinct assimilation and acculturation by hybridizing and authenticating himself in the diasporic space. He is a romantic iconoclast who can see through the holes and fissures of the diasporic experience. Accordingly, he offers a sarcastic and deconstructive evaluation of the dominant cultural stereotypes in the novel. His observations highlight the stereotypes that refer to the discourse fixtures determining the relationship between the native and the immigrant. His scathing attacks also describe that such stereotypes are representatives of the racial dominance for maintaining the other (migrant). Bhabha contends that stereotypes deal with the problem of fixing individuals and denying them to have a sense of their own identity. Notably, Dev is empowered to decode the racial discourse; he deconstructs such stereotypization to reconstruct a negotiated and postcolonial identity of the immigrant.

Dev detests the mimicking immigrants in the hostland. His outbursts signify a counter-narrative of resistance in the novel; he despises the racial discourse that contains reductionist expressions such as 'Wogs,' 'Asiatics,' 'Macaulay bastards' etc. Knowing that London has three kinds of lavatories namely Ladies, Gents and Asiatics, he experiences his otherization in the hostland. Even a peddler isn't ready to tell him the cost of a Russian icon as he considers him incapable of buying the same. Feeling disgusted, Dev declares that "...this is a jungly city, this London of yours" (Desai 12, emphasis original). However, Dev denies to match the pervasive passivity and docile acceptance of the racial slurs and declares that "...I wouldn't live in a country where I was insulted and unwanted...I will go back to India..." (Desai 19). The Clapham tube station frightens him and suffocates him and he feels "...like a Kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth of a prison" (Desai 63). Dev is haunted by the homeland; he now feels alienated and rues his decision of filtering into England. His dislocation assumes a sort of sovereignty and thus reformulates his understanding of the homeland. Therefore, he shuttles between the hostland and the homeland, the present and the past and the familiar and the distant coupled with a simultaneous desire to cohere his existence by way of assimilation and acculturation in the hostland. Notably, the hostland destabilizes and disrupts his identity in the hostland; the tangible (physical characteristics) and the intangible baggage (the belief systems of the homeland) are concomitant to his othering in England.

In the second part of the novel "Discovery and Recognition," the ambivalent in-between of the diasporic space entangles Dev's consciousness and deepens his duality. Facing the dialectics of desire and derision, he undergoes a transformation of perspective; his "...change of mind is depicted symbolically through several incidents" (Kajali Sharma, *Symbolism in Anita Desai* 75). Dev's hybridity depicts a new self-fashioning; it generates a newness mediating and reconstructing cultural differences. It helps him to de-essentialize his identity by shaping a creative reinscription in the Bhabhaesque 'Third Space' to envision a multilogue of inter-community mosaic. Now, Dev negotiates his duality by deciding not to return to the homeland and says "...all I want is—well, yes, a good time. Not to return to India" (Desai 140). Accordingly, Dev chooses a reinscription to live on the edges/margins for which there is a typical Bhabhaesque term, i.e., liminality which means 'threshold'. He prefers the transitory, in-between space, which is characterized by indeterminacy and hybridity coupled with the potential for perpetual destabilization and change. Such an understanding endows him a multi-accented and discursive position in the diasporic space vis-a-vis the dualism of the hostland and the homeland.

The preceding analysis establishes that Sarah, Adit and Dev make different choices to negotiate the duality of the hostland and the homeland in the diasporic space. The study also highlights that the diasporic space confronts them in varying proportions. Accordingly, they make different choices to cohere their existence by way of assimilation in the hostland (Sarah and Dev), or retrieval to the homeland (Adit). This is how they negotiate the duality homeland (roots) with the hostland (routes). The study foregrounds that this dislocation and dispersion (in the diasporic space) simultaneously acts as an empowering tool; it empowers the characters to reinscribe/de-essentialize the dominant discourse that otherizes Sarah, Adit and Dev. As a result, they can see through the opaque

nature of such discourse/hegemonizing structures; they can also understand their ambivalent and oscillating condition in the diasporic space. Accordingly, they fashion a subtle and authentic understanding to subvert the authoritative, fixed and totalizing notions in the diasporic space. It enables them to facilitate a self-fashioning signifying an assertion to reinscribe, hybridize, and negotiate their identities deconstructing racism, difference and inequality.

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## Mapping Home amid Shifting Spatialities in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

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### *Abstract*

*In postmodern, globalized worldview, the notion of home has entered into discursive modes of representation across disciplines. The categories of gender, race, and class have inserted a disruptive discursiveness in the notional construct of home as its constitutive factors. The competing narratives on home make it a contested space of ideologies. The idea of home now is a reflection of continuous flux and reconstruction. This paper attempts to ground the notion of home within the renewed debates on space and spatiality in human geography by investigating the spatial dynamics of home in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. *Exit West* inserts the issues of home and belonging into a global context by depicting condition of homelessness as an issue that concerns one and all irrespective of being an immigrant or not. A constantly shifting and fluid spatiality brings into play alternative narratives of home, disrupting the racialized and gendered notions of home.*

*Keywords: Exit West, Home, Space, Spatiality, Place.*

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Spatial renaissance is considerably a recent phenomenon and scholars of spatiality (Sara Upstone/ Doreen Massey/ Edward Soja etc.) feel that there is a need to reaffirm the significance of spatial so that it gets its due importance alongside temporality. Sara Upstone notes that, “to reassert spatiality is to privilege it as a context that must be read alongside temporality as a factor of equal significance” (3). In this context postmodern geography seeks to unravel the entrenched ideological construction of space through “radical deconstruction and reconstruction” (Soja, “Postmodern Geographies” 45; Jones, “Spaces of Belonging” 41). Soja is a pioneering spatial thinker whose concept of ‘thirdspace’ is very significant as it promotes openness as far as the spatiality of life is concerned. He disapproves the ‘myth of linear narratives’ which emphasise the historical and progressive notions favouring time and relegating space to little significance. With the emergence of such deconstructive spatial theorisations, notion of home which was conceptualised as rooted in place and geography has also been challenged. The word ‘space’ signifies the essence of the current mobile world that is intersected through so many threads where the meaning of home has evolved considerably.

Diaspora disrupts the idea of home as a fixed enclosure and projects it as a continuous process, always evolving. Present epoch of travel and migration has resulted in the fragmentation and disintegration of coherent communities, lending the diaspora condition of ‘without home’ a global context. Martin Heidegger's assertion in his book *Pathmarks* that “Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world” (285) can't be more relevant in present times. In present times of transformations



and migrations, home evokes ideas of impermanence and dispossession which is in quite contrast to what it signified earlier. This article is rather focussed on enumerating Brah's definition of home as "the lived experience of locality" (192) which points to a spatial discursiveness in the notion of home. Avtar Brah enumerates two dimensions of home as, "a mythic place of desire in diasporic imagination" as well as, "a lived experience in locality" (188). Brah here puts idea of home in both historical context which is no longer accessible and also in its present territoriality, which signifies the mobile and fluid idea of home that is capable of being constituted and reconstituted again and again disrupting its earlier connotations if not entirely but at least to a larger extent. Before moving further to investigate the notion of home in Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*, it is important to raise a few questions as far as the issue of home is concerned. The questions would be;

- How the home-making process becomes a subversive phenomenon in diaspora space?
- What are the political stakes involved in constructing a home in an alien space?
- How prevailing power structures of race and patriarchy are challenged while imagining a new home in diaspora.

Mohsin Hamid is an immigrant writer of Pakistani origin. Born in Lahore, he has spent half his life there and rest in places like London, New York and California (Interview to Waterstones). He has authored four novels which include *Moth Smoke* (2000), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), *Exit West* (2017), besides writing a book of essays called *Discontent and its Civilizations* (2014). Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* is a story of loss and hope which revolves around the characters of Saeed and Nadia, who are forced to flee their home city marred by war and violence. Their journey through magical doors, traversing different countries and continents, creates a narrative of migration in which questions of home and belonging become as much important and relevant to any human being as they are to Saeed and Nadia. Divided in three sections, home will be discussed under three rubrics; first examining the critique of home as a fixed notion, second will deal with role of gendered space in shaping the narrative of home and final section will analyse the racialized and nativist discourse on home.

### **Disrupting Home as a Fixed Coordinate**

Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* examines the issues of home and belonging in the context of the involuntary migrations and growing irrelevance of conventional borders by undermining their efficacy through the use of magical realism. He uses 'magical doors' effectively to render the established spatial order insignificant if not obsolete. Novel opens by referring to the initial setting as a "city swollen by refugees" (1). Such a description of the city indicates that there is a crisis like situation and it brings to our mind the current situation that is prevalent in many countries around the world triggered by wars and violence. Hamid has on purpose kept the city unnamed to lend it a global context or as a sign of warning that it could be any city. The narrative is built in such a way that what happens in a remote unknown city affects all and seems to be the destiny of all. Hamid has made an attempt to show how in the present globalised world, one cannot escape from the consequences of something happening hundreds or thousands of miles away. Anthony Giddens's definition of globalisation fits well with the narrative of Hamid. Giddens defines globalisation as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (64). Magical doors that are mentioned in almost all chapters consistently are used to undercut the established order of space and home. The digressions that Hamid takes from the main plot to insert a happening in some remote unknown place are done purposefully to connect the dots in the larger picture. Cyber and geographical spatial disruptions run parallel in his scheme of things to challenge the fixed notions of home and space.

As Saeed's email was being downloaded from a server and read by his client, far away in Australia, a pale skinned woman was sleeping alone in the Sydney neighbourhood of Surry

Hills [...] her room was bathed in the glow of her computer charger and wireless router, but the closet doorway was dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging. He too was dark, with dark skin and dark woolly eyes.  
(6)

The downloading of Saeed's mail in Australia and the emergence of an immigrant from darkness of a magical door into the bedroom of an unnamed lady in Sydney show the changing dynamics of the home and space. The incident is quite symbolic as far as the present world of refugee crisis and massive migrations is concerned. Through such incidents, Mohsin Hamid brings migration and its impact to the door of everyone. Home and its space are no more sacrosanct or inviolable; rather it is very much permeable from unknown quarters. He takes the debate on home from the war torn city to a peaceful location and constructs them as equally vulnerable and effectible.

Bell Hooks remarks that, "Home is no longer just one place. It is locations. It is a place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives" (Hooks 19). For Nadia, home is also not one place but many locations. Nadia hopes for new beginnings in new places. The way Nadia and Saeed move from one place to another place or from one home to another underscores the impermanence of the home. Their journey signifies the new diaspora reality of routes, where home as a fixed coordinate is replaced by a notion of home that is susceptible to repeated reconstruction. The continuous movement of Saeed and Nadia from one place to another place reflects both hope as well as their alienation from these places where they are excluded from the spatial mainstream and pushed to margins. And to overcome this marginalization, they continue to traverse place after place until they find respectable space. "Hamid's use of these magical doors effectively ties the local to the global in a cosmic corridor of connection through which characters are transported from the known to the unknown (Philip 1). Throughout the novel, people are on the move. Not only immigrants but even some of the natives have been shown to leave their places like London for some unknown places through the magic doors to escape their present problems. Hamid, as has been mentioned earlier as well, inserts an episode from somewhere which is completely unrelated to the plot at present but is linked to the larger theme of the novel. One such example is of a man who wanted to commit suicide but found a magical door on the right time and entered it to find himself in a country called Namimbia away from his all previous problems. Such examples emphasise the spatial dynamics of our lives, where routes instead of roots have achieved prominence.

### **Challenging Gendered Constructions of Home**

Mary Douglas observes that, "the more we reflect on the tyranny of the home, the less surprising it is that the young wish to be free of its scrutiny and control" (287). The principal female character Nadia is in complete incongruence with her home and society. Nadia is a kind of misfit in her society and her home. The home she lives in is in stark opposition to her idea of home. She challenges everything that her home stands for and the identity it bestows on her. Nadia's decision to live an independent life away from her home comes at a huge price. She had to sacrifice her family and all other relations to realise her dream of an independent life. Home is a place that is built carefully to create and maintain a hierarchy in which women are relegated to insignificant spaces. "While home may be men's castle, it is a castle riven with inequality and power, as well as love and care" (Ralph and Lynn 520). When Saeed requests her to move into his home after his mother's death, Nadia finds herself again at the cusp of being entangled in the family life again, even though she is determined to be alone and independent. Such concerns about her freedom and independence make her hesitant about moving in Saeed's home. "Part of her still resisted the idea of moving in with him, with anyone for that matter, having at such great difficulty moved out in the first place" (72). She has apprehensions whether she will be able to preserve her newly found identity or not. As she moves into Saeed's family home, she never gets to spend another day or night in her own apartment. Nadia's

convictions are driven by ideas that are individualistic and she refuses subservience and conformity.

Nadia's notions of home fall within Edward Soja's concept of 'thirdspace'. She doesn't incorporate elements from her birth city or the land where she relocates instead she chooses to drift in a third space, where she allows herself to be a free spirit without any regard for any fixed home and identity. Soja's thirdspace is more than dialectical synthesis, it actively transforms the established binaries and as Soja asserts,

It introduces a critical other-than choice that speaks and critiques through its otherness [...] It does not derive simply from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different. (61)

Nadia could be seen as the most defiant character who epitomizes the postmodern nomadic subject, wishing to be free from bondages of place and culture. Hamid seems to have crafted her character keeping in mind the famous line by Virginia Woolf that goes as, "As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world (109)". She not only rejects her incarceration within her parents' home but also takes enough care to not allow Saeed dominate her and snatch away her freedom. This complete breakdown from spatial determinants is informed more by Edward Soja's concept of thirdspace, a space of extraordinary openness.

Nadia is a kind of free bird who does not conform to the role that society prescribes for her. One example of her rift with her surroundings and her house is the way it has been decorated. The walls of her home are decorated with religious verses and mementos and she herself loves art classes. "The art in Nadia's childhood home consisted of religious verses and photos of holy sites, framed and mounted on walls" (17). Right from her childhood, Nadia comes forth as a person who questions things around her and this habit though initially non-serious for her parents assumes serious connotations when she starts questioning religious beliefs later and all this frightens her father. "Her constant questioning and growing irreverence in matters of faith upset and frightened him" (18). Growing in a conservative religious society, such an individual is bound to be alienated or self-exiled. In Nadia's case, she chooses to leave her home and live as an independent unmarried woman on her own. Nadia's initial confinement within home or constriction of space for her could be also seen from the 'purdah' system which is prevalent in many societies. "All forms of purdah have been displays of class privilege, the implication being that families who keep 'their' women in purdah can afford to forgo the income from their labour outside the home" (Jackson 58). In such a system, women are allowed little to no outside mobility. Nadia expresses her choice through her decision to leave her home and construct a space of her own. The 'room of her own' that she manages to secure for herself is her first home as an independent woman. This act by her is an attempt to challenge the spatial constructs of her society which cannot reconcile to the fact that woman leads an independent life on her own without her family or at least without a male guardian. "The claim that women's place is in 'his home' is an old strategy that mobilises notions of femininity; locates them in the private, and imposes an ideology of domesticity" (McFadden 2). Nadia is epitome of modern nomadic subject or a woman who has relinquished all desire for fixity and is reluctant to accept the created spatial hierarchies that relegate women to less significant spaces. Such an act becomes more offensive and unacceptable at a time when her city is mired in crisis and is being taken over by the fundamentalist groups. But Nadia has learnt to live amid such horrifying times and manages to protect herself from any untoward incident.

### **Global vs. Nativist Constructions of Home**

*Exit West* also critiques the racialized and nativist narratives of home and space. It challenges the "existing spatial discourses based on racialization and enclosure" (Kandiyoti 25) and imagines an inclusive and non-racialized notion of home. The influx of different racial groups of

immigrants in a seemingly homogenous space threatens to disrupt the existing spatial structure which is built on the premise of race. Through magical doors, immigrants have arrived into homes left vacant by natives. The house where Saeed and Nadia live is occupied by around fifty immigrants who refuse to vacate it despite police threats and warnings. The influx of immigrants into London has created what Avtar Brah calls 'diasporic space,' a space that is not only inhabited by the immigrant but the native as well. Coming together of immigrants and natives gives rise to a new spatiality which is disruptive and heterogeneous.

Nadia and Saeed can see similarities between their home city and London. Just as their city had been overtaken by immigrants from other war hit areas and had built temporary tents in whatever space was available, London provided a similar picture as many previously open areas had been occupied by immigrants. Nadia at times wonders whether London is any different from her hometown because like militants in her hometown, there are nativists in London who talk about 'wholesale slaughter.' London as a cosmopolitan centre did not live up to its image and resembled Saeed and Nadia's town. In both the places, extremists had sway and the weak and vulnerable were targeted. Hamid universalises the immigrant crisis and he tries to impress upon the reader to understand the futility of an originary homeland and instead recognise the coexistence of people as a global community. There is dynamism at the heart of diasporic home; there are multiple forces that shape it and these factors include different subjectivities, multiple nation-spaces and cultures instead of a single locatable origin. In the larger context of home as a nation, this conflict is also visible which rests on the narratives of race and nativism. Hamid's narratives problematize the racialized narrative of an enclosed homeland. His narratives not only contests but also disrupts the racialized narratives of home. *Exit West* demonstrates how the contentious space of diaspora inserts fluidity and ambivalence into the nativist claims of home based on race and tribalism.

## Conclusion

Hamid through a compelling narrative inserts the current crisis of migration into a global script. Suddenly the issues of home and space are as much relevant to us as they are to an immigrant in far off land. Hamid uses magical realism in the form of magical doors to do away with the process of journey and instead focuses on the places of dislocation and relocation. Use of magical doors along with smart phones is used to obliterate the distance between the places. These doors are significant as they become the means to leave behind the homelands for new unseen potential homelands. The novel is about the collapse of the home and homeland and the struggle to construct them elsewhere. Home is envisioned beyond the conventional space constraints. The question of gender is addressed through the defiant character of Nadia as she moves from one home to another, challenging and dismantling the sanctity of a normative home. She vehemently asserts her autonomy in choosing to leave or adopt any home. The significance of roots and originary home are acknowledged, yet the disruption of home and space is forcefully asserted. *Exit West* attains significance as it portrays the contemporary crisis stricken global community. Saeed and Nadia represent not just the conventional diasporic figures, their characters assume universalistic significance. The known and unknown places where the action unfolds are indications to other potential places of conflict and crisis. In this context, home becomes an ever more vulnerable idea and at the same time it also escapes the normative home-space nexus.

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**Diasporic Experience within the Framework of War and Terrorism:  
Reading Adib Khan's *Spiral Road***

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*Abstract*

*The paper promises to focus on the Bangladeshi migrant experience enshrouded within the tumult of war and terrorism and portrays the dilemma of a permanent return to 'roots' after having traced various 'routes'. Adib Khan, whose own life bears similarities with his protagonist's, is well positioned to write *Spiral Road*, a pertinent novel and a rare work that gives insights into the ties that bind the world views that reverberate beyond the placid, prosperous streets of Australia. The resilient acceptance of 'return' by the protagonist is drenched in the futility of an expression of resent. The ambivalence of the consciousness of the migrant, resulting from the pull between 'home' and a 'homing desire', provokes divided loyalties. Alienation, once dealt with in the first dislocation, revisits the protagonist in the 'homecoming', as home is not what he had left behind and the 'mythic space of desire' in his consciousness eludes him. The past, intertwined with the violence and turpitude of war, boomerangs in his present with a force that brings his 'escape' into sharp focus. Two-fold suspicion from the inherited as well as the adopted cultures problematizes his return. The initial journey of 'unbelonging' from home to 'belonging' to an adopted home, retraces a spiral road, manifesting itself into the final 'unbelonging' from the adopted home to 'belonging' to home, reinforcing the constant journeying of a diaspora.*

*Keywords: alienation, homecoming, belonging, unbelonging*

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The roots beckon, the branches tantalize; what was 'home' shall always lure, the 'homing desire' always mesmerises. A glance at the Bangladeshi-Australian writer Adib Khan's body of work gives the impression of meditations on a theme, with its focus on loss, regret, secrets and family history-all played out against a backdrop of cultural fragmentation. His second novel, *Spiral Road*, relives the potpourri of emotions of loss, regret, alienation, disorientation and nostalgia; and is in many ways, a complement to his first, *Seasonal Adjustments*, which won the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction and the 1995 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book. Khan's preoccupation in both the texts has been with identity, particularly the identity of the migrant, and the search for self. Adib Khan, himself, migrated to Australia in 1973. Retaining tangible ties with the motherland, he tends to return physically and imaginatively to Bangladesh, his protagonist in the *Spiral Road*, Masud, being one of the imaginative 'routes' he takes to visit his 'roots.'

*Spiral Road* is told from the first-person perspective of Masud Alam, an emotionally guarded man, who was born in Bangladesh, but who now lives quietly in Melbourne, where he works as a librarian. Khan uses his own experience of cultural fragmentation to tease out the betrayals and inconsistencies, the idealism and the bigotry that infest nationalism, as well as illustrate the lack of a secure identity for those who are alienated from their country of birth. Masud Alam, the protagonist, through whom Adib Khan relives the existential and experiential dilemmas of a displaced individual,



prefers to live in a shell of his own creation, holding life, including his girlfriend, Amelia, at a distance. This shell has stood him in good stead and has helped him escape- first from the tumult of a forced migration, and again, from the discomfort of a forced return, after a thirty year long 'distance' in time and space. His return to his homeland of Bangladesh after thirty years, tugs at some of the threads of grief and regret that have been held taut for years.

Masud's father's slow but sure decline towards the 'Bermuda triangle' of death through the dark tunnel of Alzheimer's, motivates his forced return to Bangladesh – once 'home' to him. But home had meant affluence and power under the feudal *zamindari* class system; but this home of his memories has degenerated into a 'mythic place' of imagination, now in ruins, where Zia, Masud's brother, struggles to juggle financial pressures and strains to keep the family afloat. These pressures are intensified manifold due to their Abba's deteriorating health, their mother's incessant attempt to cling to illusions of status and due to the presence of their divorced sister who is trying to bring up two young children. Landing on this unaccustomed turf afflicted with the vagaries of life, Masud finds himself sucked into the vortex of recollections of family history and his attempts to find a way through this maze to establish an identity of his own. The resultant effort of engaging with a world he wishes to escape, forces him to hesitantly find his way out of his shell.

Coming to terms with the past he had long ago run away from, means, recalling the days of the bloody Bangladeshi liberation struggle of 1971 he had been an important part. Back home, he is regarded by many as a freedom fighter, a national hero; but Masud Alam sees things differently; his youthful idealism has given way to a kind of shell-shocked ambivalence and, as the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly obvious that he carries psychological scars from his war experiences, scars that never did heal. This personal journey of introspection, coloured by the clouds of troubled political climate, reverberates with the pain of the changing, complex attitudes of his old friends and neighbours. The reluctance of shedding the garb of comfortable routine for a hesitant trial of the coldness of new terrain and an initiation on to the path of rediscovery is aptly brought out by Khan when Zia warns Masud that few landmarks of the Dhaka of his youth remain. It is unwelcome news that makes him exclaim: "I don't enjoy surprises that compel me to renegotiate my relationship with the past" (8). He is shocked at how the allegiances and loyalties of his family members have changed and his own are challenged. Khan himself claims that after his last 'physical' visit to Bangladesh, he removed from his flat in Melbourne, an old photograph of Dhaka, as it was no longer real – Dhaka had changed unrecognisably in his absence. Salman Rushdie's seminal essay "Imaginary Homelands" echoes the very same emotion of the pain-filled loss of failing to "restore the past [India] to [himself]" (11).

As a 'lapsed Muslim,' Masud becomes a target of extremists and is thrust into a world, remote from the comfort and compromise of his existence as a librarian in Melbourne. This change not only echoes the horrors of the past, but also ties the issues of identity and belonging to the colossal issue of international terrorism reverberating in the World Trade Centre attacks and the painful ramifications thereafter, for the Muslims. In fact, as Khan himself quotes in his interview, "The impetus for the novel, *Spiral Road*, was not personal experience, but the reported threat from the U.S. Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, after 9/11 to the Pakistani Prime Minister: [We'll bomb you back into the stone age, if you do not support the US-led war on terror]." (Bali Advertiser)

War, terrorism and violence in the aftermath of 9/11 have had gruelling influences, particularly on the emigrant Islamic. This sheer bewilderment of living in constant threat of annihilation and loss of identity can also be traced in Palestinian, Syrian and Yemini diaspora writers who express in very innovative literary styles, the human tragedy of people who were forced into a journey of exile and banishment from their homeland. Against the backdrop of Israel occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish -whose own home was razed

by the Israeli army-chronicled the Palestinian *Nakba* (catastrophe), envisaging the looming horrors that afflicted the dispossessed, exiled and disabled Palestinians, “and he himself houses in the home his poetry constructs” (Farhan 148). Darwish's verses internalize the sense of 'not belonging' and living as a stranger. Again, Syrian poet, Ali Ahmad Said Esber 'Adonis' who lived a long life in exile to escape imprisonment due to his allegiance to the Syrian National Socialist Party, delves into autobiographical poetry, wherein he “celebrates his epiphany of exile,” where “his banishment could not deter his freedom but it liberates him from the territorial boundaries and also opens the new horizons of unknown segments of the universe” (Farhan 149).

Coming back to the novel, *Spiral Road* traces—on a broader canvas—the journey of Muslims from the 1971 Bangladeshi fight for independence to the 9/11 WTC attacks, making each Muslim a potential suspect, silhouetted in streaks of terrorism. Omar, Masud's nephew, returns from America, having left a high profile job, and it is his return right after the attacks, that triggers memories of some unvisited dark corners in Masud's mind. But the contemporary world resists any black and white codification of a terrorist and the grey area that Masud inhabits is one of the violent and shadowy campaigns driven by religious militancy and his supposed heroism as a fighter for Bangladesh's freedom from Pakistan.

Parallel to this, Khan's imaginative return through *Spiral Road* is not his first return, of course, as already highlighted, having returned to his homeland before in *Seasonal Adjustments* as well in the person of Iqbal Chaudhari. Having been listed as emotionally and spiritually damaged by the Pakistan/Bangladesh massacre in 1971 and having gone into the war as a dedicated and idealistic nationalist, Masud Alam, in *Spiral Road*, ends up branded by the national army as an insurgent, a terrorist. Thirty years down the spiralling road and twelve years after his last visit, he returns reluctantly, and in the process, unleashes another psychological journey to exorcism. The routine of the life in Melbourne, that he yearningly clings to, is nothing but a shield protecting him from revisiting the wounded lanes of memory; from coming to terms with a 'labelled' past. The lure of yet another escape finds expression through these words:

There's an unvarying routine about most things in my life [in Melbourne] – the time I leave for work and when I return. A run on the Richmond oval most mornings. Competition racquetball after work on Tuesday. Wednesday nights devoted to the washing machine and the weekly jaunt to the supermarket on Thursday evening. I can even guess when my young neighbours are gearing themselves for a party. The unpredictable and the chaotic seem far away. I've learned to cage the familiar turbulence of the past somewhere in the maze of my inner being, where it remains perpetually dark. (17)

But Masud's character never succeeds in betraying the reader into believing that this is a fulfilling and satisfying life for him. In fact, his detached relationship with Amelia, a single mother, also underscores his existence in a limbo, where his resilience is but a mask, behind which lurks a constant unease to accept the reality of his escape. In this sense, he becomes different from the voluntary immigrants, who yearn for the diasporic life of constant 'becoming' because Masud yearns for Melbourne and its routine, once in Bangladesh, for the escape route it provides. His alienation is not one of a man nostalgic for the recreation of the past, but of one who fears its revival. Hence, the painful and lengthy interrogation at the Bangladeshi airport intensifies his resentment on his return; and the ironic recollection of his 'heroic' activities in the war, leading to a permission to enter Dhaka, further antagonises him. His father's illness and a crisis initiated by his uncle Musa's decision to marry someone young enough to be his grand-daughter, instigated him in making a return journey to his ancestral land. This, in turn, leads to the unravelling of well-guarded family secrets and interpenetration of personal and national histories, where archives of memories and forgotten letters are unearthed to bridge the discontinuities and the ruptures caused by the fragmenting and fracturing

immigrant experience.

The detachment gives way, involuntarily, to strengthening of bonds with the members of his family who, hitherto, had been held at a distance. Not only does he rediscover Bangladesh, but also himself, through his developing relationships. He confronts the truth about his uncle Musa and himself when he discovers his uncle's real reasons for marrying for the fourth time:

The ensuing silence is the perfect cue for me to enter. Yes the moment is fragile, so intimate and tender, as though the most intricate of feelings have been created in a mesh of harmony. I want to tell uncle Musa that I admire his guts and that he has the right to live as he pleases. And to hell with *izzat*, propriety and what others may say about his marriage. Yet, I feel like a bungling gatecrasher. I cannot disturb them. They're entitled to sit there, dream and talk about their problems. I shall cherish the sight.... Today the universe has opened up to me just that little more. (356)

The final impulsive acknowledgement of not being able to leave Bangladesh is also the final recognition and acceptance of him – the exorcism becoming complete. The denial of any connections with his family, finally gives way to the acceptance of deep connections, in spite of the chaotic, emotionally charged strings binding them in taut filiations. He finally relates with 'this' Masud of the present rather than the 'diasporic' Masud of Melbourne with his soulless existence coveted till date for its anonymity. His re-awakening to love, tenderness and duty are poignantly exemplified in the following outburst:

I close my eyes. I'm levitating. Then, the daggers of ghastly awareness. The burden of what has to be.... I'm unable to run anymore. (362)

But the daggers of awareness are more welcome to him in the final pages than the comfort of a 'rootless' route to Melbourne's detached solitude. The initial journey of 'unbelonging' from Bangladesh to 'belonging' in Melbourne retraces a spiral road manifesting itself into the final 'unbelonging' from Melbourne to 'belonging' in Bangladesh, reinforcing the constant journeying of a diaspora. Yet it can never be forgotten that Bangladesh is also not any 'utopia' for Masud and his misgivings find an expression thus:

My mind swivels back to the giddy days of March 1971. There was an idea then. I thought it was more important than life itself.... In bed I reinvent my adult life. I don't leave Dhaka. The war never happens. Pakistan remains unified. I have an unexciting but well-paid job. Marriage and children. I'm towards the end of my working life, sitting on a balcony, contemplating retirement. The uneventful years have slipped away. I'm left wondering what else I could have done. (160)

This bewildering dilemma of 'belonging' and 'unbelonging' brings to mind Yemenian novelist, Mohammad Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers*, that deals with the dislocation and identity crisis of the emigrant Yemenis “caught between cultures by the displacements caused by civil war or labor migration” (Altwaiji 93). Expelled from Egypt for his leanings towards Marxism, Abdul-Wali pens the tale of a people scarred by the long exile, some may have relented into willing submission; but then, there “come the half-breeds torn apart by the duality of their allegiance to home or the absence of any allegiance at all” ... as one of the characters in the text says, “Yes, us! We're searching for a homeland, a nation, a hope. You don't know what it's like to feel like a stranger” (qtd. Altwaiji 93)

'Home' that is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination for critics like Salman Rushdie and Avtaha Brah, leaps out of that myth into reality for Masud in the sense that he does return to the place of his origin but the return is not a celebrated return, but a reluctant one. And though the decision of staying back for good has been made, it is not a welcome retreat. Adib Khan's exploration of the poetics of return reveals that the longed-for return to the idealised ancestral home is as painful as the initial departure. Hence, the divided self of the immigrant is revealed in all its starkness. Masud reiterates:

Fragmentation has grown in me here. I feel emotionally torn. All these landscapes are too

diverse to unify my thinking. The wandering migrant.... the roaming atheist. The sense of loss is maddening because I'm unable to pinpoint the reasons for the regret I feel. I doubt if I'll ever come back to live here again and yet there's an elusive being within me that wants to redefine belonging and whispers about homecoming and mortality. About ending where I began. About a completion to the cycle of life. (170)

But the completion of this cycle and life coming full circle, is fraught with divided loyalties where the ambivalent consciousness of the diasporic, experiences a pull towards 'home' and an equally tantalising pull of 'homing desire' towards the land of opportunities, though Masud does not really cash in on those opportunities in the novel. The pull towards home is not nostalgic for him but forced; yet this view is challenged when the knowledge that his ancestral house has been demolished, makes him feel "...as if someone had smashed me with jackhammer" (183). Home is "not a physical location anymore. More like many places in the mind" (37). It is these discontinuities and ruptures that result in a sense of loss and the inability to objectify it that lead to what has been called "impossible mourning" by Vijay Mishra. The pain of return is heightened in the marginalising of Masud in family gatherings as he feels alienated in his own land. It is not only the past that he runs away from, but also the present, where he wishes to insulate himself from a life in a Bangladesh that is rife with the ramifications of the New York attacks. His words echo the unwillingness to take up responsibility for anything and an extreme desire to run away from all – the inherited as well as the adopted 'home':

Maybe I'm among those Muslim men of the twentieth century living without permanent ties to the West, emotionally and spiritually uprooted. (240)

The poignant moments of recollection of his nationalist militant activity are effectively etched in the following word-picture:

Right and wrong are woefully inadequate words to describe the greyness of the worlds I traverse. Naturally. I've aged.... Sleep evades me. I walk through a dense forest, followed by flitting shadows and hearing ghoulis laughter. I come across a deep trench. There are people sitting on the dry ground, talking. They look up. I don't recognise the faces that mock me.... The bed of the trench opens like a gate and I'm sucked into an abyss of sights and sounds that can only be conjured up by a primitive mind. I continue to fall until the first sight of dawn rescues me. (229-231)

This framework of war, terrorism and violence within which the character of Masud Alam is sketched, also portrays the dilemma of the Muslim diaspora that has been 'othered', post 9/11. Masud – the product of war for freedom of Bangladesh, opposes Omar's fanatic militancy and in the process of dissuading him, unburdens himself off his own haunting past, easing his passage to a reconciliation. Omar remains undeterred, but Masud finds peace and the power and willingness to forgive his father's adulterous affair and to understand his uncle's decision to remarry. The novel culminates with a 'coming to terms' with life in more ways than one for him and with a cementing of all the ruptures and fissures in the edifice of relationships against the odds of violence and terrorism.

Khan, whose own life bears similarities with his protagonist's, is well positioned to write the pertinent novel; *Spiral Road*-- a rare work that offers insights into the ties that bind and the world views that reverberate beyond the placid, prosperous streets of Australia.

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## Nationalism-Religion Dynamics in Asif Currimbhoy's *The Captives*

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### *Abstract*

*Nationalism is an important topic of discussion today. In the context of contemporary situations, political theorists are not unanimous about the nuances and connotations of nationalism. In the popular sense of the term, nationalism refers to loyalty to and love for the nation. Asif Currimbhoy in his play, *The Captives* (1963), foregrounds the issue of how nationalism and the minority religion get locked in a situation of conflict and tension in the Indian nation-state. This article will critically examine how a narrow idea of nationalism as conceived in popular ideology can pose a grave danger to the life of a true nationalist who professes the 'wrong' religion. Hasan, an Indian Muslim soldier, who puts his life at risk for the sake of his motherland, is asked to prove his love for the nation. This paper will also foreground the dilemma that is deep-seated in the psyche of the Indian Muslims many of whom chose a secular India over an Islamic Pakistan.*

*Keywords: nationalism, minority, ideology.*

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Nationalism has been taking various forms and practices in different nation-states today. It figures regularly in national and international debates. In the context of contemporary situations, political theorists elaborate on the nuances and connotations of nationalism. Nationalism is popularly perceived to be an unflinching loyalty to, and love for, the nation. Obviously, this is a naïve attempt to define a very complex issue which shelters nuanced and often conflicting connotations. Such a definition is often not very exclusive and erases the plurality of the nationalists' locations in a nation-state. Asif Currimbhoy in his play, *The Captives* (1963), foregrounds the complex nature of nationalism in the Indian context where the issue of religious identity further complicates its definition. The play juxtaposes different, and often opposing, strains of nationalism that creates tension in the life of the nation. This paper will critically examine the play mentioned above to explore the dialogue between different shades and connotations of the term nationalism.

Currimbhoy is interested in representing how different aspects of the identity (such as ethnicity, language, religion, and social position) of individuals affect their status as citizens of a nation. In his play, *Sonar Bangla* (1972), for instance, he demonstrates how the conflict between national identity and ethnic or linguistic identity can lead to the breaking of a nation. It is about ethnic, linguistic and ultimately political conflicts between the people of West Pakistan and of East Pakistan that started immediately after the 1947 Partition. The play reveals the hegemonic mindset of the West Pakistanis who had a total disregard for the ethnic practices and cultural passion of the Bengali population. The play brings to the fore the anxieties of the ethnic minorities. In this paper, however, I



shall not discuss *Sonar Bangla* but concentrate on *The Captives* which explores the hiatus between the question of nationalism and the issue of religion that exists in India.

*The Captives* is set against the backdrop of the Indo-Chinese war of 1962. It is a narrative of an Indian Muslim soldier called Hasan who is married to Raj, a Sikh. This inter-faith marriage testifies to the liberal, interweaving social fabric of India and underlines the strength of the national foundation of the country. Different communities lived side by side for centuries. That tradition continues even today. The Partition of India in 1947, however, sowed the seeds of communal disharmony which began to crop up again and again in the national debates. The British rulers in their zeal to hold on to power for a long time adopted 'divide and rule' policy, thereby creating friction between the members of the two major communities, Hindus and Muslims and they had been quite successful in this end. During the Partition, the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were all involved in internecine fights and communal mayhem which damaged the syncretic nature of the nation to a great extent. In this context, Saeed Naqvi observes, "... a country divided by sectarianism or shaped along communal lines will no longer be India. It will be a different country, a retrograde nation ruled by belief, superstition and authoritarian impulses, a replica of failed states and religious dictatorships around the world where tyranny has displaced democracy, human rights, justice and liberty for all" (xv). Ever since the time, members of the minority communities, mainly Muslims, had often been the object of suspicion, and their loyalty to the nation is often questioned. It is only natural that the marriage between Hasan and Raj in the play would face stiff resistance from their respective families. But they prioritised their love over their religious identities. Currimbhoy places this inter-faith marriage at the heart of the play both to underline the possibilities, and even desirability, of the syncretic culture of the nation as well as to dramatically trigger off tension within the scope of the play. To celebrate the diversity of their marriage, the couple even name their sons Hameed and Kripal, following the naming traditions of the two communities, sending a strong signal to the agents of hate and animosity. Hasan, as we see in the play, is a staunch nationalist whose loyalty to India does not waver even under intense pressure. In the last Act of the play, we see how in the face of temptation and adversity Hasan remains resolute proving that one's religious identity poses no hurdle to the pursuit of nationalist aspirations.

In the Indian context, however, religious identity can discursively be a factor in creating cracks in the national space. These cracks open up mainly during periods of political crises and ideological conflicts. A war with a neighbouring country professing a different religion, for instance, can put a minority community under the scanner of the majoritarian politicians and even sections of misguided common people. Tagore had foreseen this. He was critical of the simplistic notion of nationalism and was apprehensive that the anti-colonial nationalism in India might later turn the hate for the colonial foreigner into a hate for all kinds of 'others' in the nation itself who would be judged on the basis of religion, ethnicity, language, caste, and even political belief. Tagore felt, Ramachandra Guha points out, that "there was a thin line between nationalism and xenophobia" and he was particularly sceptical about whether Gandhi's propagation of non-cooperation as a political weapon would be able to "dissolve Hindu-Muslim differences" (xxxiii). Tagore's perception has come true on many occasions in contemporary history. In the context of Indo-Pakistan conflicts, Rajmohan Gandhi rightly observes that "the Hindu-Muslim and India-Pakistan questions are two distinct things... yet the two questions are connected. ... and when there is an India-Pakistan cricket match, India's Muslims can become conscious of eyes probing their inner sentiments" (x). On the occasions of communal tension nationalist sentiment tends to verge on xenophobia. Guha writes that although Gandhi had his own reasons for his justification of the idea of his brand of nationalism and spoke about Indian nationalism being "not exclusive, not aggressive, nor destructive. It is health-giving, religious and therefore humanitarian" (xxxii) events that followed in Indian history gives credibility to Tagore's apprehension. Tagore was afraid that nationalism, if misused, would create uncertainty and fear among the members of the minority groups. Contrary to its objective of uniting people, it would rather exclude sections of population.<sup>1</sup> We find validation of this point in what

happens to Hasan in Currimbhoy's play. Mehtab, an old Congressman, despite considering Hasan like a son, shoots him on the mere suspicion that he might have collaborated with a Pakistani soldier, thereby compromising the security of the nation. The suspicion is solely based on Hasan's religious identity. This fear of the identity of the religious 'other' is such an overpowering concern that he overlooks his love for Hasan and shoots him. Hence, Tagore's apprehensions were not entirely unfounded. We see reverberations of his thinking in Naqvi's words. Naqvi writes, "The toleration and syncretism that had marked over a thousand years of Hindu-Muslim equations began to give way to bitterness and hostility" (xiv).

*The Captives* is, as the playwright declares in the Preface, a sequel to an earlier play, *The Restaurant* (1960) which remained unpublished, but it can be viewed as an independent play (9). He observes that the earlier play reflects a particular epoch in India – that of Partition which subsequently led to the disruption of unity between different communities in the country.<sup>2</sup> From this point of view it has thematic continuation in the present play which, however, explores the theme of double loyalty (to nation and religion) to a considerable extent. So, the paper will concentrate on how the shadows of Partition loom large in the background and how Pakistan, born out of the Partition as an enemy state, acts as a reference point in this play. At the beginning of the play, we get a clear reference to the India-China war of 1962. Reference to this war occurs in the latter part of the play. Currimbhoy adds some crucial information about the theme of the play. He writes:

*The Captives* is however intended to be more than a war [Sino-India war] play. It is basically a conflict of various social and political forces in the country today. It is suggestive of the position of the Indian Muslim under pressure of deteriorating relations between India and Pakistan. (9)

The playwright here brings up the issue of the history of India and its territorial division i.e., the history of one nation that got divided into two, India and Pakistan. He also gives some background information about this text. He refers to the rise of communal forces which are opposed to the peaceful co-existence of people of all religions, races, ethnic groups, etc. In this play, he represents the fear of the Indian Muslims who go through periods of uncertainty and suffer from the politics of exclusion. Their loyalty to the nation is frequently questioned. This suspicion is intensified when even a casual connection with Pakistan, the enemy nation, crops up, not to speak of attempts at establishing cross-border fraternity. Citizenship of a particular country may not be a bar to the establishment of a friendly relationship even with the citizens of an enemy country. Muslims can indeed maintain a friendly relationship with the non-Muslims of India; there is no contradiction in a Muslim citizen's loyalty to his or her nation and his or her aspirations for establishing other Muslims living in other nation-states.<sup>3</sup> However, the fact remains that in some discourses citizenship is posited vis-à-vis religious identity of the minorities (if it is other than that of the majority population. Pan-religious (like pan-Islamic) attachment is also viewed with suspicion. Currimbhoy as a playwright posits his plot in such a complex of intricate relationship.

In the nation-formation in the Indian subcontinent, religion played an important role. Pakistan was declared an Islamic country as Muslim identity turned out to be synonymous with the national identity there. Bangladesh which was born later in 1971, has similar identity dynamics although linguistic identity emerged as an important factor in the new nation. Religion and polity in Pakistan in particular became interchangeable and believers in other faiths were pushed to the periphery. *Sonar Bangla* is a stark reminder of the problem of homogeneous religious identity. In the first few years of the creation of Pakistan, there was, among the characters in this play, a strong undercurrent of love towards the newly formed Pakistan, a nation founded on the basis of religion. But as the Bengali identity began to assert itself, their option began to shift slowly from the concept of religion-based nation to that of ethnicity- and language-based nation. Differences between the citizens of East Pakistan and of West Pakistan began to crop up immediately after the formation of the new nation. The ethnic and linguistic differences later led to the birth of a new nation, Bangladesh. So, we see that the concept of the nation-state was undergoing a change within a short span of time.

According to the Western concept of the nation, ethnicity was a parameter in the formation of a nation. In the Indian subcontinent, however, religion became a functional criterion in nation-building. Although India is a secular nation-state, traces of religious clashes continue in discursive and socio-cultural spaces.

The focal point in the play comes when a Pakistani soldier, Aref, accidentally comes to the Indian camp, mistaking it as his camp. Subsequently, he is held as a captive by the Indian soldiers. Here he meets Hasan. Later, he comes to know that the soldier he meets – Hasan – is a Muslim, his co-religionist. He tries to win over Hasan on the basis of a pan-Islamic sentiment which conflicts with Hasan's understanding of nationalism. In Pakistan, however, Islam is both a religious ideology and polity. This is not the case in India. Aref tries to trap Hasan within Islamic identity. He tries to convince Hasan that in Pakistan he would not face the discrimination and segregation which he faces in India. Here Aref bares open Hasan's vulnerability in India as a Muslim citizen. We see Hasan rejecting Aref's pan-Islamic discourses because his understanding of nationalism is exclusively based on a secular principle. He puts his country first over his religious fraternity. Hasan has a deep sense of nationalism which is inclusive. India is not an embodiment of exclusive nationalism. But he suffers from dilemma whenever there is tension across the border and questions are raised about his commitment to the country on the false assumption that he may be drawn towards Pakistan because it has largely a Muslim population. We may refer here to Gandhi's comment on national-communal equation quoted earlier and see why the Indian Muslims face uncomfortable questions on a daily basis about her or his commitment to the country s/he has been living for generations. Naqvi points out an absence of initiatives taken in this respect prior to the Partition. He observes that “[t]he distressing truth is that in all these [letters on the Partition plan] exchanges between Mountbatten, Gandhiji, Nehru, Patel and Azad, there is no evidence that there is much thought given to Indian Muslims and their plight” (62). It is easy to gauge the helpless condition of the Muslims living in India for several decades or centuries. Muslims as a minority group live in a state of fear and uncertainty because of their religious identity. Rakhshanda Jalil writes about the predicament of Indian Muslims in post-Partition India, “In the years after the Partition, accused of being traitors whose rightful place was on the other side of the border, a border that their forefathers had helped create, they were reduced to pawns in a game of electoral politics” (xii). Jalil brings to the fore the dilemma of Indian Muslims that they have to face on a daily basis. That's why, Aref, a Pakistani soldier tries to take advantage of Hassan's position in India when he says: 'You know very well that I'm stronger in my country than you are [as a Muslim] in yours. You know very well that I'm freer in my country than you are in yours'(45). Aref calls Hassan 'a mere minority in his country.' When Hassan replies that Muslims are fifty million strong in India, Aref scoffs at the comment, “Fifty million weak! Fifty million underprivileged! Fifty million who're afraid to raise their voices. Fifty million who will succumb to their integration” (46). He also calls Hassan 'a second-class citizen' in his own country. By choosing a fellow Muslim from the 'enemy' country as a character who underscores the history of prejudice and injustice against the Indian Muslims, Currimbhoy makes them stand before the mirror and recognise the reality. Despite adversities, Hasan indeed remains steadfast in his loyalty to India. The playwright seems to emphasise this point.

As the play progresses, we see that the Indian camp is being outflanked by the Chinese forces. We see Hasan's loyalty and commitment is again being questioned by Mehtab who is a believer in Gandhian philosophy of life. Mehtab accuses Hasan for helping Aref [though Pakistan is not at war with China, Aref is caught in the crossfire] to move to a safer place. Currimbhoy comments in a write-up that Mehtab “found himself torn by suspicion and questioned the loyalty of the Indian-Muslim who was close to his heart. Too late he realized his mistake, the betrayal that was in effect his own, the killing he did of his blood-brother through hate when in effect his whole life had been committed to love and non-violence” (15). He [Mehtab] is indeed a “captive to the image I had created... victim to the faith that bound me... it was a moral image that no man could hold indefinitely, and it grew and grew till there was no sustaining it” (57).

In *The Captives* Currimbhoy presents different types of nationalism. On one hand, he

presents Aref who is hell-bent on freeing himself from the clutches of his Indian captors. So, he tries to utilize his religious identity to tempt Hasan but he miserably fails. Islam is the basis of his idea of nationalism. On the other hand, there is Mehtab who is a believer of Gandhian ideals but he is not able to keep his belief intact. He falters in a critical situation. And lastly, there is Hasan who stands resolute in his belief of a secular India in the face of vitriolic attacks from both Aref and Mehtab. In spite of all that happened to him, he reposes faith in the traditional values of pluralism and toleration. Hasan's belief in the secular ideals is quite similar to that of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. In his address to students at Aligarh Muslim University, Azad says, "You are the citizens of free India- a State which is determined to develop its political and social life on secular and democratic lines. The essence of a secular and democratic state is freedom opportunity for the individual without regard to race, religion, caste or community" (qtd. in Habib 245). So we see Hasan standing out as beacon of hope amidst the crises of humanity.

Thus, Hasan reinforces India's secular ethos and composite heritage at the end of the play when he keeps silent about who shot him on the night of the Chinese attack. And then, we hear the voice of a *muezzin* (one who calls out the followers to a mosque), calling from the minaret of a mosque (65). The call of the *muezzin* restores our faith in secular India. Hence, it is abundantly clear that despite many challenges to India's multi-ethnic diversity, as Srirupa Roy writes, "the territorial-national integrity of India still survives. Moreover, the Indian polity continues to exist as an active and functioning democracy, held together by mechanisms other than force or authoritarian dominance. From this perspective, India represents a success story of diversity management" (3). She rightly observes that the patchwork of subnational identities that make up Indian culture and society cannot so easily be transformed by majoritarian ideological maneuvers (2). The critical analysis of Currimbhoy's play above substantiates Roy's point.

### Notes

1. The differences of opinion regarding the feasibility of non-cooperation movement and the potentiality of narrow nationalism degrading itself into xenophobia are analysed in Ramachandra Guha's Introduction to Rabindranath Tagore' *Nationalism* (pp. xxxiii). The Tagore-Gandhi debate started supposedly in 1920 when Rabindranath Tagore came to know about the non-co-operation movement being led by Mahatma Gandhi. Guha writes about Tagore's response to this movement in the following words, "In a letter posted from Chicago on 5 March 1921, Tagore observed: 'What irony of fate is this that I should be preaching co-operation of cultures between East and West on this side of the sea just at the moment when the doctrine of non-co-operation is preached on the other side?'" (xxix). Guha adds that in the first week of September 1921 Gandhi met Tagore at the latter's family home in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and they had a long discussion on non-cooperation (xxix). Guha goes on to add more about this debate, "Tagore later recalled that he had told Gandhi that 'the whole world is suffering today from *the cult of a selfish and short-sighted nationalism*. India has all down her history offered hospitality to the invader of whatever nation, need or colour. I have come to believe that, as Indians, we not only have much to learn from the West but that we also have something to contribute. (xxxii; emphasis added). For more details, see Ramachandra Guha's Introduction to Rabindranath Tagore' *Nationalism* (vii-lxviii)

2. Rajmohan Gandhi comments in this context, "Unless I am greatly mistaken, our descendants will regard the transfer of power as less significant than the inhumanity to which many Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs allowed themselves to sink that year. It is a year of shame, not a year of our achievement" (1). So, we get a validation of the point that Partition had, indeed, led to the "disruption of unity" in India.

3. Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, one of the strongest proponents of Hindu-Muslim unity, observes: "While living in India and forming a *qaum* [community] with other communities in the country, Muslims can retain their Muslimness and can also protect their rights, distinct culture,

language, religion and personal law, and can also think and act for their protection. While discharging their national duty, they can maintain their relationship with the Muslim *ummah*[the whole community] whether they live in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Hejaz, Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Asia Minor, West Asia, Africa, Europe, and America, etc. This neither affects the universal Islamic affinity of Indian Muslims nor there can be a clash with the universal Islamic affinity of Muslims living in other countries. (137)

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## **Cosmopolitanism in Sikhism and its Transmission among Different Generations of Diaspora: Exploring the Problematics in Harjit Atwal's *British Born Desi***

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### *Abstract*

*Exodus to foreign lands in search of greener pastures is a malaise that India as a country in general and Punjab as a state in particular are desolately suffering from. Migration, though an age-old phenomenon is never without its multiple set of problematics. It is on reaching the adopted land that the migrants are hit hard by the blitzkrieg of challenges such as racism, exploitation, alienation, adaptation to a different value-system along with the pull of roots, accompanied by the nagging sense of constant evaluation by and disparaging comparison with the original residents. The religious faith and indigenous value-system of the migrants tend to be relegated to the background as they deal with the immediacy of survival. It is after attaining economic stability that the deeper questions of culture, identity and transmission of values to the successive generations begin to perturb them, as they perceive their progeny drifting away from them. Harjit Atwal, a well-known Punjabi novelist, delineates this inter-generational conflict in the context of Sikhs in the novel, *British Born Desi* and the present paper explores the role played therein by the indigenous religion-based value-system and its impact on the respective negotiation of identities by the different generations and their interrelations. The paper further investigates the problematics of the misinterpretation and the erroneous transference of the religious spirit and cosmopolitan values of Sikhism to next generation which is keen to a large extent to get familiar with and imbibe the philosophy, values and ethos of Sikhism. The paper also argues that the translation of the Sikh scripture *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* in other languages must be encouraged and its eternal values must be highlighted by making a comparative study of the scriptures of other religions.*

*Keywords: migration, ambivalent identity, inter-generational conflict, Sikh indigenous values, latitudinarian faith.*

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The life of an immigrant is a life that regularly poses intersectional questions at multiple levels- social, economic, cultural, religious, pertaining to roots and identity, acculturation and assimilation, and the being in question is on a persistent quest for answers, making life more of a race against difficult odds or an odd chase against race, to twist the already complicated matter further. It is a dichotomy or rather an ambivalence where the self gets divided between respite and remorse. The satisfaction of having improved the standard of one's life is far outweighed by the sense of forfeiture of one's homeland, nativity and the erstwhile emotional bonds that filled one's heart with a sense of security. It is a nerve-racking ordeal for the immigrant to constantly long for this lost ground on the one side and desperately attempt to belong to the adopted yet fugacious home on the other. Preservation of their indigenous values and the proper transference of those to the successive generations born in the adopted land, is another matter of profound concern.

Ronald Inglehart, a well-known political scientist, expresses in his book *The Silent Revolution*, that it is only after having reached a reasonable level of economic security that the emotional, spiritual and expressive needs of one's self start pressing for attention and satiation. For these so-called hybridised yet 'split' personalities, self-expression and self-representation through writing, is a way of connecting with their lost 'matrix.' Remembering the past is reassuring and cathartic in the turbulent present and helps the writers negotiate their fluid and constantly evolving



identities in the alien lands. Stuart Hall also talks of “ethnicities being threatened by the dislocating effects of globalization,” (109) which can be detrimental to the systems of representation. It is not only a communicative but a formative process for the writer as he negotiates his way between the “place” as original and “space” as performative, as differentiated by Giddens and quoted by Hall (109). Avtar Brah in the introduction to her well-known work *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* describes “narrative as an interpretive retelling” and the “individual narration becomes meaningful as a collective re-memory” (10).

The diasporic writing in Britain by Punjabi and Sikh writers has recently started moving out of the tag of ‘ghetto literature’ and the credit for that goes to the writers of the second and the third generation such as Satnam Sanghera, Balli Rai, Sukhdev Sandhu, Jasvender Sanghera, Daljit Nagra, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti and a few more, who have started expressing themselves in English and taking up the tensions of the transcultural form, hybridity and fluid identities. The first generation writers such as Harjit Atwal, Rupinder Singh Dhillon, Raghubir Dhand, Darshan Dhir, Kailash Puri (although her autobiography *Pool of Life* is written in English), Amarjit Chandan and many more have lived almost their whole lives in the U.K. but preferred to write in their mother tongue and their writings deal with more conventional topics that emerged out of their first-hand experience.

Harjit Atwal, who migrated to the U.K. in 1977, belongs to the early first-generation migrants and is a well-known Punjabi novelist credited with more than two dozen novels, short story collections, poetry anthologies, travelogues, biographies, literary articles along with columns in newspapers. Based on his everyday life, he deals with and depicts numerous issues pertaining to the lives of the diaspora such as alienation, pull of the roots, racism, linguistic hurdles, unemployment, burden of overwork, exploitation, generational gaps, shattering familial bonds and problems in acculturation, in his writings.

Even the titles of his novels and other collections are suggestive and evocative of the complexity and impact of the migratory experience and the disquieting attempts by the migrants to come to terms with it, such as collections of poems titled *Sard Pairan di Udik, A Wait with Cold Feet*) and *Suka Pata Te Hawa (A Dead Leaf in the Wind)*, collections of short stories, *Kala Lahu, (Black Blood)*, *Sapan Da Bhar, Bartania, (Britain, Full of Snakes)* delineating the British exposure, *Khuh Wala Ghar, (A House with a Well)*, a collection of short stories of reminiscence, and the novels *One Way, Ret, (The Sands)*, *Swari, (The Passenger)*, and *Southall* that focus specifically on the vacuity in a migrant's life. It is in his novel *British Born Desi (Indians Born in Britain)* written in 2011 that some issues of the successive generations of diaspora are dealt with. His novel *Southall* captures the lives of Sikhs and Punjabis in Southall town of London which is referred to as a Mini-India due to the predominance of South Asians especially Punjabis in that area. Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla in *Sikhs in Britain* cite the example of Southall as an area of heavy Sikh concentration and a site where the “re-establishment of *biradari* networks recreated the familiar social and psychological norms of Sikh society” (166). The novel however, poignantly brings out the pain of the first-generation migrants who have not even attempted to adapt themselves to the foreign culture but stayed somewhere in its proximity and contrasts it with the attitude of the second generation born and brought up in that culture which also has not adopted it completely but created a new culture out of the amalgamation. The novel *British Born Desi*, which is a sort of sequel to *Southall*, is more the first-generation's perspective of the second generation which, having acquired high educational degrees, is contributing significantly to Britain's progress and proving well that race and ethnicity are no detriments to advancement. It also brings to the fore the issues that the second generation of migrants, who are referred to as BBCDs (British born confused *desis*), has to deal with and which are totally diverse from the matters that bothered the earlier generation. The earlier migrants, rather than facilitating the integration of the youth into the alien culture, have only added to their troubles and forced them to raise questions about their identity, past, and religion. With their 'frozen-in-the-past' understanding of the religion, the elders create boundaries of orthodoxy around the youngsters to

prevent their ideational alienation from their roots and origin. Although religion and religiosity are seen only in the form of a backdrop to the other issues encountered by the youngsters, Atwal foregrounds their dissension and rebellion against the elders, attributed to those differences along with the futile attempts by the latter to keep them under their fold, using religion as a means to control.

The novel opens with the protagonist Mohan Bains driving from Southall towards his workplace, the Planning Office of the Councillor, where he works with his English colleagues Edward and Peter Murphy. At the very outset the readers are led into the prevalent atmosphere of racism that haunts the first and the second generation migrants alike. Edward quotes his dad as saying that these people have no self-respect: "Give them overtime and you can call them Paki as many times as you want." (my trans.; 71).

The assimilationist tendencies of the native westerners (and it is a total reversal of the word 'native' as Brah notices) (188), make them act un-host-like if not completely hostile in an attempt to force the migrants to abandon their archaic values. The first-generation migrants still have the solace of nostalgia and a kind of escape into a sense of loss, but it is the second-generation migrants who have to move out and deal with racism, on a day-to-day basis. They are compelled to devise strategies to tackle the problem and find answers to the questions hurled at them by life in the midst of alien cultures as we cannot talk of a single homogenous culture. Brah problematizes the notion of 'culture clash' and the resultant stress of identity-conflict experienced by the British-Asian generation. She points out that there are substantial differences between the various strata of the British society, so the notion of one British identity is faulty and its intermixing also does not always result in a clash (187). This adds to the confusion of the British-born Sikh youth pulling them in different directions with no anchor.

All the characters portrayed in the novel are Sikhism (although not adhering to the true definition of a Sikh) which is an originally latitudinarian and cosmopolitan religion, and can provide answers to most of the questions facing them only if know where to look. Migration does entail major socio-economic and cultural changes for the first generation of migrants but the generations born in the adopted land are exposed to entirely different influences in their foundational years. Brah accepts that such a situation has potential for conflict, although she feels that conflict is a strong word for inter-generational differences (42). Atwal's novel, *British Born Desi* is a strong case in point as it delineates very well the wide gap between the eastern values based on tradition and religion, and their dilution and disintegration in the western liberal atmosphere of the country, which the first generation had chosen to adopt to seek green pastures. The first generation migrants, who migrated in their early youth or middle-age, are well grounded in their faith and its related value-system but they have been so busy in improving their living standards that their lives have gone out of hands. The Sikh character, Pala Singh, in the novel compares the life of a migrant to a game, that has wins as well as losses. Atwal writes while referring to him:

Coming to England is a win. Reaching this level from three pounds is no less than a win. Came to this country, worked hard, bought a house, educated the children, ate good food, lived with respect among the people, they are all wins indeed. Why is he so tormented if he has faced a major loss in the case of his children? ... This gamble everyone has lost. Duman has lost, Gurmukh Singh has lost, Kara has lost, Sadhu Singh has lost and the great Khabi Khan Gurdial Singh has also lost (my trans.; 52).

It is projected as an almost ubiquitous phenomenon in the novel that the generations of Sikhs born and brought up there, to whom Britain is now home, are facing serious generational conflict with their parents. All the characters from the younger generations are shown to desert their parents for the sake of their personal relationships. They have been raised and educated in a liberal environment and want their personal freedom at every cost. Any interference or curtailment by the parents is simply intolerable for them. The first generation immigrants, who are still emotionally connected with their roots and have kept the past, however evasive, ensconced somewhere inside them, keep on making

ineffectual attempts to make their successive generations develop a bond with the lost homeland and its cherished culture and values. Initially, the efforts made in inculcating the faith and devotion to religion are limited to taking the children to the gurudwara on weekends and forcing them to compulsorily attend the Punjabi classes being held there. Neither an attempt is made to familiarize the children with their glorious Sikh past or the evolution of Sikhism, nor is the parental role model of a true, devout Sikh visible to them in their homes. What is required is the in-depth explanation of the universality and virtuosity of Sikh religion that actually started as a protest against the casteist and other corruptions that had crept into the socio-religious fabric of those times.

For the diaspora, as compared to land, language and culture which have to be necessarily left behind or altered respectively for integration in a foreign country, religion and faith are the easiest to carry along and preserve, and can be real sources of strength against the onslaughts of an alien culture, in a multicultural scenario. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood clearly spell out in the introduction to their edited book, *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, that as a counterforce to the “destructive power of xenophobia or fettered culture” minorities are claiming to be “recognised as different, to retain their right to practise distinctive cultures and religions” (Werbner and Modood 3). The solution, however, does not lie in the assertion of difference. British multiculturalism, according to Brah, has been carrying a problematic baggage. On the one side it is alleged to have a minoritising agenda and becoming a discourse about the “ethnic other” and on the other hand it was also perceived as a weapon of defence against the assimilative policies (226). Multiculturalism, with its deeply inscribed racialized discursive formations has been almost labelled a failure in Britain and there is much that it can gain from the non-essentialist statutes of Sikhism which was founded as a truly multicultural and pluralistic religion.

It is perturbing that especially in the case of the Sikh migrants, the genuine ethos of Sikhism seems to have been lost during the chase of materialistic dreams. In the novel under examination, the Sikh characters are from diverse economic strata. Numerous gurudwaras that have been enthusiastically established all over Southall are mentioned in the backdrop and various characters such as Parduman Singh, Pala Singh, Saudagar Singh, Manjit Kaur pay obeisance regularly at the gurudwaras which have turned out to hotbeds of monetary and sexual corruption. The sacred institution of gurudwaras offers political power to the affluent Sikhs, thus paving the way for intra-ethnic partitions among the Sikhs. Harjit Atwal refers to an instance of propaganda for gurudwara elections:

Listen boys, the Gurudwara elections are round the corner, this time we will not let the Doabias win, create more and more votes.... what is this matter about Doabias? They have had a monopoly over Gurudwara committee for many years, this time we will bring in a combined committee of the Sikhs from Malwa and Ambarsar.... Ever since the income to the Gurudwara has improved, the race for the hold over the committees has picked up momentum. (my trans.;302)

Rather than transmitting the actual philosophy of the religion to the younger generations, the Sikh diaspora are busy raising Sikh issues over Sikh symbols as turban or *kirpan* or focusing on anti-racist or immigration policy issues. Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla in their book *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community* comment on this aspect:

British Sikhs have failed to evolve national and local institutions that command legitimacy, collective action has been possible mainly on single-issue movements such as anti-racism, immigration policies, turban and kirpan campaigns, or, after 1984, pro-Khalistan, or, post-Khalistan, the politics of victimhood. Single-issue movements are popular as a mode of mobilization because they are more likely to reward a leader and a faction by offering the potential for leadership (95).

Understandably, the first-generation migrants have had to slog very hard for survival in a

country that was cold in every way and faced harder odds than the successive ones for whom the multicultural policies and the Race Relations departments formed by the government have at least ostensibly eased out racism matters on the surface. The stress and loss of self-worth, along with the crumbling marital relations faced by the parents, as also the desire to integrate with the adopted culture pushed them towards alcoholism and smoking habits which are regarded as sinful as per the tenets of Sikhism. One of the characters, Manjit Kaur is shown to have many grudges against her husband Jagga who does not pay attention to her feelings and despite her repeated entreating has not been able to quit smoking. The outcome is that their son Jeevanjot too has taken to smoking and even gone a step ahead and started taking drugs. Manjit Kaur has fallen into an extra-marital affair with Kartar and she cannot face her grown-up son as he too is aware of her relations outside marriage. Other female characters in the novel as Monica and Sunita also develop physical relations with rich and elderly men like Parduman Singh who is a father of five daughters and is depicted to be outwardly very religious and pious. These women with loose morals then blackmail the elderly men into getting them permanent residency of the country. Such parents and first set of migrants have neither been good role-models for their children nor have they been able to teach them the true meaning of Sikh religion which lies not in building gurudwaras and ritualistic bow in front of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* but to understand and imbibe the teachings of the Sikh Gurus to live life. The take-away for the young boy Mohan in the novel, for instance, is that the monetary offerings made at the gurudwara were payment for the *prashad*, the actual significance of which nobody cared to explain to the innocent child.

Deeply chagrined at the progressive moral degradation of their progeny, the parents then start opposing their alliances tooth and nail. The most shocking reality of the England of the time as depicted in the novel is that of forced marriages, elopements, and honour killings happening at an incredible frequency. As the parents feel the control slipping out of their hands, they resort to force in the name of religious orthodoxy and family honour and push their children into unwilling marital alliances and in extreme cases disown or murder their own children just as Sadhu Singh slits the throat of his daughter Sukhi with a sword because of her love affair, and even as Pala Singh attempts to kill his daughter Maninder. Pala Singh is delineated as a devout Sikh who visits the gurudwara daily but the simplest notions of humility and higher thinking “Sikhan da man neevan, mat uchi” which are part of the daily *Ardaas* (prayer) have not been adequately understood and followed by him and several others in the community. Sikhism is a latitudinarian religion that was founded by Guru Nanak on the principles of universal love, tolerance and welfare for all:

*Janoh Jot na pucho Jaati, Aage jaat na hai*” (Recognize the Lord's Light within all, and do not consider social class or status; there are no classes or castes in the world hereafter (SGGS 349) and *Eko pawan, maati sabh eka, sabh eka jot sabaiya*” (There is only one breath; all are made of the same clay; the light within all is the same (SGGS 96).

The spirit of service, universal brotherhood and compassion underlying the inclusive tradition of *Guru ka Langar* (Guru's kitchen) which transcends all man made distinctions, are the hallmark of Sikhism. It is certainly appalling to learn that the adherents of this permissive religion have spiritually deteriorated to this extent. The irony is, that some of these parents, due to the double consciousness of evaluating oneself with the yardstick of the 'other' are willing to accept their children's alliances with the *Goras* but would not hear of marrying them to Sikhs of *Tarkhan, Chamar or Nai* caste for the fear of earning a bad reputation, as the narrative brings out. On a positive note, in keeping with the claims made by Avtar Brah, Harjit Atwal also projects Dilraj Kaur, the not so well educated wife of Saudagar Singh, who displays rare foresight, and sensibly says, “Times have changed, now it is enough that the child should get married . . . If the girl elopes from home, we will face humiliation, our respect lies in marrying her off ourselves. These days, people are accepting so many inter-caste marriages.” (15, my translation)

Sikhism, the youngest of the world religions, was founded in a multicultural scenario and was

created to purge the existing religions of their communal and casteist taints, with its thrust on virtuous living. The spirit of the religion was and is indubitably egalitarian. The true followers of the valiant religion are well groomed to hold their own in the face of any challenge from other cultures or religious traditions. With the migration of Sikhs to the remotest corners of the world, Sikhism is on the track to fast become a world religion. It is of utmost importance therefore, that the Sikhs display the most upright character in accordance with its essential principles which are non-essentialist. If Sikh religion has to be preserved in its pristine form and glory, and properly passed on to the posterity, who are swiftly drifting away from it, despite being genuinely interested in learning about it and imbibing it, they have to be familiarized with its actual liberal foundation of opposing casteism and developing a *sahaj awastha* of tolerance and respect for other faiths which is the cornerstone of Sikhism, just as Mohan in the novel is keenly interested to know about the tenth Sikh Guru and even looks up the internet for details. His acquaintance Himmat Singh tells him: "You will not find this information in the books. You will have to study Sikhism deeply for the comprehension of these notions" (my trans.; 72).

The parent generation has created only a 'hollow halo' around their religion. The next generation of Sikh diaspora which is a sharp, receptive and open-minded, needs to be initiated into the religion right from childhood, familiarized with its origin, struggles and evolution. The concept of *Khalsa* which is vital to Sikhism requires to be properly explained to them. They need to be well aware that it is not only about the outer form of the Sikh but it is someone possessing the prescribed virtues and following those in his life, who deserves to assume the form of a *Khalsa* that is a true and pure Sikh. Once the virtuous way of living is practically demonstrated to them, the parents would not have to worry about inter-caste marriages as they would be elevating Sikhism to a still higher level, rising above caste-distinctions and creating more admirers and followers for Sikhism in the world. Harjit Atwal's narrative shows the virtues enshrined in Sikhism eventually winning, as the heroic father Sadhu Singh, who had killed his daughter, returns after the jail term and laments the devastation of his family and Paala Singh who had contemplated murdering his daughter Maninder and disowning his sons Mohan and Amar for inter-caste marriages, reconcile with the circumstances. Most of the autobiographical books or memoirs written by the next generation Sikh writers as Satnam Sanghera's *Marriage Material*, *The Boy with the Topknot*, Jaswinder Sanghera's *Shame* and *Shame Travels*, the Sikh character Hardjit in *Londonstani*, focus on such conflicts between different generations.

Atwal's treatment of the issue is along the lines of what Gurbhagat Singh, a renowned Sikh scholar, heralds in his book *Sikhism and Postmodern Thought*. He emphasises the desirable state of '*sahaja*' recommended for the Sikhs, which along with talking of the unity of the Supreme '*Ek Onkar*,' also advocates comfort with difference. About the future of Sikhism, he presages:

to remain relevant and to share the benefits of the global system, they (religions) have to evolve secondary otherness, which means reinterpreting their original features in new contexts. In other words, winning a place in the larger world now means not refusing translation. Untranslatability is to be interrogated and its obscurity minimized . . . General as the dialogical existence of particularities is the goal. General as leveling is to be resisted but resistance is to accompany a modificatory and unsealing self-hermeneutic. (147)

Sikhism, which was originally a cosmopolitan religion, with its central scriptural text, the living Guru comprising *Bani* of different Bhats, Bhagats and Gursikhs along with the Sikh Gurus, is definitely open to such translations, reinterpretations and comparative study with other religions as it will ensure permanent currency and relevance of its teachings across geographical frontiers. Static and rigid exegesis, with emphasis only on rituals and ceremonies, the kind of orthodoxy exhibited by the first generation migrants in *British Born Desi* will only drive the younger generations away from the religion.



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## Resistance to the Discourse of Subjugation: A Study of Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*

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### Abstract

*A piece of writing which challenges and exposes the hegemonic power structure, can be categorized as Resistance Literature. An autobiographical narrative seeks to register the personal experiences of the writer with the objective of correcting the false history, awakening the reader's consciousness and continuing the struggle against the oppressive powers. The present paper discusses Elaine Brown's A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story as a resistance narrative against racial discrimination, gender bias and Capitalism. Brown challenges the racial ideology prevalent in America through the detailed description of Police brutality. Starting with violent resistance, Brown shifts to Socialist Revolution to fight against the bigger monster of Capitalism. The paper also throws light on Elaine Brown's autobiography as a feminist text which exposes and resists the sexist and patriarchal ideology within the Black Panther Party.*

*Keywords: Hegemonic power structure, Resistance Literature, Gender bias, Socialist Revolution, Capitalism, Black Panther Party.*

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“Where there is Power, there is Resistance.”

(Michel Foucault)

Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* is an autobiographical resistance narrative. An autobiography narrates the personal experiences of the author in response to the public life. Resistance exhibited in the narrative concerns the narrator as well as the public and such a narrative poses challenge to the hegemonic power and to the distorted historical record. “The connection between knowledge and power, the awareness of the exploitation of knowledge by the interests of power to create a distorted historical record, is central to resistance narratives” (Barbara Harlow 116). Brown also records her odyssey as an activist of the Black Power Movement, through which she resists and questions the racist ideology. “Crucial omission of historical record” and “hegemonic assumptions” (Perkins 22) have been addressed in a challenging manner in this autobiographical resistance narrative.

Brown is an African American woman writer who has served as the only woman head and Chairwoman of the Black Panther Party, founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966. She ran for the Green Party's presidential nomination in 2008. Brown spent her early life in North Philadelphia and then shifted to Los Angeles and finally settled in Oakland. *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* was published in 1992. The issues like subjugation of women, color and class discrimination, misogyny and gender bias within the Black Panther Party and the impact of Capitalism in America have been documented and exposed vehemently. In 2017, this book was optioned by a major Production House for a feature film. Brown has authored another book, *The Condemnation of Little B: New Age Racism in America* (2002) which analyses the condition of African Americans in an age of neo-colonialism. She has also worked for the upliftment of poor and impoverished children by serving as Director and Founder of a non-profit education corporation Fields of Flowers.

In *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*, Brown gives an autobiographical account of her journey from an impoverished childhood to the position of the Head of the Black Panther Party

and narrates in detail her hardships which at the same time depict the condition of her own people. During her personal struggle, she gets acquainted with racial discrimination at a larger level. She also exposes the inner functioning of the Black Panther Party, which is ridden with misogyny and gender discrimination towards female members of the Party. She asserts that the Black Panther Party, which was created to render justice and provide equality to all, had actually failed to do so. The resistance is not just against the white hegemonic power structure but also against the patriarchal social set up of her own revolutionary Party.

*A Taste of Power* is a narrative of violent resistance. In the violent resistance, there is rebellion against the dominant power structure, with an equal use of weapons to cause bloodshed by the oppressor and the oppressed. The violent resistance shown by the Black Panther Party against White imperialism is discussed in detail as Brown herself was actively involved in the Party. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was founded in the year 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale to achieve “black liberation” (Carpini 190) through means unlike the non-violent strategy of earlier Civil Rights Movements. Initially, the Party's role was to provide self-defense to the oppressed Black Americans. The discrimination coupled with inequality and injustice led to the foundation of this Party. Their non-violent protests were countered by the violent reactions of the groups like the Ku Klux Klan. This led to the violent attacks in retaliation by the BPP too. This Party was also influenced by the leaders of the Allied Powers during the Second World War, according to them, “Violence was a legitimate tool to use in the fight for freedom” (Austin 4). With the assassination of the Civil Rights activist, Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, the Black Panther Party gained momentum. They started propounding that a non-violent approach cannot lead to the desired goal and they picked up guns to fight against racial discrimination and oppression.

The violent resistance becomes the core of Brown's autobiography as it does not start with the childhood hardships of the narrator but with the holding of powerful position of the Chairwoman of the BPP. She says, “I have all the guns and all the money, I can withstand challenge from without and from within. Am I right comrade?” (Brown 3). It sets the tone and tenor of the narration. She asserts in a firm manner that she is in a commanding position to deal with any kind of rebellion. Brown served the BPP as a dedicated member for seven years and then she became the Chairwoman in 1974. She kept the tradition of violent retaliation against the oppressors, started by her predecessors. She talks about the training of the members of the BPP to use violence, “There was, of course, our expensive arsenal of weapons, and the clandestine underground operating out of every chapter, Brothers trained in Vietnam and on the wretched streets of America who could and would use violence to carry out our political objectives” (Brown 15).

The autobiographer pens down several incidents where violence was absolutely necessary to counter the oppressor. Bunchy Carter, another member of the BPP, has been introduced as “the most dangerous Black man in Los Angeles, known as 'Mayor of Ghetto' (Brown 118). Bunchy gives the justification of using guns, when he says:

Weapons of words won't deal with the Man [the oppressor] I think history has taught us that. The Man is a beast, and he's armed against us. The only thing that will deal with the Man is the gun, and men [the oppressed black people] willing to use the gun. (Brown 120)

His words stress upon the urgent need of violent resistance as the non-violent one has already proved to be a failure.

The violent resistance, further, gets exhibited by the language used by the BPP against their enemy, which here is the Police. The term 'Pig' is used to address the Police, which tries to quell their agitation by force. Huey P. Newton, the co-founder of the Party, calls it a 'psychological warfare' in his autobiography *Revolutionary Suicide*. 'Pig' describes the true character of the policeman, who is “brutal, gross and uncaring” (Newton). Bunchy also refers to the brutality and oppression by the policemen, when he talks about declaring a war against the 'pigs.' The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) also finds this usage disrespectful and humiliating. It uses all its might to suppress this

resistance, which for them, is the seed of anarchy. Here, power and resistance are at play. As Foucault remarks, “Where there is power, there is Resistance...” (94-95). He sees both of them complementing each other in a manner of cause and effect. There are three basic premises of the traditional concept of Power which Foucault calls “Juridico-discursive.” Firstly, the “power is a possession,” secondly that “power flows downwards” and thirdly that “Primary function” of power is “repressive” (Dei et al.60). In *A Taste of Power*, the law enforcement agency (FBI) demonstrates its power to suppress the resistance of the BPP and renders them powerless.

Other than Bunchy Carter, Captain Franco, another member of the BPP has been mentioned in the autobiography. He is called “the second most dangerous man” in Los Angeles (Brown 139). Franco tells Brown about designing a special bullet by mixing garlic paste and gunpowder. He says, “If you hit a Pig with one of these bullets, he's dead-even if you hit him in the toe” (Brown 140). This violent resistance had created turbulence in the USA. The Director of the FBI at that time, J. Edgar Hoover, declared the BPP as the greatest threat to the internal security of the USA on June 15, 1969. He promised to exterminate it by the end of 1969. (Teltumbde)

The violent resistance of the BPP seems to have been influenced by international revolutionaries of that time. Brown provides ample evidence of this influence in her autobiography. Many of the BPP members, including Brown herself, are shown reading and referring to the works of Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, Lenin, Fidel Castro and Malcolm X. Brown refers to Mao's concept of change, when she takes charge as Chairwoman, saying: “As chairman Mao said 'Let a thousand revolutions bloom!' Change is good. We have to welcome change. Those who resist change will be swept away in the irrelevant duet of history!” (Brown 5). Other than these political revolutionaries, Brown was also greatly influenced by Franz Fanon's seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth*. She got acquainted with his revolutionary treatise during her association with the Black Student Alliance. Fanon's view on violence reverberates in the ideology of the BPP, when Fanon says, “[v]iolence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (qtd in Austin 90). The BPP's violent resistance to power destroys the hierarchy of being in an inferior position and asserts their capability to stand up to power.

However, this violent resistance by the BPP did not last long as strict measures were taken by the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINELPRO). Now, the focus gets shifted to the Socialist revolution as it includes educational and electoral reforms. Here, the influence of Karl Marx can be noticed as the class struggle and inequality in the society is measured on the basis of economic disparity. According to Marx, Revolutionary Socialism makes common people powerful in order to topple the Capitalists and brings social, economic and political change in the society. Brown points to the Socialist change in the USA to her fellow comrades in 1974: “I recommitted my life to the party, to fulfil its purpose of introducing socialist revolution in the United States...”. (Brown 16)

Brown gets introduced to the topics of Socialism and Capitalism in Los Angeles, when she comes in contact with Jay Richard Kennedy, a married White fiction writer and they fall in love. He is a staunch Socialist and keeps telling Brown about the ill effects of Capitalism and about the welfare schemes of Socialism during their years of intimate relationship. He calls Capitalism a cruel scheme which encourages a few to amass personal wealth and become rich and strong. These few wealthy people get to control the lives of poor people under the Capitalist regime. This makes Brown realize that due to Capitalism, social evils like “racism, discrimination and prejudice...develop and thrive” (Brown 92). With the intention of bringing an awakening amongst the oppressed people, the BPP sets aside the violent resistance and starts introducing Socialist programs by the end of 1969. Though the armed struggle had to continue, as Brown writes, “[b]ut the ultimate armed struggle is not the business of the vanguard. Our business is to develop and organize our people to carry out the revolution to achieve the subjective goal of freedom” (Brown 248).

The free community service, which was later termed as Survival Program by Newton,

includes the following important schemes; Free Breakfast for School Children, medical clinics, clothing, buses to prison, sickle cell anaemia research foundation, ambulance programs, etc (Carpini 192). The aim of having these programs, as Newton notes, “They (the survival programs) were designed to help the people survive until their consciousness is raised, which is only the first step in the revolution to build a new America” (Brown 249). Thus, the threats of Capitalism were conveyed to the common masses. As a result, the success of these survival programs became a real threat to the people in power as it was uniting underprivileged people and it could prove to be a dangerous weapon of destabilizing them. Consequently, the FBI and the police went out with full force to sabotage these programs by raiding the Breakfast for Children Program and ransacking food storage facilities.

Along with Revolutionary Socialism, the BPP plunged into electoral politics too, to raise the consciousness of Black people. After 1970, one of its leaders, Eldridge Cleaver ran to become President under the Peace and Freedom Party. Similarly, Bobby Seale became the candidate for the office of Mayor of Oakland (Brown 314). The Black people were made aware of their voting rights, and the issues related to their day-to-day lives were discussed during the campaigns. It created a big difference, the suppressed people started becoming conscious of reclaiming their Black identity. “They were becoming citizens, ready to change the nature of things, to install Panthers where there had been only Republicans for last three decades” (Brown 324). Seale and Brown were nominated as the candidates for the office of the Mayor of Oakland and member of the City Council, respectively. They promised to solve the problems of people and people trusted them with their votes. When Brown, declared her candidacy for a seat on the City Council of Oakland for the second time, she was endorsed by Alameda County Central Labor Council. It was a big setback for the Republicans. Though she didn't win this time too, but 44% of vote share boosted Brown's confidence. She was happy that people were getting united and were awakening towards the exercise of their rights.

As the Chairwoman of the BPP, Brown worked hard to gather support for a politician like Jerry Brown, who was an anti-racist, and as a result he won as the Governor of California against Ronald Regan. Thus, the BPP worked continuously to protect the rights of Black people by supporting those candidates who promised to uplift the condition of the Black people. Eventually, with the support of the BPP, Lionel Wilson became the first Black Mayor of Oakland. The BPP, with its survival programs and active participation in electoral process, made significant contribution to the awakening of the Black people's consciousness towards the evils of a Capitalist system. A strong resistance was built against the Capitalist powers that be.

In her autobiography, Brown also deals in detail with the issue of gender discrimination in the American society in general and within her Party, in particular. The fact of the matter is that she had to quit a Party, which she built with her sweat and blood, because of insufferable gender discrimination against women. It is highly ironic and condemnable that a Party, which was originally established to fight against inequality and injustice, was rejected because of its incapability to stand up to that standard. Brown records numerous instances of sexism and misogyny experienced by her, from the period of her stay in her mother's house to the Chairmanship of the BPP. She recounts the days at 25<sup>th</sup> Norris Street of North Philadelphia, where boys controlled the whole neighbourhood. “They walked in packs and generally terrified everybody with their very presence” (Brown 41). Girls felt unsafe as they could force themselves upon them whenever they wanted. In one such incident, Brown was forced to stay and dance at her friend Carol's place by a gang of boys, who had entered her house without any reason. They switched off the lights and played loud music. They started groping her in the dark. She escaped the rape just because, the leader of the gang realized that she belonged to their area and left her calling “Avenue bitch.” Brown was lucky to escape this sexual assault but this incident exposes the condition of hapless girls. They were forced to remain within four walls to avoid such incidents, otherwise the frequent cases of molestation and rape were happening without any check.

Brown throws ample light on the disadvantageous situation of women, which she

experienced herself not just as a child but also as a grown up in the BPP. The sexist attitude of a member of Central Committee, named Earl Anthony, is revealed in the narrative. At one point of time, he tells Brown that a true sister should feel happy to sleep with a Brother (Brown 115). This kind of attitude of the male Panthers demonstrates how female Panthers were used as sexual objects by the male counterparts in the BPP. Along with the ten-point program, females were expected to perform an additional duty of satisfying the sexual appetite of the male Panthers. This deep-rooted sexism has been exposed on several occasions in the autobiography. Brown asserts herself with some other female members of the Party and says, “We should not be rewarding any brother with our bodies, in the bedroom or in the kitchen” (Brown 192). The unfair treatment of female Panthers enrages Brown, violent treatment of women in the BPP is commonplace. Brown recounts not only the violent assault by Eldridge Cleaver on his wife but she also recollects her personal experience with underground leader Steve, when her life was threatened by him.

When Brown became the Chairwoman of the BPP due to the BPP's co-founder's escape to Cuba in 1974 in the face of murder charges, she became a crusader not only of the Black men's liberty but also of Black women's equality. She advocated that Black women should also be given equal opportunity to walk shoulder to shoulder with men, then only the real 'Black power' will prevail. She recruited more and more women to the important positions on the basis of their merit. Her objective was to bring liberty to the Blacks that included black women in particular as she believed that freedom will be lop-sided without it. She asserted, “I would claim my womanhood and my place. If that gave rise to my being labelled a “man-hating lesbian, feminist bitch,” I would be the most radical of them” (Brown 368). She succeeds in bringing a lot of change in her Party during her tenure as the Chairwoman but it does not last long. After Newton's return, the Brothers started pointing to the Party's weak position under female leadership. Newton also encouraged gender discrimination. The meritorious and hardworking female member Regina was ill-treated by the Brothers and acts of indiscipline by Newton's bodyguard were overlooked. On seeing such rampant misogyny in the Party, Brown decided to leave. The safety and wellbeing of her daughter were of paramount concern to her. Since parting ways from the Panthers in 1977, Brown has focused on issues including the criminalization of poverty, mass incarceration, and the concrete needs of oppressed communities, such as her work as CEO of Oakland & the World Enterprises, which provides support for formerly incarcerated people and others barred from economic opportunities to build businesses and become self-sufficient.

Thus, *A Taste of Power* is a narrative which questions and challenges the hegemonic White power structure through violent resistance in the beginning and then changes its strategy to Socialist Resistance to attain its goal of raising the consciousness of Black people. It also resists against the discriminatory behaviour towards women by highlighting the suppression and subjugation of women in one way or the other in the BPP and in the American society as well. This autobiography can also be called a political tool which represents the injustices and atrocities committed against the marginalized people of the Black community, and within it, the Black women. By forming the Black Panther Party, the oppressed Black people show solidarity to wage a war against their oppressor till they achieve the goal of getting liberation. Brown intends to alter the consciousness of masses by disrupting the status quo in such a way that will lead to progressive social transformation. Through various modes of resistance, Brown offers corrective discourse at multiple levels in her autobiography. She uses her writing effectively as a weapon to question the powerful and, thus, seeks to make them accountable. In her recent conversation with Rob Johnson, president of the Institute for New Economic Thinking (INET), in a free-ranging podcast covering America's current racial reckoning, her social justice work in Oakland, California, she observes that the pandemic has simply served to expose the reality of a country that has institutionalized the oppression of black people and people of every other color, including whites, who happen to be poor. While she finds hope in the rage triggered by George Floyd's murder and is “glad to see people are at least awake, if



not necessarily conscious of what needs to be done.” She feels “there are some lessons that *Black Lives Matter* has taken from the Panthers—some cautionary tales. There’s a tendency in the *Black Lives Matter* movement to be less centralized, to be a leaderless movement. Some of that might be as a result of what was one of the great downfalls of the Panthers” but sounds prophetic in her warning that “it has the potential for change only if it comes to be developed into an organized force that is going to start the long, hard march of dismantling, trying to dismantle, those institutions that have kept black people oppressed since the beginning of this country in Jamestown.”

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## Pure/Fallen: Understanding the Discursive Construction of Identity in Binodini Dasi's *My Story and My Life as an Actress*

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### *Abstract*

*Individuals are forced to adjust themselves as per the demands of the contemporary society in which they strive to create an identity out of the available choices. Foucault too rejected the idea of the sense of being as according to him identities are constructed in a particular context as a result of texts, discourses and institutions. The present paper is an attempt to explore the similar discursive construction of identity in Binodini Dasi who was constantly dwindling between the binary oppositions of actress/prostitute, fame/disgrace, and pure/fallen. A close reading of Binodini Dasi's self-narrative text, My Story and My Life as an Actress reveals how identity is not possessed rather constructed under the influence of social factors.*

*Keywords: Fallen, Pure, Identity, Discursive Construction, Autobiography*

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The idea of identity becomes intriguing for the person who confronts the dilemma between many possibilities and contemporary social existence. Diverse experiences, diverse social roles, and different milieu can leave a person perplexed about the real identity. Hence, the new understanding of identity does not provide it a definition. It is not simply “Who I am?”, it is not possessed, rather it is constructed while living with a group of people following certain traditions, customs and ideologies, and choosing something from the options available. The present paper focuses on the discursive formation of identity as a result of the dualities in Binodini Dasi's self-narrative texts, namely *Amar Katha (My Story, 1912)* and *Amar Abhinetri Jiban (My Life as an Actress 1924-25)* translated from Bangla into English by Rimli Bhattacharya. The objective is to explore the unpinning concerns of her split self resulting in a dualism between private and public personality and between life and art. Simultaneously leading the life of an actress who is appreciated on the stage by the masses and a concubine who is detested by the same public, Binodini Dasi found herself caught in the dilemma of creating her identity. This discursive performance led her to write the self-narratives in order to redefine the notions of gender and to position herself within the social realm. The bodily discourse on the stage of a pure woman and the social reality of a fallen woman resulted in the making and unmaking of her identity.

Binodini Dasi (1863–1941), popularly known as Nati Binodini, was a Calcutta-based, Bengali-speaking renowned actress and thespian. She started acting at the age of twelve and ended by the time she was twenty-three. The year 1884 actually created a furor in the history of the 19th century colonial Bengali theatre, as it was the first time that a woman, a public woman performed on stage, and that too the role of a virtuous woman in a religious play *Chaitanyaleela*. Though Binodini had predecessors like Elokeshi, Golapsundari, Ganga Baiji, Khetromoni, Rajkumari and others performing on stage before her, it was her powerful performance that made her the queen of theatre for many years, superseding all other actresses of her time. Despite the fact that she was very young as an artist, she very confidently presented herself in front of her senior actors.

Dasi, living in the suburbs of Calcutta, hailed from a family of prostitutes. She lost her brother at a very tender age and that gave her mother anguish and trauma. Later on, Binodini could not put her only girl child Shakuntala to school. The intense social exclusion she faced tore her apart.

She lost her daughter too who came in her life as bliss. Her subjugation under Gurmukh Rai did not allow her to make herself free from the degraded status of a prostitute. Whatever she achieved as an actress is effaced by her identity of a low-born harlot. Her leaving the theatre is also a sort of silent rebellion:

The concubines, like us, have to endure many ups and downs; still, they have their limits. But my destiny has always been very harsh . . . Our destination has remained erroneous, whenever we desire to follow the right path, the wrong comes in the way. (*My Life* . . . 34)

In the text taken for study, Binodini Dasi mentions her entry into the theater. Ganga Baiji, a musician who came to live with them was the one who introduced her to the realm of theatre:

When I was nine, a singer came to reside in our apartment . . . She was an orphan, my mother and grandmother used to love her as their daughter. Her name was Ganga Baiji. Later, she became a famous singer in the Star Theatre. . . . We became friends and used to call each other 'Golap'. (*My Story* 63)

Binodini started taking her music lessons from her. Ganga Baiji used to be visited by many people and all of them were surprised to see Binodini's talent at that tender age of nine. She recalls:

My new life began to be put together from this time onwards. In those years of childhood, that luxurious new world, the instruction I received and the work—everything—seemed to be new to me. I did not understand anything, I did not know anything; but whatever was taught to me I followed faithfully to the best of my ability. (*My Story* 65)

Under the guidance of Girish Chandra Ghosh, Binodini with the desired freedom and education became “Flower of the Native Stage.” Playing the epic characters like Sita, Draupadi, Radhika, Uttara and many more, she projected the image of pure women. Though outwardly leading a successful life, she was inwardly facing the traumas and took a sudden retirement from the stage. At one place, in *My Story* (1998) she expresses:

I had taken retirement from the stage for various reasons and had been living a life of joy and sorrow in isolation. The chief one of these many reasons was that I was extremely hurt by the deceptions that were practised on me, when after having tempted me in various ways, I was used to get something done. (*My Story* 106)

The stage seemed to provide “space” to Binodini who was otherwise a socially marginalized woman hailing from a prostitute quarters. In her quest for a new identity she forgot that the “individuals are highly under the control of external factors, they indispensably become heavily dependent on these factors even though they believe that they have developed their authentic self-identities.” (Göncüoğlu 1016)

The politics of theatre during the colonial period on one hand and the social and nationalistic ideologies on the other did not allow the women artists to voice their concerns. In such a scenario when Binodini was struggling for her identity on the stage in Star theatre, she faced deception and treachery from the fellow artists and had to leave the theatre.

Although “free” to encounter the public sphere, they were denied the degree of social acceptability/status that was otherwise available to the then upper middle class “New Women. (Roy 514)

The fancy and religious narratives on the stage represented the ironic reflection on the structural oppression which these women actresses encountered. The stage actually came out to be an ambiguous space—the attractive as well as deceptive.

Discursive formation of identity is governed by certain rules. It lacks coherence and unity. It is the feeling of denial, anger and ambition that receives an entirely different social gaze that eventually results in discursive identity. Both denial and acceptance are part of the same rubric of the construction of identity. On one side there is an independent being and on the other, he is shaped by certain dreams, fears and desires which he encounters while growing up in the society.

Identity, in this respect, like Derrida's view of lingual communication, seems to be like a

narrative viewed and interpreted in plenty of different ways with continually deferred signified identities that tend to change as they will be the signifier identities for new signified identities depending on individual, time, milieu and cultural story. (Göncüoğlu 1025)

A similar discursive formation of identity can be observed in case of Binodini. The theatre world of colonial Calcutta was also marred by treachery, betrayal, loss and exploitation. Nati became a victim of the same. Though she made every possible effort to carve a niche for herself as a performer, she couldn't come out of her hyphenated existence of prostitute-actress.

To abandon one shelter and attain another has been our perpetual law yet, in this condition I was very disturbed. People may laugh at a concubine's guilt consciousness or pain. But, if, they consider it gravely, they may surely decipher the woman in us. (*My Life*.... 11)

For approximately two thousand years the dancing girls in India have remained the entertainers for the males. While contributing to dance, music and theatre these were the women who used to act as courtesans too. These women for over a long period enjoyed the bitter fame by dwindling between the gratification which they received because of being free from the social restrictions and the self-negation which they faced while satiating the physical appetite of males. However, these were the women who led to the emergence of theatre and cinema. Becoming the custodian of art, they got alternative “space” in theatre.

Theatre provided an alternative “space” for them, thereby imploring them to dream, to nurture their creativity and live up to better expectations. (Roy 516)

In Bengal at that time, the educated women of the households couldn't come on the stage, so the prostitutes were hired to cater to the public interest. A metamorphosis in the contents of the plays being produced in Colonial Bengal also took place because of the emergent middle class who questioned the vulgarities and eventually gave rise to “a culture that was infused with traditional Hindu religiosities merged with a look back into the puranas”. (Mukhupadhyay 36) The public used to enjoy the roles of “pure” women as performed by the harlots on the stage, yet there was a common dissent on the issue:

No doubt religious dramas like *Proladh Charitra* and *Chaitanya Lila* are calculated to elevate the human character, but when we consider the vicious and immoral persons who represent these characters, we are overpowered with a feeling of disgust. It has been suggested more than once that women of the town should not be allowed to act in those theatres . . . These women are so many pitfalls for our young men, and should be removed from the theatres as speedily as possible. (Roy 518)

Lowly, ignorant, actress, as well as a concubine, Binodini Dasi was loved at the stage but hated in her real life, and was trying to position herself between self-worth and no-worth. The life-long engagements on the stage give the impetus to the “self” to raise the question of “I”. Yet free to enjoy the public sphere, she was denied social acceptance.

One cannot help noting the deliberate contrasts between form and content and the contradictions in Binodini presenting herself as actress-bhadramahila writer: both as the brilliant actress as well as the wretched fallen woman. The question of Binodini Dasi's identity embodies, to some extent, the range of reception to the new form and the new conventions of representation—the novelty of theatre. (Bhattacharya 38)

The fame and glory on one side and the following void on the other made the actresses enter into the realm of oblivion. Though she is respected as a benevolent woman and as an actress, at the same time, she was kept out of the section of respectable women. This new binary between male/female, outside/inside, the home/the world, and spiritual/physical is the result of nationalistic discourse. Another binary which was seen in Bengal at that time was between *Bhadramahila* (a woman of respectable upbringing) and *barbonita* (a public woman). Women belonging to respectable upbringing in the garb of veils were excluded from theatre. The public woman was considered a commodity by most of the men whose seduction was savoured by many but admitted by none. Binodini in such a scenario ruptured the traditions by emerging as a voice for all such public women.

She entered into theatre where men used to play the roles of women and received accolades. However, the “. . . disillusioned *bhadraloks* of Bengal wanted to give a counter narrative to this carefree and often vulgar exhibitionism of the Western woman and was thus abhorrent to the portrayal of virtuous characters by prostitutes who in reality were home breakers” (Mukopadhyay 38). Binodini because of being the daughter of a prostitute also became a part of this vicious circle and eventually left the theatre when she was at the peak of her career which depicts that she did not take the extreme position to oppose the hegemonic patriarchal discourse; rather she tried to position herself under the garb of social respectability. Inside the theatre walls, she was virtuous, but outside she was a seductress. She even performed all the rituals expected from a virtuous woman, but the so-called enlightened Bengali society did not allow her to change herself. Even the name “Nati” given to her is under question:

*Nati*, in 19th century writings in Bangali, increasing became a comment on sexuality rather than a primary indicator of occupational identity. (Dandapat 144)

She never used that name for herself. The name represents Binodini as a sexual commodity fallen from the ideologies rather than representing her as a dancer. Her self dwindling between the actress/woman identity, gave priority to actress as she sacrificed her womanhood in front of Gurmukh Roy in order to protect the actress residing in her. The construction of Binodini's self is shaped by the society's norms and discourses. Foucault's theory of Discourses stresses on the fact that history of a society is shaped by the power relations of that society, in this case so was the case with Binodini.

Writing an autobiography by a woman is in itself an expression of her rebelliousness as well as self-revelation. Binodini is a marginalised woman by class, gender and profession. In her autobiography, she reveals how males are responsible for the vicious circle of which the women unknowingly become a part. Her writing shows her subversion as well as resistance towards the hegemonic practices of Bengali culture and society. She “. . . questions and shows her resistance to the prevailing beliefs of her times and asserts her own set of beliefs” (Vyas 102). And in doing so she redefines her individuality.

Even when she is compared with new women, it is found that the new women write more about their survival tactics adopted by them in the contemporary society instead of emerging as rebels like Dasi. Even for Kamala Das writing an autobiography appears to be a part of survival strategy. She was writing so that she could forget; so that she could do away with humiliation, public mockery. The assertiveness and the bold “I” prevalent throughout the autobiography of Dasi is rarely seen in new women.

On many occasions she is found to be severely critical of the Bengali society she has held responsible for her misfortunes whereas her enlightened predecessors, even if victimised by the customs of the society, could not imagine to do so from their pigeonhole assigned by “their society which demanded womanly virtues like self-sacrifice, submission, devotion etc.” (Das 202) Expressing her anger against the hypocrisy of society, she holds patriarchy responsible for this poor lot of women. Her voicing the protest is quite evident here:

Like my own tainted and polluted heart, I have tainted these pure white pages with writing.

But what else could I do! A polluted being can do nothing other than pollute! (*My Story* 107)

Her autobiography, the genre which can also be defined as “self in performance,” has somehow given her the impetus to voice her gendered subjectivity which further talks about a larger feminine self. Though she does not belong to the category of radical feminists, yet the voice of this 'Subaltern' cannot be ignored. While writing this autobiography, she has ruptured the traditions:

Since the male-oriented society makes women define themselves according to the social norms that are male-centered, women have used literature as a medium to voice their thoughts and portray the hurdles they face as women. (Kaur 44)

Women have always been excluded from literature. Even when they started writing their autobiographies, their texts were also categorized as the confession of their personal fears, struggles and emotions instead of telling the tales of success and achievements as in the case of their male-

counterparts. It is true that women's lives are imbricated within societies, tied to others relational. Glimore proffers women autobiographies as a disruptive mode through which women writers move from the position of object into the subjectivity of self-representational agency (255). So when men write their autobiographies, they talk about themselves as exemplary individuals having unitary, coherent and successful lives. Ironically, the autobiographies written by women are neglected and do not get due appreciation. Binodini could foresee the same and had expressed her concern too:

I have written this, however laughable people may find my inner pain . . . because I have no more fear of being ridiculed by people. It is they who have cured me of such a fear. Their censure or praise, all is as one to me. (*My Story* 107)

However, the universal “I” in the text, gives it significance. The bold, logical and assertive tone of Dasi cannot be ignored.

The lived experiences of Binodini as expressed in her autobiography have somehow helped her in constituting her identity, though at certain places, she devalues her self-worth and defines herself as “fallen,” “sinner,” “inferior” and “to be beheld.”

Autobiography has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness – women, black people, working-class people – have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a “personal” voice, which speaks beyond itself. (Anderson 104)

The very act of narrating one's own life also creates an illusion of identity which actually is enveloped in the multiple layers of social, political, cultural and performative strictures.

Thus, the purpose is to explore the social, sexual and emotional exploitation of women while constructing the identity of the “self” under the patriarchal and colonial regime. The crucial significance of the “Other” cannot be ignored during this process of creation of identity. To fill her void, Binodini sacrificed her life for theatre but could not come out of the pressures of patriarchy. Dwindling between the dualities of fallen and pure, she led the life of actress-prostitute. Her autobiography shows the discursive formation of her identity as well as her subjectivity based on Foucauldian discourse in which an individual constitutes knowledge under some dominance of power and social realities.

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# Negotiating the Ambivalent Nature of Colonial Self-fashioning in the Autobiographies of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru

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## *Abstract*

*This paper shall attempt to unravel the ambivalent nature of colonial self-fashioning and identity formation in the autobiographies of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. A study of subjectivity in Indian self-narratives remains incomplete without taking up this major aspect. Two of the most significant autobiographies of pre-independence India, Mahatma Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) and Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936) are the primary texts chosen for this study. One of the main objectives of this article will be to explore how exposure to colonial education, literature, law made Nehru and Gandhi imaginatively create a part of their subjectivity and identity—the complexities of conforming as well as contesting or subverting Anglicised manners and thoughts. Drawing on the postcolonial and Marxist perspectives of theorists like Gauri Vishwanathan, Homi Bhabha and Leela Gandhi it shall strive to negotiate hybrid, ambivalent colonial identities in the selected autobiographies.*

*Keywords: autobiography, self-fashioning, ambivalent colonial identity, hybridity.*

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## **Introduction and Objectives**

English language, literature, colonial lifestyle and education greatly influenced the identity construction of many Indians in the pre-independence period. But whether the nature of such an impact led to an ideological shift or it marked the way for hybridity is highly debatable. This major aspect undoubtedly forms the part and parcel of Indian English literature. Postcolonial theorists and critics like Gauri Vishwanathan, Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmed have long been theorizing about it. The fact that most of the writers like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru either wrote in English or got their books translated in English, taking refuge in its culture and belief system makes the analysis necessary. Mahatma Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) and Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936) are two of the most prominent autobiographies where a mingling of both Indian and colonial ways can be witnessed. This paper aims to identify and critically analyse the problematics of the different facets of English self-fashioning and colonial identity construction by these autobiographers. Meenakshi Mukherjee in the essay “Nation, Novel, Language” strives to find out in Indian English novels evidences of ambivalence and self-reflexivity of the Indian writers towards English (Mukherjee 3). She chooses to deal only with the genre of the Indian English novel. But a similar lens can inevitably be applied to study autobiographies like that of Nehru's and Gandhi's, which flourished around the same time. To interpret how English influence rendered their autobiographical subjectivities hybrid, ambivalent and paradoxical shall be the major focus here.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Gauri Vishwanathan perceived colonialism and English literature as ideological weapons used by the British for imperial expansion, whereas theorists like Homi Bhabha who reflected on the hybrid, ambivalent nature of English influence and the significance of appropriation. Gauri

Vishwanathan's *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989) interpreted the ideological nature of English education and literature in India. She drew heavily from Antonio Gramsci's concept of ideological state apparatuses and characterized ideology as a form of masking. Social control and exercise of colonial power were, according to her, the main motives behind the introduction of English literature and curriculum. Vishwanathan argues in line with Bruce McCully and David Kopf as to how the growth of Indian nationalism and Bengal Renaissance owed itself to western thought and education. She writes, "The affirmation of an ideal self and an ideal political state through a specific national literature--English literature--is in essence an affirmation of English identity" (Vishwanathan 20). She traces the origin and growth of English literature and the political motive since the Chartered Act of 1913, through the policies of Charles Grant, Warren Hastings, Lord Cornwallis, William Bentinck and such other political leaders in order to propagate religious and moral ideas. Vishwanathan attempts to give a panoramic view of the political scenario which aimed at producing Anglicised professionals from upper-class and middle-class Indians through English education.

Countering the above mentioned arguments, Homi Bhabha, however, came up with a postmodern approach to English literature, colonial authority and its appropriation in the Third World. In the chapter "Signs Taken for Wonders" from his book *Location of Culture* (1994) he argues the colonial presence and authority to be ambivalent and hybrid—always a two way traffic rather than a one way imposition. "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (Bhabha 159). He thus talks of a kind of subversion and fissure that accompany colonial literature or authority. In the words of Shai Ginsberg who very lucidly explains Bhabha's concept in his article "Signs and Wonders: Fetishism and Hybridity in Homi Bhabha's 'The Location of Culture'", "Bhabha tries to discover the locations in which control over the discourse slips away from the colonizer opening up gaps and fissures in which resistance to colonial power can be produced" (Ginsberg 232). Bhabha therefore theorizes an impossibility of identity by denying Said's idea of binary and contrapuntality. Homi Bhabha's theorization of 'colonial mimicry' in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" stands very pertinent in the study of English self-fashioning and colonial identity construction in Indian English autobiographies as most of the writers at different stages try to imitate or appropriate the colonial ways. Similar to his concept of hybridity, 'colonial mimicry' too accompanies shades of ambivalence, partial representation and disavowal towards the colonial authority. "The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (126), writes Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*.

Drawing on the above discussed theorizations, Leela Gandhi presents a treatise *Affective Communities: Anti-colonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship* (2005) putting forth the voice of the anti-imperialist from among the stereotyped imperialists. She advances an account of the other side of both the colonizer and the colonized—the grounds of friendship and mutual collaboration. Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* (1983) was also one of the first works to break the one way relationship between the colonizer and the colonized which is usually taken for granted. These three postcolonial formulations of the theorists Gauri Vishwanathan, Homi Bhabha and Leela Gandhi will form the yardstick for textual analysis in this article.

## English Education and Law

Gauri Vishwanathan in the chapter "One Power, One Mind" deals at length with the use of literature and law employed as ideological tools by the English rulers in late nineteenth century India. As she writes, "The connection between literature and the profession of law is an old and powerful one in Indian education" (Vishwanathan 92). She notes how James Mill, Charles Trevelyan and others wanted to induce a sense of duty and responsibility in Indians through the professional training in law. Moreover, she mentions of the Hunter Commission of 1882 which perceived the role of law as the

hallmark of European self-fashioning and English identity formation by the Indians. The importance and trend of studying law established by them seems to recur in many Indian personalities like Gandhi, Nehru, Cornelia Sorabji among others. The acceptance of judicial roles also required a prior knowledge of European literature, thoughts and manners, which is why many Indians took refuge in English literature. Choosing and idealising England as the best and the only place for higher studies was yet another mode of self-fashioning or imagining an English identity.

The discourse about going to England for higher studies is overtly evident in case of Gandhi. It clearly shows the overpowering influence of English education system and administration which demanded a prior knowledge of law. The trend of English self-fashioning gets highlighted from the instance of Gandhi's family friend Mavji Dave advising his father: "Think of that barrister who has just come back from England. How stylishly he lives! He could get the Diwanship for asking. I would strongly advise you to send Mohandas to England this very year" (Gandhi 44). Gandhi had to join the bar despite the fact that he initially wanted to go for the medical profession, which was disliked by his father. The wisest thing during that age was considered to become a barrister. He even understood *The Bhagwat Gita* in terms of the English law.

Same is also observed in the case of Jawaharlal Nehru. Talking about the popularity law then had as a profession in the then India Nehru writes about his father, "Naturally he looked to the law as that was the only profession then, in India, which offered any opening for talent and prizes for the successful" (Nehru 4). Following the prevalent trend of studying in England, Nehru also went to Cambridge and Harrow for his higher studies. On his return to India, he was naturally drawn towards his father's profession, that is, the Bar.

However, although both Nehru and Gandhi tried to fashion themselves as the English gentleman by studying law, their autobiographies reveal how both of them ultimately ended up dissatisfied, leaving their profession. Nehru joined Indian politics by being a part of the Congress while Gandhi ended up being a social worker cum political leader. Instances of fissures, ambivalence and disavowal can thus be witnessed here. This very important instance echoes Bhabha's assertion that colonial presence is always ambivalent—a split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference.

### Hybrid and Ambivalent Colonial Identities

It is evident from Gandhi's autobiography that although he went to England for his higher studies, he was always of the opinion that "in all Indian curricula of higher education there should be a place for Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic, besides of course the vernacular" (Gandhi 27). Hindu ways, literature and traditions appealed to Gandhi the most. The role of *The Ramayana* and *The Bhagwat Gita* in his identity formation is really vital. Again at one instance Gandhi relates his hatred for European self-fashioning and Christianity, "Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one's own clothes did not deserve the name (Gandhi 42). At another instance in London, Mr. Coates tried to convince Gandhi about the Christian idea of sin and redemption, but the latter completely detested such a theory of atonement. His dialogue with Gandhi over Hinduism-Christianity strife and the superiority of Christianity brings to light the utter condescending attitude of Coates. Through a conflicting dialogue over religion, Gandhi in fact gains more confidence and affirmation of his own faith in Hinduism through his defence of the same. An elaborate description of Mr. Coates' stance became important in order to redefine Gandhi's take on religious beliefs. A hybrid self-fashioning clearly visible as colonial English presence is considered as ambivalent by him. Meat eating was forced upon him in England but he could not give up his vow he had made to his mother. This reflects Homi Bhabha's concept of the hybrid where the process of domination is reversed through disavowal (Bhabha 112). The English style of clothing that he had appropriated in England got subverted on his return to India when he took refuge in *dhotis*.

Gandhi's worldview was deeply shaped by his readings of Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, Ruskin's *Unto This Last* Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*. His high regards for Hinduism grew through a reading of Max Muller's *India—What Can It Teach Us?* and the translation of the *Upanishads* by the Theosophical Society. Some other religious books by English writers like that of Washington Irving's *Life of Mahomet and His Successors* and Carlyle's panegyric on the Prophet heightened Muhammad's position in Gandhi's eyes. Thereafter, Gandhi's perceptions on vegetarianism was created in England through a reading of English writers like Henry Salt and Howard Williams. The books on vegetarianism he read changed his worldview and he began constructing his identity as a vegetarian for life. The dialogues on vegetarianism in England greatly attracted Gandhi who then took to reading some of the best testaments on dietetic studies like Howard William's *The Ethics of Diet* or Dr. Anna Kingsford's *The Perfect Way in Diet*. This very fact needs a reference to Leela Gandhi who in *Affective Communities* (2006) analysed Gandhi's belief as to how vegetarianism would aid India politically. She argues on the English vegetarians being anti-colonial, humanitarian and socialistic, which in turn strengthened the British-Indian bond. Moreover, Mr Saunder's help in Calcutta, Mr and Mrs Gladstone and service, celibacy, the support of the Englishmen like Dr. Booth, Mr. Escombe in Boer war, as Gandhi writes, led to his friendships with many Englishmen. The chapter "European Contacts" highlights the fluid and hybrid nature of English self-fashioning in case of Gandhi. These instances show the colonial presence as a two way affair rather than a one sided ideological dominance.

When it comes to Jawaharlal Nehru, his Westernized way of life is evident since his childhood, as his father Motilal Nehru had always been an admirer of English lifestyle, manners and thoughts, to the extent that "he had a feeling that his own countrymen had fallen low and almost deserved what they had got" (Nehru 5). Annie Besant, F.T. Brooks were the good Englishmen who broadened Nehru's horizons in numerous ways, be it through science or religion. The then Chief Justice of Allahabad, Sir Grimwood was an Englishman who sought for friendly relationship between the British and the Indians, as was admired by Nehru. He in fact became a member of the Theosophical Society only at the age of thirteen under the overwhelming influence of the famous British socialist and theosophist Mrs Annie Besant whose powerful oration moved Nehru in many ways. Being yet another anti-colonial Englishman and a part of the "affective communities", the missionary C. F. Andrews' works like *Independence—the Immediate Need* greatly moved Nehru. As he writes, "It was wonderful that C.F. Andrews, a foreigner and one belonging to the dominant race in India, should echo that cry of our inmost being" (Nehru 723). Nehru often felt very privileged about a slice of his persona being Anglicised. Nehru, under the influence of F.T. Brooks became well versed in English literature from his childhood itself. Apart from children's literature, Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, H.G. Wells, Mark Twain, K. Jerome, Du Maurier met his love for extensive reading of English language texts. Moreover, Nehru's socialistic bent of mind owes itself to a reading of G.B. Shaw and Bertrand Russell. As Gauri Vishwanathan significantly notes, "In 1844 Lord Hardinge, governor-general from 1844-1848 passed a resolution assuring preference in the selection for public office to Indians who had distinguished themselves in European literature," (Vishwanathan 89). The validation Nehru got from many Englishmen made him flaunt this very fact of being a part of the civilized English society as he asserts while recounting his experience in a jail:

Even for Englishmen I was an individual and not merely one of the mass, and, I imagine, the fact that I had received my education in England and especially my having been to an English public school, bought me nearer to them. Because of this, they could not help considering me as more or less civilized after their own pattern. . . (Nehru 362)

In the jail itself, owing to his privileged identity, Nehru was given access to all kinds of books on current topics, religion and novels. He at another place relates how he owed his identity formation to the English and England:

Personally, I owe too much to England in my mental makeup ever to feel wholly alien to her. . . All my predictions (apart from the political plane) are in favour of England and the English

people, and if I have become what is called an uncompromising opponent of British rule in India, it is almost in spite of myself. (Nehru 436)

Thus, he associated a significant part of his subjectivity with England and the English people. English education was thus successful in building a “Babu” out of him.

Nehru acknowledged the blessings of railway, telegraphs and wireless brought in by the British rule but then again said, “as I rushed across the Indian plains, the railway, that life-giver, has almost seemed to me like iron bands confining and imprisoning India” (452). In contrast to this, he considered science to be a gift of the British rule without which India could be nowhere. He completely ignores the great native Indian scientists like Chanakya, Aryabhata, Jagadish Chandra Bose and others. Nehru therefore always carried mixed feelings towards English India. He even ended up critiquing the Indians in the then Indian Civil Service who blindly followed the empire and its dominance like mere puppets, leading to India's doom, rather regarding them as the petty bourgeoisie. Nehru here echoes Vishwanathan's theory of masks of conquest whereby English education and administration ideologically moulded many Indians for strengthening the imperial rule. The British, however, had a constant gaze on him. The autobiography even had to go through censorship in London before it was made available in India. Nehru's autobiography thus delineates his constant strivings to make a balance between his love for English culture, science, philosophy and his anti-colonial knack to free his country from the shackles of the dominating empire.

## Conclusion

The overall analysis thus clarifies how an ambivalent and hybrid creation of subjectivity in these autobiographies renders colonial mimicry as mere mockery of English ways and education by rather countering the colonizer's desire to produce all compliant subjects. Self-fashioning through English literature is overwhelmingly witnessed in both the autobiographies. Nehru imitated the English life, style and education but revolted against the colonial rule. Gandhi and Nehru, in fact, display a pattern whereby they conform to colonial mimicry (in Bhabha's terms) in the beginning of their education, life and law as career but later end up countering colonial authority by having an ambivalent relationship with the same. A simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards colonial dominance is very much witnessed in the autobiographies taken for this study, which results in a disruption of colonial authority. While initially they completely gave into Anglicism by suppressing and critiquing the Indian ways, later they shared an ambivalent relationship with the same.

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## **A Critique of *A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution, Exodus And Exile of Kashmiri Pandits***

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### *Abstract*

*How does it feel like to be homeless in one's own country? How did the community with a rich heritage get reduced to a nomadic existence which left indelible impacts on their psyche? The present paper seeks to analyse the life of the displaced Pandits of Kashmir who continue to carry the burden of their troubled history with them wherever they go. Whenever the Pandits of Kashmir are mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is their homeless selves. To understand the homelessness and unhomeliness of the community concerned, this paper objectively discusses the idea of 'home' with a special focus on its significance for the Pandits who faced a mass exodus from their homeland. The study will take into account the memoir anthology titled *A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution, Exodus and Exile of Kashmiri Pandits* (2015), edited by Siddhartha Gigoo and Varad Sharma. In the anthology, dozens of the authors record their harrowing experiences, the memories of home, and manifest their quest for the homeland.*

*Keywords: Exodus, Homely, Unhomeliness, Kashmiri Pandit, Nation-State.*

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The notion of 'home' and its significance to masses of a particular space or place has changed with the change in every epoch's material conditions. We often see 'home' is pitted against the term 'homeless' which certainly creates a sharp binary suggesting the literal meaning, that is, 'a lack of home' in the public imagination (McCarthy 3). Besides many others who examined the idea of 'home' and 'un-home,' one can refer to Watson and Austerberry whose "home-to-homelessness continuum" is considered a first model to include home and homelessness on a same sliding scale which spans from extreme 'rooflessness' to unacceptable forms of housing where one feels 'not-at-home' (qtd. in Phillips). It can be seen on a continuum of permanent housing with personal warmth, well-being and stability to a public space where 'at-home' activities take place.

Watson and Austerberry's arguments about the continuum are pertinent to the situations of Pandits. Peter Somerville provides a much broader framework and identifies six signifiers of home in the forms of shelter, hearth, privacy, roots, abode (and sometimes additionally, 'paradise') (Somerville 533). Oxford Dictionary defines home a space of an individual's origin where one lives and realises the full significance of their belonging ("Home"). Many thinkers around the world either consider the same definition adequate or build upon the very idea of 'home' which is relative to one's place of origin. The negation of the idea is profoundly generated in these couple of hundred years when "[t]he pace of our headlong rush from a wilderness existence through an agrarian life to urbanisation is staggering



and exponential” (Brooks 10). The world gained an enormous pace globalising the population in both economic and political terms. These globalised orders began policing the masses of particular space or place, looting native resources under the pretext of development, welfare-states, and isolating them from their basic rights if they defied the ruling ideas of the states.

Specially as the political and economic situations took a turn toward new orders, the idea of home has started catching attention in the literary and academic sphere. May Wright Sewall defines 'home' a 'meeting place' for family, and “the form or sphere under which these abstract relations exist and manifest themselves” (Sewall 274). It is essential to comprehend the significance of what is called 'home' relating it with the existing status quo of Kashmiri Pandits who have been rendered homeless and also contain the elements of 'home', 'un-home' at the same time.

While hunkering in middle of the present new orders attributed to the neo-colonial establishments, it seems perplexing even to think of the notion—what is home? These 'new orders' have caused massive migrations which are either self-induced or forceful. Since the emergence of grim situations in the valley Kashmiri Muslims felt a deep sense of betrayal for having been snatched of their right to self-determination which formed the basal structure of their relationship with the Indian state. Kashmiri Muslims nurtured a hatred towards India whereas the Pandits considered themselves a loyal subject of the state. The valley which once known as “a paradise on earth” turned into a place where the clouds of death hover around one's head every time (qtd. in Ferguson 121). In the wake of insurgency, the non-state elements also found an opportunity to take advantage of the situation that further led the Muslim youth rising in euphoria for militancy. Indian state responded to the situation harshly and began deploying hundreds and thousands of its army troops in the valley which gave a worse shape to the situations—killing, torturing, abducting, and imprisoning Muslims heartlessly. Subsequently, the Pandits came on the radar of Muslim fundamentalists due to which they felt threatened following the disappearance and killing of some prominent Pandits. In the later years of the 1980s and early 1990s 'home' became the most unsafe place to live for both the communities. Many people from these communities migrated from either one village to another or villages to the city of Srinagar which they thought safer for its being at media radar and in front of dozens of other institutions meant for people's security. All this deadly conflict resulted in a painful exodus of the Pandits, who were to be ghettoised either in migrant camps in Jammu or had to seek shelter in other parts of the country or the world.

There emerges an uncanny situation among both the communities which configures the 'homeland' as an enigma for them. One lost familiarity with what is called 'feeling-at-home' and others lost their home/homeland forever. The inquiry about what 'home' implies for the Pandits necessitates what it means to be 'unhomely' for them. One needs to extend the discourse a little further and consider the binary of home and homelessness briefly which does not necessarily outline being 'not-at-home.' To examine the relative notions which provide a somewhat coherence to the idea, Sigmund Freud in his essay “*The Uncanny*” (1919) emphasises the term '*unheimlich*' which suggests two diametrically opposite meanings that are “feeling at home and not feeling at home” (qtd. in Ghazoul 2). James Strachey who has translated Freud's collective works into English, defines the Freudian term '*unheimlich*' as opposed to what is '*heimlich*' or “homely” or “native,” and concludes uncanny of “unhomely-[ness]” as an upsetting precisely because it is unfamiliar or not known (Strachey 220).

Unlike Freudian attempt of bracketing the uncanniness in a purely psychological domain, Homi K. Bhabha recognises the term under the colonial and neo-colonial orders. He replaces the psychological domain of '*unheimlich*', bringing it to a political sphere. Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) intelligibly identifies the 'un-homely-ness' as a “paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition” (Bhabha 13). His ascertaining the unhomeliness as a post-colonial condition becomes here a relevant point for discussing the existing situation of Kashmiris and their unhomely experiences. Amid the establishment of the 'new world orders' Kashmir continues to be policed at the hands of the two neighbouring nation-states. For the present study, it has taken into account a

collection of memoirs titled *A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution, Exodus and Exile of Kashmiri Pandits* (2015), edited by Siddhartha Gigoo and Varad Sharma. It helps in bringing together the strange experiences of the Pandits in as well as out of their homeland. Since the community experienced and is perhaps still undergoing an extremely difficult situation, it is imperative to examine their uncanny situation which they continue to face in exile.

The bunch of memoirs is an account of dozens of the authors in which they narrate how they endured the collective nightmares in the valley. It tells about the Pandits' peaceful times spent with the Muslim brethren in the valley, of horrific days and nights, of fear, of painful exodus, of despair and hopelessness, and finally of identity and existential crisis. After the forceful exodus of this community, their sense of home was stolen which they never recovered. Mary Douglas, in her essay "*The Idea of Home: A Kind of Space*," defines home the "embryonic communities" as similar as many sociologists believe. What the natives of Kashmir (both Pandits and Muslims) faced in their homes disrupts the very idea of a society which Douglas puts forward. (Douglas 288). The political scenario that contributed to an ever-increasing divide between the Pandits and the Muslims is believed by both the communities. However, for a section of the Pandits, the valley's Islamization remains one of the main reasons for their tragic exodus which can be studied in Kundan Lal Chowdhury's "*It is for Your Own Good to Leave*" in the memoir under scrutiny. The rising hostility gave further rise to routine warnings, threats, abductions, and killings of some prominent Pandits, such as; Tika Lal Taploo, Justice Neel Kanth Ganjoo, Pandit Lassa Kaul a Director of Doordarshan, Pushker Nath Handoo, Assitant Director of J&K State Information Department (17-34). This turmoil terrified the whole community as reflected in the text:

We exist in an ambience of fear as we hear of more killings almost every day. Even the sound of radio out of tune, of a cistern filling with water, of leaves rustling in the breeze—these everyday sounds—sound menacing at times. The doorbell rings and your heart flutters, a knock on the door and you brace yourself, a telephone ring and you wonder whether it is another unknown caller threatening you to leave or face the consequences. (26)

The memoir records how fear and terror lurked in the hearts of the Pandits as their mind vacillated between the risk of displacement and fear of living behind like scared chickens in a coop. Meenakshi Raina unveils her fatal experience in "*Nights of Terror*" by depicting the horrific nights that she along with her family and community have undergone before leaving their homes in the mid of January 1990. She recalls one cold night of 1989 when a bunch of masked men hurled stones on their rooftop. It felt "as if it was raining stones from the sky" (62). Such incidents were instrumental in intimidating the Pandits, and the tactics were said to be a common drill in those days. It was the night of 19th January which her (Raina's) grandmother could not forget. The slogans were raised against Pandits and announcements were made to frighten the whole community. One slogan which the grandmother had heard on that horrendous night was "*Assi gacchi panunuy Pakistan, Batav rostuy batinen saan*" [we want our Pakistan, without the Pandit men, but with their women] (63). She often used to whisper that slogan which kept haunting her even in exile. Her final words to the valley were "*Moklaye Kashmir*" which means "Kashmiri is finished" (63). The grandmother assesses the hostile environment and the devastating end of the community. While working in Doordarshan, Raina's father, after the assassination of Pandit Lassa Kaul (the director of Doordarshan), felt extremely scared as he could not return home in the evening because the place was worst affected. His experiences perfectly exemplify the reduced status of a him-like a subject who was 'homeless at home.' What if a home itself becomes a riskier place to live? Despite having his own house, he lives in the Doordarshan complex because it was unsafe for him to access home in that terrifying atmosphere. In the complex too, he moved between rooms every other night. Not staying in the same room regularly was a measure to hide his whereabouts and thus ensured his safety (64). It would be apt to say that the grim situations which the community were pushed into, seemed paradoxical to what Geraldine Brooks defines 'home' not the "four walls" rather an "environment offering security and

happiness . . .” (Brooks 18).

The homely consciousness of Pandits was hence taken away or lost forever. Pramod K. Nayar aptly sums it up as a “home yet-not- home” where “the sureties of home do not exist” (Nayar 101). For the Pandit community the environment of security, safety and development ceased to exist. In the story “*If We're Killed, the Gold Buried in the Earth under that Apple Tree Belongs to You*” Ashok Pandit reminisces the parade of 26th January 1990 which they were watching on TV in the house of a neighbour, Madan Lal. They were left “terrorised” by two youths who entered the house and threatened them for watching the Indian Republic day parade (38). The youths certainly showed their resistance against the day, intent on defying any such celebration related to the Indian state. Quite similar is the account of Arvind Gigoo in whose “*Days of Parting*” one finds a brutally honest narration of the whole societal and political constructions in the valley. The author has been in an ideal association with Muslims and Pandits in the neighbourhood until the 90s when the militancy engulfed the valley. Despite being confronted by dreadful situations multiple times, he never believed in what was happening around. Suddenly, he found himself “horrificed” at “the scene unfolding in the Tourists Reception Centre” (146). Thousands of Pandit families were boarding buses, leaving their homeland for Jammu and other cities. Gigoo sees three old Muslim friends at the ticket counter who were “shaking [and] trembling” while watching at the given scenario at the time. They asked Gigoo “Are you also going to Jammu?” and nervously apprehended that they too will “be killed when you leave this place?” (146). The scene seems to have shaken the author's 'homely' consciousness for the first time. It certainly signifies a disastrous end of the parting community on the one hand, and “terror and death in the six eyes”—certainly of his three Muslim friends on the other. It was at this moment that he might have estimated the collapse of centuries-old cultural ethos and societal harmony betwixt both communities. He seems bitterly anxious in his final words for the Muslim brethren amid the political degeneration of which he remarks, “Kashmir is not safe in the hands of its clever rulers” (159).

In such a politically fluid situation, Pandits' struggle for survival becomes a severe concern as they have become refugees in their own country. Sushant Dhar, in his narrative, “*Summers of Exile*” describes their fourteen years struggle in exile which they endured in one room tenement only where the “conditions were inhuman” (76). The author describes the quarters provided for migrants in the camps “frightening” where “mornings were gloomy. Each day was an ordeal; a fight every moment, [and also] a fight within” (76). It would be significant here to state that like Sushant Dhar, every Pandit had to endure the forceful exodus after which survival became a struggle which he simply calls “nightmare” (76). Dhar's account is representative of the dreadful situations that the Pandits had to face in the migrant camps in Jammu.

Neeru Kaul better expresses the pain of rootlessness in “*My House of Stone*” as she remembers the excruciating pain that her grandfather, who once was a teacher with a great spirit, underwent in exile. His profound sense of belonging to home and pastoral life in the valley never faded until his painful demise. He craved in his last days for “everything that he cared for all his life” for which “he waited for them to appear in his dreams if the cattle had been fed and cows milked and land ploughed and fields watered” (94). At the time of grandfather's demise, he takes leave with the last words – “*Gharr chi yirvinaav. Gharr hay gatchav'* (Home is ruin. Let's go home)” (94). This instance from the life of Neeru Kaul's grandfather is evident of the pain of ageing Pandits who were violently uprooted from the land of origin and they always craved to have a vision of that, in the last moments of their lives. Similarly, the roots of religious traditions, and a cultural legacy that Pandits had developed as well as preserved in the valley for centuries, faced a sudden downfall as a consequence of violent othering of the community. Pramod K. Nayar, perhaps for the reasons of a similar kind, identifies that Postcolonial modernisation thus results in the loss of home and homeland” (88).

Kundan Lal Chowdhury's memoir takes us back to April 1990 when a local Urdu daily published a front-page ultimatum issued by Hizb-ul Mujahideen warning Pandits to leave the valley within 36 hours or "face death" (28). The instances such as; the cautioning headlines in newspapers, anti-India graffiti inscribed on walls, threatening notices pasted on electricity poles, reflected a total collapse of the system of governance. During this time, neighbours and allies of the one-another community went helpless to reflect upon the situation. Thus, the community which lived with their Muslim counterparts for centuries was forced into exile, leaving behind their rich past and the exemplary relationship of peace and communal harmony. Their life in exile continues to reflect the pain of getting uprooted from their land of origin, as Sushant Dhar asks the readers:

[C]an you imagine what we went through? The pain of not being in your home, the pain of leaving your home, the pain of parting with your belongings . . . the pain of not having a morsel of rice for your children, the pain of sleeping in the veranda of Government schools for years, the pain of living in a tattered tent for years, the pain of living under a killer dome in refugee quarters . . . the pain of listening to narratives that create more injustice and more torment in our hearts, the pain of withered hope for twenty-five years. (86-87)

One can sense the terrible agony of living life in exile in inhuman conditions, the pain of parting from one's home and land of belonging, braving hunger and pangs generated by fading hope for justice. On the other hand, exodus of the Pandits is used by the powers that be as a political weapon. The state represents this conflict very strategically, not as a political, but rather communal. However, it is evident from the incidents of killings of prominent Pandits that they were barely communal in nature but rather political. Among those who were targeted and killed by insurgents, were also the prominent Muslims including Mir Mustafa, a former legislator, Mushir-ul-Haq, the Vice-Chancellor of Kashmir University, and his secretary Abdul Gani, Mirwaiz of Kashmir, Molvi Mohammad Farooq and a senior politician Moulana Mohammad Sayeed Masoodi and alike (Ahmad 229). These were all high-profile killings which were equally targeted by insurgents whom they believed were in service to the nation-state. Despite these facts, the intent of the nation-state post-exodus could be objectively investigated into which it is often seen legitimising violence on Kashmir. Nishita Trisal, a Kashmiri Pandit in exile who is a Doctoral candidate in the University of Michigan, proclaims that "[w]ith this sleight of hand, the government has resuscitated an old strategy of instrumentalising the pain and loss of Kashmiri Pandits to legitimise its violence against Kashmiri Muslims." She unequivocally opposes this position by stating that their painful exodus was "the loss of an identity, a history, one my family saw as being deliberately taken from them" (Trisal).

To sum up, *A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution, Exodus and Exile of Kashmiri Pandits* (2015) portrays a grim and realistic picture of the turmoil in Kashmir that tore apart the centuries-old communal harmony when the insurgency engulfed the Kashmir valley. Apart from grievous wounds it inflicted upon the valley, it resulted in the painful exodus of Pandits from their homeland. The present paper critically examines the notion of home concerning the homeless selves of the exiled Pandit community which had a rich cultural and religious heritage, significantly unique from other Hindu sub-cultures and traditions of mainland India. Everything that the Pandit community cherished in the valley ceased to exist as Raina's grandmother's words "*Moklaye Kashmir*" agonisingly sum it up. Their tragedy is compounded as they witness dreadful conditions in the migrant camps in Jammu for decades which intensifies their longing for home. Sushant Dhar, in "*Summers of Exile*", writes that "Exile did terrible things to us; we became cold in the face of terrible situations" (85) as many of them had to spend years in verandas of government schools and makeshift camps and get attuned to the Dogra community. These traumatic selves in exile, as Gigoo states, seem to be in quest of home continue to crave for living life backwards—in their homeland as the richness of their past is securely buried in their consciousness. The more they think of the loss of their history, the more their psychological suffering intensifies (Malik 22). For the intellectually vibrant Pandit community, though living in Jammu, Delhi or else where in the country and the world, Kashmir is still their home and this strain is manifest in the memoir.

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**Flight from Masculinity: Arundhati Roy's  
The Ministry of Utmost Happiness as a Transgender Tragedy**

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*Abstract*

*Arundhati Roy's epic novel The Ministry of Utmost Happiness explores, among other things, the transgender phenomenon special to the Indian subcontinent, i.e. the hijras, focusing on the vicissitudes of one of its protagonists, Anjum. The hijras have lived on the fringes of Indian society for many centuries. They constitute a closely knit male-to-female transgender community living off the mainstream Indian society. They are popularly perceived as unfortunate people, who are ostracized for not conforming to the traditional gender norms. However, this article seeks to argue from the psychological and social perspectives that many young men, generally aged 6-18 years, who experience gender dysphoria, choose to become hijras in order to circumvent the tremendous challenges – social, economic and even sexual – they are required to face as men and not just, as often uncritically understood, because of biological imperatives, genetic aetiology or endocrine conditions. Their transgender status arguably affords them easy access to resources, since their feminized bodies now turn intrinsically worthy and amenable to negotiation. This argument runs counter to the established view that the hijras are a disadvantaged lot whose genes have played havoc with their lives and obliged them to embrace a gender identity other than the one assigned at birth, and consequently they face interpersonal repudiation and social alienation. Drawing on recent studies on masculinity, it is contended here that, in reality, their transgender identity proves to be valuable and rewarding and, above all, an expedient way of fleeing masculinity and evading responsibilities which men in general shoulder against heavy odds. Living as a hijra is, however, fraught with problems and challenges of its own kind primarily because of the stringent norms and codes imposed on them by the hijra community itself. As a community the hijras are no different from any other rigidly organized caste group of India. Therefore, this article further asserts that, despite the assurance of traditional entitlements and community bonds, becoming a hijra is not necessarily the best means of practicing one's chosen gender in the changed scenario of the 21st century. Anjum's story amply testifies to this fact.*

*Keywords: gender dysphoria; transgender; hijras; emasculation; masculinity*

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## **Introduction**

Arundhati Roy's second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) offers a nuanced perspective on the transgender phenomenon in India, more correctly the *hijra* cult. In doing so it joins Khushwant Singh's *Delhi: A Novel* (1990), John Irving's *A Son of the Circus* (1994), Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* (2002), Jeet Thayil's *Nacropolis* (2012) and Anosh Irani's *The Parcel* (2016) which have all cast hijras in central roles and treated their lives with deep understanding. The hijras have been a highly visible, if marginalized, demographic of India for hundreds of years – respected, feared and reviled all at the same time – and in recent years they have attracted the attention of not just creative writers, as mentioned above, but sociologists, anthropologists and gender theorists as well (Jaffrey 1996; Nanda 1999; Talwar 1999; Sharma 2004; Reddy 2005). They should not however be confused with the emergent transgender community in the West, or in India itself for that matter. The



Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 (1.2.k) includes the hijras within the broad category of “transgender persons.”

(k) “transgender person” means a person whose gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at birth and includes trans-man or trans-woman (whether or not such person has undergone Sex Reassignment Surgery or hormone therapy or laser therapy or such other therapy), person with intersex variations, genderqueer and person having such socio-cultural identities as *kinner*, *hijra*, *aravani* and *jogta*. (Government of India)

The law allows for no difference between the hijras and other transpersons, when in reality many differences do obtain between them. Unlike the other transpersons, in the West as well as in India, the hijras are highly organized with an elaborate social and religious bureaucracy and they feel entitled to social privileges and economic provisioning on the part of mainstream society on account of their gender deviance and the spiritual powers supposedly proceeding from it – to bless or curse. They do not evoke the kind of spontaneous love and sympathy transpeople in the West often do because of their sense of entitlement, minacious behavior and predatory lifestyle. They are basically men or intersexed individuals who desperately try to embrace womanhood often by means of a risky gender reassignment surgery (GRS), called *nirvana*, and for a variety of reasons – genetic, hormonal and environmental (including social and economic factors). They see masculinity as a burden, a kind of poison coursing through their veins which is better drained from their bodies at the time of *nirvana*, and conversely they idealize femininity and ardently long for authentic womanhood. In other words, they are not in search of the so called third gender identity, but a genuine feminine identity possibly for the advantages it entails. Their preference for femininity is so ardent that some of them go to the extent of faking menstruation every month!

The hijra community has all the trappings of a strictly organized and well regulated religion/caste, despite claiming to have renounced the world, with iron-clad discipline superadded. While the transpeople in the West enjoy varying degrees of freedom of choice, the hijras have no such chance! They are as surely the prisoners of their social organization as other Indians are of the caste system, and indeed they are far worse off than the latter since their body alterations are irreversible.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy portrays, in spite of herself, the protagonist Anjum as a victim of the hijra cult because, although becoming a hijra affords her immediate relief from gender confusion apart from getting herself oriented with a kindred community, she eventually realizes how the hijra cult exercises a soul killing influence on her by robbing her of freedom of choice and the chance to perform her gender as a transwoman. Focusing on Anjum whose life begins as a hijra but assumes the proportions of a tragedy in course of time, this article would explore the social history of the hijras, and account for their current moral confusion, the dilemmas they face on a daily basis, and the very desirability of their lifestyle in the substantially changed socioeconomic context of today. The article would conclude that the hijra lifestyle is largely unsustainable in the current era of rapid modernization. They certainly qualify as misfits in a knowledge society. It is perhaps time they reconsidered their way of life, and reoriented themselves – no longer as a community but as separate individuals professing a different gender identity, if they wish so. Since they are basically a male-to-female transgender community, it is also equally possible that by strengthening masculinity in general, and in them in particular, the need to transition from the masculine to any other gender will not arise in the first place for an overwhelming majority of them.

## Methods

This article subjects *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* to an intensely analytical reading, plumbing its depths and establishing its social and psychological significance to contemporary Indian society as it navigates gender confusion. Being interdisciplinary in nature, it draws heavily on the latest scholarship on masculinity in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology and even biology (Horrocks 1994; Haywood and Ghail 2003; Barry, et al 2019) in order to elucidate the theme

of hijra transgenderism. Added to these are philosophical contemplation on the researcher's part, his lived experience, anecdotal evidence and other observational research tools which have all been profitably employed in order to assess the novel in terms of portraying gender dysphoria supposedly experienced by the hijras. Inevitably therefore, the article tends to be descriptive, analytical and philosophical. It presents some well thought out views emanating from an in-depth reading of the novel, objectively reflecting on the transgender phenomenon relative to the hijras, and making fruitful connections with allied disciplines. Its conclusions too proceed from this broad-based critical assessment of the novel.

### **Anjum's Gender Dysphoria: Its Psychosocial Context**

Anjum (born Aftab) is a hermaphrodite by birth, but psychologically inclined towards the feminine. It is important to investigate why she chooses to embrace femininity so wholeheartedly rather than continue with her fairly well-designed male anatomy. She is part of a highly scripted social context in which men are mandated to work hard, earn and provide for their families putting themselves to enormous stress and strain in the process. She presumably observes with the eagerness of a wide-eyed child how her father Mulaqat Ali is required to struggle to make both the ends meet and how in desperation he takes refuge in poetry to alleviate his suffering. She unconsciously notes that society would never protect and provision her if she continues as a male. For sure she will be obliged to study hard, earn and be accountable. She also perhaps observes men in the neighbourhood over-appreciating and pedestalizing girls and women while riding roughshod over the wishes and needs of other men. The effect of this unfriendly atmosphere is not lost on her. It insidiously sows in her the fear of adult male responsibilities and challenges – the success objectification they suffer, the performance anxiety they experience, the human capital they need to painstakingly accumulate for hypergamous assessment and the external validation they need to earn if they are to be counted as human beings at all. Her reptilian brain unmistakably warns her against these dangers. In response, she soon develops distinct feminine traits in terms of dressing and attitude to the utter dismay of her father who claims descent from the hyper masculine Changez Khan of Mongolia. His recounting the tales of their warrior ancestors and their exploits on the battlefield leave Anjum unmoved (because war is hard work), but the story of Changez Khan's love for his beautiful wife Borte Khatun, to regain whom he fought a whole army singlehandedly (Roy 27), makes Anjum want to be *her* (because Borte Khatun could gain her man's love by merely looking pretty). Understandably, therefore, when obliged to behave like a boy against her will by family and peers, she feels distraught and disoriented, and ardently longs for a space to do her gender. It cannot be said with certainty that she has at this stage in her life a clear idea of which of the prevalent genders she belongs to, nor does she have a chance to undergo gender dysphoria diagnosis. That she is a hermaphrodite with ambiguous genitalia, complicates matters further. However, an opportunity presents itself to her, when she is fifteen, in the form of the Khwabgah ('house of dreams' inhabited by a group of hijras in old Delhi) and she promptly joins their ranks undergoing emasculation surgery, among other things. That appears to be the only option available to her given her inability to visualize practicing her gender any other way. Despite embracing the gender of her choice, she is eventually disenchanted with the hijra community as well, it being as conservative, hierarchical and hidebound as the world (called *Duniya* in the hijra parlance) she has left behind. Thoroughly disillusioned, she renounces hijrahood, leaves the Khwabgah, and starts living on her own terms in an abandoned graveyard, as a transwoman.

### **Hijrahood, a Poverty-driven Choice**

It is pertinent to note here why boys, such as Aftab/Anjum, hailing from disadvantaged socio-economic background prefer to become hijras,<sup>1</sup> often by undergoing a crude form of emasculation surgery and hormone replacement therapy (HRT), when it is equally possible to

strengthen the male side of their personality by undergoing similar procedures (Kailey 2005), psychological counselling, behaviour modification, and even by exercising willpower, and 'outgrow' their feminine tendencies. It should be, in fact, much easier doing so since most of them already have well-designed male reproductive anatomy.<sup>2</sup> Even in case of one born with ambiguous genitalia only either ovaries or testes are present, and not both. In such cases it is perfectly possible to experience sexual pleasure either as a male or female. For example, although Anjum is born a hermaphrodite, her sexual pleasure expresses itself like a man's (Roy 27) before she undergoes surgery. She never experiences sexual pleasure again after that in the feminine aspect, although she dispenses liberal doses of it to her lovers. It is certainly possible to explain this psychological phenomenon. It may just be that these boys, who perceive early enough how life is extremely challenging, demanding and stressful for men of meagre means, unconsciously choose to embrace the feminine side of their personality. Given the fact that Indian society is generally indulgent towards women, often meting out preferential treatment to them, they perhaps intuit that it would be easier surviving as women (or half women/hijras) rather than as poverty-stricken men in a world rife with myriad competitions – a world in which men are held to high standards and expected to be accountable for every one of their actions. Susceptible young boys are wont to feel that they are missing out on the chance to live an easy and protected life and are instead being compelled to seek a life of hardship requiring them to perform and succeed or face humiliation if they fail.<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup>Female/feminized bodies, on the other hand, are intrinsically worthy and they command greater approval. For young men who lack the courage to live like men facing challenges every step of their way, and meeting the terrible demands the world makes on them, and who are also psychologically disposed to prefer femininity to masculinity, becoming a hijra is at least a viable option. Once they overcome, and they do eventually overcome, the shame attendant on assuming a feminine persona, and transition to the transgender, their bodies turn into assets and prized possessions and cease to be liabilities or a constant source of anxiety, discomfort and frustration. Having become feminized, they also begin to crave for privileges and entitlements. In fact, they go a step further and, besides using their bodies for seductive purposes, they weaponize them when necessary to extort money from men in various ways, such as exposing their private parts in public. That there is an easy living to be made this way is obvious. Instances of men stricken by economic adversity taking to cross-dressing like the hijras, and begging/extorting are not uncommon in India. The hijras often fiercely denounce these cross-dressers and even engage in fierce street battles with them because they cut into their livelihood. It all goes to prove the point that it is profitable to embrace femininity – whether as hijras or cross-dressers.

It may be for the above reason that, while treating the Khwabgah as a place where "Holy Souls trapped in the wrong bodies" are liberated, its inmates do not address "[t]he question of what would happen if the Holy Soul were a man trapped in a woman's body" (Roy 53). Their lifestyle (ritual begging, extortion, sex work, etc) will be unsustainable if they continue as men. If they are to extort money as a group of men, they would be promptly designated as thugs and thrown in jail. In the predominantly masculine societies of the Middle East no hijra cult or the equivalent of it exists.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, boys and men in these cultures are treated with respect and sensitivity and not constantly challenged to 'prove themselves' one way or another. They are also surrounded by many masculine men on whom they model themselves and from whom they derive sufficient male affirmation. There is thus no incentive or need for boys to long for a feminine identity, leave alone actually transitioning to the feminine/transgender. The powerful male models at home, school and society in general, in the form of fathers, teachers and community leaders, help the rare few boys who betray a tendency towards femininity in quickly overcoming it.

### **Anjum's Transformation**

It is perhaps these psychological, social and economic factors which oblige Anjum, albeit unconsciously, to become a hijra. Having joined the ranks of the hijras she embraces femininity with a

zeal that would put even real women to shame.

She had her nose pierced and wore an elaborate, stone-studded nose-pin, outlined her eyes with kohl and blue eye shadow and gave herself a luscious, bow-shaped Madhubala mouth of glossy-red lipstick. ... She wasn't beautiful in the way Bombay Silk was, but she was sexier, more intriguing, handsome in the way some women can be. Those looks combined with her steadfast commitment to an exaggerated, outrageous kind of femininity made the real, biological women in the neighbourhood – even those who did not wear full burqas – look cloudy and dispersed. (Roy 26-27)

In addition to the external accoutrements, Anjum makes, as pointed out already, permanent alterations to her body by undergoing emasculation surgery. On her eighteenth birthday, although she dreams of herself as a bride on her wedding night her body expresses sexual pleasure into her new dress *like a man's*, suggesting that her mind and body are at odds with each other. As she feels betrayed and humiliated, Ustad Kulsoom Bi suggests that she should see Dr Mukhtar and have her male genitalia surgically removed so that her body would not catch her unawares again. Dr Mukhtar turns out to be a scamster since his excision of her male parts proves to be excruciatingly painful and his reconstruction of her female organ does not happen the way he promises it would. It does not work well even after two corrective surgeries robbing Anjum of any chance of sexual pleasure again. His hormone pills do un-deepen her voice, but at the same time they give her a peculiar rasping voice that often frightens others. Dr Mukhtar is reminiscent of the new crop of transgender and transsexual physicians in the West who have found new avenues of making money on the basis of how people, sometimes even children as young as two years, *feel* about their bodies (Serritella 2016; Van Meter 2018), rather than ascertaining the aetiology involved. Since these medical professionals have a vested interest in the transgender phenomenon, they never suggest to their 'patients' that instead of going on hormone therapy or making permanent modification to their bodies, they could consider preserving and strengthening their biological gender, nor do they warn against the health hazards involved – cancer, deep vein thrombosis, terrible mood swings, etc – of prolonged hormone therapy. True to this, after Dr Mukhtar's 'treatment' Anjum becomes some kind of a 'drama queen' constantly swayed by emotions. This debilitating emotional vulnerability stays with her even when she relocates to the graveyard. For example, at the Jannat Guest House and Funeral Services which she maintains at the graveyard, the rules are “esoteric – warm, welcoming smiles or irrational roars of rejection, depending on nobody-really-knew-what” (Roy 79-80). Even her closest friend Saddam Hussain is scared of her moods: “Let's go up to the roof,' Saddam said hastily, sensing the approach of one of her moods, which usually spelled trouble for everybody within a half-kilometre range” (Roy 82).

Once Anjum establishes herself at the Khwabgah, the hijra culture pulls her into its vortex and she begins to do what the hijras have been doing for umpteen generations – performing and prostitution – even as impatience with these practices steadily builds in her. As part of the *badhai* performance she and her fellow hijras would –

... descended on ordinary people's celebrations – weddings, births, house-warming ceremonies – dancing, singing in their wild, grating voices, offering their blessings and threatening to embarrass the hosts (by exposing their mutilated privates) and ruin the occasion with curses and a display of unthinkable obscenity unless they were paid a fee. (Roy 24)

One of Anjum's Khwabgah-mates Razia calls it *badtameezi* (misbehaviour), and another, Nimmo Gorakhpuri, describes the hijras as “jackals who feed off other people's happiness, we're Happiness Hunters” (Roy 24). Their intrusions into happy homes would also often land them in serious trouble. The most traumatic of the experiences Anjum has is when, while performing at a wedding party, she and other hijras are kicked on their backsides by the police, who arrive there to arrest the host, and ordered to run all the way home if they do not want to be charged with prostitution and obscenity. Terror stricken, they run as fast as they can through the night braving the driving rain (Roy 35). Incidentally, this is just a routine bit of humiliation Anjum suffers for thirty long years!

Although the hijras describe themselves as theoretically asexual – 'blessed people' and 'Holy Souls,' according to Ustad Kulsoom Bi—most of them are not averse to commercial sex work – ostensibly for survival in an otherwise unsympathetic world – and each hijra's sexual market value (SMV), within her in-group, is most often contingent upon her superior ability to entertain men. Anjum has a string of lovers, but she never experiences sexual pleasure as a receptive partner in her relationships for reasons outlined already. Like ascetics who willingly sacrifice personal pleasures and dedicate their lives to the service of humanity she devotes her body to giving pleasure to men in need of sexual gratification. She becomes a much sought-after lover for her skill – unique and uninhibited forms of sexual pleasure that are otherwise not available to men within the confines of marriage. The chief among her admirers is Mr D.D. Gupta, a building contractor who, among other things, sees to her comfort after she takes up residence at the graveyard, and plays a supportive role even when he is working in faraway Iraq. Towards the end of the novel he almost moves in with her, preferring to spend long hours with her rather than with his otherworldly wife. Mr Gupta is drawn to Anjum, at least to begin with, because his wife is not too keen on fulfilling his physical appetites, and who is in fact happy about such needs being taken care of by somebody else. Female sexuality, even within marriage like in the case of Mr Gupta, is in short supply in India for a variety of reasons (Kakar 19-24) and even hijras are preferred by some men if they fill this gap. Additionally, these men get a form of female validation from the hijras without having to jump through hoops and bend over backwards, as is usual in heterosexual long term relationships (LTRs).

Three decades of life as a hijra makes Anjum famous primarily for the exotica she exudes, and the femininity she wholeheartedly embraces. Not even an iota of that fame would have been possible had she chosen to live the life of a man as evidenced by her own father Mulaqat Ali whose pathetic claim to fame as a blue blooded royal is never taken seriously by journalists, who periodically visit him, predictably because of his current straitened circumstances, and lack of achievements generally expected of men who stake a claim to fame. In case of Anjum, however, film-makers vie with each other to make documentaries on her; NGOs feature her in their publicity hoardings; and foreign correspondents share her phone number with one another as a professional favour. Her fame does not last long, though. The new crop of hijras who join the Khwabgah – especially Saeeda with her jeans, skirts and halter-necks that have greater sex appeal to the modern generation, and above all her considerable understanding of debates centred on gender, edges Anjum out of the *numero uno* spot in the media. The media no longer finds her fitting the image of New India, a knowledge society and regional superpower in the making. Ustad Kulsoom Bi, who is aware of these developments, now pits Saeeda against Anjum in the race to succeed her as ustad of the Khwabgah.

Added to these unsavoury developments is the heart-wrenching way Anjum's adopted daughter Zainab is robbed of her. She happened to find Zainab abandoned on the steps of the Jama Masjid. Her maternal instinct, obviously triggered by a sudden rush of oxytocin, forges an instantaneous bond with the child. And when her efforts to trace Zainab's parents fail, she adopts her and showers unqualified love on her. She takes great care of Zainab, nurses her through sickness, and in good time admits her to a school. However, when she is away in Gujarat, and believed to have been killed in the riots (of 2002), she is alienated from Zainab, presumably by Saeeda, and it culminates in her losing Zainab to the Khwabgah altogether. The Zainab episode shows Anjum in an altogether new light as a hijra. Defying the common perception of the hijras as abductors of male children, Anjum feels spontaneous and genuine love for a girl child and adopts her only after her efforts to locate her parents prove futile. She makes Zainab the centre of her life and grows addle headed by force of love, but she is ultimately deprived of the joys of motherhood!

Anjum now feels that continuing at the Khwabgah and living as a hijra for that matter, are no longer prudent. Life as a hijra has not been exactly what she imagined it to be, in spite of the initial euphoria. It has been a series of challenges, humiliations, disappointments, and deprivations. She now wants to be free to live her life independently, and honestly – as a transwoman – and, if she can,



support others, including a few hijras who have, for one reason or another, “fallen out of, or been expelled from, the tightly administered grid of Hijra Gharanas” (Roy 68). To put it in perspective, she graduates from helping a few needy men in physical terms to helping fellow subalterns in social and ideological terms. In a symbolic gesture, bordering on a religious ritual, she makes a bonfire of the three documentary films, two glossy coffee-table books of photographs, seven photo features in foreign magazines, and an album of press clippings in foreign newspapers (all about her), and when the fire dies out she rubs a pinch of ash into her face and hair suggesting that she has renounced the hijra life this time round!

It has to be admitted here that, although Anjum renounces hijrahood, the hijra mindset lingers on, demonstrating its corrupting influence on her. Once she relocates to the graveyard, she certainly does not indulge in begging, extortion, prostitution and the like, but she feels entitled to unearned resources all the same. For example, she builds structures that serve as her home, guesthouse and funeral parlour when she has no legal right to do so. She also pilfers electricity from the adjacent mortuary and ensures uninterrupted power supply to her makeshift home when rest of the metropolis reels under frequent power outages.

Whichever way Anjum prefers to live at the graveyard, it certainly dawns on her that the hijra lifestyle has become unsustainable since Indian society has now grown largely impatient with panhandlers and ritual beggars given the spread of education, modernization and prevalence of corporate culture. Many communities which practised ritual begging for a living in the past have given up that lifestyle and got integrated into the mainstream Indian society. This is exemplified by one of Anjum's former friends at the Khwabgah, Nimmo Gorakhpuri, who too renounces hijrahood and becomes a goat-magnate trading in exotic goats for slaughter on Bakr-Eid (Eid al-Adha). She now owns two flats and a small farm in Mewat near Delhi apart from a Maruti 800 car, and generally leads a productive and fulfilling life. That the hijra lifestyle is no longer desirable clearly comes out in the conversation Anjum, Saeeda and Nimmo have following their encounter with a group of hijras begging – more precisely, demanding money by banging on car windows – at the traffic lights. As their car sped away, Saeeda said that because sexual-reassignment surgery was becoming cheaper, better, and more accessible to people, Hijras would soon disappear. 'Nobody will need to go through what we've been through any more.'

'You mean no more Indo-Pak?' Nimmo Gorakhpuri said.

'It wasn't all bad,' Anjum said. 'I think it would be a shame if we became extinct.'

'It was all bad,' Nimmo Gorakhpuri said. (Roy 409)

The suggestion here is that if one chooses to live as a transperson it is entirely up to him/her, but turning it into a well-coordinated predatory system, as the hijras certainly do, is utterly unacceptable in the modern context. The hijras are shunned not for what they are but for the way they live – unwelcome bawdy performances at functions, panhandling and prostitution. The Hindu sanyasis (ascetics), with whom they are fond of comparing themselves, too live in a distinct way, set apart from society. However, unlike the hijras, these sanyasis are held in high regard not because of being what they are, or dressing the way they do, but because of the valuable social service they often render and the uplifting spiritual guidance they offer. The hijras make no such value addition to society, nor enrich common people's lives in a tangible way. Still, they expect society to not just accept them but even support and empathize with them! It does not seem to occur to them that, if they are eunuchs – by birth or by choice – they could just be that and still live a productive life the way the pre-Mughal era eunuchs had done. They need not make a big issue of their gender deviance, that too in ways which are irritating at best and infuriating at worst.

### **Conclusion: Masculinity is Destiny**

In spite of a sustained effort on Arundhati Roy's part to paint the hijras with a broad brush, and in a relatively sympathetic light in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, her criticism of their lifestyle



trickles through the chinks and crevices of the narrative. She seems to be all for freedom of choice in respect of gender but she is certainly not in favour of turning the private choice of a few confused individuals to build and perpetuate a soul-killing predatory system. In fact, in the metropolitan cities of India, and even in other urban centres, transgender people, especially those hailing from slightly privileged families, no longer prefer the hijra label to describe them. They practice their gender in private and without the least inconvenience to others.

The days of benevolent patronage and amused tolerance of the hijras are passé. They are perceived today as relics of an exotic past, and as a collective embarrassment. As Roy herself notes, albeit somewhat ironically, that they do not “suit the image of the New India – a nuclear power and an emerging destination for international finance” (Roy 18). Their purported spiritual position which hinges on superstition – blessing young people with fertility or cursing them with infertility, as the case may be – does not hold much water in modern times, imbued as they are with scientific temper. Given this, one of their recruitment practices – claiming intersexed babies for themselves – is no longer viable as parents of sexually anomalous children are likely to consider corrective surgery such as phalloplasty rather than surrender their children to the hijras. In recent years, social media too has exposed the claims of the hijras for what they are by widely circulating videos depicting their disagreeable and disruptive behaviour in public places. It has had the unintended effect of further solidifying the negative perception of their lifestyle.

The claim of the hijras on others' resources for favour of existing on this earth, as physically and psychologically emasculated individuals with self-ascribed spiritual powers, rather than for what they contribute to society, is arbitrary and untenable. There are millions of men in India who are far worse off than them, such as the little cobbler (Roy 161-62) who mends Tilo's shoes, and her friend Dr Azad Bhartiya's brother a granite quarry worker who dies of inhaling too much stone-dust (Roy 258). They eke out a meager but honest living or go down fighting the battle of life, but never feel entitled to resources and privileges they have not earned. When the going gets tough, which seems imminent, the hijras might increasingly resort to sex work and aggressive panhandling, or further widen the scope of their performances and demand ever higher fees (Nanda 52), which again is unacceptable from both social and moral standpoints. Regular office jobs may not always be available to them – nor are they handed on a silver platter to others, for that matter – because of the choices they make, but blue collar work is always available if they really want to 'earn an honest penny,' so to say. However, if they wish to continue to project themselves in public the way they have done for ages, and hold on to their traditional lifestyle, and refuse to adapt to the now vastly altered environment, they will inevitably face a measure of social censure. There is really no way around it. It is not easy to change the entire world and bring it in line with the thinking of a few individuals, or get it to approve of a lifestyle not just deemed deviant but experientially felt to be intrusive and even invasive. That would be tantamount to reverse discrimination, smacking of entitlement mentality on top of it. What can however be easily done is for the hijras themselves, as exemplified by Nimmo Gorakhpuri, to make adjustments in terms of thinking, behaviour and lifestyle, like every responsible member of society does to one degree or another, and become productive individuals.

The long-term solution to the whole issue perhaps lies in strengthening masculinity which has been devalued, derided, and demonized with boys and men being constantly told that there is something innately wrong with them and that they should apologize for being male, and as if to atone for it, flee their masculinity! In reality, however, true masculinity lies in moral courage to uphold values; strong determination to overcome adversity; physical strength to propel civilization forward; innate drive to survive, help and protect others, especially women and children; spontaneous initiative to learn, innovate and improve; and uncompromising quest to excel. These masculine traits and virtues are worth cherishing not because they are masculine, but because they are good for all. The issue now is not that men are too masculine, but they are not masculine enough. When men harness their masculinity and channelize it in the right direction, they are at their creative and productive best. It is therefore time men learnt to resist devaluation and pathologization of

masculinity, acquire some red pill knowledge (Seidler 1989; Garcia 2008; Tomassi 2017; Farrell 2001; Wright 2017), wrest the control of gender narrative and rid it of its anti-male bias, and emerge in the final analysis as strong men capable of facing the vicissitudes of life with equanimity rather than allow their masculinity to atrophy. There will then be no real need for men suffering from gender dysphoria or otherwise to embrace a different gender identity, including hijrahhood.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>A study conducted by Niraj Kumar on the hijras of Odisha shows that almost all the respondents hailed from poor background and becoming hijras had been the only option for them, primarily because they were unaware of other transgender identities.

<sup>2</sup>Prior to the advent of transgender 'ideology' children exhibiting such tendencies were treated with watchful waiting. For many of them it would eventually turn out to be a passing phase. With family counselling, and rarely also with individual therapy, a vast majority of them (up to 75%) would accept their anatomic sex by their late adolescence and outgrow their early transgender tendencies. Because of gender feminism, which is intent on obliterating gender differences, helpless children are being subjected to puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones and surgical mutilation resulting in permanent alterations to their bodies. The Freudian view has it that the human organism (body) follows its own rules – it is only interested in surviving as long as is possible, and in reproducing, no matter what the mind (super-ego component of the psyche) which is shaped by environmental factors, desires or detests (Freud 33). Thus even if the brain of a transgender person, in the present context a hijra, prefers a feminine persona, the body wishes to remain male and even to reproduce. It is essentially a tussle between the body and the mind. Genetically speaking, DNA is imprinted in every cell; no surgery can alter it. Every organ of the human body is sexed. Feelings alone do not determine whether one is a man or woman. Feelings are determined mostly by environmental factors. If the environment is altered, most of the time feelings will change accordingly. Moreover, humans are a sexually dimorphic species. Among them sex is intended for procreation and perpetuation of the species. Any sexual orientation other than the one contributing to the propagation of the species is at best 'unnatural.'

<sup>3</sup>It is true that at a later stage a certain percentage of girls are discriminated against and married off early but a boy of six or seven years has no idea of the privileges supposedly accruing to him – the so called male dividend – later in life. He would only see what he can see in the immediate present in which girls are treated softly while boys are challenged to compete.

<sup>4</sup>There is also an added disincentive to being men these days. To be a man is now deemed toxic. It is reflected in a plethora of punitive anti-male laws that seek to penalize and punish men for just being men disregarding the basic principles of jurisprudence such as presumption of innocence, preponderance of evidence and due process.

<sup>5</sup>Not counting the so called *Khanith* in Oman who are basically men tending to behave like women (Zuhur 32).

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## Mapping Multiple Marginalities: Exploring the Muted Voices in Dalit Literature

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### *Abstract*

*Dominance renders many groups subdued, marginalized, and muted. Their perspectives are not embodied in the mainstream discourse. Consequently, most of the ethnographic studies are biased and incomplete as they leave out the perspectives of the muted groups. The study asserts for perspectives of muted women in the Dalit Literature, which is largely patriarchal and discusses Dalit man as the central figure of suffering. The researcher explores the world of women in Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* and Daya Pawar's *Baluta*. The exploration of these texts reveals multiple marginalities of Dalit women owing to their intersectional oppression of caste, class, and gender. The interlocking nature of oppression leads to women's vulnerability, exploitation, silent sufferings, which call for a Dalit Feminist Standpoint.*

*Keywords: Dominance, marginalization, intersectional oppressions, perspective, standpoint.*

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### **Introduction**

Most of the ethnographic studies conducted are biased and incomplete as the data collected for the studies include the perspectives of the dominant groups only (Ardener 1975). Edwin Ardener and Shirley Ardener observed that the researchers mainly talk to adult males and leave out the perspectives of women, children, and other groups muted by the cultural hierarchy. Likewise, the ethnographic writings of the Dalit community are partial as they marginalize the voices of their women. Men and women perceive the world differently because they have different lived experiences that shape their varied perspectives (Kramarae, 1981).

The main genre of Dalit Literature is Dalit autobiography such as Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (1978), Laxman Mane's *Upara* (1980; translated as *Outsider*), Om Prakash Valmiki's *Jhoothan* (1997), Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (1991; translated as *The Outcaste*), Surajpal Chauhan's *Tiraskrit* (2002), and many others. These life narratives are originally written in Indian regional languages and their translation into English brought them into the forefront of the literary arena underlining caste discrimination, Dalits ostracism, and their vicious repression by social hierarchy. The writings depict the pains and sufferings of the Dalit community. But in these autobiographies, man is the central figure of suffering (Bhoites 1997). Dalit women's distress, endurance, and struggle are not been comprehended and represented.

Hence the paper argues for the silent sufferings of Dalit women and their marginalization in the Dalit literature. The research uses Daya Pawar's *Baluta* and Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* as study tools and finds that buried under the oppressive social structure are the muted narratives of Dalit women which are largely ignored by the authors. The paper formulates the perspectives of women in the select texts, which are testimonies to the silent sufferings of the muted group. The study leads to the need for situating a Dalit Feminist Standpoint.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

*Baluta* (1978) by Daya Pawar is one of the first Dalit autobiographies to be published. The

narrative is an unpolished depiction of the pervasive cruelty of the caste system and a gut-wrenching, candid personal account of the author, his family, and community. The text elucidates the hardships of untouchables in the dire poverty and inhuman practices set against them and the plights of Daya Pawar's split personality and traumas of alienation he suffers due to his low caste in the caste hierarchical society (Kavya 2019:266).

The autobiography is also a social commentary that extensively discusses Dalit politics of rural Maharashtra in the 1940s and 1950s – its slums, chawls, brothels, and gambling dens where the poor and the outcast found ways to make a life. But the author outcasts the sufferings of women of the Dalit community and has mainly shown them as bitches in heat and sexual objects. The Dalit community has a common saying, “Before you choose your sheep, with me you will have to sleep” (Baluta 38). Daya's *Dada* was a womanizer. He would hide the scythe of the woman cutting grass and say to her, “If you let me have sex with you, I'll return your scythe.” (Baluta, 37). As a result, the common perception of a woman in the text is given as an object and sexually perverse creature but her character is questionable whereas a man's sexual behavior is treated as normal. Thus the chastity of the woman in the Dalit community is rendered erratic.

Daya Pawar, the author, is also a complex and alienated character who on one hand, immerses himself in intellectual and political work voicing against caste discrimination but on the other hand, is suspicious of his wife thinking that she is in a relationship with a Muslim boy and finally deserts her. She then marries an old man and works as a laborer. Another character that suffers gender oppression is Jamuna whose husband is also suspicious about her character and harasses her. He ultimately sells her to a brothel. During her old age, she ends up begging. Hence caste, sexism, and poverty coexist and overlap. Caste, class, and gender oppression are interlocking in nature (Sharma and Kumar, 2020) that reinforces the oppression of Dalit women making them “Dalit of Dalits,” (Manorma, 2008). They are pushed to the lowest societal framework bearing the brunt of caste, gender, and class oppression.

Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003) is an English translation of his original Marathi text *Akkarmashi* (1984). *Akkarmashi* in Marathi means a person of illegitimate birth, one who is incomplete, impure, or an outcast. The book primarily holds the agony and anguish of the writer, who is pained because of his illegitimate birth, the result of an illicit relationship of his mother. The author states:

My mother is untouchable, while my father is a high caste from one of the privileged classes of India. Mother lives in a hut, father lives in a mansion, Father is a landlord; mother, landless. I am an *Akkarmashi* (half-caste). I am condemned, branded illegitimate. (*The Outcaste* ix).

The text primarily discusses the torments of the author who has nothing and he argues, "A man is recognized in the world by his religion, caste or his father; I had neither a father's name nor any religion nor caste. I had no inherited identity at all" (*The Outcaste* 59). The humiliation and pains of being an illegitimate son haunt Limbale throughout his life: at the time of his admission in school, fixing of marriage, and all social dealings. He broods over his fate,

Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days and allow me to grow in the fetus? Why did she allow his bitter embryo to grow? How many eyes must have humiliated her because they consider her a whore? (*The Outcaste* 37).

As there is no outside of the text, deconstruction of *The Outcaste* shows the assorted meanings at work within the language. The narrative of Limbale reveals that along with his excruciating story there exists an unrepresented suppressed narrative of his mother's agony. Implicit in every significant literary work is a serious account of the society within which it takes birth. Therefore, under the explicit agony of the author lays the sigh, vulnerability, and the silent sufferings of his mother, a Dalit woman who is sexually exploited by a Patil, the upper-caste landlord who in turn draws legitimacy of sexual exploitation from his wealth and social status. The author confers,



This is almost a tradition – a Patil, always a big landowner, has a Dalit woman as his whore. There is at least one such house in every village. Children born to such a whore have no legal father because there is an unbridgeable gap between such a father and son. The prestige of the father is at stake! (*The Outcaste* 59).

The prevalent social structure and Dalit patriarchy also make adolescent Daya Pawar, to question his mother, “How come you're pregnant when my father is dead?” (*Baluta* 62). He suspects the character of his widow mother because she undergoes a miscarriage. There is a severe conflict in the mind of the author that drifts him from his mother until she explains to him that she has been pregnant when his father died. The doubt against his mother's character triggers in the mind of the author because of his complex psychological condition caused by childhood memories and emotional abuse. He has seen babies in the gutter. The municipal clinic had a cradle for orphaned and unwanted babies (*Baluta*, 270). Pawar's autobiography discusses the tale of a newborn found from the river. Police find the mother and punish her, “She is paraded on the road from the market to the government office area. The public follows, cursing and abusing” (*Baluta*, 124). The author calls these “daily dramas” in and around the red light area of Bombay, where all eunuchs and prostitutes stood around and made lewd conversation. The happenings that appear as “daily dramas” to the author are the day-to-day “lived experience” of Dalit women where they have no choice but have to live with the experience of vulnerability and manifold intersecting oppressions of caste, gender, and class. The happenings with Dalit women also show their humiliation, dehumanization, lack of basic medical facilities, and awareness to change their circumstances.

Thus, an examination and deconstruction of *Baluta* and *The Outcaste* reveal the suppressed tales of Dalit women's sufferings. Because of their low caste, they endure the burden of twin patriarchy. One is intrinsic patriarchy from the men of their community and is ideologically entrenched and complicates man-woman relationship within the Dalit family. The women in the Dalit community undergo many problems resulting from Dalit patriarchy and gender oppression such as gendered violence, sexual exploitations, bearing with unwanted pregnancies, and gendered household labor. They perform survival activities of food gathering under difficult conditions as running the household remains their responsibility whereas the majority of men spend their earnings on drinking alcohol. Thus women labor relentlessly for their household without any payment and acknowledgment. Their work is not comprehended and taken for granted by men.

Whereas the labor performed by the Dalit community has been discussed in *Baluta* and the author is aggrieved at their condition. The author explicates that Mahars toil the whole day as there is no timetable for their work. The narrator asserts, “It was slavery, for he was bound to whatever work had to be done for all twenty-four hours of the day. This was called bigar labour” (*Baluta* 65). For all the performed labor Dalits get *baluta*, a small share of the village harvest. The Mahar did not see *Baluta*-his share of the produce of the land as a charity. It was his right (*Baluta* 63). The hard relentless labor Dalits perform for *Baluta* has been discussed by the author but the persistent toiling of women in the fields and the household has been ignored. The traditional stories narrated by their ancestors about their loyalty to the upper castes and *baluta* as one of the fifty-two rights Mahars had. The celebrated traditions that gave rise to *Maharki* and all such like stories that advance the subjugation of Dalits injure the psyche of Daya Pawar from his childhood. He states, “The history will not be erased. Perhaps it will only go when I die. This stain of helplessness on my face? It dates back to that time. However, much I scour my face, even to the point of bleeding, it will not be wiped away” (*Baluta* 65). The childhood menace, the way he is tangled in his painful memories is hard for him to erase and he is jeopardized till the end of his life.

Pawar and Limbale have discussed their aches and sufferings of their community but have distanced themselves from the vulnerability and distress of Dalit women. Limbale states, “I have written this so that readers will learn the woes of the son of a whore” (*The Outcaste* ix). Deconstruction of the text reveals a unique social reality. The extrinsic patriarchy also called non-Dalit patriarchy makes economically deprived Dalit women vulnerable. The upper-caste landlords exploit Dalit



women both economically and sexually and also get impunity against their crimes. Thus this patriarchy is unquestionable. The unarticulated narrative of Masamai, Limbale's mother implicates Dalit woman's poverty, hunger, starvation, vulnerability, and sexual exploitation. Her life is a testimony to the overlapping oppressions of caste, class, and gender, which economically deprived rural Dalit women endure.

There are Dalit families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of the Patil's whore. Even the children born to her from her husband are considered the children of a Patil. Besides survival on the charity of a Patil what else a household expect? (*The Outcaste* 38)

We can see a terrible pun on the last words 'household expects.' A Dalit woman fulfills the expectations of the household. As running the household is primarily the duty of a Dalit woman, amid poverty, hunger, and starvation she is expected to do anything for the survival of her family, even selling her body which ironically fetches her label of 'whore'. Immorality is committed by Patils; the household of Dalits feeds on the charity of Patils and sexual exploitation of Dalit woman, who effaces herself for the survival of her family. Ironically the woman is termed as a 'whore'. This illustrates how men marginalize and dominate women by controlling the language (Charamare 1981). They formulate derogatory terminology for the subjugation of women. And if a woman gets pregnant the oppressive social structure holds the woman responsible for the birth of an illegitimate child and she is many a time punished and paraded (*Baluta* 270).

The exploration thus proves Lazar's claim that many social practices far from being neutral are gendered which sustain a patriarchal social order. Relations of power, she says, "[S]ystematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude, disempowering women as a social group" (Lazar 145). Thus women of the Dalit community which endures social, economic, and political oppression are further oppressed because of their gender. *Baluta* and *The Outcaste* explicate the partial reality of Dalit women's lives. Their unique lived experiences are not accurately represented in literature. Hence, the study necessitates a Dalit Feminist Standpoint formulated in their writings thus representing their perspectives shaped on their unique lived experiences of caste, class, and gender.

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# **Distressing Realities: A Comparative Study of Manish Jha's *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* and the *Mahabharata***

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## *Abstract*

*The article compares and contrasts Manish Jha's film Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women and the Mahabharata, a mythical saga, by highlighting the portrayal of humiliation and exploitation faced by the female protagonists- Kalki and Draupadi respectively. Such a comparative study of the epic and the film will indicate both similitudes and dissimilitudes that exist between them. It will also reflect the status of women, particularly their sufferings as victims of male hegemony in their respective social and cultural specificities. By making a comparison of the film with the epic, the article claims that the film and the epic bring attention to issues in social and gender injustice.*

*Keywords: humiliation, suffering, patriarchy, social and gender injustice.*

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## **Introduction**

The film serves two essential purposes, to entertain and to impact the opinion and views of the diverse viewing populace. As a genre, the film is a significant and influential medium of creating social, cultural, and psychological change. As stated by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), in collaboration with KPMG (Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler), the Indian film industry “is the world's largest producer of films by volume - producing almost a thousand films annually” (45). It influences a considerable part of the Indian consumer's mindshare and holds the power to shape human interactions while challenging the existing institutional arrangements. In this regard, Manish Jha's film *Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women* has invited a fair amount of debate on futuristic rural India on the screen (“No woman's land”). Jha through the film acquaints the audience with the harsh reality concerning female subjectivity in the wake of feticide and infanticide. It critiques the exploitative hegemonic patriarchal set up which “systematically kills girls - after they are born, if they have not been finished off in the womb itself” (Maithili).

Based on a revisionist perspective (Allen 5), the study claims that the film and the epic, share the question of gender injustice. Some examples of this are: the pseudo choice given to the female protagonists in *Svayamvar*, their wedlock with five men, and their inclination towards one of the brothers. Also, the female protagonist of the movie, Kalki, shares more or less the same fate as Draupadi. Therefore, the paper engages in a contrastive study of the *Mahabharata*, and the film, *Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women*. Although belonging to different genres, time periods, and narrative structure, there are obvious and stark similarities in the humiliation and exploitation faced by both the female protagonists. Such a comparative study between the epic and the film will reflect the status of women, and their sufferings as victims of male hegemony in their respective social and

cultural specificities. As stated by Hutchinson, the comparative study brings “a whole set of political, historical, and cultural pre-dispositions to the comparison, a perpetual apparatus through which we conjure meaning as we compare it” (2). Further, its aim is also to bring forth the “meaningful dialogue between cultures and literatures” (Zepetnek and Mukherjee 15).

The film *Matrubhoomi* highlights the vicious reality where female feticide is a frequent phenomenon, and the village in Bihar reaches a state where there are no women in the place. It begins with the distressing and lamentable reality when a newly born baby girl is drowned in milk as her father has been expecting a male child. With time, the same tradition continues, and this unrestricted trend leads to a village populated entirely by males. As a result, the displeased and dissatisfied youth starts indulging in cross-dressed dance performances, watching imported pornographic films, and even bestiality as a way of satisfying their sexual desires.

The female protagonist, Kalki, lives in a nearby village with her false identity. She dresses like a male so that no one could recognize her as a woman. When a wealthy farmer comes to know about her through a local priest, he buys Kalki from her father and his five sons marry her. Kalki is forced to sleep with all of them, including the father-in-law. Amid all the physical and psychological turmoil, she is brutally punished when she tries to escape with the help of Raghu, the servant boy. She is chained in a cow-shed like the animals, without any food and water, and the men from the village rape her every night. At the end, when Kalki becomes pregnant, the whole village claims paternity which results in barbarous violence. The movie ends when Kalki gives birth to a baby girl.

The subject of female infanticide and feticide portrayed in the film (2003) finds its validation in the 2001 report from NCBI which marks a steady decline in the sex ratio in India. The statistics reveal that “the sex ratio, calculated as number of girls per 1000 boys in the 0-6 age group, declined from 945 girls per 1000 boys in the 1991 census to 927 during the 2001 census” (Kumar 1007). In the same year states such as Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat “fell into the category of having fewer than 800 girls per 1000 boys for the first time” (Kumar 1007). In this regard, Francois Farah, country representative of the UN Population Fund, asserts that “a stage may soon come where it would become extremely difficult, if not impossible, to make up for the missing girls” (Kumar 1007). He further adds that “[t]oday we are at a stage where many villages are having fewer or no small daughters and... the resulting imbalance can destroy the social and human fabric” (Kumar 1007). The male-female sex ratio in India continues to worsen “from 909 in 2011, 898 in 2013 to 887 in 2014” (“India sex ratio”). In this regard, Muthalaly juxtaposes the extinction of tigers with the extinction of women in society, presenting the true picture of the society if the practice isn't curbed. Also, Doval raises a question, “Is Rape the future of an Indian woman?” By giving reference to the film, Doval talks about the plight of the female protagonist Kalki who is forced to marry five men who rape her over and over again. Although Doval accentuates on the brutal experiences of the protagonist, however, she does not attempt to make a comparison between the *Mahabharata* and *Matrubhoomi*. Therefore, the article compares the film with the great epic the *Mahabharata*, as in the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi had to marry all the five brothers. Essentially though, both texts, the film and the epic, highlight the oppressive nature of patriarchy where a male child is considered as a blessing, and a girl child is perceived as a curse and, thus, is subjected to death.

The present paper is divided into various sections continuing the comparison between the film, *Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women* and the *Mahabharata*. It begins with a discussion on *svayamvar* and elucidates how both eras perceive the word differently. Further, it examines the reason behind the wedlock of Kalki and Draupadi with five men along with their inclination towards Suraj and Arjun respectively. It also addresses the consideration of Kalki and Draupadi as the genesis of the war with its repercussions.

## ***Svayamvar***

The word *swayamvar* means a woman choosing a husband as per her wish. In the film, the priest finds the girl when she is singing in the forest. Following her, he reaches her home, where he proposes to her father about her wedlock to the son of a rich man. Kalki is not even asked for her consent and her father agrees to the marriage of his only daughter to the five men against five lakh rupees and five cows. The moment he (Kalki's father) comes to know that the father-in-law is also involved in the sexual activity with his daughter, instead of showing any anger towards him or any outrage and compassion towards his daughter, he visits their place to make more money for an extra person sleeping with his daughter.

Similarly, in the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi's father, King Drupad already knew that nobody would be able to defeat Arjun in archery and therefore his daughter would marry him only. At the time of *yajna*, King Drupad proclaims “[a]t last! I have a lovely daughter who will be the perfect wife to the handsome Arjuna” (Nagpal 31). A similar awareness makes Draupadi aver, “[f]irstly, no one other than Arjun would be able to prove himself worthy. Consequently, it would be Arjun who would become the son-in-law of the Panchal monarch” (Ray 28). The quote showcases the weak position of a woman where she is given an artificial choice in choosing her husband. Although, beneath the surface, everything is directed and controlled by patriarchy. The father sells his daughter at a high price, it could be bravery in the *Mahabharata* (in *svayamvar*) but in the movie, it's a kind of a business transaction to get a better price. Also, in the film when the priest along with Ramcharan and Suraj comes to her house, at that time there is only one suitor for her, Suraj. It is quite possible that she could have thought of Suraj as her would-be husband. The similarity lies in the same thought of Draupadi where she contemplates Arjun to be her only husband.

### **Wedlock with five men**

In the film, the cause for Kalki's wedlock with five men finds its relevance in the social context where female feticide and infanticide are quite common. Kalki becomes the cradle of lust for all the brothers and their father. They treat her as their property or an object of sexual desire and use. It shows the physical, psychological, and emotional torment that a woman undergoes. When Kalki develops a liking towards Suraj, he is killed by his brothers in resentment. Whereas, in the *Mahabharata*, the proclamation of Kunti further forms the basis of the miseries in the life of Draupadi, “[m]y sons, whatever you have brought, divide it amongst the five of you equally” (Ray 55). It was upon Kunti's word that Draupadi had to marry five men. Pratibha Ray, in her novel, *Yajnaseni* unravels the hidden reality in the *Mahabharata*, especially the sexist reality: “Disgust was welling up in my heart for the elder brother. In his eyes I could clearly make out the secret flame of lust” (56). Draupadi is married to five men; one of the interpretations could be that Draupadi perceives the lust in the eyes of five Pandavas. Ray describes Draupadi's beauty as “[a]mazing! Complexion like the petals of the blue lotus! Thick hair like the waves of the ocean, and large, entrancing blue lotus-like eyes radiant with intelligence!” (7). Seeing her beauty, Yudhishtir intentionally gives utterance to the statement “[s]ee Mata Shri, what we have brought for you” (Jain 147) so that Kunti may misapprehend it as alms and commands it to divide among all the five brothers.

### **Inclination/liking of Protagonist**

The film *Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women* reconstitutes numerous incidents that share the same grounds with the *Mahabharata*. In the film, Kalki never wants to get married to five people. She is forced into wedlock by her father. However, it doesn't stop here, it goes even further that the father-in-law is also involved in her rape. She has to face the physical and mental pain day in

and day out. Similarly, even though, numerous narratives exist in the contemporary times on how Draupadi feels being married to five people for instance, in Ray's *Yajnaseni*, she never likes it, she wants to get married to Arjun only. She never desires to be the wife of five men. Nevertheless, to be the wife of Arjun, she accepts all the other four brothers as her husbands. She asserts:

I have made an offering of my life to keep the five Pandavs bound together, yet blinded by love for Arjun I thought of sowing dissension among them. Although the next moment, full of remorse, cleansing myself of the meanness, I would curse myself . . . My mind rebelled. Did I have no say? Then what was the meaning of the *svayamvar*? Why did Father prescribe such significant conditions for it? Which conditions had these brothers fulfilled for marrying me? I had placed the garland of bridegroom-choice around the neck of one already. By law, and according to *dharma*, it was he alone who was my husband...Why should I accept the other brothers as husbands? (369, 56).

The above-mentioned quote divulges the reluctance of Draupadi in being the wife of the other Pandavs. The original epic has never brought on the surface the kind of plight and humiliation that she endures in being the wife of five men. Nevertheless, in the present time, the contemporary discourses are trying to explore it like in Ray's *Yajnaseni*. Draupadi probably could have been facing the same thing because what she has in mind is Arjun but someone else is coming and raping her. So, the paper observes that getting married to five people is nothing but getting raped by five different men. What Kalki is feeling at that moment might be very similar to what Draupadi may have felt, and what happens is a kind of perpetuation of the same torment. It is a kind of sadistic pleasure that the men are deriving as is experienced by the Kauravs in the *Cheerharan* of Draupadi. Chakravarty observes, "Dushasana pulled Draupadi by her hair and brought her to the assembly. Much slander and torture was unleashed upon her" (16) in front of all the spectators, from younger to older. In a similar vein, when Kalki is in the cow-shed, she is raped by several men, irrespective of their age and caste.

### The Genesis of Conflict/War

In the film, the Brahmins and the Dalits fight because of Kalki, claiming paternity to the unborn child of her. The kind of war that takes place in the movie is a kind of struggle which symbolizes the famous Kurukshetra war that has been fought in the *Mahabharata*. These people are taking revenge, not on men but women, the reason being that a woman is always seen as an object, from ancient times as in the *Mahabharata*, to present times. This can be easily seen when Raghu's uncle considers Kalki as the cause of Raghu's death. He states "I am Raghu's uncle. It is because of you he got killed" (Jha 1:10:36- 1:10:42). The movie ends when Kalki gives birth to a child, and such a conclusion for this film could be contemplated as a continuum of the same torment by the girl child as well. It could also be interpreted as a sign of hope, shown through the birth of a girl child in this patriarchal society where women are present only through their absence. However, an identical contradiction is presented in the *Mahabharata* as well. Draupadi is often portrayed as the cause of the Kurukshetra war which is fought between Kauravs and Pandavs. In this context, Divakaruni recalls the prophecy for Draupadi as "[y]ou will be remembered for causing the greatest war of your time. You will bring about the death of evil kings- and your children's, and your brother's. A million women will become widows because of you..." (39).

### Repercussion of War

The riots in the film *Matrubhoomi* bring death. Similarly, the war in the *Mahabharata* causes a lot of destruction and bloodshed comprising "lakhs of corpses, split into parts, limb by limb, bloodied hair and skulls. Bodies without heads, heads without bodies, chests split apart, lumps of flesh, bones, intestines..." (Ray 382). Also, in the *Mahabharata*, five Pandavas are the epitome of



virtuousness, justness, and truthfulness who have taken birth on earth for the establishment of Dharma. On the contrary, in the movie, the five brothers are a different kind of Pandavas, (war)mongers, the ones who eat woman flesh in modern times. Suraj who epitomizes the character of Arjun is killed in the movie by his brothers because of his closeness to their common wife. Raghu, the servant is more of a Vidhur character, as Vidhur helps Draupadi by intervening at the time of *cheerharan*. In fact, Vidura, is the first to “protest against the dice-game and the summoning of Draupadi” (Bhattacharya 150). Likewise, Raghu also intervenes by helping her in escaping when one of the brothers beats Kalki, and she pleads with Raghu to help her. Kalki states “I want to go. I want to go from here. Take me from here. Wherever, just take me from here. Please take me Raghu. I can't live here. I want to go to my home...” (Jha 1:06:07- 1:06:32). Also, Sukha, the boy who has come to serve as a servant after the death of Raghu, represents Krishna; just as Krishna helps Draupadi by providing her with the cloth at the time of her *Cheerharan*, “[t]he more he pulled, the more my body would get clothed with costly garments. Seeing this amazing sight the entire hall was stunned” (Ray 243), in the same manner, Sukha helps Kalki when she is in the utmost need, feeding and helping her in the end when her father-in-law is about to kill her.

## Conclusion

This study brings to the forefront the common themes that run through Manish Jha's film *Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women*, and the *Mahabharata*, using comparisons and contrasts. On the one hand, it reveals the weak position of women in the patriarchal set up, and on the other hand, it critiques the vicious reality and dehumanization of the patriarchs who believe in the extermination of the fair gender. Both the protagonists, Kalki and Draupadi are the mute victims of the male dominance. They are treated as a mere commodity for the use of their male counterparts. The study also reveals the continuation of same pain, humiliation, and oppression towards women over the ages. While it may be viewed as a limitation that the paper does not take into consideration the contextual differences between the two ages where these texts are situated, it fulfills the objective of contrasting the social realities of two different ages, thereby showcasing that there exists uniformity in the ideology of the society from the ancient time to the present time.

## Notes

In the paper, the term revisionist means re-interpretation of a historical account.

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## **Feminist Revisioning of Indian Mythology: Limning of Kavita Kane's Uruvi in Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen**

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### *Abstract*

*Myths play a crucial role in the establishment of patriarchal ideologies which in turn relegate women to an inferior position. To overturn the conventional androcentric ideology and provide a new female point of view, the feminist revisionists recreate myths. These revisionists examine how patriarchy, through the use of myths, contrives to neglect female characters in the cultural texts. Through "revision of the patriarchal myths" (Wilcox, 10) the image of powerful and intelligent women is created and the female voice is asserted. The retelling of myths from female standpoint began in the west with the revision, reframing, and re-visiting of western canonical texts that subjugated women. For instance, Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent* and India Edghill's *Queenmaker* recreate the stories of Dinah and Michal from the Bible. Among contemporary Indian writers whose work aligns with such a revisionist tradition is Kavita Kane; and she re-tells one of the lesser known stories from the Mahabharata in her novel, *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2013). The essay sets out to analyse Kane's novel's revisionist reading which recreates the story of Karna of the Mahabharata, from perspectives of Uruvi, his second wife. In the novel, the author re-examines the myth to present the perspective of an ignored female character; and she does this through depicting the traditionally neglected character of Uruvi as proficient and efficacious, thus, contributing to the inception of female ideology.*

*Keywords: myth, patriarchy, ideology, feminist, revision, gynocentric*

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Feminist revisionists, retelling myths from a feminist stance, conclude that women in mythic narratives have been delineated from an androcentric perspective. They further observe that the female characters from mythology receive conventional portrayal of myths by scholars and writers when authoring critical writings and literary works based on these myths. In the Western tradition, the Greco-Roman mythology and in the Eastern (Indian) tradition, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, act as the fountainhead for all the subsequent mythological writings in literature. Commenting on Western canonical texts Gerda Lerner in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* aptly opines, "A literary canon, which defined itself by the Bible, the Greek classics and Milton, would necessarily bury the significance and the meaning of women's literary work ..." (225). Similarly, deliberating on the impact of biblical narratives on women Grace Varada Brandmaier in her research work, *Patriarchy and the Power of Myth: Exploring the Significance of Matriarchal Prehistory* remarks, "...women have no place, no voice with which to contribute the construction of what is meaningful" (21). In *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir rightly opines that in mythologies women have been treated as "the elementary silence of truth" (196).

In the Western as well as the Eastern mythological texts women, owing to their gender, have been systematized to accomplish androcentric motives. Tippabhotla Vyomakesisri in her article, *Presentation of Women in Literature from Past to Present*, expresses her views, "In the epic *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* women characters have traits that had their unfair moments of subjugation due to their gender . . . The fact is that these characters were curated and edited to suit the

needs of patriarchal society” (18). The illustration of women in literature as meek, silent and submissive perpetuate patriarchal ideology as it takes into consideration the male viewpoint completely repudiating the female perspective. Many writers, as a result, take up revision of the myths which misrepresent and ignore female characters and recast them as strong, influential and dynamic. These writers reclaim the relinquished female characters along with emphasizing the perceptions of women in their writings from a contemporary outlook, thus, engaging in the practice of feminist revisionist mythology.

In such a critical state of affairs, Alicia Ostriker in *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* comments:

“...women writers have been imprisoned in an “oppressor's language” which denies them access to authoritative expression ... and I suggest the variety of strategies women use to subvert and overcome this denial. ... I consider a major strategy – revisionist mythmaking – as a means of exploring and attempting to transform self and the culture. Myths are the sanctuaries of language where our meanings for “male” and “female” are stored, to rewrite them from a female point of view is to discover new possibilities for meaning” (11).

Feminist revisionist mythology involves revision and rewriting of mythic or canonical texts from feminist perspective to create feminist texts that emphasize women's point of view. Adrienne Rich explains, “Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction— is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (18-19). During mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the writers engaged in the practice of feminist revisionist mythology, as a consequence of the growing feminist consciousness in the second-wave of western feminism, revised the mythological discourse. It is essentially western literature that has been revised under this practice. The authors pursuing this practice revise biblical narratives which, according to them, perpetuate patriarchal ideology in Western societies, thus, denigrating woman to a subordinate position. The canonical texts are rewritten to provide gynocentric renderings that defy the androcentric ideology established in these myths. Feminist revisionists, worldwide, having comprehended the importance of myth in establishing the ideologies, took to its revision in order to subvert the androcentric ideology and offer new gynocentric alternatives. The revisionists aim to modify the perspective of people through retelling of myths. The recreated versions bring forth new aspects or highlight the unseen elements in a story. Writers such as Mona Van Dyun, Alta and Adrienne Rich greatly impacted feminist revisionism of mythology. Some other feminist revisionists are Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Michele Robert, Anita Diamant and India Edghill who have revised canonical texts that subjugate women.

In India, the revision of phallogocentric myths from a feminist perspective has been taken up by a number of writers such as Namita Gokhale in *Shakuntala, the play of memory*; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in *The Palace of Illusions, The Forest of Enchantments* and Samhita Arni in *Sita's Ramayana*. Within the tradition of the feminist revisioning Kavita Kane is also a writer who revises and retells the mythic tales and folklores from a feminist point of view. Among the series of books she has written, the first and the most acclaimed is *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*. The incidents and the characters of the novel have been rendered through the perspective of Uruvi, the second wife of Karna, one of the most enigmatic characters from a folklore related to the epic Mahabharata. She acknowledges in her interview with Sayantani Chakrabarty, from *Times of India*, “I was very comfortable with mythology as it is a huge canvas to express contemporary thoughts through our old stories, to recreate and reinterpret characters populating our mythology and to invest them with a certain present day sensibility especially against the social framework of change”. This situates her in the practice of feminist revisionist mythology.

In the same interview Kavita Kane posits that Uruvi, the *Kshatriya* bride of Karna, is “fictitious, derived from a Tamil folk lore” that introduces '*Ponnuruvi*' as one of his wives. For many

scholars 'Ponnuruvi' is not the name but an epithet used for one of his wives. The story of this novel is based on the play *Karna Moksham*. Vibhanshu Dave informs in his blogpost about *Karna Moksham: Story of Karna's Wife, Ponnuruvi*, "Karna Moksham is one of the most popular plays in the Kattaikkuttu repertoire. It is attributed to the author Pukalentippulavar . . . In Tamil Kataikuttu tradition the classical story has undergone a thorough reworking and adaptation to the local context. Karna's wife, Punnuruvi does not find a place in the written traditions of the epic. However, she fulfills a pivotal role in the performed version of the story".

Kavita Kane in *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, as a feminist revisionist, subverts Uruvi's traditional perspective of a class conscious woman, and she reconceptualises her as a contemporary modern woman free from all the social and cultural prejudices. In the play *Karna Moksham*, "... Ponnuruvi admits to her friends that she has had a nightmare, ... predicts her husband's violent death on the battlefield and her impending widowhood"(Dave). Kane's novel opens with a dream but instead of the dream of widowhood, Uruvi sees the dream of Karna's love:

She woke up with a start . . . she had seen the same dream. Again. Over and over again. And each time the persistently vivid dream spawned a haunted restlessness, pushing her into uneasy wakefulness.

The night was quiet, the marbled bedroom quieter still, but Uruvi could almost hear the raging turmoil within her . . . 'Karna', she uttered the name softly, and whispered it several times over, convinced that this was the man she had loved since the day she had first seen him (1).

In the play *Karna Moksham* Uruvi does not want to meet Karna, "She feels she has been trapped into a déclassé marriage and she scoffs at the invitation of this 'cart man's brad'" (Dave). In the novel Uruvi is in love with Karna and instead of his caste "the sheer nobility of the act had stirred her" (5). Before marriage Uruvi is well aware of Karna's caste but being a woman free from all social prejudices, "...pondered the princess . . . He was Karna, the King of Anga, the king with a crown of thorns, the king who was a sutaputra . . . He would always be the sutaputra, the eternal pariah . . . And yet, she, Uruvi . . . loved this man. . . . It was easy to fall in love with Karna . . . She wished to wed him one day. . ." (13). In the play *Karna Moksham*, it is Karna who comes to meet Ponnuruvi/Uruvi before proceeding to war but in the novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* Uruvi meets Karna, "Karna was amazingly calm when Uruvi came to him" (277).

Uruvi is, however, revived by Kane as a spokesperson of the neglected and the marginalized characters in her novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*. Kane asserts in her aforementioned interview, "I am fascinated by minor and largely overlooked women characters – those who are vastly ignored, often even discounted". She, being a mythological feminist revisionist, revises the characters from mythological narratives including folklores. The revisionists sometimes retell the myths through characters they have fashioned to present an approach they have envisioned to serve their purpose of revisioning.

In this novel the author presents Uruvi as the only daughter of sixth King of Pukeya, Vahusha and Queen Shubhra. In the very beginning of the novel *Karna's wife: The Outcast's Queen*, Uruvi, the beautiful, intelligent and strong *kshatriya* princess is shown in love with Karna, a *sutaputra*. Despite the enormous difference in their social status, Uruvi wants to marry Karna and she has clearly conveyed the same to her parents. Her father tries to reason with her and informs her of the consequences of her decision, "If you marry him, you will marry doom" (18)! But Uruvi is resolute and despite all odds, wants to marry Karna or else stay unmarried. She asserts:

You brought me up to be what I am today; to make me capable, to look after myself and be wise enough to distinguish between the good and the bad. You were the one who encouraged me to make my own decisions and to stick to them and be brave enough to accept my problem. . . . I have enough courage in me tackle the worst moments as and when I come across them one day (21).

Kane portrays Uruvi confirming to the Indian feminist stance. Uruvi makes choices for

herself, stands by them and instead of being a staunch rebel she takes into consideration the happiness and approval of her parents.

Father, you taught me to honour and love the brave and good and I want to marry such a man. I want you to approve of him because I know I can never be happy knowing that I have hurt you. ... One cannot be happy at the expense of others' unhappiness, especially if they are those you love dearly. Father, I want your approval and your blessings and I want you to honour Karna as you would any good human being (21).

King Vahusha finally accedes. She agrees to *swayamvar* only when her parents acquiesce to her choice of husband. Uruvi, in the literal sense of the word, *swayamvar*/self choice exercises her right to choose her husband, unlike Sita or Draupadi who could not exert their right to select their husbands but had to marry the man who would fulfill the conditions of *swayamvar*. Uruvi's choice of Karna as her husband in *swayamvar*, however, is not accepted by the kings and princes present as she has chosen a non-*Kshatriya* over them. "A violent battle seemed about to erupt" (34). The protest against Uruvi's decision of marrying Karna and reconciliation of this disagreement only when other male authorities show their support is the vivid evidence of the patriarchal system that denies respect to the choice of a female. It is only after Krishna's proclamation that Uruvi's choice must be respected that the chaos settles. King Vahusha also asseverates, "My daughters decision is her own and I, as her father, stand by it completely" (37).

Uruvi's life with Karna is blissful. She spends time with him, talking to him for hours, discussing political and other serious subjects. Karna starts admiring her. "Mixed with her vivacity was an inner calmness, composure, a serenity that relaxed him. He found himself talking to her freely about matters he usually kept to himself... It was not mere knowledge, but her ability to comprehend even nuances with a quick, deep perceptiveness" (49). She fascinates him. Enthralled by Uruvi and entranced by her beauty and intelligence, he felt enlivened and soothed in her presence, "...she was like a haven where he sought refuge and he knew he could never let go of her" (49).

All the women have begun to neglect Uruvi and look down on her as she has married an outcaste. Uruvi handles the situation very well. Uruvi knows that the royal ladies are complacent and only petty things interest them. She on the other hand, has intellectual interests. Art, literature, medicine fascinate her. Knowing full well that her acumen is far superior to these ladies she ignores their disparaging attitude. Her father observes the royal ladies ignoring Uruvi and how bravely she manages everything with a smile. King Vahusha commends her daughter—"Any other person would have locked herself in her home to hide from this deliberately cold treatment and the unkind remarks. But not my Uruvi; she is a lioness all right" (61)! Uruvi is confident of her decisions; she comes out as a brave and strong woman with fortitude. She is exceptional. Karna feels, "Uruvi was refreshingly different from all the other women he had known" (49).

Uruvi is talented in arts and music with a keen interest in gaining scientific knowledge of flora. She goes to the small *gurukul* of Rishi Bagola where she develops a deep interest in Ayurveda and healing. "While girls of her age were groomed to become dainty princesses, Princess Uruvi saddled her horse each morning to ride to the *gurukul* where she spent the day immersed in the world of medicinal herbs and other remedies" (15). Her guru finds in her the exceptional gift of healing. Though nursing the sick and the wounded soldiers is not a work appreciated for a princess, Uruvi's guru convinces King Vahusha to let her pursue the things she is passionate about. By following her passions, she again challenges the patriarchal traditions. In the time of war, Uruvi devotes herself to healing the wounded and maimed soldiers. Shona, Karna's brother shows his disagreement as it is beyond the domestic space and the battleground is an obvious male space. Through healing and thus, entering the male domain she challenges the patriarchal notions. Besides Uruvi's questioning attitude sets her apart from what is traditionally expected of a woman--silent compliance. She loathes war and interrogates her father regarding the necessity of war and what it results in. She asks, "How can you gloat about your victory while trampling on other people's lives? What is it – insatiability,



egotism or self-importance – that goads you to go to war” (16)? Uruvi advocates peace and harmony. She opposes war and war-mongering as patriarchal and oppressive forces. When Yudhishthira conducts a *rajasuyayajna*, Uruvi argues with Krishna and Karna regarding the ethics of territorial expansion through war and the duties of a king. She is of the opinion that notions of martyrdom are downright trivial, and that war can only result in terror. She expresses how she feels when her father goes to war:

I have lived with it all through childhood, tormented by constant worry, and I have seen my mother do the same, and my grandmother before her as well...the end of war is always terrible. Each time my father went for battle, I lived in the fear that he would not return...and if he had died...what good has war done except satisfaction to those seeking vain glory (102)?

These expressions show the difference in male-female perceptions of war. War, heroism, martyrdom are patriarchal notions, the repercussions of which have to be borne by women.

Uruvi is sagacious and quick to notice Duryodhana's intentions and enquires of him fearlessly, regarding the truth about his friendship with Karna, “It's no friendship you claim, Duryodhana, it's a devious arrangement . . . Do you deny that Karna is just a pawn in your game against the Pandavas” (81)? She assertively questions Karna regarding his gratuitous indebtedness towards Duryodhana which would ultimately lead to his downfall. Uruvi motivates him to choose the right path and battle for his dignity, respect and sense of pride as a warrior.

As a woman Uruvi is infuriated when she comes to know of Draupadi's humiliation in public and feels agonized at Draupadi's predicament. Intensely enraged, she interrogates Karna, “Tell me, Karna, in your own words what happened there. How you instigated Duryodhana to drag Draupadi to the hall... Did it make you feel proud, great warrior, to pull a woman by her hair and haul her through the royal hall...to strip her of her pride...to deride her as a prostitute? ... What sort of a man are you” (116)? Uruvi leaves Karna and goes back to Pukeya. The distress that she feels for Draupadi shows feminist solidarity. She appeals to Kunti and Arjuna to let her meet Draupadi as her rage will cause disaster. She says, “let me bear the brunt of her fury” (124). Uruvi is resolute, decisive and righteous. In this instance Uruvi's actions reveal her feminist stance that vehemently opposes abuse of women.

Uruvi leaves her husband as she holds him responsible for victimization of Draupadi. She speaks strongly in favour of wronged and insulted Draupadi when Kunti calls Draupadi a public woman and Bhanumati blames Draupadi of being the cause of war. Uruvi says, “How fair is it to blame Draupadi for every mess? Draupadi is the catalyst who will precipitate what the Kauravas have initiated” (202). Uruvi speaks not only for Draupadi but the other wronged women Ambika, Ambalika, Gandhari and the likes, as well. She says to Kunti, “...gross injustice has been heaped upon these women” (158). She is aware that they had to suffer because of pervasive patriarchal beliefs.

After Karna's death she becomes the mainstay of Karna's family. Pandavas repent after becoming aware of the fact that Karna is their elder brother. They meet Uruvi requesting her to let the Pandavas train Vrishkethu to which she agrees but refuses to crown Vrishkethu as future king. “No! I cannot accept this . . . I don't want history being replayed! ...I want peace, not even the tiniest hint of a potential war” (303). Uruvi rises above her personal desires and aspirations in many instances, thus challenging patriarchal ideology. The choices she makes in her life not only protest against conventional patriarchal beliefs, but they are an important step in her pursuit for an identity and a place of her own in the world dominated by patriarchy.

## Conclusion

The feminist revisionists firmly believe that classical myths have aided in the establishment of patriarchal ideology which connives to subordinate women and present them as meek, submissive and voiceless. Kavita Kane, as a revisionist, succeeds in portraying a strong and intelligent woman, contrary to the meek and subservient woman presented in the old myths. Kane, by employing feminist

criticque, takes a pretermitted mythological character, Uruvi, from folklore, and explores all the possibilities to revise the character for presenting a woman as powerful, righteous and affectionate. Kane's Uruvi is strong, decisive and free from all social and cultural prejudices. The author is successful in bringing the ignored character into the limelight fully as Uruvi challenges patriarchy through her anti-war thinking and her quality of being a great healer. She comes across as a powerful character who takes on patriarchy and its norms, asserting her point of view with courage. In keeping with the tradition of feminist revisionist mythology then, and in alignment with feminist perspectives, Kane remarkably re-tells one of the lesser-known stories from the age-old epic. Uruvi's strong voice, as well as her powerful character, her emotions, thoughts and perspectives, all shine forth as she expresses herself confidently and takes actions on her own accord. By revising the neglected and marginalized mythological character, Kane raises and transforms the traditional, patriarchal and phallogocentric aspects and offers gynocentric rendering effectively.

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**Transgressing Cultural Taboos: A Study of Nalini Jameela's  
*The Autobiography of a Sex Worker***

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*Abstract*

*Self-writings by women contribute immensely to the changing image of oppressed women. Throughout history, it is evident that men's writings about women have never been able to narrate appropriately the oppression suffered by women. In most of the cases, they have been portrayed as victims without identity. In the present research paper, the life narrative of a South Indian woman from the most derided profession in India has been analyzed. Nalini Jameela's *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* (2007) is a narrative that comes straight from a woman who has suffered violence and hypocrisy of the patriarchal society and has survived in the oddest of circumstances.*

*Keywords: autobiography, prostitution, sex-worker, narrative, resistance, self, hegemonic dominance, culture, identity.*

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The term prostitution refers to the profession of sex-work which is usually exchanged with money or other favors or services. It is deeply ingrained in human culture and is viewed and interpreted in various ways. It interrogates the supposed equality of genders. At the same time, it highlights the hypocritical male psyche which regards the image of the female prostitute as immoral and uncultured. Prostitution as a social act is considered polluting and unnatural but it often serves the sexual interests of men at the cost of women sex workers who are considered as lowly and impertinent.

Prostitution may be seen as a major form of exploitation of women. Its roots can be traced in early human civilization and it has been ever spreading under the garb of religion and politics. It would not be wrong to say that whenever man had money, goods or services available for barter, they were exchanged for sex. This is also evident from the fact that throughout Greek and Roman periods, prostitution remained legal. Although Christian ethics banned prostitution in the early first century, it was not bereft of injustice towards women. While the men who hired prostitutes were not considered accountable, women offering sexual services were whipped and exiled. Centuries later, prostitution was permissible in most of the countries of the world. Tom Head in his article 'The History of Prostitution' states that "Government-funded brothels were established in major Italian cities throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries" (Head). In the succeeding centuries, prostitution came to be accepted as a part of human society. Forced prostitution in military brothels during the World Wars is again a heinous act proving the oppression of women.

The history of sex work in India can be traced back to the *Devdasi* tradition in which young girls were given away to the priests or such holy men in the name of religion. This was done by the parents to rid themselves of the burden of marrying off their daughters. With time, men belonging to the influential sections of the society started using women to satisfy their lust in exchange for money. This system gradually became popular in the Indian society and young girls/women began to be lured into sex trade due to various reasons--the most common being the want of money. Menorca Chaturvedi in her article, "Conditions of Sex Workers in India," observes, "No girl enters into this profession by choice. She is compelled to join it. Lack of employment, the realization of being unwanted at home, and the subsequent hopelessness often force them to take such a drastic step" (Chaturvedi). Even George Bernard Shaw in "Preface" to *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893) has remarked that "the

alternative offered by society collectively to the poor women is a miserable life, starved, overworked, fetid, ailing, ugly..." (239).

Women's writings about their lives have often revealed how they have been oppressed by the patriarchal forces in the society. However, not much work has been done on the lives and experiences of women sex workers. At the international level, a few women sex workers, through their writings, have shared their experiences and have voiced the oppression that they had to suffer in this profession. *To Beg I am Ashamed: The Autobiography of a London Prostitute* (1938) by Sheila Cousins is an example of an autobiographical writing from the pen of a prostitute in the United Kingdom. In the Indian context, there have been very few autobiographical narratives by sex workers. *My Story* and *my Life as an Actress* (1913) by Binodini Dasi, a well-known Bengali actress, dates back to the pre-independence era. Binodini's narrative is quite ahead of its time. Nalini Jameela through her autobiography, *The Autobiography of a Sex-Worker* (2007) revived this tradition in women's autobiographical writings by raising her voice against the exploitation of sex workers and narrating their problems in a resistive manner. She wrote her autobiography amidst questions of moral uprightness and ethics.

Nalini Jameela was born in a village, Kallur in Thrissur, Kerala in Southern India in 1954. Though Nalini was a Hindu by birth, she converted to Islam after she married a Muslim client, Shahul Hameed and changed her name to Jameela. This is how she became 'Nalini Jameela'. In fact, her identity was lost somewhere between being a Hindu and being a Muslim. In the conflict between whether she was Nalini or Jameela, she decided to let her name be Nalini Jameela. The truth was that she belonged to no religion. She knew only one religion i.e. the religion of freedom. Coincidentally, Kamala Das, with whose *My Story* Jameela's autobiography has often been compared, also converted to Islam later in her life.

The protagonist Nalini was deprived of proper education as she was removed from school at the age of nine due to the poor economic conditions of her family. Since she was poor and uneducated, she had to work as a labourer and a domestic servant before turning into a sex worker. Nalini faced stark discrimination on the basis of caste, colour and economic status in her society. From early childhood, she had learnt that being a woman was a problematic issue and if the woman belonged to a lower caste, poor family and was dark-skinned, the survival was even more difficult. She had exploitative experiences in her school, in the tile factory where she worked for some time and later even in the profession of sex work.

Jameela's autobiography first appeared in 2005 in Malayalam under the title, *Oru Laingikatozhilaliyute Atmakatha*. After the release of this first version of her autobiography written in collaboration with a friend, I. Gopinath, she felt that she had been portrayed "like a puppet who dances to other's tunes" (Jameela 2007:178). This book was surrounded by a lot of controversy, following which Jameela rejected the first version. She prepared a second version in her own words and style which she regarded as the authentic one. The book was translated in English by J. Devika and released in 2007 under the title *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* which sent shock waves through the society.

Her second book *Romantic Encounters of a Sex Worker* (2018) (English translation by Reshma Bhardwaj) deals with detailed encounters with her clients. She has made documentaries named *Jwalamukhi kal* and *Nisabdarakkapettavarilekku Orettinottam (A Glimpse of the Silenced)*. These are based on the lives of female sex workers and police atrocities faced by them. She has even conducted workshops for sex workers and participated in many discussions. At present, Nalini Jameela is the coordinator of Sex Workers' Forum of Kerala and is an active member of five Non-Government Organizations.

In her narrative, Nalini has raised very pertinent questions regarding the whole burden of social stigmas to be shouldered by women alone when men are equally responsible for the proliferation of sex work in any society. In the patriarchal set-up, it is the woman who is looked down

upon and socially ostracized whereas the man continues to lead a respectful life in spite of being an active participant in the trade. Jameela's narrative is a response to the social taboos and hypocrisies aimed at the marginalization of women working as sex workers. Her claim is not that prostitution is a solution to women's problems like poverty and low social status. She regards prostitution as rendering of services like any other service which gives a kind of freedom to women by being economically and socially independent. Jameela's childhood in an economically backward family, her repeatedly unsuccessful marriages, her falling into sex trade and the subsequent exploitation had led her to be a woman without identity of her own. Her sense of identity emerges from the fact that she never felt ashamed of the kind of work she had to do. The interrogative nature of Nalini Jameela led her to question the subservience of women. She defied the laws of the patriarchal society by going against her father over certain family issues. Since she was thrown out of home at an early age, she married a co-worker for the sake of getting married, as it was not expected from a woman in her society to remain single. The marriage did not work out well. To make it worse, her husband died of cancer at a young age. Left with no other choice for work to meet the domestic needs, she was forced by circumstances to enter sex work. In this field, she saw the hypocrisies underlying the patriarchal society. After she took up the profession of a sex worker, she was criticized and defamed by her society. However, she did not bother about the patriarchal system as it was more important for her to raise her children.

During her life as a sex worker, she witnessed that it was the woman who was made the culprit by the society in the whole system of sex work. Hence, she was treated as marginalized in the society. The marginalization a sex worker faces in the patriarchal system, is almost equivalent to untouchability. Such women are not considered suitable to be a part of a respectable society. She wrote her life as a sex worker when it was still a taboo in India to talk about sex work. Though sex work is now legal in India and there are many provisions for sex workers, most of them are still exploited and face violence, deceit and sexual assault.

Nalini Jameela questions the society for treating sex work as an offence when it is only that one is paid for the service of sexual gratification it offers to the other. Her impressive arguments have changed the way sex work was looked at in Southern India. She found power in being economically self-sufficient though she was looked down upon with scorn and contempt in the society. Much before Jameela asserted the importance of economic independence of women, Ismat Chughtai, a famous Indian writer, in her memoir *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan* (1988) translated into English as *A Life in Words* (2012) by M. Asaduddin, had asserted the subservient condition of women in a patriarchal society. She wrote extensively about economic dependence of women on men and the resultant subjugation:

If a girl obeys the men in her family simply because she is economically dependent on them, then it is not obedience but deception. If a wife stays with her husband simply because he is her provider then she's as helpless as a prostitute. The children born of such a mother will only display helplessness and a slavish mentality. As long as the women of our country continue to suffer oppression without resistance we will be weighed down by a sense of inferiority in political and economic spheres too. (Chughtai 11)

She has also unveiled the hypocrisy of the custodians and protectors of law and order in the society. They were also her clients who sought sexual services from her at night and got her arrested the next day. As she puts, "Police to sleep with by night; police to give a thrashing by day!" (Jameela 2007:26). In her documentary, *Sex, Lies and a Book*, she claims, "I thought about the cruelty of the male gender and felt sad. Masks . . . so many Masks" (*Sex, Lies and a Book*). One of her co-workers, Sabria who raised her voice before National Women's Commission against the oppression of sex workers and their status, was tortured to death by the political forces. She understood that in a society like hers in which women held no power and control over their lives, sex workers had no scope of getting their due share. They were not welcome at home because of the social taboos and could not make a home of their own because no one would marry them. Through various incidents, Jameela throws light on the helplessness of sex workers in India.



Jameela's solutions to the problems of sex workers are based on her philosophy that one holds the responsibility of defining oneself. There is no fixed criterion of what is good and what is bad and how a human being should be. We have to make our choices in life and take responsibility for what we do. By telling the sex workers that they do not commit any offence by doing sex work and "If you think it's an offence, you're sure to be punished," she brought this marginalized category of sex workers to the centre by becoming their voice and demanding respect and dignity for them (Jameela 2007:85). In fact, in her autobiography, she has deconstructed the whole idea of marginalization of sex workers.

Nalini Jameela has raised certain moot questions about the hypocrisy of human society and its dual standards of morality. She has been able to negotiate the dilemmas about her identity, personhood and human worth. Rising out of the straitjacket of a sex worker, she has raised her potent voice against the hegemonic dominance of the patriarchal society over women involved in sex work, and unwraps the false layers camouflaging male psyche which thrives on exploiting and dominating women. In short, Nalini Jameela considers sex work to be a profession like others that gives a woman a sense of independence and allows her to be unapologetic about the modes and mores of her life. Her autobiography candidly chronicles her fluctuating fortunes and records her transition from a filthy, unwanted condition to a powerful central space. With determination and will-power, she has been able to fight all odds and forcefully represent the whole community of sex workers.

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## Exploring Gender Fluidity in Amrutha Patil's *Kari*

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### *Abstract*

*The discovery and gradual acceptance of gender fluidity has been a major breakthrough in gender studies. The disruption of binaries brought about the discovery and burgeoning of varied identities and the associated fluidity with these identities. The present paper deals with exploring gender fluidity in Amrutha Patil's graphic novel Kari. In addition, the paper also focuses on the creation of stereotypical women via commercial advertisements and other social institutions like family. Even in the contemporary scenario of varied burgeoning identities, there are cultural conditioning to be the quintessential male and female. This cultural conditioning regarding beauty and being 'clogs' the flow and navigating with a gender fluid identity becomes disorienting for the concerned. Therefore, a ready acceptance at social and cultural level for the grey spaces is the panacea to the unchecked burgeoning of fluid identities.*

*Keywords: fluidity, Pansexuality, Thirdiness, stereotypical binary, Grey spaces.*

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Gender fluidity is a colossal breakthrough in the postmodern world of unremitting transition. Prior to delving further in the different aspects of fluidity it is mandatory to briefly trace the trajectory of the gradual evolution that humanity has made with respect to diverse gender identities. It took decades to mitigate the variance between the privileged 'self' and the unprivileged 'other.' The eighteenth century saw women coming out of their homes, questioning the discrimination and demanding the basic rights through the Abolitionist movement. The movement soon evolved into a massive second wave feminism and questioned the different roles of men and women. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1945) questioned the role of women as the 'other' and man as the 'self.' Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) advocated political rights for women. Butler's theory of performativity and social construction of gender in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990) ended the chasm between the self and the other. Due to this, the creation of two individual and equal selves took place and the binary stood disrupted. The disruption of binaries brought about the discovery and burgeoning of varied identities and the associated fluidity with these identities.

The acknowledgement of gender fluidity is yet another milestone further for humankind. In general, terms, gender fluidity refers to a broad spectrum of being and expressing oneself through one's body and desires. Postmodernist thinkers believed in discovering the local narratives and rejecting the Meta narratives. In application, gender is the Meta narrative and its further division into Gays, Lesbians, Butch, drag queen, bisexuals, hijras and other transgender are the local narratives. The division of gender into seminal sectors and inclusion of queerness by postmodernist thinkers is a major breakthrough in gender analysis. The days of Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf* are over where she had to undergo a court trial for creating a lesbian protagonist. The inclination to delve deep into the world of third gender or gender fluid people has made the literary scene replete with queer literature. Abha Dawesar's *Babyji* (2005) pans on the life of teenage Anamika wherein she is busy trying to explore her sexuality with men and women. *A Married Woman* by Manju Kapoor (2003) depicts the protagonist, Asha suddenly finding love in her newfound friend Pipee and almost ruining her marriage. *Cobalt Blue* (2013) by Sachin Kundalkar expatiates on the life of two siblings (boy and a girl) who have

feelings for a man in their house. The excellence of this work lies in baring the individual feelings of a gay and a girl. *The Man Who Would Be Queen* (2011) is the autobiography of gay poet Hoshang Merchant and offers an authentic peep into the life of gays. This depicts a marked transition on the literary scene where a third gender has begun to write his/her own feelings. Amrutha Patil's *Kari* also deserves a mention as it takes the norm of gender fluidity a notch higher.

The present paper explores gender fluidity in Amrutha Patil's graphic novel, *Kari* and also expatiates on the creation of stereotypical women via commercial advertisements and other social institutions like family. The novel begins with the suicide attempt of Kari and her love interest Ruth. Ruth is saved by the safety net of her building and Kari by falling into sewer drain of her building. Ruth flies to another city and Kari crawls into her office. At the outset, Kari appears to be a lesbian but the further reading acquaints the reader with Kari's negotiation and engagement with her identity. Kari, a queer protagonist, belongs neither to the heterosexual nor to the homosexual. She belongs to the grey area which does not exclusively fall into black or white. Her established identity is in not conforming to either the homosexual or heterosexual gender norms. She slowly moves in her journey and finally discovers her prism like self, vibrant and colorful. As Amrutha Patil says in her interview with Paul Gravett:

I wanted to send an unusual protagonist into the Indian literary scene. A young, deeply introverted asexual and queer woman- counterpoint to the hyper feminine prototypes one keeps coming across. Yet, the book is not a coming-out tale. Kari's queerness is incidental, rather than central to her journey. She is dark and funny and detached – something you may not expect from a quickie 'suicidal lesbian' synopses. People love quick synopses. (Patil as quoted in Gravett, 2012: n.p)

Kari's assertion "my favorite form is float" (39) enforces Patil's view that Kari's journey through her queerness is not stable but she likes to float effortlessly from one identity to another. Kari's character is parallel to that of Anamika in *Babyji* where the latter is trying to explore her sexuality between lesbianism and further as well. The experiences of both these characters pan from woman to lesbian and beyond into queerness. Patil captures her pansexual queer desires and experiences even in the way Kari savors fruits of different tastes and fragrances. She says:

There are some fruits you do not want to venture into alone. A peach, for one, creature of texture and smell, sings like a siren. A fruit that lingers on your fingertips with unfruitlike insistence, fuzzy like the down on a pretty jaw. Figs are dark creatures too, skins purple as loving bruises. A fig is one hundred percent debauched. Lush as a smashed mouth. (*Kari* 66)

Her comparison of Peach to the 'fuzzy like the down and pretty jaw' and figs purple color to the 'loving bruises' indicate to the queer variation of her identity. Her desire for enjoying the lushness of various fruits indicates her desire to taste and enjoy all that she can. She intends to enjoy the uniqueness of every fruit or forbidden fruit.

She enjoys the days when the boyfriends of Delna and Billo do not turn up in their apartment. She expresses that her roommates flirt with her and shamelessly mother her. Patil puts forth a very valid point through Kari when she categorically says, "make no mistake - there is no thing as a straight woman" (*Kari*66). This statement is a complete revelation in itself and acquaints the reader with even more different and individual shade of the grey space. Della and Billo's shameless flirting with Kari in the absence of their boyfriends show a fluid streak in the genders of all the three girls mentioned and not only Kari. Begum Jaan in Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaf* is also comparable to Kari because she forges a relationship with Rabbo her maid servant, to fill in her husband's empty space who is always busy with the boys with 'tiny waists'. Begum Jaan's pining for her husband while in a relationship with her maid servant Rabbo is indicative of her bisexual identity. This stance also indicates that fluidity has no perfect trajectory and is arbitrary.

Kari is averse to the romantic advances of Lazarus but when she meets his girlfriend and ponders on his prospects of leaving the country, she again hears an umbilical cord snap the second

time. Interestingly she mentions the umbilical cord snap for the first time with Ruth when Ruth leaves the city. This comparison between Lazarus and Ruth questions the relationship of Kari with Ruth and Lazarus respectively. Sharing an umbilical cord evinces a strong connection between Ruth and Kari. Does the snapping of umbilical cord with Lazarus mean that she shared an identical connection with him as she shared with Ruth? If yes, why did she not accept his proposal? If no, then what did she feel for him? The unanswered question automatically falls into the grey space and takes repose in arbitrariness. It would not be justified to label Kari a lesbian.

We cannot term her a lesbian because she herself cannot pinpoint her identity. The variance in her identity is visible in her following conversation with Lazarus after she rejects his proposal:

Lazarus: are you like a proper lesbian?

Kari : A proper lesbian? I roll the word 'lesbian' in my mouth and it feels strange there. Sort of fleshly, salivating, I'd say armchair straight, armchair gay, active loner. The circus isn't in my life. It's in my head. (*Kari* 79)

Kari cannot locate her identity in the word lesbian. She feels that it does not completely define her or encapsulate her identity comprehensively. Her acknowledgement that circus is in her head not in life denotes the dissimilar vein which spills over and makes her fluid and fall into the arbitrary. There seems to be no coherent order in her mind and body. Gay Becker says, "Order begins with the body that is, our understanding of the world and ourselves begins with our reliance on the orderly functioning of our bodies. This bodily knowledge informs what we do and say in our daily life. In addition we carry our histories with us into the present through our bodies". (Becker12). It appears that Kari in most part of the novel is trying to read her body. Though the confusion is about not being able to read her body, she expresses her identity in her actions. Her love for the arbitrary and fluid is exclusively visible when she watches K.D. Lang for the first time on Television she says:

I remember the day I saw kd lang for the first time. On TV. Grammy Awards 1997. She was handsome, preening. Me, I was mute, with no way to explain myself to myself or to anyone else. What kind of creature was this, this genderless one, and why did she make me feel this way? All I knew was that if I ever stood in a room across a creature such as this, my heart would be in a serious peril. (*Kari* 80)

Kari's attraction to k.d. lang acquaints the reader to an extent with her choice to see her fulfilment in no specific gender. There is bare attraction in her mind towards the 'genderless being' (*Kari* 80) and nothing more. P .Bhadury in her research article "There is no Such Thing as a Straight Woman.: Queer Female Representations in South Asian Graphic Narratives, contends that,"Scholars and reviewers alike have usually described Kari as a lesbian character. However she aspires to the elusive "genderless" quality kd lang possesses and pushes towards a non-binary, androgynous identity (Bhadury 428)

Kari comes across as a queer and reveling in the grey space but her intense sorrow at Dela 'tweezing' out her unwanted baby, puts us in touch with her feminine side and her motherly instinct. On the other hand, her incessant thought about Ruth makes us aware about her queer love. Despite her attraction for Angel but her respectable distance puts her across as a stoic person. The above-mentioned performances illustrate a contrast between her feminine and queer side. In the words of Judith Butler, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender . . . Identity is performativity constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 33). Kari's confusion stands a notch higher when she stands naked in front of a mirror. She is in confusion as to what her body is trying to tell her. Patil lays Kari's psychological situation bare when she says:

It's not that I have a bad relationship with the mirror. On the contrary, I think mirrors are splendid, shiny things that make great collectibles, whether whole or in smashed bits. Problem is, I just don't know what they are trying to tell me. These things can be troubling. The girls are outside the door telling me to wear kohl, and here I am wondering why I am not looking like Sean Penn today. (*Kari* 60)

The protagonist's cluttered thought process is discernible when she cannot understand what her body is trying to tell her. Incongruity in the alignment between her mind and body is troublesome for her. Even in the incongruous situation, Kari is sure about the floating aspect of her personality. When her roommates try to set her up with a boy she immediately stages her escape towards the bathroom and manages to satisfy herself with some unknown woman, an 'adventuress' (*Kari* 74). "I am not revolted I am simply disinterested" (*Kari* 76) is the basic cause she gives for staging her escape from the disinterested man.

Kari's preference for a buzz cut on the award function marks her own acceptance towards her queer space. Instead of visiting a saloon, she visits a barber and tries to lie that she is auditioning for a role but later insists on a buzz cut. She remains firm and clear, even on the insistence of the barber that she wanted a complete buzz cut. She does not budge even when the barber says that he would give her a woman's boy cut. For the information of the reader she says that she chooses to be a 'shorn sheep' instead of a 'rumpled siren' (*Kari* 106) because increasingly her hair make her feel like a drag queen. Her reference to herself as a drag queen exhibits her discomfort in her identity as only a lesbian. Through this statement she also stresses on the performance aspect of her identity. Butler says, "When we say gender is performed, we usually mean that we have taken on a role we are acting in some way and that our acting our role playing is crucial to the gender that we are and the gender that we present to the world" (Big Think 0:07- 0:23)

As mentioned earlier, the discovery and gradual acceptance of gender fluidity has been a major breakthrough in gender studies. Even in the contemporary scenario of varied burgeoning identities, there are cultural conditioning to be the quintessential male and female. This cultural conditioning regarding beauty and being 'clogs' the flow and navigating with a gender fluid identity, becomes disorienting for the concerned. Butler's view supports the statement and says, "It's my view that gender is culturally formed, but it's also a domain of agency or freedom and that it is most important to resist the violence that is imposed by ideal gender norms, especially against those who are gender different, who are non-conforming in their gender presentation.

The name of the advertisement agency in which Kari works is Fairytale Hair. On the audition day for hair product, she looks at the girls and ponders about their plunging necklines and questions in her mind, 'if hair product audition equals so much cleavage, lingerie audition equals what?' (*Kari* 65). The advertisements lead to the endorsement of the certain beauty products and also stereotypical male and female as well. Over the years, the products change but the concept of stereotypical male and female foments and seeps in the Jungian collective conscience of the society and culture. This seeping mars the life of people who do not intend to remain encased in particular genders. Kari's mother does not understand the relationship between her daughter and Ruth. When Kari introduces Ruth as her best friend, her mother immediately remarks. "When a husband comes best friends becomes nobodies" (*Kari* 29). Zap, Della's boyfriend also advises Kari to pursue a relationship with Lazarus because according to him, "eventually a woman needs a man and a man needs a woman" (*Kari* 81). This advice is a representation of the oppressive heterosexual matrix and exclusion of the third space. Third space suffers not only due to exclusion but also due to loss of acknowledgement. Not being able to harmonize with one's identity is an issue as complex as a disease. To Kari's mother her problems are not complex and on Ganesh Puja advises her daughter, "to humble myself before Ganesh. Says it will clear the cobwebs in my brain and remind me that there is more to life than my foolish problems and roommates" (*Kari* 92).

While Kari's psychological landscape is full of complexities during the course of the novel, in the end she surely finds an exit route for herself. When she sees a girl jumping off from the next building and falling on the road Kari almost immediately decides to continue her journey. She says, "three things become apparent to me: 1) I feel no bird urge. (to fly and fall), 2) I want to step back not step off, 3) I still love Ruthie more than anyone else in the world, but I won't be jumping off the ledges for anyone any more" (*Kari* 114). Her statement evinces that Kari has finally reached a very contented juncture in her life where she does not have to negotiate with anything in her life and has chosen to

float rather than staying clogged.

In view of the above it is important to comprehend, "All thirdness is not alike" (Reddy 75). An easy and unquestioned switch seems to be the answer to let the identity flow without trying to fix gender identity. Staying afloat should receive recognition as a form of stable identity at the same time the switch should gain social and cultural acceptance. It requires subversion of not only heterosexual but also of homosexual oppression and to create a yet diverse shade of grey altogether.

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## Liminal Heterotopias in Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series

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### *Abstract*

*Eoin Colfer is well-known for his Artemis Fowl series consisting of eight fantasy, young adult novels with a 12-year-old eponymous anti-hero and several fairy creatures. This paper explores how Colfer's creation of multiple spaces within the framework of Michel Foucault's heterotopia, and Victor Turner's liminality contribute to a 'fantastic' reading of the text. These spaces removed from ordinary time and space, act as counter-sites simultaneously reflecting the 'real' world exemplifying the human imagination.*

Keywords: *Artemis Fowl, Eoin Colfer, fantasy, heterotopias, liminal spaces*

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### **Introduction**

Fantastic spaces are characterised by a primary world and an imaginary secondary world. The term secondary world was first used by J.R.R. Tolkien in an essay, 'On Faerie Story'. These worlds generally have their rules of existence, where humans share space with supernatural creatures and protagonists can travel through time and space. Objects and talismans facilitate uninterrupted movement between the worlds. These spaces are isolated, different and liminal in nature, intimately connected to the outer world and are both different from and similar to the established spaces in our world. Eoin Colfer, in his *Artemis Fowl* series, creates a multitude of alternate spaces in addition to these worlds called 'heterotopias.'

The present paper contends that reading the spaces in the *Artemis Fowl* series within the framework of Michel Foucault's heterotopia, and Victor Turner's liminality contributes to Colfer's creation of fantasy. I also argue that these fantastic spaces are no less farther from reality as it presents a commentary on the 'real' world. Negotiating these alternate spaces motivates young readers to develop a sense of agency to critique and comment on the reader's world, thereby promoting a critical appraisal.

### **Approaching and Defining Fantasy**

Fantasy literature accommodates the presence of wonder, mystery, magic, and a belief in the impossible, improbable and the inexplicable. Various critics and writers of fantasy have attempted to define and categorise the fantasy form. Todorov's structuralist understanding of the fantastic is a "hesitation" between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events (33). Eric S. Rabkin's *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976), Christine Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981) and Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) articulate Todorov's definition of the fantastic. Other contributions to fantasy scholarship are Maria Nikolajeva's article, "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern" (2003), and Alison Waller's *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism* (2009). Considerable work has also been done by Farah Mendelsohn, Harold Bloom, Kathryn Hume and Colin Manlove in the field of fantasy literature.

## Eoin Colfer: An Introduction

Eoin Colfer is an Irish author, most famous for his eight-part *Artemis Fowl* series which has an eponymous 12-year-old anti-hero. The plot ranges from stealing gold from the fairies to unveiling the Ice Cube, Fowl's invention to stop global warming. Recently, Eoin Colfer made the headlines, when 'Artemis' hit the big screen. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, and promoted by Walt Disney Studios, it has actors like Judi Dench, Colin Farrell and Josh Gad and was released in June 2020.

Artemis, portrayed as cold and cynical, uses his intelligence to build his family fortune by committing crimes. Through the series, Fowl's personality changes, and he begins to show remorse for his criminal actions. Under the influence of Holly Short, an elf, he steals only from those who deserve it and shares his loot with the public. The use of hi-tech, new-age gadgetry reflects the contemporary world children are exposed to and their ability to manipulate and adapt to the technology-savvy digital world.

Several reports (Tulsworld, Forbes, etc.,) examined the possibility of Colfer's Artemis as the new Harry Potter. However, Colfer "believes it nonsensical to compare Artemis to Harry. It is like comparing an apple with an orange" (Kellaway, *The Guardian*). Eoin Colfer's publications include *Benny and Omar* (1998), *Benny and Babe* (1990) and *The Wish List* (2000), under the Warp series *The Reluctant Assassin* (2013) and *The Hangman's Revolution* (2014). More recently he has published *The Fowl Twins* (2019) and *Deny All Charges* (2020).

## Theoretical Framework

Foucault's Heterotopias refer to spaces of *otherness*, which are neither here nor there, simultaneously physical and mental, thus reflecting Victor Turner's concept of the liminal. Analysing Foucault's heterotopias or "other spaces" as a theoretical construct helps in understanding Colfer's multiple worlds. A Foucauldian heterotopia is a

kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. ... [T]hese places are different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about (Foucault 1986, 24).

Extending Foucault's theory Maria Nikolajeva (2005) describes heterotopias as:

The "hetero" emphasises dissimilarity, dissonance, and ambiguity of the worlds. Heterotopia denotes a multitude of discordant universes, the ambivalent and the unstable spatial and temporal conditions in fiction. The concept itself comes from quantum physics. Heterotopia interrogates the conventional definitions of children's fiction based on simplicity, stability and optimism. By definition, heterotopic space is neither simple nor stable. On the contrary, it is intricate and convoluted, ever-changing, ever shape-shifting (*Aesthetic Approaches* 141).

Turner's concept of the liminal in "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage" is based on Arnold van Gennep's work *Rites de Passage* (1909). For Gennep, liminality signifies a threshold, a state of in-betweenness where reversal of hierarchical values and social statuses can occur.

Sandor Klapcsik discusses liminality as "a constant oscillation, crossing back and forth, between social, textual, and cultural positions" and as a "space of continuous transference, an infinite process formed by *transgressions* across evanescent, porous, evasive borderlines" (3). For Ronald Primeau, liminal is an intermediate space, or border, in the process of self-discovery suspending them "not only in space and time but between what they think they know about the past and what they have reason to suspect will be inevitable when they get home" (69).

## Review of Literature

Several fantasy writers have used heterotopic spaces to establish fantasy. It allows authors to create fictional representations of spaces otherwise impossible. Notable among them are Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*, Tolkien's Middle-Earth, J.M Barrie's *Neverland*, etc., and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Rowling, in her creation of the fictional non-magical Muggle world and its polar opposite, the Magical world of Hogwarts brings in several 'other' spaces like the 9<sup>¾</sup> platform at Kings Cross, the Pensieve, 12, Grimmauld Place, Room of Requirement, Hogsmeade Village etc., which satisfy the Foucauldian definition of a heterotopia.

Sarah Cantrell argues that Heterotopic spaces exist at the margins of safety and danger, order and chaos (195). Cantrell avers that Hogwarts excites a multiplicity of interpretations as a fictional space existing nowhere. Hogwarts' position as an isolated, different, and therefore other space suggests its heterotopic qualities (198). What Cantrell claims for Hogwarts is true for Colfer's spaces as well.

Analysing the heterotopias in the works of Diana Wynne Jones, Nikolajeva (2003) says that the unique feature of Jones's construction of literary space is that, unlike most fantasy writers, she "frequently starts in Otherworlds, depicting our world as strange" (144), a device recognized in criticism as de-familiarization. For instance, dishwashers, cars and radios are considered fantastic by the inhabitants in *The Power of Three*, while their uncanny ability to see into the future is considered normal. Similarly, the telephone is a novel object for Ron Weasley in the *Harry Potter* series. Ron's father, Arthur is fascinated by Muggle items like plugs and batteries which he religiously collects. However, the Floo network used for transportation of people, the ability to apparate from one place to another, using flying broomsticks, etc., are perceived as natural by the wizarding world. In *Artemis Fowl* the underground Lower Elements Police (LEPs) use the Pressure Chutes and Bio Bombs, a technology they consider far ahead of that used by the people above ground. Colfer thereby critiques our dependence on gadgets and modern technology that we consider path-breaking and mind-boggling.

Foucault (1986) describes ships with its entry and exit from different ports and rugs, which were originally reproductions of the garden (26) as heterotopic spaces and are used by authors as flying carpets in fantasy literature. Even Railway trains in utopian fantasy literature operate as heterotopias (Jenkins 23). For instance, 'Hogwarts Express' in Rowling takes its travellers to an alternate space of Hogwarts School.

Usually, characters in the secondary worlds return to the primary world after their adventures. Artemis always returns to his primary world after travelling these heterotopic spaces. This is in contrast to Neil Gaiman's characters in *Neverwhere* who decide to stay on in the fantasy world. This is seen in Stanislaw Lem's protagonists as well. Klapcsik remarks that Lem's characters frequently do not leave the secondary worlds because they cannot abandon the play with boundaries. His astronauts neither simply stay at home nor arrive properly on the alien planet, but remain suspended in limbo, orbiting around the alien planet (Klapcsik 168).

### Colfer's construction of alternate spaces as fantastic heterotopias

The most elaborately dealt with heterotopia among the several Colfer creates, is the Land of Hybras in *Artemis Fowl and the Lost Colony*. The other is the Land of the Berserkers in *Artemis Fowl and the Last Guardian* which hosts the spirits of fairy soldiers killed in the Battle of Tailte. Opal Koboi, a genius pixie and the primary antagonist, uses black magic to open the Berserker's Gate, a portal located on the Fowl estate, releasing the spirits to possess Beckett and Myles, the twin brothers of Artemis, causing severe havoc. The Berserkers, engaged in a war with the humans do not risk being killed as they are already dead and are being held by a skein of magic. Heaven City, another

heterotopia provides a platform for the existence of a subterranean civilisation called “The People”, consisting of elves, goblins, dwarves, centaurs, pixies, facilitating the protagonist to pursue his adventures across parallel worlds. Although these spaces are distinct, they are neither simple nor stable and are interconnected in some way or the other within the larger secondary world.

Colfer dramatizes the heterotopic space, Island of Hybras in *Artemis Fowl and the Lost Colony (LC)*. Ten thousand years ago, during the battle of Taillte between the humans and the fairies, when it appeared that the humans would overpower, the fairies retreated underground leaving the surface of the earth to the humans. However, the demons that belonged to the eighth family of the fairy people opted instead to lift their island out of time by erupting the Hybras' volcano to live in isolation. They had assembled their circle of warlocks and cast a time spell over the land of Hybras (LC 37):

When the warlocks induced the volcano, the force was too strong, and they couldn't control and the magic circle was broken. Hybras and the demons were transported, but the warlocks were blasted into space and were all killed. The rest of the pride are stuck in limbo held by a magical spell that was never meant to be permanent (LC 86).

Artemis tries to rescue the demons from Hybras when the time-spell goes wrong and they start materializing on the earth when pulled back due to their strong connection to the Moon. He solves several temporal equations and succeeds in his mission just before the time spell completely dissolves.

These heterotopias exemplify spaces of otherness, are neither here nor there, linked to “slices in time” (Foucault 6), break traditional time, accumulate time and are temporal. Furthermore, these spaces function as counter-sites to the spaces inhabited by Artemis.

According to Turner, rites of passage are transitions between fixed and stable conditions and transitions are understood as a transformation (1982, 234). “During the liminal period, the state of the ritual subject [here, Artemis] is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (235). Furthermore, liminality and rites of transition are often linked to seclusion, to a temporary withdrawal from society which happens when Artemis is in these heterotopias.

When Foucault defined heterotopias as spaces that “exist out of all places” (3) and are different from the “sites they reflect and speak about” (4), he cites gardens and theatres as examples. Cantrell says that the entry into these “other spaces” can constitute pleasurable escape, as in the case for gardens, zoos, cinemas, and motel rooms (198). Foucault's theoretical oeuvre has a direct implication on Artemis for whom these lands symbolise a pleasurable escape from the mundane chores and monotony of routine. The entry into these heterotopias is through compulsory means like the pressure chutes which both the LEPs and Artemis use to move from one world to the other.

Time is an important factor in *The Land of Hybras*. It is because time is running out that the entire demon race is under threat. Foaly, the centaur, who is the technical consultant to the LEPs explains that “Time is the key to this whole thing... Hybras has been lifted out of time. A demon gets sucked off the island drifts through the centuries like a temporal nomad” (LC 49). In Hybras time, a millennium amounts to very little. A couple of centuries skips by in the blink of an eye. Correspondingly, while Artemis and his formidable bodyguard Domovoi Butler wait for their visitor, Butler shows impatience for their 'contact' to make an appearance.

'At least tell me if our contact will be armed.'

'I doubt it,' said Artemis. 'And even if he is, he won't be with us for more than a second.'

'A second? Just beaming down through outer space, is he?'

'Not space, old friend,' said Artemis, checking his wristwatch. 'Time.' (LC 5).

When the curious creature finally appears, it hauls Artemis into the twentieth century.

The air buzzed with power and white electrical bolts crackled around the creature, slicing holes in space. A temporal rent. A hole in time . . . The chances of him being returned to his own t . . . me were minuscule. He tried to call out to Butler, but it was too late. If the word late can be used in a place where time does not exist. Their surroundings changed in a flash, or

maybe a year; it was impossible to tell (LC 10).

Artemis is whisked into the twentieth century when he makes time-travel. He sees a younger Barcelona and the magnificent Casa Mila, just under construction, and briefly meets the famous Spanish art nouveau architect Antonio Gaudi. Artemis even suggests to Gaudi that he may want to reconsider putting the mosaics on the roof. This reiterates the difference in time perceived by the fairy people and humans. The urgency of time travel is accentuated by the decay of time-spells and the unravelling of time-tunnels. "When the time tunnel collapses [demons] will be deposited on the earth, on the moon and the rest scattered across through space and time" (LC 88). Artemis even worries they may be locked up in laboratories and zoos. Eventually, the silver nugget on Artemis' wrist helps Butler yank him back into the present as silver provides a firm anchor to the present time. 'Artemis popped out of the twentieth century and landed sprawling in the twenty-first' (LC 13). When he reaches the earth, he is three years into the future but remains unchanged as he had spent it in limbo and to his chagrin realises that he is still a fifteen-year-old instead of being eighteen years.

Although Artemis is affected by 'time,' he undertakes a second time-travel to the land of Hybras to defuse a bomb and prevent explosion in Taipei 101. Artemis and his friends, Qwan and N°1 are strapped on to Holly who flies with the bomb. Holly's wings give way, and the foursome 'fall like a sack of anchors'. Artemis rips off N°1's silver bracelet to enter a new dimension. '... a revolving purple trapezoid opened in the sky and swallowed them as neatly as a kid catching a Cheerio in his mouth' (LC 287). Artemis realises that the journey between dimensions is quite violent. 'They were ripped from their dimension and dragged through wormholes of space and time with only their consciousness intact' (LC 291). He tells N°1 that his home will shortly be dragged through the time tunnel along with everything on it. 'When I say *shortly*, I mean at our end. At your end, it could already have happened, or maybe it will happen in a million years' (LC 322).

### **Time-Surge and the Deterioration of Time-Spell**

The spell that was keeping Hybras in limbo was fast disintegrating. The release of Qwan's displaced magical energy accelerates the deterioration of the time spell. The time-surge caused excruciating pain in N°1 and played havoc with Holly's bodily functions, giving her hunger cramps and accelerating the growth of her fingernails which affected her gunfire. When the temporal booms echoed around the island, parts of Hybras spun into the time-tunnel materialising on earth and space, forging a compass of concentrated magic around them. It was doubtful that any demon unlucky enough to be transported would survive (LC 329).

In the time-surge, even the timer in the bomb behaved erratically. Artemis knew that magic was simply another form of energy and had to conform to certain rules. 'An hour per second for a count of forty, followed by a deceleration to thirty minutes per second or a count of eighteen, then a slight jump backwards in time, one minute per second back for a count of two' (LC 329)

Change is an underlying characteristic of heterotopias and David G. Shane (9, 14-15) refers to this in the context of urban spaces. On Hybras, where time is non-existent, N°1, an imp, is bullied because he is the oldest imp not to have "warped" (changed into a mature demon), and is repulsed by the desire of his kind to return to Earth and take revenge on humanity. He wonders several times if he is the first warlock since the battle of Tailte to not have warped into a demon. Leon Abbot, the last survivor and war hero of the battle of Tailte, leader of the demon pride, tries to manipulate N°1 with the Mesmer to jump into the island's volcano (used to cast the time-spell) and reach the human world.

### **Conclusion**

Colfer's texts in general and *Artemis Fowl and the Lost Colony* in particular reveals that the

space structures are ever-changing, shape-shifting, heterogeneous, and ambivalent. These heterotopic spaces that exemplify imagination, transition, transformation, a willing suspension of disbelief, and Artemis' temporal liminal periods and travels, symbolising breaks in time, contribute to the establishment of a fantastic *oeuvre* in Colfer. His texts reflect contemporary society's preoccupation with and the acknowledgement of the importance of imagination. These fantastic spaces are in a sense a reflection of reality with the social and political narratives seen in the Hybras, the fight for power supremacy, inclusiveness and the modern day's obsession with gadgets. Besides, use of complex and multiple time and space narratives, the dubious nature of the fantasy realms, manipulation of the temporal and spatial dimensions, provoke young readers to observe and consider multiple perspectives and readings of the world. To sum up, Colfer manipulates time and space to construct alternate worlds of fantasy and has significantly shaped the fantastic in crucial ways.

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**Water Deficit and Hyper-Commodification in Paolo Bacigalupi's  
*The Water Knife***

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*Abstract*

*Climate Fiction is a sub-genre of Science Fiction which underpins the dystopian stance on the repercussions of global warming and climate change. Climate fiction scrutinizes the current ecological crisis and reshapes the reader's perception of environmental history and develops a dynamic relationship with the natural world. National Book Award finalist, Paolo Bacigalupi's dystopian thriller *The Water Knife* contextualizes the current water crisis with the future and makes the readers to reconsider their global understanding of humankind's relationship towards the environment. The fiction is based on Bacigalupi's short story, "The Tamarisk Hunters", and it highlights the possibilities and implications of global warming in the near future. The paper aims at exploring the ramifications of both water scarcity and the customized arcology development for water resources which is depicted in the novel *The Water Knife*.*

*Keywords: Cli-fi, Dystopia, Water Crisis, Water Politics, Arcology.*

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Climate Fiction emerges as one of the most significant trends in English Literature over the past two decades. Climate change and global warming are vital concerns of universal discourses that challenge mankind existentially and cli-fi is the creative response to such challenges. The scientific debate on climate change had started in 1896 when Swedish chemist, Svante Arrhenius, studied the relationship between atmospheric Carbon dioxide and air temperature to explain the ice age. In the year 2007 Journalist Dan Bloom coined the term, Cli-fi or Climate Fiction which is a sub-genre of science fiction and then it emerges into a new genre. It is the fortune teller that anticipates the negative implications and impact of climate change. Cli-fi is a clarion call for urgent preventive action. It examines the possibilities of a world that is changing and evolving and makes these hypothetical futures more possible.

Cli-fi novels could be categorised as science fiction, science thrillers, science horror, weird, Anthropocene realism, post-apocalyptic fiction, or dystopian fiction. Margaret Drabble's *The Dark Flood Rises*, Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*, Saci Lloyd's *Carbon Diaries*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capital series*, Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*, Octavia Butler's *Parable series* and Karl Taro Greenfield's *The Subprimes* contribute to climate change fiction. *Ibis Trilogy*, *The Hungry Tide* and *The Gun Island* of Amitav Ghosh, Rajat Chaudhuri's *The Butterfly Effect* are few notable Indian contributions to the climate fiction genre.

The world is covered with 70% of water of which 97% is saltwater, 2% is polluted water that is utilised for irrigation or industrial purposes and 1% is used for human ingestion. Availability of water and its quality is reduced by water wastage and water contamination. The major cause of water deficit is climate change induced by global warming and the growing world population. Climate change aggravates drought in water-poor zones like UAE, Libya, Western Sahara, Yemen, Jordan and

flooding in water-rich zones in capitalistic countries like USA, China, Canada, Brazil.

Water based novels are prominent modes of 'cli-fi' which expose the important dimensions of past, present and future water issues. Some of the notable works are Cynan Jones's *Stillicide*, Emmi Itaranta's *Memory of Water*, Marcus Sedgwick's *Floodland*, George Turner's *The Sea and Summer*, Varda Burstyn's *Water Inc.*, Karen Jayes' *For the Mercy of Water*, Bryan Stanley Johnson's *Albert Angelo* that project water scarcity and survival conflicts. Paolo Bacigalupi is one of the writers who has focused on water crisis.

*Paolo Tadini Bacigalupi* is a renowned American novelist, children's book writer, essayist and science fiction writer. Paolo Bacigalupi is one among the leading writers of climate fiction. He is a recipient of Hugo and Nebula Awards, the Michael L. Printz Award, the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award, the Locus Award and a National Book Award finalist. He is notable for the genre of Science fiction, Biopunk, Young Adult fiction and short fiction. His remarkable environmental works include *The Windup Girl*, *The Doubt Factory*, *The Water Knife*, *The Drowned Cities*, and *The Tangled Islands*. His works highlight the ethics and implications of genetic engineering, climate change, and scarcity of natural resources, corporate imperialism and other environmental issues. One among the finest works of Paolo Bacigalupi is *The Water Knife*, a dystopian thriller that highlights climate conflicts like water scarcity, drought, water politics that are actually confronted by south-west parts of America like Las Vegas of Nevada, Lees Ferry of Arizona, Mexico and Utah.

Today global warming is expected to accelerate the shrinkage of drinking water resources, as well as intensify droughts in arid and semi- arid regions (IPCC 67). The south-western states such as Nevada, Arizona and California fight for the water of the Colorado River which is the country's perennial water resource. Actually, at present 38 million people in southwest of America depend on the Colorado River for their water supply. Over consumption and drought caused by global warming lead the water supply to the point at which the demand exceeds the supply. Such situation is defined as 'peak water' by water experts. By 2030, the population of southwest of America of around 65 million will be affected by water scarcity. In the article *After Tomorrow*, Climatologist Peter De Menocal predicts "Megadroughts" that will affect Eurasia and North America in the next decades. Such drought is delineated in the novel *The Water Knife* and portrays water crisis that reverberates with America's climate condition and water policies at the time of writing the novel.

*The Water Knife* (2015) by Paolo Bacigalupi is a dystopian climate fiction based on his short story "The Tamarisk Hunter". The plot takes place in the near future, in the year 2030, where drought is exacerbated by rising heat and severe water shortages due to climate change's crippling effects. The Colorado River and its tributaries is a vital conduit of water for Nevada, Arizona and California, the south-western regions of the United States. The Colorado River has shrunk and created drought. Water has become an inestimable resource that acts as power and money. Even the characters are willing to kill other characters for money made out of water. Water is becoming increasingly scarce, and the individual states of the United States fight one another for access thereto. Dust storms threaten and collapse States like Texas and Arizona and transform the citizens into refugees. Other states like Nevada, California struggle to get a greater portion of Colorado River. State militias murder those refugees who try to illegally cross the Colorado River. The business tycoons like Catherine Case have power over the extremely reduced supply of water and are constantly fighting with the armed members who are guarding the rivers' dwindling water storage. Meanwhile, the Elites start buying a new Chinese architectural luxurious arcology which is environmentally enriched to lead a healthy life away from dust storms and dry spells. Angel Velasquez, Maria Villarosa and Lucy Monroe are the major characters who flourish in the corruption of the water crisis.

Paolo Bacigalupi delineates the drought as "Big Daddy Drought" (*TWK* 22) which devastated the southwest California into hot and dry land. Dust storm, Drought and dryness are the outcomes of over consumption of natural resources by the surfeit population. The climate condition of southwest of California due to global warming and climate change is well delineated by Paolo Bacigalupi in the opening page of the fiction itself. "Sweat was a body's history, compressed into

jewels, beaded on the brow, staining shirts with salt. It told you everything about how a person had ended up in the right place at the wrong time, and whether they would survive another day” (TWK 1). The image of sweat accentuates the importance of water to the people. Rainfall becomes a dream for the people of California because of the big brought. For them rain is a benediction that they are eagerly waiting for, as is visible in the following lines:

Lucy woke to the sound of rain. A benediction, gently pattering. For the first time in more than a year, her body relaxed. The release of tension was so sudden that for a moment she felt as if she were filled with helium. Weightless. All her sadness and horror sloughed off her frame like the skin of a snake, too confining and gritted and dry to contain her any longer, and she was rising. She was new and clean and lighter than air, and she sobbed with the release of it. And then she woke fully, and it wasn't rain caressing the windows of her home but dust, and the weight of her life came crushing down upon her once again. (TWK 21)

*The Water Knife* reminds one of Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* which projected the conflict between Los Angeles and the Owens Valley Farmers in the first decades of the early 1990s. During that time, Los Angeles was rapidly growing and needed more water. A project was set to build an aqua duct diverting the water from the Owens river to Los Angeles, which would force the Owens valley farmers to abandon agriculture. As projected in the film, clandestine techniques are used to secure water rights, besides the misguidance of mass media which are owned by the friends of the politicians defending the water project. Similar aspects are present in the novel. For instance, the character Lucy gets into the conflict between states for the control of water as that of the main character in *Chinatown*. Angel comments on the disaster of the Blue Mesa Dam and the situation of farmers' and their protest while travelling to Phoenix: “A bunch of crazy- ass Colorado farmers were up on top of the Blue Mesa Dam with their guns out, threatening to do whatever the hell Colorado farmers threatened to do when they were shit out of luck” (TWK 103). The Farmers protest is similar to that of the Owens Valley Farmers who fought for their water rights.

The novel reveals the influence of the historical book of Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert* (1986). The book subtitled *The American West and its Disappearing Water* explores the journalistic study of water mismanagement in the western states of the United States. The book plays a significant role in the novel, as it contains a water rights document of Hohokam prior appropriation of the Colorado River. Whoever between Las Vegas, Phoenix, and California authorities gets the book that will determine the future of Phoenix. The book has the Pima water rights which belonged to Phoenix which is the real beneficiary of the water rights. Several characters in the novel reference Cadillac Desert as an anticipation of the environmental disaster they find themselves in. Lucy and Ratan both have first-edition copies of the book. However, for Maria, the book is pretty much worthless, unless it is selling it: “I need a book about how I'm supposed to live now. Unless you got a book like that, I don't need the weight” (TWK 181). Angel shares a similar sentiment about the book when he tells Lucy, “All of you with your nice hard-copy first editions, all of you pretending you know shit. [...] Acting like you saw all this shit coming. [...] Back then nobody gave a shit about what [Reisner] said” (TWK 343). Even then Cadillac Desert is only beneficial to these characters alone rather than those who read Reisner's words.

Historian Donald Worster in his book *Rivers of Empire* asserts that the American Southwest water policies are based on the doctrine of prior appropriation. This principle stipulates that a community or city that has first claimed right over Colorado has priority over its water (88). As far as the doctrine of prior appropriation is concerned, the city of Los Angeles, established long before Phoenix or Las Vegas, thus has a right to a predetermined water source. If the flow of the river drains below that level, potentially, Los Angeles will collect the entire water leaving the other two cities dry. This water policy is significant in the novel where the main characters fight to gain the rights of the water that belonged to the Hohokam civilisation, ensuring the preference of Phoenix, Las Vegas or Los Angeles over Colorado. It is evident in the following lines during the conversation between Lucy and Angel,

Years ago they made a deal with Phoenix to shift all their tribal water rights over the city. The Pima had water rights to Central Arizona Project water because of old reparations; Phoenix needed that water when the rivers around here started drying up, so it was a win-win. Phoenix got the water it wanted to keep growing, and the Pima got a massive cash settlement that they used to buy land up north. (TWK 232)

In *The Water Knife* Michael Ratan, senior hydrologist, explains the condition of Arizona water resources to Maria Villarosa who along with her friend Sarah gives sexual service to him. Ratan describes the condition of Central Arizona Project as, “The CAP is Arizona’s IV drip.” Ratan explains: “It pumps water up out of the Colorado River and brings it three hundred miles across the desert of Phoenix.... The aquifers around here all pumped to hell. But Phoenix still has a pulse because of the CAP” (TWK 45). Like linking of rivers project, Central Arizona Project pumps water from the Colorado River which passes across three hundred miles to Phoenix. But Still, Phoenix faces water scarcity due to global warming. People of Phoenix migrate to the neighbouring state due to water stress. It is not possible to migrate from one state to the other because each state has militias to guard their water resources by having water rights. The appointed militias even mercilessly kill the refugees or 'zoners' who cross the interstate borders.

Another significant aspect of the novel is the concept of Arcology where a new alienated niche is created for the wealthy alone. Arcology is a symbol of economic inequality. It represents a Utopian structure that highlights a variety of residential, commercial, and agricultural facilities and often is self-sufficient and ecologically sustainable. The Taiyang Arcology is an artificial ecological indoor habitat, in Phoenix, for wealthy residents. Everything is recycled and used in the arcology and it provides environmentally responsible living for those who can afford it. Toomie describes the Taiyang Arcology as prefabricated homes:

Working on something like that, you're building the future. The people who do that . . . you've got to make all these models: software and water flows and population. Figure out how to balance all the plants and animals, how to clean up the waste and turn it into fertilizers they can use in their greenhouses, how to clean the water, too. You run black water down through filters...the other end, the water, it's cleaner than what they pump up from underground. Nature does all the work, all the different little animals together, like gears fitted inside an engine. Its own kind of machine. A whole big living machine. (TWK 91)

Characters like Angel and Maria are willing to harm others so as to live in an arcology. In contrast, Michael Ratan has no understanding of the harsh realities of life in Phoenix and takes his life in the arcology for granted, seeking out even greater wealth for himself by selling the water rights. Lucy who really wants to safeguard her state from the dry spell by grabbing the tribal water rights which truly belongs to Phoenix, Arizona. Without realizing Lucy's generosity, Maria kills her selfishly.

Arcologies are like utopias that threaten the ideology of egalitarianism. Jameson asserts that the utopians “not only offer to conceive of such alternate systems; Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of social totality” (Jameson xii). As Jameson reiterates, these arcologies are only meant for the wealthy, not for everyone. The Aristocrats enjoy all pleasures though they largely cause environmental degradation in comparison to the poor. It is similar to that of the developed nations which contribute liberally to carbon footprints. When it comes to the consequences, the whole universe will be severely affected.

The citizens of Phoenix suffer a lot without drinking water which is one of the survival needs of life. Clearsac is a ubiquitous technology in the form of plastic containers used to recycle urine into drinking water. Almost all the characters are compelled to use Clearsacs unwillingly when they are badly in need of water. This condition is due to the improper management of water resources. In future, the Clearsac technology may be used for drinking water unless the water management is regulated properly. A new wastewater treatment method 'peecycling' is discovered for the production of fertilizers. Gregory Keoleian, director of the Center for Sustainable Systems, University of

Michigan, says that “Both conventional wastewater treatment and fertilizer production are carbon - intensive processes, flushing urine with its valuable nutrients down toilets for processing in energy-intensive wastewater treatment plants makes no sense” (De Weerd). The method has smaller footprints than the conventional wastewater management in terms of greenhouse gases emission, energy consumption and freshwater usage.

Moreover, Catherine Case who owns 'biotectural' firms grabs the water rights to construct arcologies like Cypress. Angel, Lucy and Maria are in search of the Pima tribe water rights which actually belongs to Phoenix. Finally, those water rights reach the hands of Maria and Angel who really want to live in an arcology. Thus, Bacigalupi highlights the importance of water in daily life and tends to direct his readers' focus towards noticeable signs of change today. As he points out in an interview with the Imagination and Climate Futures Initiative at Arizona State University, he expects his readers to understand that Lake Mead is not only scenic but scary: “... once somebody closes the book and returns to this present moment, I hope they will look at the world differently. ... the present moment will be recontextualized for them.” And also, he asserts that decision-making will have a huge effect on the future we create: “When I was writing *The Water Knife* one of the things, I wanted to do was model two different versions of a city. Las Vegas has said, the data doesn't look good, let's start planning. Phoenix says, maybe it won't be as bad. And Phoenix is devastated” (Bacigalupi).

However, the novel “takes what already exists and makes an imaginative leap into the future, following current sociocultural, political or scientific developments to their potentially devastating conclusions” (Otto 180). In the novel, water acts as a double-edged knife both as an elixir of life to the elites and destroyer to the poor who suffer a lot due to the commodification of water. The knife cuts the bond between nature and human as well as the relationship among human beings. Water scarcity and commodification of water lead the people to indulge in war, protest, betrayal, greed, corruption, murder, class conflict and so forth. Water crisis affects socio – economic and political stability of the country. Though they found new technology like Clearbags which filter urine into drinking water, Arcology an artificial indoor habitat, Johnnytrucks for toilets etc., such efforts are not permanent solutions for the water crisis. Appointing militias for water, cutting the water pumps, construction of arcologies for the rich are the crucial events which affects the entire humanity and environment adversely. Such a devastating situation should be prevented. To mitigate all these environmental issues, the attitude of the people has to be enhanced, strengthened and revitalized towards sustainable development.

In India, Water scarcity and water stress are expected to worsen as the overall population is expected to be 1.6 billion by the year 2050. The report of the Composite Water Management Index states that by 2030, India's water supply is projected to be twice the current supply, implying severe water stress and scarcity for hundreds of millions of people. Nearly one million people are affected every year due to water shortage in India. In the novel, the conflict among those states for water is similar to that of the present-day interstate water dispute, especially the Cauvery dispute among Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Puducherry, in the southern parts of India. To avoid water stress, water sustainable projects like Interstate linking of rivers can be implemented. Inter-State interlinking of rivers aims at transferring surplus water from rivers and canals to the water scarce areas. It improves irrigation, increases food production, controls flood, reduces water scarcity and unifies the states. To control water pollution, Indian government has launched programmes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, National Rural Drinking Water Programme and Namami Gange to reach sixth Sustainable Development Goals that deals with Water and Sanitation.

Man Booker Prize Awardee Amitav Ghosh's non-fiction *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* confronts the issues of climate change in three parts, namely Literature, History, Politics. He deals with climate change and history and insists on the significance of climate change that “the events of today's changing climate, in that they represent the totality of human actions over time, represent also the terminus of history. For if the entirety of our past is contained within the present, then temporality itself is drained of significance...” (115). Amitav Ghosh debunks the myths



or assumptions of climate change through the great Derangement. He insists that we are actually surviving in the climate change era (the present) exactly and it is the need of the hour to understand both the present and the future. By considering the future requirements, he insists on taking collective action against the ramifications of global warming by understanding the present.

Patrick Murphy writes, “Many dystopian writers would be entirely dissatisfied if their novels led people only to understanding and not to any type of social action” (26). Similarly, Bacigalupi through his dystopian plot creates awareness about the environmental limits where the human anthropocentric action cause damage to the earth's life-supporting system and emphasize to contribute to environmental restoration. The duty of the humanity is well explained in the following words of Tagore: “For us the highest purpose of this world is not merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but realizing our own selves in it through expansion of sympathy: not alienating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union” (Prafull). In my opinion, the worst situation of Water deficit and commodification of water can be overcome by taking prompt action against these water and other environmental issues by establishing desalination plants, afforestation, waste water treatment plants, linking of rivers etc. Since water crisis is the universal problem, it is necessary to take instantaneous action to avoid water disputes. Therefore, it is our collective responsibility as human beings to preserve the planet and sustain the resources for the future generations.

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## **A/Cross(-ing of) Borders: An Analysis of Gene Lang Yuen's *American Born Chinese***

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### *Abstract*

*Man has always tried to grapple with questions about his identity and has had timely revisions of the factors that contribute to this. There are philosophical theories centring on this and also artistic renditions. Gene Lang Yuen's graphic novel American Born Chinese has gained awards and popular attention for being a text that presents this issue through the multimodal medium of comics. Yang has disclosed that personal experiences have been borrowed even though the work is not completely autobiographical. He makes use of myth as a device to thread through the different events and give it a universality.*

*Keywords: Diaspora, Liminal Identity, Multimodality, Myth*

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### **Introduction**

Diaspora, with Greek etymological origins that mean “scattering,” is a term that gained currency with an increase in people who have moved away from their native geographic spaces not always as an escape from persecution but as part of a choice to pursue better lifestyles and opportunities. A direct consequence is the intermingling of racial and ethnic diversities and in the process those who have transgressed into fresher pastures accept the new people and their culture as the desirable norm. They develop the impulse to shun the stereotypical images of one's ethnic origins that lend a sense of the 'other' and long to blend in with the new norm. Everyone wants to belong and belong to the “correct” group. In a cultural sense, this pushes them to leave behind their native inclinations and move towards a new perception of the self. The ensuing identity crisis is a constant reminder and hindrance for the 'new native.'

Victor Turner popularised the term “Liminal Identity” in 1967 building up on Arnold van Gennep's coinage of the term “liminality” in 1909. The new native occupies this cultural space of liminal identity as they are on the threshold of accepting and adapting to something different and new. From within the original Anthropological framework, liminality offers a space of transformation into a hybrid version which conjoins the past and the future. Unfortunately, ethnic bullying is one among the other tactics of marginalisation. Any country that has gained for itself the tag of being a haven of success has on board this issue. America is a potpourri of identities. From its first settlers to the current influx, thousands have herded to this promised land of theirs but, a mechanism that is governed by the hegemony of races is in place, thus making negotiations for people of a different race difficult.

It is in this context that the liminal space becomes a permanent abode for the new natives. They do not experience the transformation that is expected. Most of them are forever stuck in an existential dilemmas, not being able to give up the ghost of their racial memory and completely embrace the new. Diaspora literature addresses this issue.

## Gene Luen Yang

Yang is an Asian–American cartoonist who after a two-year stint as a computer engineer became a teacher of computer science. Yang's parents of Asian origin were first generation migrants who successfully built their lives in America, but they also introduced Yang to his Asian culture through stories. Yang's love for stories and his passion for comics led him to create *American Born Chinese*, a graphic novel among many other works. Ever since its publication in 2006, this graphic novel has bagged for itself numerous awards and recognition solely because of its capacity to be a catalyst among young readers in sensitizing them to the negative aspects of racial stereotyping. It was the first graphic novel to be nominated for a National Book Award and is also the winner of the Printz Award that recognises the contribution to young adult literature. Graphic novels are a hybrid version of comics and novels. Unlike comics, they appear as a single production and like comics, they make use of the combination of words and images. Comics had been assigned a position among Children's Literature which were considered as 'simple' texts that entertain children. Developments in literary theory, anthropology and cultural studies expanded the horizon and children's literature gained attention as texts with layers of embedded meanings. When used constructively, these texts are crucial in making the world a better place. *American Born Chinese* is a graphic novel that addresses the identity crisis of an adolescent boy of Asian descent struggling to deceive himself into believing that renouncing his racial lineage would help him claim his new American identity.

## Multimodality

*American Born Chinese* is a multimodal text which, opposed to a monomodal text has more than one channel of communication. Multimodality uses multiple channels of communication relying on providing varied sensory stimulus. Studies in this area prove that the superior reception the 'written' texts enjoyed from academic circles was based on the lack of wholesome understanding of the faculties of the human brain that were engaged in the process of 'reading.'

In the Introduction to *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality*, Ruth Page stresses on the relevance of the theory of Multimodality that has come to the forefront of discussion in the field of Narratology. Narratives have always drawn on various forms of “semiotic resources” (Ruth Page 1). These have never been solely verbal in nature. Pictorial, gestural, audio, kinesthetic, voice modulation etc are some of the other resources that add to the meaningful experience. Technological advancements have influenced story telling also and the consumers of fiction and non-fiction have been enamoured by the plethora of narratives that are now assisted by hyperlinks and different forms of interfaces that help the narrative function in a non-linear format. Ruth Page says, “. . . a narratology derived from the verbal resources alone can no longer be fully adequate to the task of interrogating storytelling in its broadest sense (2).

Yang has made a wise decision in choosing this mode of narration which is competent to participate in the race for readership/viewership in today's age of virtual reality. The multiple modes chosen belong to the word and picture combination. In order to appeal to the young readers of today, as a writer Yang caters to the need to 'see' something that today's generation of readers who are fed on the visual medium, needs for being convinced. This narrative about creation of new identities as a result of 'crossing borders' takes shape through a mode that moves 'across' the borders of the verbal and visual.

## Identity Crisis

The desire to fit in and belong to a group that is not accommodative of your differences is the worst nightmare a young adolescent can have. This is something that is normal for people going

through that phase, but to be of a different racial origin would be increasingly detrimental. In *American Born Chinese*, we see a clash of Chinese and American cultures. An American boy of Chinese origin wants to shed his native identity and truly 'upgrade' himself to become an American. The realisation of this dream is made almost impossible because of the presence of two very persistent factors. One is the stereotypical image of a deplorably awkward personality and lifestyle that have been attributed to the Chinese and other similar Asian ethnicities by the West. The second is a sense of unworthiness that is generated within the mind of the Asian immigrants, one that is spurred by an evaluation of oneself and everything ethnically native to that self against the norms laid down by the yardstick the formation of which is dictated by the Western culture.

The multimodal form of narration that has been chosen enables the reader to 'feel' the isolation and embarrassment the protagonist and others go through. The images themselves speak about the cruelly wrong impressions that are etched so deeply in the psyche of the white American. These images do not even need the assistance of words to make things clear.

### Use of Myth

Yang has woven the entire story interspersed with the ancient Chinese myth of the Monkey King. It is not a myth about a superhero who is wise, undefeatable and one that belongs to the higher order. We see a monkey here, who is vain, proud and defeated. As a reader, the notion of "monkey/ape" as the predecessor of the human race establishes the archetypal nature of myth. Northrop Frye through Archetypal Criticism has shown how myths are a collective of recurrent patterns that appear in all narratives. These are an expression of man's innate fears, apprehensions or insecurities. The novel begins with the story of the Monkey King, the initial part of which is one that feeds his ego, but it is from the moment of rejection that he tastes the sour taste of dissatisfaction with himself and his surroundings. It is from the moment of the stench of monkey fur that we see the Monkey King beginning his journey of self-realisation. His ego has been deflated and pride hurt. He desperately begins to want to become someone else. But we leave the myth at a point when there seems to be no redemption for the Monkey King.

### *American Born Chinese*

The pile of rocks beneath which he is trapped, serves to reorient the readers to the heap of thwarted desires of Jin Wang. As a child, he is quite comfortable with his life in that predominantly Asian-populated part of the city cocooned in his comfort zone with his Asian playmates. His official exposure to the white community begins with the family shifting to a more 'white prone' area, that suggests the upward movement on the financial and social ladder. Yang has begun this section with the young Wang in tears reminiscing about the happy times he is leaving behind. The old Chinese parable that his mother had narrated to him revolves around the indoctrination of the idea that the environment you live in moulds your personality. The parents wanted their son to go higher up the ladder of success and so had decided to move to a more promising locality that would shape his destiny.

Jin Wang's fetish for the character of the 'Transformer' is an unconscious attempt on his part to denounce the part of his identity that embarrasses him by casting on him the shadow of being an outcast. Transformers are cartoon characters that give little children hope to change into a better self and thereby a better world. But, the flip side of the argument is that when we court change, we reveal our disconnect with who we really are. In the text, it is the old Chinese woman, the herbalist, who throws light upon this. Through her working on the abacus, we sense Yang trying to reinforce the view that even the Chinese can be wise. Yang has made us realize how innocent things like toys or cartoons instil within the child the urge to completely transform himself into something that is almost unattainable. Pearls of Wisdom like parables of a culture can be manoeuvred to be put to a more

distorted use. The last panel displays a dialogue less frame, where the reader is left with just the sound of the abacus beads, Yang pictorially represents the lack of understanding that plagues the young Wang who is an outsider.

The entire panel shows a spatial-temporal moment when there is communication without words, not just for the characters in the story world, but also for the reader; the reader stationed at the



Fig. 1. The herbalist spells out the problem for Wang who is too young to understand it.

When young Wang is introduced to his classmates, his name and country of origin are misinterpreted. It is clearly a reflection of how the East or the Orient has been allotted a generic existence. The different ethnic groups of the East are not recognised and they are seen as a single homogenous group. Their native cuisine and culture are belittled, and unfortunately, fellow Asian students avoid one another. Each one of the Asian students is like a mirror reflecting the ethnic differences between the Asian community and the whites. They become embarrassing reminders for each other.

Wang is mocked by his fellow white schoolmates when eating his native food. They sarcastically ask him to stay away from their pets. In a later panel, he is shown as eating a sandwich. Though there is no direct comment on this, the image speaks a lot. The child is on his way to acclimatizing himself to the foreign culture. The panel shows young Wang looking back at us with the sandwich in his hands, symbolically turning his back on his ethnicity. Even without words, the image alone has the power to communicate when placed in the right context.

The Monkey King after strenuous practice acquires the “Four Major Disciplines Of Bodily Form,” the last one being the ability to transform himself into a much 'better' physical form. He manages to create a different body image. His fellow monkey subjects cannot even identify the changes in him but they do feel he has changed. Here, there is an immediate connection that is established between him and Wang. The image of the blonde hair that a white boy Greg has, stands as a metaphor for all that the adolescent Wang wants to transform into. The blonde hair is a constant reminder as to what Wang is not. The reader's mind races back to the 'Transformer' incident.

Multimodality facilitates the writer to invoke the memory of 'copy-paste.' The cyber driven culture where even identities are muted and changed with the ease of the click of keys, is effectively portrayed with these images. Had words been used, it would have amounted to sounding like a patronising sermon.





Fig. 2. Wang imagines how a new blonde avatar can help him get his girl.

After a confrontation with Wang's only trustworthy friend, Wei-Chen, Wang consciously alienates himself from his ethnic roots and restrains any feeling of guilt or remorse to infiltrate his mind that is gearing up to transform completely into an American. He is aghast that Wei-Chen actually thinks of him as his brother. In the Asian culture kinship and feelings of honour and obligation to express support plays an integral role. Flaunting those ideals are considered to be a grave sin. When Wang blatantly expresses his contempt for his Asian friend, he is consciously flouting his native ethnic value system. Using the term "F.O.B." (fresh off the boat) to refer to him clearly exposes the feeling of embarrassment that Wang experiences.

That night he convinces his own conscience that he is right. And the next page leads us to the panel where he is reminded of the words of the herbalist's wife. He has finally forgone his soul and hence can easily transform into someone else. In the following panels we see that Wang transforms into Danny, with blonde hair!



Fig. 3. This image captures in one shot Wang's transformation.

We see the old Chinese woman who had almost prophesied the transformation of Wang and how Wang undergoes it looking out at the reader with amazement himself. Upon closer perusal one can see that the image of the character of Wang literally changes; not just the colour of hair, but the eyes seem to have lost the typical slant and the body is also shown as undergoing a 'blossoming'. The young Chinese lad is transforming into a white American boy. This transformation is what has given Wang/Danny the courage to face those who 'see' him: his peers and also the reader.

The multimodal nature of the text makes the communication of all these details easier and even more efficient. The creative energy that would have been spent on the possible alternate verbal content was saved and spent on more vibrant multifaceted narrative structures that employ different semantic fields.

It is here in the narrative that the reader realizes the relevance of the character Danny who had already been introduced much earlier in the work. The fragmentary nature of narration would send a wrong message initially, that the story of Danny had no connection with Wang or the Monkey King. In the following panels we see how Wang transforms into Danny and how he has a physical encounter with his cousin Chin-kee from his native place. Chin-Kee has been created as an embodiment of all detestable stereotypical characteristic features of the East Asian community. His name, attire, demeanour and language has had an elaborately exaggerated representation by which Yang wants the reader to be reminded of all stereotypical impressions.

The fight between Danny and Chin-Kee leads to the revelation of the true identity of Chin-Kee (The Monkey King) and Danny goes back to being his old self, Wang. The narrative then takes the reader back to The Monkey King whose son Wei-Chen is sent to the world on a mission. Finally, all loose ends come together to complete the circle and Wang is advised by the Monkey King to recognize and accept his true self. The Monkey King recounts to Wang about how it took him centuries to realize the value of humility, to accept his identity as a monkey. The Monkey King reveals to Wang that his intention is to serve as his "conscience", as a force that would lead him back to his "soul". Finally, Wang and Wei-Chen have a reunion.

It is interesting to note how Yang very clearly states, through his narrative techniques of multimodality, how perceptions that can be hazardously misleading, become embedded in the cultural psyche of a group of people. The media plays an important role in this. It is obvious that the visual representations always accentuated the pre-existent oral stereotypes. The visual cemented and re-enforced the oral. Being a multimodal text, *American Born Chinese* has made overt pictorial allusions to different media, like the panels where the word "clap" keeps appearing. This is a direct reminder of the applause and laugh track that had accompanied some sitcoms in their early years.

There is an appropriation of the visual narratorial mode in the work and there are many panels that suggest backgrounding and foregrounding. Panels also show images in two distinct colour tones. The image of Wang's classroom is muted into a neutral tone to form the background. The focus is on Wang and his thoughts, not on the rest of the class. Such panels qualify as those revealing an interior monologue.

There are a few instances of panels having the same image appearing repeatedly. This technique is used to throw emphasis on a certain aspect. For example, in the picture that follows, on the left side we see the repetitive appearance of the image of the Monkey King who is astonished. Such repetition helps in establishing the intensity of emotion that the reader is to empathise with.



Fig. 4. Realization dawns upon the Monkey King

The script within the bubble is initially made to be poorly visible and then made clearly visible. In the topmost panel, the Monkey King alone appears. In the second one, the Omnipotent Tze-Yo-Tzuh and his words are partially visible. In the final panel, Tze-Yo-Tzuh and his words are clearly visible, but there is a change in Monkey-King. He has turned towards the speaker. The reader understands the gradual progression of the Monkey King from astonishment to realization.

The novel concludes with everyone coming to terms with their own identities and accepting their racial lineage. Being respectful of who you are will always make acceptance easier and one is at peace with oneself. It is with this message that Gene Luen Yang leaves the reader. Yang says in an interview that by reading something that is about someone who is apparently very different on the outside but experiences similar feelings within, helps the reader understand humanity better (“Our Common Humanity,” *You Tube*).

## Conclusion

As the narrative unfolds vis-a-vis what Lang avers in the interview, it is crystal clear that the novelist is convinced regarding the power of this genre in reaching out to and convincing the youth about the trauma of racial discrimination and stereotyping. It engages and enlightens the reader. The fact that it is a graphic novel makes it more palatable to the younger audience and the multimodal nature of the narrative ensures the efficacy of communication along with verbal economy.

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# The Success Secrets of Mayil in Mayil Series—An Analysis through Rogerian Lenses

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## *Abstract*

*The paper delineates the Children Literature in general besides exploring the development of genre in the East and the West. Narrowing down to the Indo Anglian Children writings, the paper elucidates the success of Mayil from Mayil series through the lens of Rogerian theory. Mayil Series comprises three works of contemporary children's fiction, namely Mayil Will Not Be Quiet!, Mostly Madly Mayil, and This is Me, Mayil penned by the flourishing duo of the decade, Niveditha Subramaniam and Sowmya Rajendran. This duo's maiden work, Mayil Will Not Be Quiet! (2011), has won Sahitya Akademi's Bal Sahitya Puraskar award in 2015. The other two works were published in the years 2013 & 2018 respectively. Mayil, the protagonist of the series, being a 12 year old girl, is a logorrhoeic who expects immediate answers for all her questions. She has all the chaos and charisma of adolescence yet she chases her dream to be a writer, the instinct that occurred suddenly. The second fiction, Mostly Madly Mayil presents the understanding of the world through Mayil's perception. The last work deals with the actualization of Mayil's dream. The paper aims at analysing the positive and the negative emotions of Mayil who overcomes her emotional obstacle with the help of elders' compassionate environment. It also moves a step forward to scrutinise the success secrets of the protagonist, Mayil employing the person-centered theory or Rogerian theory of an American Psychotherapist, Carl Raansom Rogers as catalyst. It also nails the importance of congruence of self, among 'ideal self', 'real self' and 'self-image' that renders self-actualization by inculcating the traits of the fully functioning person.*

*Keywords: Self-actualization, Ideal self, Real self, Self-image, Fully functioning, Person-centered theory.*

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## **Introduction**

European Renaissance laid the foundation for the emergence of children literature as a genre. The genre includes a wide variety of fairy tales, fables, rhymes, graphic fiction, comic, picture books, young adult fiction, short story and so on. The concept of childhood which is different from adulthood and considering this as a stage of innocence bloomed in the people's mind during the Renaissance. John Locke's 'tabula rasa' and Puritanical notions have opened the doors for children literature. The proper origin of children literature is tough to trace as every part of the world has its own cultural pattern and aural-oral means of communication. In oral tradition, knowledge, art, beliefs and cultural material are received, preserved and transmitted orally through song or speech from one generation to another. This may include folklore, ballads, chants, prose or verse. The various religious sects like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Catholicism have transmitted their scriptures, ritual hymns and mythologies through utterance.

The primary features of pre modern children literature were of didactic and moralistic nature that aimed to convey conduct related religious and educational lessons. John Cotton's *The New England Primer* (1619) is one such book that encompasses religious lessons like Child's morning and evening prayers and educational lessons like alphabets, vowels, consonants, double letters and religious rhyme of the alphabet. There was a sudden shift from didactic to delight. John Newbery's *A*

*Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744) is the first book meant for entertainment. The book comprises a mixture of rhymes, picture stories and games for pleasure. Mary Cooper's *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* is the first known printed collection of English nursery rhymes.

The trend of featuring more humorous and child oriented books emerged in the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is regarded as the first English Masterpiece written for children. Its publication initiated the Golden Age of Children's Literature that extended till World War I. Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* are notable adventure stories. The impact of industrialisation on children and their pathetic plight, familial issues, nostalgic childhood, child's interaction with the society are some of the core themes dealt by the authors of the west.

The pre-colonial India was rich in literary and cultural traditions and a treasure trove for myths, mystery, ethical and moral stories. One needs to delve deep in history to know about Indian oral narrative tradition. It includes songs, verses, proverb, riddles, lullabies, tales of god and kings. The most known among these is *Panchatantra*. The author of the text is anonymous and it is believed that the work dates back between 200 BCE and 300 CE. *Panchatantra*, its Sanskrit title, means 'Five Treatises' is a series of interwoven fables where anthropomorphized animals are used to discern human virtues and vices. It is strongly believed that Panchatantra is the source for many fable literature around the world that includes *Arabian Nights* and of many nursery rhymes and ballads of the west. Scholars find similarities between some stories of *Panchatantra* and *Aesop's Fables*.

The advent of Christian Missionaries, Colonial policies, Macaulay's Educational policies and their dominance over the natives has paved the way for the production of Indian Children Literature in English. Dhan Gopal Mukerji (1890 – 1936), an immigrant to U.S., is the earliest Children writer of India. His work, *Kari, the Elephant* (1923) won the Newbery Medal in 1928. The other noted writers like Tagore, R.K. Narayan, Satyajit Ray have also dealt with the concepts of children. The post-colonial Indo Anglian writers like Anita Desai, Ruskin Bond, Salman Rushdie, Anita Nair, Shashi Deshpande and Sudha Murthy have focused on a wide variety of themes pertaining to children. In India, the genre has received more attention than before in recent years. The works of 21<sup>st</sup> century writers are realistic in nature and encompass the current issues arising from digitalization, heavy dependence on modern gadgets and sketches both the boon and the bane of the era.

### Viewing 'Mayil' Series through Carl Roger's Lenses

Niveditha Subramaniam and Sowmya Rajendran, budding writers of the contemporary children fiction, have authored Mayil series. It is a set of three children fiction works--*Mayil Will Not Be Quiet!*, *Mostly Madly Mayil* and *This is Me, Mayil* that have been published in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Mayil Will Not Be Quiet!*, published in 2011, has won Sahitya Akademi's *Bal Sahitya Puraskar* in 2015. *Mostly Madly Mayil* and *This is Me, Mayil* were published in 2013 & 2018 respectively. This series is a cumulative portrayal of the diarist and blooming writer, Mayil.

The present paper, "The Success Secrets of Mayil in Mayil Series—An Analysis through Rogerian Lenses" focuses on Mayil's dream journey to be Mayilwriter [A term used by the authors]. It also analyses and asserts the reasons behind the realization of Mayil's dream by applying Carl Rogers' concept of self-actualization. In the duo's maiden work, *Mayil Will Not Be Quiet!*, the protagonist, Mayil is a curious adolescent Chennai girl of twelve who seeks quick answers for everything. The logorrhoeic nature of Mayil is the cause for her being bullied and creates many doubts and troubles. By recording her daily events in the diary that is gifted by her father, Mr. Ganeshan, on a new year's eve, she takes the maiden step to become a writer.

Their second work, *Mostly Madly Mayil*, portrays Mayil as a 14 year old girl with a wider perspective who pools in her personal experience and societal perception on caste, sexual harassment and so on in her diary. Being a vibrant adolescent, Mayil with her friends gets involved in cyber



stalking that thrills them. She acts as one of the student editors for the school magazine.

Mayil, the 16 years old girl, turns to be a keen observer in the latest third work, *This is Me, Mayil*. With even more wider perspective, she responds to the happenings around her. She deals with her peer's personal problem with utmost care and solves it with the elders' assistance. She turns to be more self-reflective and sculpts herself into a writer.

Carl Ransom Rogers (1902–1987), an American psychologist has developed a form of psychotherapy known as Rogerian psychotherapy or the person-centered therapy. Living in the present, responsible for one's own thoughts, feelings, participating fully with organismic [sic] trust, that is mutual trust with others, and self-actualization tendency are the key concepts of the theory. Rogers believes that the 'growth' of the person to achieve his goal needs an environment that provides him with genuineness, acceptance and empathy.

Kamlesh Singh in one of her discourses avers that Carl Rogers believes that Self-actualization occurs in the state of congruence among 'self--Ideal self,' 'Self-image' and 'Real/True self.' The 'ideal self' refers to what an individual wishes to be, the 'self-image' refers to how an individual sees or evaluates oneself which is mainly formed from the interaction of the child with parents and others. The 'real/true self' refers to the individual's actual behaviour. The congruence of such self gives confidence and motivation and results in making a fully functioning person (Singh 2019).

According to Rogers, to be a fully functioning person is an ideal state where the person tends to accept the changes and challenges. He identifies five characteristics of the fully functioning person, namely (i) Open to experience, (ii) Existential living, (iii) Trust feelings, (iv) Creativity and (v) Fulfilled life. He asserts that the childhood experience of a person is the main determinant for self-actualization and to become a fully functioning person.

Mayil's constant effort to become a renowned writer has sprung from her childhood experience of writing a diary. Her father, Ganeshan had gifted a diary on a new year's eve to deal with the talkative nature of Mayil and surprisingly it kindled a deep desire to become a writer in her. Initially Mayil feels that she would be a writer instead of being logorrhoeic. The sudden personality shift has pruned Maya, her mother who metaphorically compares her daughter to the writer Virginia Woolf while her father takes pride in addressing her daughter as a future writer. Zainab aunty, Maya's friend calls Mayil as 'Mayilwriter'. Such acknowledgement and praise of elders would develop self-esteem and are instrumental in instilling positive self-image and ideal self. It is clearly evident from her words, "I want to write something BIG. I want to grow up FAST" (*MWBQ* 14).

Despite her initial efforts being comparable to those of an amateur, her responsibility towards her own feelings and thoughts helps her actualise her dream to be a writer. The inner transformation of personality has moulded Mayil to a fully functioning person. She fits well in Rogers' features of the fully functioning person. The chief feature is open to experience that is to accept both positive and negative emotions. When Mayil tries to clarify the gender discrimination for some French words with Zainab aunty, she replies that all the soft sounding words are feminine while the harsh sounding words are masculine. On hearing this, Mayil's father satirically noted that ". . . whoever looked at his daughter didn't make that rule" (*MWBQ* 14). Mayil feels much offended by her father's comment but she decides to be silent.

When she writes her first story about the shortest pencil in the world, she does not get much satisfaction from her own writing. Her grandfather helps her come out of self-disgust. She records in her diary that "He said it didn't matter if my story wasn't that great, because my paper ball sure was" (*MWBQ* 94). [Here the authors deliberately employ grammatically wrong sentence because Mayil being a small girl may prone to commit errors. They mean to say that her grandfather encourages Mayil that if she is not satisfied with her own writings, then he is sure that she could make paper balls out of those papers and play]

Mayil often feels inferior or rather sad about her dark complexion and curly hair. She has been bullied by her classmates for not being so fair and beautiful like them. They have even gone to the

extent of gifting a sachet of fairness cream to her. Maya, Mayil's mother, advises her daughter thus: "...you have to decide how beautiful or ugly you are. Don't let anyone else decide that for you. And I hope you decide that you are beautiful" (*MWBQ* 65). In an incident, the parents handle the situation with utmost care without breaching the self – esteem of their children, Mayil and Thamarai. The hardware expert who visits them to fix the crashed personal computer informs the family that someone has watched the unwanted website. The parents without getting panicky say that they could understand the children's curiosity and acknowledge it to be normal. Mayil declares that she is ignorant of the incident and claims that it would be her brother, Thamarai.

Mayil exhibits Rogers' concept of existential living which denotes keeping in touch with different life experiences shunning preconceptions and prejudices, that is to live at present. It is evident from her curiosity to learn the world around her. She observes the opinionated views of others towards the transgender and their outfit in the public place which raises a volley of questions in her mind. She clarifies her queries with her mother. She comes to know about the various issues of the society such as caste discrimination, gender issues, sexual harassment, domestic violence, indecent exposure and so on. She starts to read newspapers and magazines as a venture to update herself about the world happenings and to find solution to her questions.

On a journey to her maternal aunt's home by electric train, Mayil witnesses "a weirdly dressed 'lady – man'". The heavy - eyed Mayil wants to sit near the 'lady – man' for a nap, her father warns her not to sit near such persons as they may pester for money. Mayil, her father Ganesan, her brother Thamarai Kannan, her maternal grandfather and her neighbour Saroja paati ["paati" – a respectful word for an old woman] have actively participated in the rally on Walkers' Rights. Among them, Mayil holding the placards has distributed the flyers. Mayil reiterates her grandfather's comment in her diary thus: "Thatha said I had a "blazing" look on my face when I was holding up the placard. Like Che Guevera. Only thing missing was the headband" (*MMM* 134). In a nutshell, she observes, reflects and reacts to the society's tune.

The third feature of Rogers' personality concept is to 'possess trust feelings' that is trust on one's own self for making choices. The strategy of Ganeshan to make her daughter quiet by gifting a diary has provided the necessary prodding to Mayil to construct a big dream of becoming a writer in future. She finds a writer in herself and appreciates herself when her known circles too recognise a 'Mayilwriter' in her. Starting her writing journey as a diary writer at the age of 13 she continues to pour down to satiate her inner urge of writing. Then she holds the position to be one of the student editors for the school magazine. Next she becomes a blogger and finally she takes part in writing competition.

The fourth trait of Rogers' fully functioning person is to be creative. It is generally believed that creative thinking and risk taking for self-development are the signs of a 'growing' person. The ability to adjust, change and seek new experiences will make one's life interesting. In spite of her dissatisfaction in her journey to be a good writer, she has never lost faith in her choice. Her strenuous effort has fetched a place among student editors for her school magazine. She gets an opportunity to write solution to the personal queries of other schoolmates under a pen name, Agony Ant.

In one of the letters to Agony Ant, a boy has shared his problem stating that his parents often compare him with his sister. He also grieves that he doesn't always want to be someone else. Mayil, the agony ant has replied that "Talk to your parents frankly about what you feel. Confide in your sister and tell her about it. Do what you are good at and be proud of it. Most of all, don't end up comparing yourself to anyone." (*MMM* 120). Mayil's unique characteristic and her creativity are evident from her reply to the boy.

Mayil, Vidyashankar and Susan are shortlisted for the star champion finale, for which they have to design an innovative game. Mayil has modelled a game named, 'Paati On Wheels'. The game consists of three levels in which paati riding on a cycle, has to collect empty bottles and trash them. Then she has to collect the reusable items and to manufacture a new product. In the final round, the team of green volunteers consists of a player as bishop, paati as queen and an avatar have to play chess with the villains who wear plastic bags on their heads. This innovative game on green revolution has

etched her star champion title and 'Funtastic'(a firm) is instrumental in introducing Mayil's 'Paati On Wheels' as a game CD.

Looking for new challenges and experiences and successfully encountering them will make a person happy and satisfied with his life. Mayil never lets go any of the opportunities that come her way. Despite stage fear, she faces the gathering, clearly explains her games and becomes a star champ. Mayil being 14 years old knows no writing technique and feels, "I think writing is my real secret. I'm really happy when I write" (MMM 137). By identifying her real strength, she boldly faces the challenges and balances herself to bring out the best of her. It is apparent from Mayil's resolution for the new year:

This Year's Mayil  
Made a new friend  
She could always be herself  
She never had to pretend.

...

This Year's Mayil  
Learnt how to write  
She didn't always win,  
But it made her feel light. (TMM 123)

Being a progressive person, Mayil's 'ideal-image' becomes congruent with her 'self-image' and 'real/true self.' Mayil's 'ideal-image' to become a writer has gone right with her self-evaluation that has been formed from the interaction with others and her actual self of being a writer. This congruence with 'self' lights the fire of self-actualization in her and drives her to achieve high.

## Conclusion

In the first book of the series, *Mayil Will Not Be Quiet*, she accidentally discovers a writer in her. In the second and the third books, namely *Mostly Madly Mayil* and *This is Me, Mayil*, she reacts to the happenings in the world by constantly exploring the new Mayilwriter in her. She evolves to be an environment sensitive person by observing the way of the world and steadily grows for the betterment. On achieving her dream, Mayil turns to be a fully functioning person. Mayil's dream to become Mayil writer has come true due to her consistent efforts. She accepts both the positive and the negative experiences that she gets and considers them as the stepping stone to achieve her dream. The steady growth of Mayil is due to the genuine, acceptable and compassionate environment that surrounds her. On the whole, the analysis of the success secrets of Mayil in Mayil series using Carl Rogers' concept of fully functioning person projects Mayil as a fully functioning person who has the five vital characteristics that have been listed out by the Psychologist Rogers and leads to the notable congruence of Mayil's self.

The paper has briefly explained how Carl Roger's concept of the fully functioning person can be applied to the genre of Children Literature, for evaluation, in the context of the three works of Niveditha Subramanyam and Sowmya Rajendran.

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## **Cultural Diversity Through Localised English Language in Selected Indo-Pak English Novels**

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### *Abstract*

*Indo-Pak English fiction, in recent decades, manifests its profound concern for the English language in the contemporary worldwide globalization. Fiction writers from Pakistan and India attempt to consolidate their semantic personality (s) and localized thoughts through deconstruction of language difference between Standard English and localized version. The present research endeavors to highlight this connection between novel, writer and the significant role of language. The study is delimited to critical discussion of two novels; Sea of Poppies by Amitav Gosh and The Scatter Here is too Great by Bilal Tanweer with respect to the localization of Standard English language. This study will develop a thorough understanding by breaking down the texts and the conversation between various characters to interpret the textual as well as linguistic connections with the local context. This study is descriptive and interpretive. Textual analysis has been used as a research method to evaluate the novels. Moreover the theoretical ideas of Jean Francois Lyotard have been incorporated to analyze the deconstruction through the strategies of CM and CS. The present research ends with recommendations and suggestions for future research with respect to literary studies.*

*Keywords: Indian English fiction, Pakistani English fiction, postmodernism, code-mixing, code-switching, textual analysis.*

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### **Introduction**

The English language in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, being a non-native language, is still viewed as a foreign language though it has attained a prominent position in the linguistic groups, such as, media, academics and politics etc. These countries (Pakistan and India) have embraced it as a language of communication in their official set ups. Similarly, its strong impact has spread to various social and humanistic disciplines including the English fiction of India and Pakistan. Emile Benveniste; a renowned French linguist, comments on the vital role of any language and she states, “It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject, because language alone establishes the concept of ego in reality, in its reality which is that of being” (“Subjectivity in Language” 40). Similarly, Okara in his article “African Speech ... English Words” supports the change of English language when he states, “Living languages grow like living things, and English is far from a dead language. There are American, West Indian, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand versions of English. All of them add life and vigor to the language while reflecting their own respective cultures” (qtd in Kellman 187). Due to colonization in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, the English language got mixed up with various local languages that paved the way for an extensive use of code-switching and code-mixing in fiction. Likewise, postmodern Pakistani English fiction writers appropriate the

English language as per their need of generating meaningful yet indigenous discourse. They use strategies of code-switching and code-mixing which are linked to bilingualism; a bilingual is a person who can communicate in both primary and secondary languages to a certain degree. “The phenomenon of people having more than one code (language) is called bilingualism or multilingualism” (Wardaugh 101). This inclusive English language reflects the postmodern context that celebrates the differences, and deconstructs the binaries of superior/inferior language.

Postmodernism, as a literary movement, developed as an expansion or a response against modernism in 1970. It brought a feeling of something finished and over with respect to hegemony of ideas, cultures and life perspectives particularly in post-World War Two scenario. Jean Francois Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition* refers it as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (xx iv) because it challenges the modern claims of objectivity and fixed truths. Similarly postmodern fiction represents multiple languages and cultures in one single language that celebrates equality as well as differences.

This study considers Amitav Ghosh's work as representative of postmodern fiction. Amitav Ghosh's creative endeavor consists of both fictional and non-fictional works as he, being an anthropologist, writer and academician, focuses on the diversity and rich cultural and linguistic heritage of India. His profound concern for India is quite evident in his style of using India as a fictional setting, in most of his novels. His fiction includes *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and *Sea of Poppies* (2008).

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is based on a grand and historical voyage of Indian slaves from Calcutta to Mauritius in a yacht named *Ibis*. The tale is divided into three segments in particular i.e. Land, River and Sea. The characters' speak in a language that reflects different social and cultural sensibilities as Shao Pin Lu comments, “In *Sea of Poppies*, language importantly serves both as an index of the cross-cultural fusion that was operating in the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and their littoral zone and hinterland in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and also as a trope for the emergence of new identities in the *Ibis* trilogy” (377).

Pakistani English fiction writer Bilal Tanweer did his MFA from Columbia University. He was nominated for 'Granta's New Voices for 2011' and has also received '2010 PEN Translation Grant'. His novel *The Scatter Here is too Great* (2013) is based on local culture, society, norms, traditions, politics, terrorism and spiritualism with specific reference to Karachi (one of the main cities of Pakistan). It consists of short stories and each story presents a different angle of local Karachi along with its fears, insecurities, problems, terrorism, politics and other current issues. The novel appropriates the English language as per the local context and it generates a discourse that incorporates various local words through code switching and code mixing.

## Review of Literature

The contemporary Indo-Pak fiction writers consciously or unconsciously attempt to transform English language through code mixing and code switching in order to represent local culture. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Amitav Gosh's *Sea of Poppies* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and many other novels portray women issues, politics, and history through localized English language. These works highlight national issues that require urgent focus and treatment. The writers manifest a creative aspect and also demonstrate the profound commitment towards humanity, justice, tolerance, pluralism, truth, democracy and history of their nation (s). Moreover, this significant concern to reflect the indigenous culture through the localized English language makes them contemporary postmodern Indian novelists who stand at par with global fiction writers. Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin in *Empire Writes Back* express the difference in Standard and localized English as they state, “Both English and English, with their attendant social, cultural, and



political agencies, will exist side by side as 'vernacular' and 'standard'(74). Code-mixing in a discourse reflects the inclusion of two or more languages at an intra-sentential level, while code-switching on inter-sentential level. Prasad (2008) considers code mixing as “linguistic cocktail” which involves “a few words of one language and a few from others, and again a few words from the former and a few from the latter and so on, mix up” (242). Similarly, according to Treffers, code-mixing can be defined as “the interaction between the grammars and the lexicons of two languages” (243).

The term 'postmodernism' is defined by a variety of interpretations and in this way it has created confusion and controversies among different theorists. The theorists namely Linda Hutcheon, Jurgen Habermas, Ihab Hassan, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard have proposed their ideas about postmodernism. Though, their attempts could not define the movement in an absolute way, as this trend is currently in practice and ongoing, hence, it is vulnerable to change. However, a research study entitled “Perspectives on Postmodernism and Historical Fiction” states, “Ihab Hassan browses history looking for mentions of this term and finds it used for the first time in 1934 by Federico de Onís in his *Antología de la poesía española e hispanoamericana* (233).” Similarly, *Business Standard* quotes Amitav Ghosh:

The idea of a fixity in language is so impossible and so unnecessary, since childhood, we have always been told to 'use the correct English word', to 'speak properly', and we have developed a deep-rooted anxiety about the language. But English used to be much richer than that, and the process of 'purification' should be combated. (n.p)

Shirley Chew, a professor of postcolonial literature, reviews *Sea of Poppies* in ‘The Independent’, as: “With the colourful characters, another bedazzling aspect of *Sea of Poppies* is the clash and mingling of languages. Bhojpuri, Bengali, Laskari, Hindustani, Anglo-Indian words and phrases” (np). Similarly, Luo in her research study explores Ghosh's representation of diverse cultural heritage of India, she states, “In *Sea of Poppies*, language importantly serves both as an index of the cross-cultural fusion that was operating in the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and their littoral zone and hinterland in the second quarter of the nineteenth-century, and also as a trope for the emergence of new identities in the Ibis trilogy” (377).

## Research Methodology

In this study, Jean Francois Lyotard's theoretical concept of postmodern deconstruction of binaries has been applied, and textual analysis has been used as a research method to evaluate the selected texts. The current research significantly focuses on the incorporation of CM and CS in terms of representation of local settings, characters and events from the novels. It further explores the specific words, sentences and communicative instances that represent local culture or traditions related to indigenous rituals, food and relationships etc.

## Significance of Study

This research is significant with respect to its focus on the deconstruction of specific binary opposition of superior/inferior language i.e. Standard English Language/localized English language. It evaluates the depiction of social status and cultures through code-mixed and code-switched English language that is known as Penglish and Hinglish in Pakistan and India respectively. It also highlights the interaction of English language with different local Indian languages that forms a unique localized language to represent non-English culture.

## Research Objectives

This study aims:

To trace the connection of a speaker with localized English regarding representation of his/her context in the selected novels.

To explore the postmodern deconstruction of binary of Standard English/localized English in *Sea of Poppies* and *The Scatter Here is Too Great* through evaluation of CM and CS.

## Research Questions

On the basis of research objectives, this study investigates the following questions:

1. To what extent, does the transformed Standard English language represent the speakers in their contexts?
2. How do the selected novels deconstruct binary oppositions through the strategies of CM and CS?

## Textual Analysis

### *Sea of Poppies*

#### Code-switching

*Sea of Poppies* is written in English language that is mixed with various local languages such as Bengali, Bhojpuri and Hindi. It incorporates words from these languages through code-mixing and code-switching and this phenomenon demonstrates a variety of characters belonging to various cultural backgrounds. For instance, the characters of Deeti and Kalua mix their English with native Bhojpuri language while, on the other hand, Jodu and Baboo Nob Kissin incorporate Bengali words in their conversations. Raja Neel Rattan's conversation in English is another example of code-switching, especially, when he meets the people of different classes. Similarly, Paulette, due to her French origin, speaks English with a French intonation, and she also learns Bengali from her caretakers' family. Likewise, lascars belong to different origins, and they also experience lifelong travelling, therefore, they speak localized English. Amitav Ghosh does not provide the interpretation of the native words used by these characters rather he uses the context in order to make the sense familiar to the readers. One such instance happens at the beginning of the novel when Chandan Singh shouts 'Kabutri-ki-ma' as the text writes, "Deeti and her daughter were eating their midday meal when Chandan Singh stopped his ox-cart at their door. Kabutri-ki-ma! he shouted" (28). Here, Gosh does not explain that Kabutri-ki-ma means mother of Kabutri rather he makes it clear from the context later on. He mentions their mother-daughter relationship when Kabutri addresses her mother as 'Ma?' (ibid). It also facilitates the reader to understand the word 'Kabutri-ki-Ma' while following their conversation and context. Bill Ashcroft relates this technique, of using un-translated native words, to the idea of deconstruction of a superior status associated with the imperial language. He states, "Refusing to translate words not only registers a sense of cultural distinctiveness but also forces the reader into an active engagement with the vernacular culture" (176). However, at other instance, Ghosh provides translation when Deeti sings in her native language on her wedding night. The text writes:

Sakhiya-ho, saiya more pise masala  
Sakhiya-ho, bara mitha lage masala

[Oh friends, my love's a-grinding  
Oh friends, how sweet is this spice! ] (33).

This localization, of English, also refers to the gap that exists while representing various cultures, for instance, Ghosh uses such terms that cannot be translated in any other/non-native language. For example, when Deeti's mother-in-law addresses her as a 'Draupadi' it alludes to the

famous Indian mythological character of Mahabharata who was the virtuous but, ironically, a single shared wife of five brothers. Ghosh provides the supporting information about 'Draupadi' and mentions the reason that why Deeti is called so. The abrupt use of this very word also manifests the fact that there is no other alternative word for this name in English language. On the other hand, Neel Rattan uses English as per his context, such as, in one of the situations, he comes in contact with an Englishman while, at other instance, he becomes the native Neel, especially, when he deals with the locals. At one moment he asks his servant, 'Yeh kya bat hai?' (168) and then immediately he shifts to the formal English when he talks to the police officer, 'Ah, Major Hall! What can I do for you?' (170). Similarly, Mr Lambert's interest towards different languages is evident from Baboo Nob Kissin's comment when he says, "Lambert-sahib always discussing with me in Bangla, But I am always replying in chaste English" (136). Paulette (a French lady) was living in Mr. Burnham's house and she was not attended by the servants if she talked in Bengali language. "The bearers and khidmutgars would often ignore her if she spoke to them in Bengali – or anything other than the kitchen-Hindustani that was the language of command in the house" (123).

### ***The Scatter Here is Too Great***

#### **Code-mixing.**

#### **Intra-sentential**

Bilal Tanweer, being a bilingual writer, represents the local concepts in his *The Scatter Here is too Great* either by providing a literal translation or explanation in an easy English language. This study evaluates the intra-sentential CM through the lens of translated as well as un-translated ideas in the novel

#### a) Translated

Here are few examples from the text that represent some local words along with their English translation i.e. provided by Tanweer. These are:

"For some reason, the house was named Patang that is, Kite" (30).

"Outside the station, on the chowk! At the intersection! How many people?" (166).'

#### b) Un-translated

"It has delicious fruit cake: cheap chai, so strong" (79).

In this sentence, he does not repeat Urdu word 'chai' rather he gives explanation that the tea was strong; a specialty of Pakistani culture indeed. He represents their tea-time culture where family or friends sit together over a cup of tea and sweets.

#### **Involving a Change of Pronunciation**

The novelist attempts to modify some English words into phonological structure of Urdu, for example, "He's trailing a chant: Po-etry, hist-ery, pheel-aasaphy, diee-gest, fayy-shion, boooooks, all kinds, boooooks, boooooks!" (74). These words stand for the terms i.e. 'poetry', 'history', 'philosophy', 'digest', 'fashion' and 'books'.

"Our young intell-kachool!" (85). The mentioned line shows that, due to influence of L1, people use L2 as per the framework of their own local phonology.

#### **Intra-lexical code mixing:**

It is a type of code-mixing in which a word is changed within its own self/boundary as "Asma Aapa's stories had become strange" (95). Here 'aapa' is an Urdu word and the addition of alphabet 's' is giving a sense of 'sister's', it also shows that the writer focuses on the relationships which are strongly followed in Pakistan. Moreover the use of a specific local Urdu word for every relation is itself an

enjoyment. Some other words like 'Amma', 'baba', 'bhaiya', 'khala' are also used by the characters, in the novel, to address their mother, father, brother and aunt. Another example is the use of Urdu word 'charsi' (drug addict) with addition of 's' to make it plural e.g. "That while he went out and got drunk and recited poetry to a bunch of runaway charsis" (48). Other such words in the novel are 'viziers', 'uchakkas' and 'Amma's' etc.

## Conclusion

The current study has evaluated the selected Indo-Pak English novels i.e. *Sea of Poppies* and *The Scatter Here is Too Great* in terms of their postmodern localization of the English language. Through application of Lyotard's postmodern theoretical concept, the textual analysis has found that the localized English decentralizes and subverts the authority of Standard English language as the main credible assortment. This study further demonstrates that this phenomenon of language appropriation connects the local with the global world and it conveys the indigenous meanings of language(s) through the strategy of CM and CS. It finds out that both the selected novels represent local culture, ritual, religion, politics and languages. Ghosh and Tanweer use the strategies of code-mixing and code-switching but, at the same time, they facilitate the readers by providing understandable contexts or literal translations too. The present study also proves that the Indo-Pak English novels are regarded as true representative of local themes in the context of a globalized world and the use of code-mixing and code-switching forms distinct group identities. The textual analysis further reveals that the incorporation of local/native words reflects specific cultural, social and contextual meanings. It is also significant because it highlights that Standard English is being improvised in different countries as per the need to represent local culture. The study finds that localized English is another variety in the existing world Englishes that needs to be explored with respect to emerging English novels from non-English South Asian countries.

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# A Corpus-based Analysis of the Use of Ellipsis in James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*

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## *Abstract*

*The article explores the use of ellipsis in James Joyce's Dubliners and Ulysses by undertaking a corpus-based analysis. He is experimental in use of language. He introduces his readers with ambiguity and suspense in his writing. He presents life as a journey and through that one encounters new vistas of experience and meaning. His writing style is individual and unique and has been investigated from diverse modes of language. This research endeavors for deeper analysis of ellipsis which is a cohesive device used by author in their writings in which he omits bit of a sentence or sometimes the whole sentence. The analysis revealed his writing style and examined how ellipsis is used differently performing different functions. The results revealed that Joyce used ellipsis more in Ulysses than in Dubliners.*

*Keywords: Corpus-based Approach, Dubliners, Ellipsis, Forms of Ellipsis, Functions of Ellipsis, Ulysses*

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## **Introduction**

The word ellipsis is derived from Greek word *elleipsis* that means "a falling short, defect." In linguistics, ellipsis creates an interaction at three levels that are syntactic, linguistic and pragmatic. There are two crucial forms of ellipsis that are syntactic ellipsis and semantic ellipsis. Syntactic ellipsis refers to the unexpressed word or a phrase in a sentence that was however never expected to occur in the syntactic structure of a sentence. Semantic ellipsis is the kind of ellipsis in which the certain elements omitted for the semantic interpretation as they are not indicated by syntactic gap. In the case of punctuation, ellipsis is denoted by suspension dots or points of suspension. The use of such punctuation highlights the fact that a certain part of a text is omitted deliberately or it refers to some incomplete idea or thought that creates a delay and interrupts the narrative flow. Ellipsis is also referred as *aposiopesis* in which the silence of the author shows that he is not willing to continue any further in his writing or speech. In such cases where there is a communication gap between the reader and the author, the reader is given an opportunity to fill the gap using his creative thoughts and ideas or at least try to do so.

Michael Naas defined ellipsis as, "a sort of speaking that conceals itself behind simulated silence; it is coded and decipherable, and deciphered, the reader has the impression of entering into the intimacy that the narrator or author shares" (1996, 93). The decoding does not mean that the gap between the author's silence and the reader's interpretation can be filled. He was of the viewpoint that



the reader has "the impression of entering into the very intimacy that the narrator or author shares with their work" (158). Therefore, their roles do not totally overlap. The incomplete writings become the piece of virtual writing through the use of ellipsis. In the point of view of Wolfgang Iser (1987, 203) the gaps that are filled creatively by the readers are called *Leerstellen* (203).

Rick Altman illustrates that "narrative text is a kind of text that includes a sequence of single following events that are connected by modulations and are organized in a specific manner. Narrative text is a type of a text that includes narration. Narration refers to the phenomenon of storytelling" (2008, 26). Paul Simpson states that a narrative structure and narrative comprehension are the two sides of one coin. When they are attached with the content the style of the text becomes very important and necessary. In comparing these two literary texts a particular linguistic feature appears to occur more in one text than the other text and so is the case with ellipsis (2004, 20). The difference in the occurrence of the linguistic features in texts is due to the difference in the style. Language is a means of communication and does not work alone. It functions as a text in use in a real situation. Ellipsis is the phenomenon in which the structural gap can be filled by the elements present in the next structure or in the context of the text. Ellipsis is one of the cohesive devices where the speech or writing is left incomplete. Novelists try to make the use of reiteration and substitution of words, clauses and sentences in place of using ellipsis. In the way of writing a novel there are a number of linguistic phenomena that the writers use to create a well formed structural pattern.

William Keach who has edited *The Complete Poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge* observed that punctuation creates pause in reading (424). The pause created by ellipsis is the place where reader is invited to start his mind's activity again. The beginning after the pause is not a new one but semi new as the continuation of the previous thoughts. The creativity involved by the reader to fill the gap is never completely similar to the author's thoughts and ideas hidden in the text. Further he asserts, "the activity of the mind, generating upon its generations, starts anew—& the pause is not, for which I am contending, at all retrospective, but always prospective—that is, the pause is not affected by what follows, but by what anterior to it was foreseen as following" (428). James Joyce has clearly used ellipsis in his writings through the relation between what is said and what is unsaid. The text that is said is visible in the writings whereas, the unsaid text is invisible. The unsaid is related to something that can never be shown at one hand and on the other hand it offers the readers with the need to reveal. The complex relation between the said and the unsaid creates instability in the text and change in fluency.

## Research Objectives

The research possesses the following objectives;

1. To determine the employment of ellipsis for any specific purpose that Joyce wanted to achieve.
2. To investigate how Joyce has utilized this expression of unsaid and involved the reader in the process of comprehending the text .

## Research Questions

The research questions of the study are:

1. What is the frequency of occurrence of ellipsis used by James Joyce in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*?
2. What are the forms and functions of ellipses utilized in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*?

## Delimitation of the Study

James Joyce wrote a number of novels, short stories and poems. His style of writing was just like performing experiments with the structure of a sentence, dialogues and characterization. He made the use of ellipsis in his writings but it is not easy to include all his writings for the analysis. So, this study is delimited only to *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, and investigates the form and functions of ellipsis used by the writer.

## Literature Review

Halliday, Michael & Hasan, Ruqaiyyah were of the view that ellipsis presents the things or part of text that are not said. It reflects the relation between the words in a text on grammatical level. Ellipsis was found to be same like substitution but they took it in a different way and regarded it a separate idea (1976, 381). Hendriks and Spenadar claimed that ellipsis is phenomena in which the elements of a text are not expressed and the meanings of those unsaid elements can be recovered by the listeners or readers (2005, 1). Further, they explained that ellipsis is a repetition of a structure including the content of the structure but some of the apparent expressions are missing. In a continued discourse the structure of adjacent sentences influences the previous sentence (2). David Crystal highlighted that the term ellipsis is used in the grammatical analyses of text. It is used in a grammatical analysis for multiple purposes such as economy, style or focus where the omitted part of text can be recovered with the help of hints present in the context(1985, 515)..

Cohesion refers to relation of meaning that exist within the text and that define a text. Cohesion consists of five types as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion (Halliday, Michael & Hasan, Ruqaiyyah 1976, 381). Darmawati Usman (2004) in her thesis entitled "*The Analysis of Ellipsis in Mrs. Warren Profession by George Bernard Shaw*" investigated the use of ellipsis in the play and inferred that some ellipsis used comprised nominal, verbal and clausal ellipsis. Arum Priadi's (2006) thesis entitled "*The Analysis of Ellipsis Within the Jakarta Post Cartoons*" reveals the types of ellipsis of elliptical forms, and the portion of each types of ellipsis. He concludes that ellipsis within *The Jakarta Post Cartoons* is categorized into types of ellipsis, that is, nominal ellipsis, verbal ellipsis and clausal ellipsis.

Crymes Ruth explained that ellipsis refers to the process in which one part misses out some part of a text whereas the missed portion must be the essential one. It showed that the missed part or words in a sentence are the constituents of that sentence (1968, 220). According to her linguistic context has an important role in ellipsis. He asserted that ellipsis indicates syntagmatic relations when the construction is the repetition of another and if it is found in the linguistic context then the construction has to be deleted (188). Michael McCarthy stated that "Ellipsis is the omission of elements normally required by the grammar which the speaker/writer assumes is obvious from the context and therefore need not be raised" (1996, 55 ). Randolph Quirk opines that ellipsis is the deletion of certain words in a sentence whose understanding is possible without those deleted words. Additionally, he explains that ellipsis exhibits two kinds of relationships at a sentential level, one is syntagmatic relation and the other is paradigmatic relation. Syntagmatic relations deal with the grammatical links created between the linguistic elements of text production. Paradigmatic relations refer to the necessary semantic value between the words essentially occurring at the same level (1985, 9). Ellipsis is also regarded as cohesive device. The main identity of ellipsis is the deletion of parts of text or complete text which are intelligible from the context (linguistic/non-linguistic). Ellipsis denotes a particular type of association between linguistic elements and characterizes common relation with the circumstances and knowledge.

Ahmed Abed is of the view that nominal ellipsis refers to the deletion of element/s in the nominal group which is a noun headword and modifier mostly. The function performed by the ellipted

elements is then performed by the determiners and other pre modifiers in a nominal clause (2012, 18) . Halliday, Michael & Hasan, Ruqaiyyah highlight that verbal ellipsis is an important feature of all texts whether spoken or written. It helps in the creation of varied and difficult discourse. Verbal ellipsis can be categorized into two main types' lexical ellipsis and operator ellipsis. Clausal ellipsis in comparison to verbal ellipsis seems to be like the verbal ellipsis but clausal ellipsis does not affect the verb rather it works with other elements in a clause structure. They further explain that clausal ellipsis involves the omission of certain elements that are not covered by both the nominal and verbal ellipsis and function as adjuncts and complements which are the two mostly influenced elements by the ellipsis 142).

**Research Methodology**

The study is based on both the quantitative and qualitative approach. It is a quantitative research as it illustrates the frequency of occurrence of ellipsis that James Joyce deploys in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*. It is a qualitative research as it explains how Joyce utilizes different functions of ellipsis. It is a corpus-based study and for this purpose, AntConc by Laurence Aunthony (A freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordancing and text analysis) is used to carry out the analysis. The plain texts of *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* files were loaded in the software and by using the feature of concordance and number of occurrence are explored. Ellipsis can be represented by more than one dot and in the text it was found that it appeared with three dots, four dots to twelve dots. The quantitative analysis of both the texts is performed individually to garner comprehensive results. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis elaborates the functions of ellipsis.

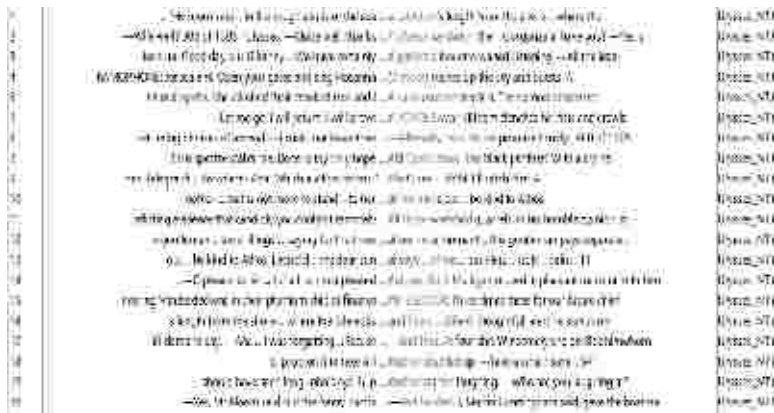
**Data Analysis**

The quantitative analysis is presented in the form of screenshots gathered from the results of the software. Ellipsis was found to be occurred in three forms in the texts. First form is the use of three dots (...). Second form is the use of four dots (....). Third form is the use of twelve dots (.....) that is an exceptional case. The function performed by these three different forms of ellipsis was the same but to count the total frequency of occurrence of ellipsis in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* all the forms were considered.



**Figure 4.1: Frequency of Occurrence of Ellipsis with Three dots in *Dubliners***

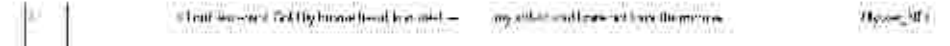
The screenshot given above illustrates the use of ellipsis with three dots (...) in *Dubliners*. Ellipsis was also used twice in a sentence so it was counted on the screen in the result bar of the software and the total number of occurrence of (...) was 144 times.



**Figure 4.3: Frequency of Occurrence of Ellipsis with Three dots in *Ulysses***  
 In *Ulysses* the frequency of occurrence of ellipsis with three dots (...) was found to have occurred 372 times.



**Figure 4.4: Frequency of Occurrence of Ellipsis with Four dots in *Ulysses***  
 In *Ulysses* the frequency of occurrence of ellipsis with four dots (....) was found to be occurred 2 times.



**Figure 4.5: Frequency of Occurrence of Ellipsis with Twelve Dots in *Ulysses***  
 An exceptional form of ellipsis with twelve dots (.....) occurred in *Ulysses* only one time.

Ellipsis	Frequency of Occurrence
...	144
....	3
.....	0
Total	147

**Table 4.1:** Total number of Frequency of Occurrence of Ellipsis in *Dubliners*

Ellipsis	Frequency of Occurrence
...	372
....	2
.....	1
Total	375

**Table 4.2:** Total number of Frequency of Occurrence of Ellipsis in *Ulysses*  
**Table 4.3:** Total Frequency of Occurrence of Ellipsis in Both the Works Done by James Joyce

The results revealed that Joyce has frequently used ellipsis in his works. It was explored that he used ellipsis less in *Dubliners* as compared to *Ulysses*. The frequent use of ellipsis in James Joyce's work reflects his way of writing. He was incomplete in his thoughts and written the texts in tension. The use of ellipsis reflected that he left many things unfinished to create tension in the readers' minds. His unstable thoughts were reflected in his writings and were left incomplete to be fulfilled by the readers by using their own creative thoughts and ideas. The difference in the frequency of occurrence of ellipsis in both the texts indicates that there are certain linguistic features that appear more frequently in one text than in the other because of the style of the text. Ellipsis follows the same manner and because there is a difference in the narration of both *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* that is why there was difference in the use of ellipsis.

The qualitative analysis highlighted how Joyce used ellipsis in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* indicating different types and functions of ellipsis. He used ellipsis in two ways. One is the use of ellipsis at the middle of the text (sentence) and the other is at the end of the sentence. Joyce has artistically used ellipsis in the middle of the text to introduce the idea that there are some ideas that are continuously running in the minds of reader as a gap for example, in "Sirens" and "Proteus." In "Proteus" following Pico della Mirandola's Stephen imagines himself as the future author of an encyclopedic work in which each book, arranged in alphabetical order, into the great flux of literature:

Have you read his F? O yes, but I prefer Q. Yes, but wonderful. O yes, W is wonderful. O yes, W. Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years, a mahamanvantara. Pico della Mirandola like. Ay, very like a whale. When one reads these strange pages of one long gone one feels that one is at one with one who once (139).

In this conversation, the connection between Stephen and Pico reflected the Neoplatonic theory of consequences. The arrangement of embedded clauses that begins with "one" and ends with ellipsis highlighted the procession from the Prime Cause to its creatures. As the story continues Stephen converted the prime cause in a type of a writer who expressed his artistic ideas and creative thoughts through books. Here the role of ellipsis is not to interrupt rather to highlight the incessant movement of intellectual influence which is an important topic related to Stephen's style in literature. In the example given above the last word "once" clearly illustrated its use as an opening of a story—"once upon a time." This dialogue instead of giving an ending point in the story, invited the readers to begin something with a new idea or may be the continuity of the previous one.

In *Dubliners*, *The Sisters* is one of the stories that ends with ellipsis. The ellipsis is in the form of four dots in a row. In general case a story ends with a full stop but here it ends with ellipsis. In this story Joyce writing continuously offers to give meaning to what is unsaid and diverts the focus from itself. The extensive use of ellipsis not only plays an important role in setting the tone of the story but also contributes in influencing its structure resulting in the prominence of the unsaid things more than the things said. Jean-Luc Nancy has observed, "Writing does not have any limit, but it is the endless inscription of the end itself [...] Such is the last page of the book, the last line of the text. [...] The ellipsis wraps up a book within the difference of its own circularity (1988, 162). It provides the reader with the view that he is reading two stories at the same time; one is clearly written and the other going on his mind. In the story there was a young boy at his uncle and aunt's place listening to a conversation between adults about Father Flynn. The dialogues of the conversation contained omissions and unsaid words. It was perhaps because the story of the priest may not be told or because they cared for the young boy.

Old Cotter was sitting at the fire, smoking, when I went downstairs to supper. While my aunt was ladling out my stirabout he said, as if returning to some former remark of his:

No, I wouldn't say he was exactly... but there was something queer... there was

something uncanny about him. I'll tell you opinion. He began to puff at his pipe, no doubt arranging his opinion in his mind. Tiresome old fool! When we knew him first he used to be rather interesting, talking of faints and worms; but I soon grew tired of him and his endless stories about the distillery. I have my own theory about it, he said. I think it was one of those ... peculiar cases ... But it's hard to say (1-2).

Old Cotter felt problem in telling the story of Father Flynn and what was his relation to the young boy.

"But it's hard to say...." shows that it was difficult for him to complete the sentence and same difficulty was faced by the boy who even did not have appropriate interpretive thoughts: "I puzzled my head to extract meaning from his unfinished sentences (3).

It was misunderstanding of young boy's part that he thought to infer meaning out of Cotter's speech full of ellipsis just to understand the conversation. In this case the boy could not understand the function of ellipsis. He tried to get meaning out of Cotter's speech from the gaps instead of using his own creativity to fill those gaps. The boy was unable to utilize his creative thoughts and he could only make a possible link between adults' speech and his thoughts. The boy commented on Cotter (not on his speech); "Tiresome old fool!" between Cotter's dialogue, "'I'll tell you my opinion..." and the time when he tried to explain his views about Father Flynn. The boy was not ready to listen Cotter even when he tried to tell Father Flynn's story. At the same time the boy was making his own story parallel to Cotter's story. In the dialogue, "I'll tell you my opinion..." there was an element of simultaneity and was not said by Cotter. The boy failed to understand the function of ellipsis and therefore, he was unable to interpret adults' conversation. The narrative style of Joyce used in ellipsis is known for its cinematic techniques. Its comparison is done by the techniques of narrative films especially the analogies in the techniques of stream of consciousness and cinematic montage and its specific use of limited point of view. The use of ellipsis in this regard increases the chances of text to have more cinematic qualities. The scene demonstrated the situation of the national library where Stephen and Buck Mulligan were having a sort of discussion on an Irish playwright. The Irish playwright was John Millington. In the meanwhile, the attendant came to the librarian, Mr. Lyster and made an announcement of the Freeman who went there for the files of Kilkenny People. The Freeman was Bloom who was there to find the keys design for the advertisement. The passage from the text is given below from *Ulysses*:

A patient silhouette waited, listening. All the leading provincial.... Northern Whig, Cork Examiner Enniscorthy Guardian. Last year. 1903.... Will you please... Evans, conduct this gentleman... If you just follow the atten.... Or, please allow me.... This way... Please, sir.... Voluble, dutiful, he led the way to all the provincial papers, a bowing dark figure following his hasty heels. The door closed (597).

Here Mr. Lyster's speech performed two functions. The first use of ellipsis shows a type of courtesy in a formal and enthusiastic way towards Bloom and the second highlights the moment in which Bloom was expected to speak. The point of view of the scene was limited further in the end where Mr. Lyster was in a great hurry and Bloom was asked to follow. Upon the closure of the door Buck Mulligan called Bloom *the sheeny* who first recognized him.

The reason for the change in the perspective was that Bloom wanted to get rid of the happenings going on. As mentioned in the cited text Bloom was first presented as silhouette, "a dark figure" and then as "the sheeny." It reflected Bloom was becoming more a type than a character. The scene made the readers prepared for the next episode of "Wandering Rocks" in which the character of Bloom was again presented as a background figure. In the passage given above it was observed that the presence of Bloom's character cannot be ignored. The exploration for the keys design, realizes the reader, as one of the important themes of novel, that of the keys, that provide an important link between Stephen and Bloom.



## Discussion

The frequency of occurrence of ellipsis in Joyce's *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* has revealed his particular style of writing that includes an extensive use of ellipsis. The qualitative analysis of his work has illustrated the fact that he has artistically used ellipsis and made his writing a wonderful piece of literature. His use of ellipsis illustrates two different functions performed in text(s). The use of ellipsis in the middle of the text reveals the importance of how the writer creates the momentum of thoughts going on in reader's mind. Although certain elements are omitted from the text yet the reader is capable of understanding the idea either by the context of text or by his own creativity. The examples from *Dubliners* explain that when ellipsis is used in the middle of the text, it is neither the interruption nor the breakdown of the ideas rather it provides the reader to continue with new thoughts and ideas. It helps in bringing readers' attention to some important events in the text, thus highlighting the importance of some vocabulary used in the text. James Joyce has used ellipsis at the end of the text. The analysis of *Dubliners* highlights the significance of using ellipsis at the end of the sentence. Normally a story or any sentence end with some punctuation marks but a story ending with ellipsis brings into prominence that there is something yet to be interpreted by the reader. It helps in understanding the overall meaning of the speech and provides reader to use his own innovative ideas for the completion of the story. Such endings give new beginnings to the stories. The analysis of the text from *Ulysses* explains that Joyce's use of ellipsis has cinematic qualities as well. James Joyce's use of ellipsis reveals that he himself was not complete in his thoughts and was living an unstable life. His personal and social life got reflected clearly in his writings. He was unable to complete the ideas presented in his work.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that the occurrence of the Ellipsis employed by James Joyce vary from *Dubliners* to *Ulysses* and comparatively, *Ulysses* witnesses excessive use of ellipsis. As this pattern is not typical for a narrative text and the occurrence of ellipsis is expected to be much lower. Although the two analyzed texts belong to same author yet are at variance from viewpoint of style. Moreover, the importance of clausal ellipsis to the cohesiveness of the text is also evident in the fact that they form cohesive ties not only across clause and sentence boundaries, but also across paragraphs. Clausal ellipsis records the highest amount of use in both dramatic and narrative texts because it usually occurs within a complex sentence. The use of informality in texts highlights the utilization of ellipsis as it is known fact that in conversations, speakers tend to be short and concise in their speech; that is they tend to use ellipsis in order to avoid tedious repetition and boring redundancy. On the other hand, in narrative texts, formality seems to be the common feature; hence less use of ellipsis is a characteristic trait in novels. Another effective element behind the use of ellipsis is that non-linguistic factors. Finally, language is not static; it has the feature of flexibility which enables James Joyce to be different from other writers and he deploys ellipsis as a literary device to show the fragmentation which is an integral part of stream of consciousness.

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## **Problems, Concerns and Remedies in English Language Teaching and Learning : A Case Study of Uttarakhand**

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### *Abstract*

*This research study aims at outlining the basic framework of English language teaching in India, its evolution over the years, the basic issues and challenges that students and teachers face in the classroom while teaching and learning English as a language rather than a subject. It explores the reasons as to why a first class degree holder in English literature fails to come up with a decent confident conversation in English in a public gathering. The question- why teaching of English has not been expectedly successful in India is a very crucial one and it cannot be ignored. This research work is a positive effort to explore and unravel the basic problems and flaws while teaching the LSWR skills as well as the other problems. It describes the dark areas, as concerns English language teaching learning and acquisition as well as suggest the remedial measures using which ELT can be modified and evolved further to help the students and empower them with international language and make them socially financially and globally upward mobile. This empirical study is based on the survey of the actual learners belonging to regional language and other backgrounds and thereafter conclusions have been arrived at for remedying the ills affecting them.*

*Keywords: teacher proficiency, LSRW skills, grammar translation method, phonetic coding ability, bilingual method.*

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English is spoken as a first language by about 375 million, as a second language by as many people and as a foreign language by around 750 million. It enjoys official or special status in at least 70 countries and is being learnt by about a billion people. English has become the international key to countries, has transcended cultures and influenced everything from fashion to tradition to lifestyles. So in a multilingual country like India, English also serves as a connecting language across the country. It creates the Pan-Indian identity for the Indians. It is clear that we need English in divergent fields of life. Familiarity to English can get you to communicate with anyone and everyone where you travel, thereby easily handling the situation.

Uttarakhand is a state with the tourism based economy. In order to help the state grow, as well as having a better standing in the competition, local people need to have a sound knowledge of English. Besides, with the penetration of the internet in the sphere of education and e-commerce, English language by default is bound to grow.

This research study aims at outlining the basic framework of English language teaching in India, its evolution over the years, the basic issues and challenges that students and teachers face in the classroom while teaching and learning English as a language rather than a subject. The target group selected is students who are at the secondary level of education and are about to enter graduation. The research data were collected through the researcher's own observation of students, students' questionnaires, students' interviews both individually and collectively.

In Uttarakhand, there is the paradoxical situation. On the one hand, there are students of A-grade reputed public schools with good language skills, while on the other hand there are students, who get their education in Hindi medium schools. They face problems with regard to English language writing and speaking flawlessly. Attitude of the weaker learner of English may be

summarised as follows :

- (a) There is an inherent fear of English among first generation learners of the language as they have never been acquainted with it.
- (b) English language is seen as an imposition on them as the language is a compulsory subject in the school curriculum.
- (c) Students lack the confidence and the enthusiasm for learning English because they feel that only intelligent learners can understand English.
- (d) Many do not know even the very basic grammatical rules because their functional contexts do not require or encourage them to use English. Sometimes, they memorize the materials in English and reproduce the answers without knowing the meaning.

Here the divide between 'private' and 'public' has historically reflected the divide between English medium and vernacular medium schools. In other words, the elite minority that learns through English medium in school, is better prepared for the challenge of University courses taught through English, and provides the main source of students on post-graduate degrees, such as the MBA, which lead to the best paid careers. An analysis of language policy practices and the curriculum and the syllabi reveals how planning for language in education is not looked at holistically in terms of basic assumptions about language learning/acquisition (how language learning takes place), learners profiles and the contexts in which learning takes place and the recent developments in language – learning – teaching. While the demand increases on the one hand, the quality of English language education in our state run schools, more particularly in rural schools, presents an abysmal picture.

English language teaching situation presents a mixed picture from top to low level in terms of teacher proficiency (TP) and the exposure of pupil to English in and outside school, i.e. the availability of English in the environment of language acquisition (EE) (Nag-Arulmani, 2000 c.b NCERT 2005). Kurien (2005) identified four types of schools as given below :

1. TP, EE (e.g. English-medium private/government aided elite schools). Proficient teachers, varying degrees of English in the environment, including as a home or first language.
2. TP, EE (e.g. New English-medium private schools, many of which uses both English and other Indian languages).  
Teachers with limited proficiency; children with little or no background in English; parents aspire to upward mobility through English.
3. TP, EE (e.g. Government-aided regional-medium schools):  
Schools with the tradition of English education along with regional languages, established by educational societies, with children from a variety of background.
4. TP, EE (Government regional-medium schools run by district and municipal education authorities) (Position Paper Teaching of English-NCF - 2005- NCERT) (p. 2)  
They enroll the largest number of elementary school children in rural India. They are also the only choice for the urban poor. Their teachers may be the least proficient in English of these four types of schools.

This research work attempts to identify the problem areas in the learning/acquisition of English as a language. For this purpose, a questionnaire consisting of 26 questions (close ended, open ended and descriptive) was distributed among 286 students ranging across 13 districts of Uttarakhand and three boards – ICSE, CBSE and Uttarakhand Board.

**Interpretation of Findings**

In order to make this study more extensive in nature, the findings of the research can be dissected and summarized as follows:

		At what level did you start learning English?			Board (No. of Students)
		Class I	Class III	Class IV	
Medium of instruction at school level	English +	0%	29.4%	70.6%	State(17)
	Hindi (83)	93.9%	6.1%	0%	CBSE(66)
	Hindi (91)	4.39%	18.68%	79.93%	State(91)
	English (112)	100%	0%	0%	ICSE(79)
		93.93%	6.07%	0%	CBSE(33)

		Rate your proficiency on a scale of 1 to 4 in terms of the following English language skills				Board (No of Students)
		Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	
Medium of instruction at school level	English +	29.41%	5.88%	23.53%	41.18%	State(17)
	Hindi (83)	22.73%	4.55%	24.24%	48.48%	CBSE(66)
	Hindi (91)	23.08%	2.20%	24.18%	50.55%	State(91)
	English (112)	30.38%	15.19%	20.25%	34.18%	ICSE(79)
		21.21%	12.12%	27.27%	39.39%	CBSE(33)

		How do you rate your knowledge of regional language in comparison to English?				Board (No of Students)
		Very good	Good	Average	Below average	
Medium of instruction at school level	English +	11.76%	58.82%	29.42%	0%	State(17)
	Hindi (83)	27.27%	60.61%	12.12%	0%	CBSE(66)
	Hindi (91)	16.48%	79.12%	4.42%	0%	State(91)
		12.66%	69.62%	11.39%	6.33%	ICSE(79)
	English (112)					
		15.15%	63.64%	18.18%	3.03%	CBSE(33)

		While speaking English, do you think in your mother tongue and then translate into English?				Board (No of Students)
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	
Medium of instruction at school level	English +	52.94%	35.29%	11.77%	0%	State(17)
	Hindi (83)	21.21%	68.18%	7.58%	3.03%	CBSE(66)
	Hindi (91)	76.92%	15.38%	7.70%	0%	State(91)
	English (112)	7.59%	10.13%	30.38%	51.90%	ICSE(79)
		15.15%	24.24%	24.24%	36.36%	CBSE(33)

		When you are stuck up with the correct pronunciation / meaning of a word, what do you do?				Board (No. of Students)
		Consult a dictionary	Internet	Ask somebody	Don't bother	
Medium of instruction at school level	English +	11.76%	5.88%	11.76%	70.59%	State(17)
	Hindi (83)	18.18%	12.12%	7.58%	62.12%	CBSE(66)
	Hindi (91)	8.79%	0%	12.09%	79.12%	State(91)
	English (112)	18.99%	13.92%	34.18%	32.91%	ICSE(79)
		24.24%	12.12%	30.30%	33.33%	CBSE(33)

Table 5 : What do you do, when you are stuck up?



		What method would you prefer to improve your English skills?				Board (No of Students)
		Interactive	Video and audio aids	Self learners	Lectures	
Medium of instruction at school level	English +	23.53%	35.29%	17.65%	23.53%	State(17)
	Hindi (83)	30.30%	33.33%	16.67%	19.70%	CBSE(66)
	Hindi (91)	37.36%	25.27%	19.78%	17.58%	State(91)
	English (112)	55.70%	26.58%	11.39%	6.33%	ICSE(79)
		39.39%	27.27%	18.18%	15.15%	CBSE(33)

		What according to you is most important for effective communication?					Board (No of Students)
		Fluency	Accuracy	Impressive way of Deliverance	Content	Command over appropriate / accurate words	
Medium of instruction at school level	English +	52.94%	11.76%	11.76%	11.76%	11.76%	State(17)
	Hindi (83)	27.27%	13.64%	15.15%	16.67%	27.27%	CBSE(66)
	Hindi (91)	23.08%	12.09%	21.98%	18.68%	24.18%	State(91)
	English (112)	31.65%	13.92%	15.19%	15.19%	24.05%	ICSE(79)
		36.36%	3.03%	12.12%	9.09%	39.39%	CBSE(33)

		While using English as a language, what hurdles do you face?				Board (No of Students)
		Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Sentence formation	Tenses	
Medium of instruction at school level	English +	17.65%	17.65%	52.94%	11.76%	State(17)
	Hindi (83)	24.24%	21.21%	31.82%	22.73%	CBSE(66)
	Hindi (91)	17.58%	13.19%	46.15%	23.08%	State(91)
	English (112)	26.58%	27.85%	18.99%	26.58%	ICSE(79)
		24.24%	27.27%	36.36%	12.12%	CBSE(33)

		Prioritize the following factors in English language learning as per your observation?						Board (No of Students)
		Social context	Attitude	Motivation	Age	Previous knowledge	Learning opportunities	
Medium of instruction at school level	English-4	17.65%	0%	11.76%	11.76%	17.65%	41.18%	State(17)
	Hindi (83) 24.24%	21.21%	10.61%	13.64%	7.58%	13.64%	41.18%	CBSE(60)
	Hindi (91)	14.29%	3.30%	12.69%	9.89%	23.08%	37.36%	State(91)
	English (112)	26.58%	13.92%	16.46%	6.33%	13.92%	22.78%	ICSE(79)
		39.39%	15.15%	12.12%	6.06%	15.15%	12.12%	CBSE(33)

### Findings of the research Learner centric problems

On the basis of the questionnaire distributed among secondary level students, the researcher came across the following hurdles that learners face in the process of English Language Learning.

- The very first issue is the level of the very first introduction to English, academically. Though our policy formulators have advocated a late introduction of English for long, the masses don't seem to agree. English in India is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. The visible impact of this presence of English is that it is today being demanded by everyone at the very initial stage of schooling.

There has been a mushrooming of private English medium schools in spite of early introduction in state schools. While English is introduced at class I in private schools, state run schools have lowered the level from class VI to class III. However, it is an axiomatic fact that the earlier a language is learnt, the better the chances for attaining mastery over it. One probable reason why students from privately run schools seem to do well in English skills is that they are exposed to the language at a much younger age and gradual familiarity with the language accustoms them to the LSRW skills of English.

*Findings-* 61.5% of the students in ICSE and CBSE board schools (both private and government aided) learnt English from class I, 9.8% students from state run schools learnt English from class III and 28.7% from class VI.

- Though English is considered as the lingua franca, the language for upward social mobility and development in today's world, students are not able to appreciate its importance fully. The onus for this ignorance falls on the teachers and the parents, unless and until students do not realize the value of learning English the universal language, the motivation to learn would not come from within them.

In the rural areas of Uttarakhand, most students are first generation learners of English. Parents are illiterate and their social exposure to English is nil. In such circumstances, students get a phobia of English and shy away from it. They are willing to 'somehow manage'

without the pains of learning the language. In such circumstances, the responsibility for changing this attitude and motivating the students falls entirely on the teacher.

*Findings-* 55.2% of students felt that English was very important. 29.9A% felt that it was indispensable. 12.6% felt that it was manageable without while 2.8% felt that English was not important.

- In order to use a language effectively, the user should be proficient in the LSRW skills. These four skills- receptive oral (listening), productive oral (speaking), receptive written (reading) and productive written (writing)- build the foundation for language learning since we are exposed to a global English using world. However, the teaching of these four skills in totality is dismal not only in state run schools but also privately run ones.

It has been found in the research study that traditionally in India, English was taught by the grammar translation method. 36% of the target group accepted that they first thought in their mother tongue and then translated it into English. 28% accepted that they often practised the method before using English. 16% of the students accepted that they sometimes depended on translation before using English as a medium, while only 19.29% except paid that they used the English language directly without translating from the regional language.

Input-rich theoretical methodologies (such as the whole language, the task based and the comprehensible input and balanced approaches) aim at exposure to the language in meaning-focussed situation so as to trigger the formation of a language system by the mind. A whopping 42% of the students accepted that they had no exposure to English media, 17% accepted that they had exposure to English through their friends, 23.8% accepted that they had exposure to English only in the classroom, while only 8.4 % had exposure to English through the family.

The problem of English language acquisition cannot be understood without getting acquainted with the experiences of the teachers. In teaching-learning process, two things play the vital roles, one is the delivering capacity of the teacher and the other one is the receiving capacity of the students. So a specific teacher-centred questionnaire was designed and circulated among 45 teachers comprising of government school English teachers, private school English teachers, College lecturers and communication skills trainers.

Instructor	Heterogeneous class	Large class	Syllabus bound curriculum	Student apathy
Govt. School teachers (13)	15.3%	7.69%	30.77%	46.15%
Private School teachers (12)	16.67%	25%	41.67%	16.67%
k--	46.15%		16.67%	
Language trainers (12)		23.08%		14.10%
College lecturers(8)	37.50%	12.50%	37.50%	12.50%

Instructor	Mother tongue Interference	Lack of usage	Hesitation	Passive learning	Unchallenging curriculum	Lack of motivation
Govt. school teachers (13)	15.38%	30.78%	15.38%	15.38%	7.70%	15.38%
Private school teachers (12)	16.67%	25.00%	16.67%	25.00%	8.33%	8.33%
Language trainers (12)	8.33%	33.33%	25.00%	16.67%	8.33%	8.33%
College lecturers (8)	0%	12.50%	12.50%	12.50%	37.50%	15.00%

Instructor	Phonetic coding ability	Grammatical sensitivity	Rate learning ability	Inductive ability
Govt. school teachers (13)	15.38%	15.38%	15.38%	53.86%
Private school teachers (12)	25.00%	41.67%	25.00%	8.33%
Language trainers (12)	15.38%	30.77%	0%	53.85%
College lecturers(8)	25.00%	37.50%	12.50%	25.00%

Instructor	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Govt. school teachers (13)	15.38%	30.77%	15.38%	38.42%
Private school teachers (12)	16.67%	41.67%	16.67%	25.00%
Language trainers (12)	23.08%	38.46%	25.00%	13.46%
College lecturers(8)	12.50%	25.00%	12.50%	50.00%

Instruction	Grammar translation method	Direct method	Structural situational approach	Communicative method	Bilingual method	Natural approach	Eclectic method
Govt. school teachers (13)	23.08%	15.38%	15.38%	7.69%	15.38%	7.69%	15.38%
Private school teachers (12)	0%	8.33%	16.67%	33.33%	16.67%	8.33%	16.67%
Language trainers (12)	0%	0%	8.33%	25.00%	16.67%	16.67%	33.33%
College lecturers (8)	0%	0%	12.50%	37.50%	25.00%	0%	25.00%
Table 14 : The best approach for teaching English							

It has been found that in the past, students were introduced to English only in their sixth standard. Students learnt English just as another subject, like Physics and Mathematics, and got very little opportunity for using it within the school as well as outside the school. Language teachers adopted and followed some or all of the different methodologies listed below to teach the language.

Grammar translation method was used by the teacher to teach young children where teacher explained every word to students in the native language to make him understand and learn English. But in this method there was at least one disadvantage. Both the teacher and the student concentrated more on  $L_1$  rather than  $L_2$ . In this method English language class seemed to be  $L_1$  class rather than  $L_2$  class. Students got only limited benefit through this method.

Most teachers follow the bilingual method to teach the students in Indian schools, where the teacher first of all explains the entire English sentence in  $L_1$  and then asks the students to perform activities in English. In the course of composing his or her English sentences, a student takes abundant help through the use of mother tongue sentences. This method does not help fluency and naturalness in language expression.

In convent and private schools, teachers stick to the practice of using only English, without depending on  $L_1$ . Here, teacher is not supposed or authorized to use any single word from  $L_1$ . This forced seclusion made students from many families with no past history or learning or using English encounter great difficulty in understanding certain words and their meanings. But this method turned out to be more useful for the students to learn language than any other method as this method creates more encouraging language environment for students in the classroom.

All the above methods have their own advantages and disadvantages where the students learnt English only as a subject rather than as language. They were also unable to put their learning into practice due to lack of a favourable environment. In addition to above constraints, the teachers

used to have very limited teaching hours, mostly from three to six hours per week which are not enough to teach the language elaborately giving emphasis at the basic elements of language.

Another limitation seen in Indian teachers is that some of the English teachers are not familiar with the latest developments in ELT pedagogy. The situation is no better even at the college level as Robert Bellarmine observes : “The most serious problem in the teaching of English in our country is to the appallingly small quantity and atrociously poor quality of English to which our learners are exposed.” Besides it is found that teaching of English in India is basically examination-oriented only.

In the earlier days English was just like a library language, but now that nation has changed totally. At present the challenges visible before the English language teachers in India are diverse and it has become necessary for them to keep abreast with the changing time.

This murky situation calls for introspection and suggesting remedies. Recent researches have considerably changed our understanding of the processes of second language acquisition and they necessitate change in the teaching methodology, so as to make learning of English more effective and relevant. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), US defines English language proficiency in this way : “A fully English proficient student is able to use English to ask questions, to understand teachers, and reading materials, to test ideas, and to challenge what is being asked in the classroom”. Four language skills contribute to proficiency in the following ways :

1. **Reading** :- The ability to comprehend and interpret text at the age and grade appropriate level.
2. **Listening** :- The ability to understand the language of the teacher and instruction, comprehend and extract information, and follow instructional discourse through which teachers provide information.
3. **Writing** :- The ability to produce written text with content and format fulfilling classroom assignments at the age and grade-appropriate level.
4. **Speaking** :- The ability to use oral language appropriately and effectively in learning activities (such as peer tutoring, collaborative learning activities, and question/answer sessions) within the classroom and in social interactions within the school

### **Suggestions for improving English language learning**

The teacher should begin with clearly stating out the objectives of English language-teaching even if they are not specified in the curriculum. Accordingly, he should chalk out a well-developed strategy to achieve those objectives.

The objective of English language teaching should be three-fold : gaining knowledge, acquisition of skill and developing a positive attitude towards the language. The teacher has to be creative and involve students in meaningful activities pitched at their level. He should devise ways of encouraging the students' participation so that language learning becomes an enjoying and absorbing engagement. It is further necessary to build up the confidence of the students to make use of the language in day-to-day working.

A stimulating positive and supportive environment goes a long way in helping the student gain confidence to communicate in English. Role play activities, discussion of current issues in groups, vocabulary games in English are some of the activities which can be helpful.

Gradual enhancement of active vocabulary needs to be promoted through regular practice in



using the words. In the initial phase, students should be guided to learn simple words. The teacher should conduct activities requiring students to use the newly acquired words to describe things or situations related to their personal experience. This helps in creating association with and promotes better understanding of the learning and longer retention. This can be best achieved through engaging them in an activity involving the use of affixes to create new words. Students should progressively be taken to a level where learning new words and using them as a part of their active vocabulary becomes a habit. It is essential that students are enthusiastic about learning the language.

The teacher has a pivotal role to play here. He has to act as a role model. If the teacher himself is passionate about the teaching-learning of English, only then can he inculcate in the students a desire to learn. His detailed preparation and resourcefulness goes a long way in inspiring the students. The teacher needs to introduce variety in the classroom to avoid monotony. Help of various audio-visual aids should be taken to enliven the classroom scenario. However, necessary preparation and care is required for the effective use of these aids. The teacher should synchronise the use of aids with his own role to create a constructive and interactive learning environment.

To deal with the problems of a large class, it is necessary to engage students in group work. Meticulously planned tasks with defined and attainable targets ensure that all the students are actively engaged and benefit from the activity. The content and methodology has to be varied to suit the divergent learning requirements of the students. Peer-to-peer communication in English has to be encouraged to supplement the inputs provided by the teacher. As already pointed out, maturity of students hardly get any opportunities to converse in English outside the classroom. Thus, it becomes essential to engage them in speaking activities in the classroom.

Teachers of English language must realize that their role is to help the students to acquire the skills of language and once they attain it, they can manage any subject and any situation. That teachers have to tap the hidden resources of the students by infusing and boosting up the confidence level of the students. What is meant here is that the teacher has to attempt to train the students in accompanying the skills of language and there is no need to acquire knowledge about the language. If the teacher explains the meaning of a text, the teacher is teaching the language as a subject. On the other hand, if the teacher trains the students in the skills of the language and give proper practice then the teacher teaches the language as a language.

Talking first about enhancing reading skills, efforts by teachers are required to motivate students to read good books, to encourage them to visit library often and pore over good books. The general scenario nowadays is that students prefer hooking onto Facebook and WhatsApp than reading a book. Hence, the need has arisen to check the ever declining interest to read and cultivate methods to promote reading. For instance competitions can be held and the one who has read maximum number of books can be awarded. An award can act as a source of inspiration for other students.

To hone writing skills, creative writing in the classroom needs to be promoted. Students need to be encouraged to do simple writing. The misconception that effective writing is one in which long, difficult words are used, needs to be eliminated. Students must be made aware of the fact that 'usage of simple apt words that convey the meaning and thought' is what an effective writing is all about. Simple fun-filled writing activities can be employed to promote writing. The teacher can float random words or ideas in the classroom and ask the students to jot down a story in which those words play a significant role. After writing they can share their story with the class. This activity aims at improving writing and speaking skills. Activities like this stimulate the brain to do some creative thinking and writing. More such kind of activities can be incorporated in the classroom teaching process to enhance writing skills.

Teaching speaking skills has a very important role to play. Many students equate being able to speak a language as knowing the language and, therefore, view learning the language as learning

how to speak the language or as Nunan (1991) wrote, “success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language.”

Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom, they may soon get demotivated and lose interest in learning. On the other hand if the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be a lot of fun, raising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be. To enhance speaking skills among students, interesting group activities fostering students' interaction can be organized. Another idea is to establish a set of class rules and develop penalty system for when they use any other language.

However, if we browse through the studies made on this four language skills we find that listening has been the most neglected area of study, due to the misconception fostered by many of us that we imbibe this skill as we mentally mature.

On the whole it can be said that a systematic and comprehensive approach has to be adopted to overcome the existing problems in English language teaching and learning. The teachers should not basically aim at imparting information to the students but at teaching them skills necessary for effective listening, speaking, reading and writing. The teacher should begin with clearly stating out the objectives of English language teaching even if they are not specified in the curriculum. Accordingly he should implement his well-chalked out strategies for attaining the objectives. It has been realized world over that simulating positive and supportive environment goes a long way in helping the student gain confidence to communicate in English. Apart from this, Government needs to adopt a serious and active role in enhancing the level of teaching and learning in India. The aim should be to bring up a generation competent in taking the challenges of the world head on. For this, educationists and English language teachers from across the country need to enter a discussion about the meaningfulness of the textbooks, the constraints of the curriculum, and limitation of the evaluation system, the lack of teaching training and the dearth of competent teachers only then we can attain linguistically fruitful results in the classroom. However, the desire to improve, to learn and to master the language in spite of all challenges has to come from within the learner. Only then the teaching-learning process will become complete in all its aspects.

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## An Interview with Kavita Kane



**Kavita Kane** is a former journalist and best-selling novelist who has authored six books in the retelling genre and for whom writing has been a path to self-discovery. Her books retell well-known mythological stories from the perspectives of the marginalised women characters in those stories. Moving on from mythological characters, Kavita Kane's next book is about Goddess Saraswati.

**Dr Uma Bhushan**, Professor, General Management, Media & Entertainment, Welingkar Institute of Management Development & Research, Mumbai interviewed the novelist on 2nd February 2021 to ascertain as to what agitates her creative self and the rigours of writing process.

*Being a student of English literature and having invested twenty years in journalism, how come you decided to turn full time writer. Any particular inflection point for the switch over? Did you ever envision to be a writer?*

Every journalist thinks of writing at least one book. I never had any inkling that I will be a writer. After 20 years in the profession, I realised that I was plateauing in my career. One day, I even remember which day – Feb. 14, 2013, I decided just like that why don't I try writing? I just did that. Six books down the line, I don't see it being any other way.

*There are a few instances of journalists turning authors as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway. Did your professional training help you to evolve as a writer?*

It definitely helps. In terms of skills, I am able to work to deadlines and write quickly. I don't have the writer's block because we never had the luxury for that in journalism. More importantly, I believe, is the attitude that I have developed to be fair. A journalist of my generation was trained to look for all sides of the story. That is the reason I intuitively seek out characters whose voices haven't been heard so far and need to be heard.

*All the six books you have authored so far are around the unsung female characters in Indian mythology. Would you, therefore, characterise yourself as a feminist writer? You have two sisters and two daughters. Has that influenced your choice of retelling stories from the feminine perspective?*

Definitely! Growing up in an essentially 'girl' family with sisters, female cousins, aunts, grandmothers outnumbering the male counterparts, there was a strong sense of sisterhood, an enhanced feeling of togetherness, sensitive to the needs and notion of being a girl, a woman, a person,

an individual. That is how feminism is definitive to me where she exists first and foremost as a person, entitled to rights and choice and decisions given to a man. Men and women are two species of the human race; if one has certain rights so does the other half. As simple, fair and just as it should be but sadly is not.

*Do you want each book to stand on its own, or are you trying to build a body of work with connections between each book?*

I did not start out with creating a body work. It has happened by default. Success on *Karna's Wife* gave me confidence to write about Urmila, *Sita's Sister* is dedicated to understanding Ramayan from her point of view. It was then that I realised that there are a huge number of complex women characters who can be explored. Menaka, for example, we only know her as a seductress who distracted many a Rishi from his penance. However, she has such an interesting and emotional story to her. My forthcoming book on Goddess Saraswathi is the first time I am attempting to write about our gods and goddesses. That though she is one of the most revered goddesses, we don't know much about her vis a vis the more popular Durga, Parvati or Lakshmi.

*Do you agree with the view that there are women writers and men writers or is writer only a writer? Put it in another way, do you think women writers can write with more knowledge and empathy about women than men writers?*

I don't believe so. My favourite book *Anna Karenina* was written by Leo Tolstoy. And a Emily Brontë could create the most tormented character like Heathcliffe in *Wuthering Heights*. Yet we cannot forget that the whole concept of women writing came about as a separate genre because women, once upon a time, were not allowed to write, not allowed to publish or did not find acceptability among the masses. Today, women writers are not facing so much opposition or rejection like 100 years ago. A writer is a social creature and he or she reflects the social context. What we do need is more women writers writing about women.

*Is it your understanding of epics or the social milieu that triggers the creative process?*

Many things around you--people, events, issues, the socio-economic injustice and from this unrest grows an essential story idea revolving around the protagonist I have chosen. Once that is triggered, the writing flows. For example, I view our epics through a woman's point of view because women have been marginalised at every level of society, consistently overridden by patriarchal domination and assumptions. These stories are stories of men, written by men, told by men and even heard by men. How about considering the mentality of female characters of those same stories? For instance, I was greatly interested in Urmila's story. But there was nothing meaty available on her when I researched. I was not confident to write about her.

I decided to write on Karna from his wife's point of view. Karna is a tragic character with a tragic flaw. I wanted to show him in the right light. Who better than his wife, who is his counterpart and *sutradari* in his life. She was someone who knew his conscience and his moral dilemma. Conflicted characters intrigue me and *Mahabharata* is full of such characters. Like the known antagonist Surpanaka whose transformation from Meenakshi to Surpanaka is the story as well as her personal journey in the narrative. I am more interested in the marginalised woman character.

*Kane's oeuvre reflects upon the flawed narratives from the mythology and portrays marginalized females but is intriguingly silent on the male dominated narratives shaped by the patriarchal*

*forces obtaining in the society. Your response?*

There is no question of being intriguingly silent as the narrative itself got severely 'flawed' due to the very forces of patriarchy. As writers, we are asking a rhetorical question here, have we interpreted our epics and ancient texts correctly and, more importantly, impartially? Or have we looked at it like we interpret everything else—from the myopic glasses of patriarchy? Sadly, it is this prejudiced interpretation of the original texts that has in a way shaped our concepts about the women of our society. Take the original stories of Ahalya and Shakuntala and observe how the different versions have morphed and even distorted the original narrative. The epics too became the biggest victim of patriarchy and both Menaka's Choice and Ahalya's Awakening reveal the patriarchal domination and assumptions. The understanding of mythological discourse changed, largely revolving around the male characters, with women being ignored as mere catalysts for the culmination of the greater stories.

*Your fictional world is peopled by marginalized women. Are male characters not marginalised? For instance Ekalavya.*

Yes, it is good line of thought too. Nakul-Sahadev, Vidur himself was marginalised because of the low caste of his mother. Mahabharata is full of conflicted characters of both genders. I believe, however, down the ages till this date, women have had to struggle with personal and social issues much more and more pervasively than men.

As I said earlier, by writing about the female characters, I portray the existential predicament of women in a male dominated society, to explore all the aspects of the woman as a person as a family member as a social creature as a political product thus challenging tired stereotypes in the process. It is necessary to see diversity of women and diversity within each woman rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal as we say done with Sita, Draupadi or Shakuntala or Ahilya. It is important to recognise the cause of womanhood into historic and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, outlook and actions. The male perspective is dominating and there is a gender based discrimination in the viewpoints. This social attitude has to be revamped, there has to be a fresh paradigm for woman's consciousness. We have to take in the fact of the rise of individualism and with all the consequent political and social re-orientations which follow a certain collective tone emphasizing the sovereignty of women.

*As your entire oeuvre mirrors mythological female characters, do you not feel constrained/inhibited in the portrayal of these characters?*

I always remember that my characters are borrowed; so I stick to the popular image that the character has, I don't want the reaction from my readers, "she is so different from what we know." Our epics and mythologies are closely connected with our religion, so it is important to portray them carefully and not show disrespect or ridicule. I respect all my characters; they are all layered characters, their stories have been told and retold, I cannot really go off on a different tangent. My writing depends on folklore, and I have to use my material with great caution. For example, we generally think of Ahilya as created by Brahma. But one folk story talks of her as a kshatriya princess, making her a regular human being. I did bring it out in my book, but I knew I was walking a tight rope there.

*Should your fiction be seen under the rubric of Feminist Revisionist Mythology only?*

Why restrict a book to such definitions? Despite their powerful individual stories, the women characters from our epics have been largely ignored. All the protest and advocacy of rights, and



eventually introspection of my female protagonists lead to self-discovery which metamorphose them into strong, independent, expeditious women willing to encounter the onslaughts of life not merely as a minority subservient group but with the cognizance of being powerful sustaining force for society as a whole. Their newer iconisation based on a strong sense of individuality reveals that there is not a singular theoretical point of reference; it has metamorphosed with changed perspectives.

*From out of the galaxy of diverse female mythological characters which one particular persona appeals to you the most and why?*

That is like asking a mother which is her favourite child. Each one of my character is precious to me. I choose to spend almost a year with each one of them from research to writing, I am involved with each one of them. There is so much of love and labour; enjoyed writing about Menaka and Ahilya. I also enjoyed writing about Surpanaka because I had to identify with a character who was so unlike me.

*The role of a dotting mother and professional wife must be impinging significantly upon your writing time. Do you plan out a work schedule for writing and choose time conducive to cerebral activity?*

I ensure minimal distraction such as keeping my phone off during the hours I work. I keep office hours 9 to 5, 6 days a week. I don't write at night as I prefer watching movies.

*Writing is an act of sadhna. Did you notice any change in your perceptions about life and new realms of heightened awareness about what it means to be human?*

Writing a book is a journey for any author. From my first to the sixth book, it has been a path of self-discovery. I find myself to be a dispassionate observer, yet the process of empathizing and understanding the character, does change you at some level.

*Where do you get your information or ideas for your books? What kind of research do you do? How long is your research? Or is it ongoing as you write the novel?*

Research is an ongoing process. Since my characters are minor and marginalised, there is not enough material about them, hence fictionalising them requires how they get filtered through the major characters and events revolving around them, for instance, Satyavati in *The Fisherqueens's Dynasty* has been moulded largely through the character of Bheeshma and the episodes around them. Likewise, Menaka through Vishwamitra or Urmila through Sita and Lakshman. Also, the *Puranas*, folk threads and different versions of the epics provide diverse viewpoints and information about the said character.

*What are the travails of publication process? How important is marketing in becoming a high-selling author?*

Not at all. It's the content which matters. Marketing is the other side of the coin of publishing and plays a major role in the visibility and sale of the book.

*What is the most difficult part of your artistic process? Have you ever experienced the writer's block? What is the one thing you will give up to become an even better writer?*

The story ideation. Without that you can't write a full-fledged story!

*Any advice for a writer to be?*

**A DIALOGUE WITH DEBUTANT NOVELISTS--PARNEET JAGGI  
AND VIKRAM SINGH DEOL**



Parneet Jaggi



Vikram Singh Deol

*The Call of the Citadel is a novel addition to the growing Indian English Fiction. Written by Vikram Singh Deol and Parneet Jaggi in 2020, it is getting rave reviews and earning appreciation from a vast network of academia. The authors have essayed a probing leap into the philosophy and psychology of two different races and spin a lucid and convincing story from the ancient Indian history. Through a pictorial and narrative description of the Indus Valley Civilization—its culture and amalgamation with other cultures, The Call of the Citadel simplifies and fictionalizes history, trying to comprehend what might have happened around 2000-3000 years ago with our ancestors in the Indian subcontinent*

**Dr. J.S. Anand**, Professor Emeritus, The European Institute of Roma Studies & Research, Belgrade, Serbia and Chairman, World Literature, India interacted with Dr. Parneet Jaggi and Dr. Vikram Singh Deol on the eve of their debut novel, *The Call of the Citadel*.

*Welcome Dr Jaggi and Dr. Deol. Will you like to share vital information about your profession, interests, attainments and passions.*

Dr. Parneet Jaggi: I am Associate Professor of English in Rajasthan, India, a bilingual poet, writing in English and Panjabi with four published volumes of English poetry, a research book on Sikhism and one each on Matthew Arnold and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Writing poetry is my passion, DestinyPoets, Yorkshire, U.K. honoured me with 'Poet of the Year 2019' and 'Critic of the Year 2019'. *The Call of the Citadel* is my first work of fiction.

Dr. Vikram Singh Deol: I am Associate Professor of History and a colleague of Dr. Jaggi in Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan, India. An alumnus of St. Georges, Mussoorie and University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, I am an ardent lover of history and literature in English, I have authored *Social and Economic Values in the Teachings of Sikh Gurus* and the historical fiction *The Call of the Citadel* published in 2020.

*How did the two authors belonging to literature and history reach consensus in shaping up the fictional narrative that comprises historical facts tailored to contemporary realities?*

PJ: We thoroughly enjoyed the journey of the collaboration of literature and history throughout the

work. The historian at work gave me adequate archaeological facts and enough liberty to exercise my imagination in constructing a fictional world, ensured that historical facts did not take over the world of Mohan-toh-Daro and gave it the look of a dry, obsolete or just a theoretical tapestry of facts collected from historical sources. We worked in tandem from day one to the finish, conniving to shape it up like an action thriller so that the reader could connect to the ancient living style of our ancestors without being forced into it.

*The Call of the Citadel is not just a regular story of romance or campus life or the portrayal of a contemporary social ill. Instead it belongs to the genre of historical fiction in which authors rarely dare to experiment. So what exactly provided the spark to undertake this venture?*

VSD & PJ: History has been an enigmatic subject to both of us. One is transported to an altogether different era and land where one is free to imagine the atmosphere, way of life, challenges and the mysteries of that period. We both were fascinated by annals of history and have previously worked together on the book, *Social and Economic Values in the Teachings of Sikh Gurus* from a historical perspective. The idea of this novel germinated when repeatedly our children complained of history as boring. Their inability to visualize the Indus Valley culture and its way of life prevented them from appreciating the essential richness of culture, heritage and the mystique. This provided the spark to embark on a narrative journey to the ancient civilization.

*Plot and background form the key elements of a work of fiction. How did you choose this background? What were your techniques of framing the plot?*

VSD & PJ: The collaboration of the two persons from the discipline of history and literature was targeted to manage loose facts of history with the 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. We did not adopt any specific techniques of framing the plot. The characters and the story took us along its flow, reaching its climax in a way we had objectively visualized. We came across innumerable theories on Indus valley civilization, but the way a narrative takes the reader in its stride is unparalleled. Therefore, with a backdrop and a few characters in mind, we let the imagination run wild and take a course of its own.

*What about the narrative technique in carrying the story to its logical conclusion? Did it allow the requisite autonomy to the characters and how were you able to keep the overseeing authors in check?*

PJ: A world of Mohan-toh-Daro is built in the very first chapter of the novel. The murder of Devika's family, the suspense that follows, the strategy of the local administration in handling the case and the incidents that follow lend a pace to the novel in the very beginning. All the characters are fictional and just a few have mild resemblances with the statues excavated in the civilization. The greatest challenge with the narrative was to balance the exotic details with the familiar and relatable ones to keep the story grounded and look real. Since the historical setting belongs to the ancient past that does not carry verbal or inscribed evidence, the narrative had to be convincing and pictorial. The theoretical framework of the story of the Indus Valley Civilization has always been shrouded in mysteries, conflicts and debates, therefore the resolution had to be shown embedded in the narrative itself. The amalgamation of the two races was not a unique happening in history, though we, as denizens of the contemporary generation find it hard to digest in order to perpetuate our existing identities.

VSD: To our surprise, the characters took us along. We had not fabricated the plot before we

introduced the characters. Just the backdrop was fixed and well thought of. The narrative was led by the characters themselves, till we found that Mohan-toh-Daro, the central location of the action, took over as the protagonist, surpassing the two conflicting clans, the natives of Mohan-toh-Daro and even the lovers, Peter Das and Devika.

*The novel shows two distinct stories overlapping each other. How was the amalgamation of the two managed towards the end, giving requisite significance to each of them?*

VSD & PJ: *The Call of the Citadel* is about the confrontation of two races at a time when the Indus valley civilization was progressing and advancing in several areas of living. The two races were distinct and disparate in more than one way. Thus we took up both stories with contrasting characters as two plots to later show up together in the historic encounter and eventually an amalgamation. Both plots were significant in their own unique ways as the indigenous people had their own skills of survival like trade, commerce, town planning, water management, art, craft, architecture etc. On the other hand, the nomadic race led by Indro had an altogether contrasting means and methods of living and advancement. Their purpose of life, skills of survival as conquering wind, fire, water, use of weapons and horses was in clear juxtaposition to the natives of Mohenjodaro. This marked contrast of skills gave the requisite significance to characters on both sides. Action, being the most important component in the novel led to the confrontation of both the races and subsequent blending of the plots that changed the entire history of the Indian subcontinent.

*Characters like Devika, Indro and Peter Das are being much appreciated by the readers. What was your technique of characterization in a plot with an ancient backdrop about which not much authentic information is available with us?*

VSD & PJ: Owing to the fact that not much information is available concerning the people of this age, we had more space for imagination to play. Here Literature took over History completely. Apart from the statues of a dancing girl and the bust of a bearded man, a little information about their facial features, and a bit about their techniques of cloth-making and sewing, we had no clear pictures of the natives of the Indus valley civilization and their personalities. Therefore the characterization had to be loosely based on the available facts gathered from the archaeological studies and the artefacts preserved in the museums of India. When we visited the museum at Kalibangan, an Indus valley town located approximately 75 kms from our hometown, Sri Ganganagar in Rajasthan, we saw stone jewellery, kitchen tools, small arms for hunting and games, toys. It gave us an idea of the environment of the city in those ancient times. Therefore the characterization had to be based on our imagination with a rough idea of the tools and crafts displayed in the museum and the pottery remains scattered over the mounds of Kalibangan. Since Mohanjodaro now falls in Pakistan, visiting Kalibangan several times during the course of writing the book gave us a first-hand feel of the civilization characters had to be visualised in compatibility with the existing milieu and the resources available to them. For example, indigo was used to colour the clothes. We find a floral garment wrapped around the bust of the bearded priest, that showed their taste for colouring and printing. Stone jewellery showing a diverse range of stones brought from different lands indicated the interest of the natives in jewellery designing, making and wearing. Based on such loose facts, we moulded our characters into living characters adorning them with multifarious attributes. Antiquity of the backdrop was a challenge as well as a blessing to play free with imagination.

*The novel inextricably deals with a paradox-- "War is a means to an end or an end to the means." How do you look at it?*

VSD & PJ: The paradox carries itself through the narrative that traces the movement of two disparate clans in history. The clan of Indro (the Invaders) is in search of a better place to settle down and lead a comfortable life. Their search ended at the city of Mohen-toh-Daro, and war became a means to an end. On the other hand, the people of Mohen-toh-Daro had been leading a settled and luxurious life they had developed over time. River Indu had raised and nurtured them. Now the erratic behaviour of the river and the attack of the invaders had led to the inevitable war which was an end to the means. Their search for new ways of survival began afresh. The complexity of this irrevocable cycle fascinated us as novelists. Nature has its ways. The development of the Indus valley civilization was remarkable owing to the river. The river provided them with potable water, water for irrigation, fish and a path for trade. The erratic behaviour of the river and nature shook the very foundation of the Indus valley civilization.

*How did you manage to strike a balance between Literature and History?*

VSD & PJ: This was a huge challenge that kept appearing as a refrain through the process of writing. A balance between fiction and history, literariness and factuality had to be deliberated with great precision. We also had to keep it extremely simple, free from the theorization and pretentious literariness of writing, in order to reach out to the common reader, especially the students.

*There are usually a number of literary influences behind a writer and his works? Which works have influenced this book or the writing technique that moves more or less like a film?*

VSD: I am a historian but also have been a student of literature. The genesis of the plot was the result of a dearth of narratives on this age on which more debates and theories have proliferated rather than any interesting stories. Apart from this, my keen interest in cinema has enhanced the pace and flow of the narrative. I was eager on a cinematic presentation of an episode of history that has been termed boring by our youth.

PJ: This work does not bear a specific influence of any book, Indian or foreign. Being readers and students of literature, we have witnessed representation of history graphically and remarkably done in novels in India as well as abroad. As the Indus Valley Civilization was to be the backdrop and the protagonist, we decided to trace our own path and follow it.

*Since the release of The Call of the Citadel in June 2020, what sort of responses and reactions have you received from readers/reviewers and critics? Which age groups have you been able to hit the most?*

VSD & PJ: It has worked very well for all age groups. Simplicity of expression and the pictorial narration have helped the reader to get a feel of the ancient history and culture of India. Different readers and critics have delved on different attributes of the narrative. Critics have also found a variety of issues and perspectives to look at the story. For instance the noted poet and critic Gopal Lahiri regards the novel as an overview of the movement of civilizations in history as it looks at “war, heroism and humanity that transcends geography, nationality and time. The result is a historical fiction that makes startlingly plain how civilizations are destined to repeat themselves.” Dr Sanjeev Gandhi observes the symbolism minutely and relates it to the archaeological findings and historical theories that coincide with the narrative . . . reminiscent of Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* . . . *Call of the Citadel* touches upon a mysterious episode of Indian history, unlocking several windows to look through.” The gaps within the narrative lend ample space to the reader to prioritize his interest through the action of the narrative. Lack of sufficient concrete information has made the subject enigmatic as well as absorbing. We are glad that we could draw a rough picture of the times that are not so easy to conceive. The demand of the readers for a prequel and a sequel give us enough

enthusiasm and motivation to look for more such themes that could connect us to our national cultural roots.

*Do you think The Call of the Citadel fits into the slot of a historical novel?*

VSD & PJ: It is a historical novel in the sense that it directly looks upon the life and culture of the Indus Valley Civilization, an era existed about 1500-2000 years ago, an era that is equally mysterious as well as enigmatic. It is enticing for its advanced life style, technological developments in water management, farming, trading, pottery, jewellery designing and many other fields. Several historical facts like town planning, artifacts, occupations, topography have been taken from the archaeological evidences and research studies in this field. Our visits to Kalibangan, an Indus Valley site in Rajasthan gave us a fair idea of the ambience and environment of that era. The museum displays the artefacts and pottery, indicating the life and manners of the people of the period. On the other hand, the characters, locations and the plot of the novel are purely fictional. Our intention was to connect ourselves and the readers to the rich, forgotten heritage of the ancient civilization and give some sense of how engaging history can be when draped with imagination and creativity.

*Saul Bellow has raised pertinent questions about the role of the writer as a moralist amidst confusions generated by science and technology Do you think The Call of the Citadel approximates to this norm and “connects” to use E.M. Forster's expression?*

VSD: All history is about connecting to our roots. So is this. Our intent as novelists was never to teach a lesson, though readers might derive one or more from the story. It is more a journey of tracing our identities as a nation than deriving lessons or relevance. Any historical fact is an asset just because it connects us to our past in one way or the other, and we as individuals and collective nation have evolved out of that past.

PJ: I quite agree with the above fact that for an author, grappling with a quest for identity has been a prepossession since the dawn of civilization. We, as individuals or as society on the whole are always curious about the journeys from our origin through the evolution, whether it is through science, genetics, astronomy, astrology, archaeology or history. We visualized a work of historical fiction that would connect our contemporary youth and educated generation to the roots that we cannot deny. Our intention was to present it as a cinematic narrative with the civilization telling its own story and characters unveiling their personalities as if they are alive today. Therefore it was never about a lesson but an association.

*What's in store for the readers from the duo? Will it be solo or joint venture?*

VSD: We hope to continue working on projects related to Indian culture, philosophy and religion.

PJ: Joint ventures are surely in the pipeline. Indians have hundreds and thousands of stories of their civilization to share with the world and even with our own generations of youth who are distanced from their roots owing to the economic and technological advancements, overshadowing most of the essential, inherent values of the Indian thought.

Although I keep writing and sharing poetry on various platforms, yet fiction has a unique way of extracting ideas from the mind.

*Thanks, Dr. Vikram Singh Deol and Dr. Parneet Jaggi for the illuminating interaction. Hoping and praying for more such literary ventures from your creative and collaborative minds.*



## Creativity and Critiquing are Ethical Questions/Dimensions\*

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The immediate provocation for this write up came from a request to review a literary article submitted for publication in a very prestigious journal. The article dealt with a critique of Nadine Gordimer's famous novel, *July's People*, published in 1981. The scholar had read the novel as a 'dystopia' which I considered to be not just a misreading but a mischievous reading. However, I recommended the article for publication, since I did not want my own take on the novel to come in the way of its publication. However, I decided to examine critically- in an article of my own- if writers and critics had any ethical norms to observe while carrying out their professional activities, or was it a 'free for all' situation wherein you had a license to write anything and critique a discourse on any kind of parameters- or no parameters at all-and get away with it.

However, before my hypothesis on ethics in creativity and critiquing, let me, briefly, go back to Gordimer's *July's People*- it was singled out by the Nobel Prize Award Committee as the high point of her literary achievements- and the critique to read it as an example of dystopia. But first things first: what is a Dystopia? Opposite of the concept of Utopia, it is defined as-

“an imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic.”

A typical dystopic work of fiction deals with a futuristic society that is dehumanizing and frightening. Some of the typical examples are: *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, *Nineteen Eightyfour* by George Orwell or *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.

Now, let us look at –very briefly- the theme of *July's People*. It is a futuristic novel, published in 1981, when the most inhuman racist minority regime in the world was still in power in South Africa. The white regime treated its majority non-European population- the African blacks and Asians- in the most cruel manner through an institutionalized discriminatory socio-political system, trampling with impunity their personal and political-even basic human-rights for nearly a century.

Gordimer's novel depicts the fate of a typical white European family-representing the entire white community in south Africa, no doubt-who are fleeing from a civil war like condition in which the minority racist regime is overthrown and the black majority takes over political power.

The novel depicts a civil war-yes. It depicts political instability-yes. It depicts taking over power through violent means by the black majority-perhaps yes. The focus on a fleeing family implies possible violence. I used the word 'possible' because the fleeing family is not only not subject to any violence but is actually saved from the possibility of one by their servant and his family. And that servant, named July- is actually a black person.

Of course, in a reversal of fortunes, the white family having fled to the country side-July's village- and a remote place, have to live their day to day lives in very primitive conditions which is just the opposite of their very comfortable and cozy life under the overthrown apartheid regime. But this new life is exactly the same life that multi millions of black Africans have been forced to live for hundreds of years under the illegal, minority white rule. No more, no less. By accepting the White Smales family among them- of course, with some resentment- July's family and fellow villagers demonstrate a great sense of humanity, sharing with them their frugal resources. The ease with which their children develop bonds with black African children and the acceptance of a white woman by the

womenfolk exposes –implicitly- the unjust and wrong policy of keeping people apart through racial discrimination. The million Rand question, therefore, is that can this depiction by Nadine Gordimer be called a dystopian vision? My answer is, certainly not. Is this in any way treating the white family unjust and inhuman? My answer is again, certainly not? Does this depiction portend an apocalypse? My answer again is, certainly not. The basis for all my answers in the negative is the existence and propagation of the Charter of 1955, by the ANC who carried out their struggle against the White regime for the establishment of a democracy, proclaiming the policy of one person one vote without discrimination on the basis of pigmentation. On the contrary, it implies that the minority white racist regime that was overthrown, was actually the one with a dystopian worldview.

'Injustice', 'totalitarian', 'apocalyptic', and 'inhuman', are all epithets that are applicable to a typical dyspotic depiction in a fictional work belonging to that genre. As shown above, none of these can be applied to *July's People* by Nadine Gordimer. If this be so, how could the scholar I have referred to above read the novel as dystopian? I would not give him the benefit of the doubt sine he is no novice but a seasoned scholar. It is a deliberate, mischievous misreading of the text, particularly because the scholar had the hind sight of a peaceful transition of power in real south Africa a few years after the publication of the novel, thanks to the sagacity of Nelson Mandela and Bishop Tutu and others. A novel like *July's People* which is overtly political in theme and is steeped in details of the history of South Africa cannot be read in isolation of the socio-politico-cultural context. This, to me, is an academic sin and the scholar is grossly guilty of the same. He ignored the ethical aspects of literary criticism, which together with the ethical duty of creativity is the real objective of my presentation here. Let me explicate below.

The question about the relevance of ethics in creative writing and critical evaluation, if any, takes me back to the very basics of producing literature. I would, therefore, like to begin at the very beginning:

What is literature? What does it deal with? Why and how is it produced? Is there any politics behind what gets produced in the name of literary discourse? Who is its creator and is there a relationship between the real person creating it and his/her persona as a writer? What, if any, is the message that a writer wishes to communicate to his/her readers? Does that message reflect any commitment on the part of the writer? What is the nature of the commitment? Is it personal or societal?

Further, how is a piece of literature critiqued and evaluated? Are there any universal criteria for evaluating a piece of writing or are these society and time specific? Should pedagogues teach a piece of literary writing independent of the contemporary context of its readers?

And, finally, the most crucial question that is, in a way, the mother of all questions:

Is a writer's freedom to write and say things absolute or is it relative and subject to societal scrutiny at any given point of time and does it involve any ethical questions?

Let me try and answer some of these questions, based on whatever I received from the scholars who have discussed these questions but more importantly how I have mulled over and grappled with these during my teaching and research career of over 50 years.

Literature to me is a written discourse-together with its oral variant called orature-based on facts: real or imaginary. No more, no less. It is a part of the cultural achievements of a society and as such is one of the indicators of a society's evolution vis-à-vis other societies. Literature for me, let me state as straight as possible, is of the society, by the society and for the society. It is, therefore, a sub system of the society and has a dialectal relationship with the society that produces it. That is to say, it is impacted by the society-whatever goes on there- and after it has been produced, it impacts the society to bring about changes in it. This also means that production of literature is a conscious act on the part of the writer which runs contrary to the belief of many that it is purely an instinctive activity. Let me state this that literary writing is born out of a conscious effort as much as a pot is produced on a potter's wheel or a painting is created on a canvas. Imagination has a significant role to play in the production of

a literary discourse. Thus, to me a writer is just a wordsmith. I will explicate on both these propositions a little later.

Let me make my proposition a little more complex by stating that not only is writing creatively a conscious activity but it is a very coolly calculated and deliberately planned activity- almost like a murder. A poet, for instance, wants to go for the 'kill' of his readers with the choice of his words, phrases, similes, metaphors, rhymes and rhythms in the same manner in which a murderer chooses his weapons to get the desired results. The proof of the pudding is in its eating: it is because of these planned choices that we remember and recall verses from Guru Nanak, Meera Bai, Bharti, Tagore, Iqbal, Faiz, Shakespeare, Eliot or Frost, to name just a few. It is because of the 'kill' that we still recall those lines. It is also a planned activity because writers prepare themselves in the most unglamorous manner by doing research, sitting on dusty chairs, leafing through pages of manuscripts falling apart, or making trips to most unexpected places. Let me give you some examples. Nanak travels all the way to Bidar in the south and even beyond to the Holy Mecca to enrich his experience that goes into his poetry. Shakespeare reads the Chronicles of Holinshed to search the plots of his plays. Krishna Sobti spends weeks in the Harding Library in Delhi looking for material to describe the old Delhi in her novel *Dilo Danish* and my friend M.G Vassanji- a renowned novelist from Canada- goes to Zanzibar, Dar and Dodoma in Tanzania, searching for locations of his characters in his award winning novel *The Book of Secrets*. For research about his novel *The Assassin's Song*, I accompany him to the interiors of old Ahmedabad city, getting a first hand knowledge of how writers, at times tire themselves out looking for material to weave into their narratives.

But why do writers take so much trouble researching for their fictive world. It is because, they believe that they have something significant to communicate to their readers. Call it the message of the narrative- and every piece of literary writing has it. Whether overtly stated or covertly concealed, this to me is the most significant part of a narrative. My position is absolutely contrary to that of Marshall McLuhan for whom medium was the message or of the post modernists who believe a literary text to be like an onion whose layers you go on peeling and you are left with nothing in the end. In fact, the western aesthetics runs down texts with overt messages- particularly from the non-European world or from people believing in socialist political philosophy as inferior. They have developed a cline according to which the word 'didactic' became a dirty word for creative writing with an overt message- something which I reject and cite them the lasting quality of religious writing all of which are great examples of literary creativity: *Mahabharat*, *Ramayan*, *Guru Granth Sahib*, *The Holy Quran*, *The Bible*, etc. Also, look at the evergreen appeal of *Panchtanta* and *Aesop's Fables* that are explicitly didactic. The poetry of Kabir and Nanak from our part of the world has such messages inbuilt into them and that is what makes them great.

To me, then, a piece of literary writing is a document, written by someone, for someone with a crucial message. And equally significant is the subject matter of a piece of creative writing which has humans at its heart, no matter what the structural rigmarole- characters, events, locations, choice of words and expressions, metaphors and similes. Even themes dealing with science fiction have 'man' at its core.

And, as a corollary, all literature is about two basic needs: physical and emotional. Physical needs involve food, clothing, shelter and emotional needs involve love, affection, jealousy, anger, sex, domination etc. Thus there is no surreal halo around literature, it is very human and earthy in its subject matter. It captures within it not only the happenings in a society but also the processes underlying them. Let me make a small related pointed here. Chinua Achebe once said that all literature is about 'the burning issues of the day'. This means that even when a writer invokes the past or refers to past writings, it has a contemporary purpose or need. If a writer invokes the *Mahabharat* or the *Ramayan* today, he/she has a contemporary situation in mind. In this sense a piece of literature is not just a document but a societal document. It is because of this that the significance of literature for interpretation in social sciences has been recognized. Marx, for instance, credited the 19<sup>th</sup> century

British novelists with a deeper understanding of the economic, political and social situation of the society of their times than the social scientists. Let me make the next point now which about the authorship of a literary work. I mentioned above that writers research and draw material from other sources or seek other people's reactions to their ideas before building them into their narratives. In this sense, all literature is a collective effort, like what I call *panchayati shatranj- a collective game of chess*- where only two persons are playing in a street game but many onlookers would be participating by suggesting moves to the players.

Literature impacts readers or listeners in a significant way because of the realistic depiction of life so that they associate themselves with the discourse. However, this reflection of reality in a text is not mechanistic but dynamic in which the writer's imagination plays a very crucial role. It is not like history where the emphasis is on objective chronological narration of actual facts, although one must recognize that recent approaches to historiography now recognize the subjectivity of the historian too. While creating what has been called the artistic reality, a writer creates a world wherein he/she selects certain facts, rearranges them in a certain order to investigate the social reality with the help of words, expressions, similes and metaphors, employing various narrative and stylistic techniques and devices like juxtaposition, irony, satire etc to create an ancient mariner like impact on his readers. This is how a Ram or a Krishan, a Macbeth or a Juliet, a Hori or a Mitro, a Faust or a Don Quixote, a Lawino or a July were created. In all this, a writer's attitude or world view plays a decisive role which he/she puts forward in the form of a message that we have spoken about above. The ultimate objective of a literary creation is to give happiness, or at least hope, to its readers. Even when misery or injustice is depicted, implicit in it is the way out as well to make the world a better place to live in. Therein lies the lasting impact of a piece of writing. That is why we still read Homer or Kabir or Khayyam or Keats or Tulsidas or Tolstoy.

This is the ethical aspect of creative writing and those creative writings that have an opposite message built into them- spreading hatred, rewarding injustice, patting jealousy, lauding crime, for instance- are unethical blatantly.

What about evaluation of literature then? How do ethical questions enter the domain of critiquing. Let me invoke here a critic called Joan Rockwell who in her 1974 book titled *Fact in Fiction*, published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, observed:

“For the student who wishes to use literature as a key to the specific values of a period or cultural area, the point is to discover the author's intentions”

So, the primary task of a critic- and I could not agree with her more- is to discover the intention of the author behind writing a discourse. It is therein that the ethical aspect or otherwise is hidden. That is why narratives written on the same theme by different authors turn out to be of different ethical values or even different discourses on the same theme by the same author at different times. If the author has taken pains to create a narrative for communicating a certain message, is it not incumbent on a critic to take pains to discover that and place it before the readers. Since teachers of literature are critiquing a text while teaching it in a class, this duty of discovering its ethical aspect and placing it before the students applies equally to them.

To conclude, then, let me return to the original proposition of the critic who misread *July's People* should have discovered- through a close, perceptive reading of the message of the novel- the intention of Nadine Gordimer in writing that fictive work. He not only failed to do but perhaps misread intentionally for reasons best known to him. This to me was an obvious case of unethical critiquing.

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 \*A part of this article was presented as Professor A.G.Stock Memorial Lecture at the University of Rajasthan (India).

## Hope is an Imperative

Rutger Bregman. *Humankind: A Hopeful History*. Published in Dutch as *De MeesteMensen Deugen*. De Correspondent: 2019. English translation by Elizabeth Manton and Erica Moore. Bloomsbury, London: 2020. Rs. 699, PP. 463

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The year 2020 had already begun with the Covid19 casting its lengthening shadow on humanity when the W.H.O. declared the SARS-CoV-2 as Public Health Emergency of International Concern in January 2020 and it was soon a rampaging pandemic by March 2020. What happened afterwards is in the public domain. The world economy came to a grinding halt. Digital propinquity replaced embodied sociality. The social media was abuzz with both humour and rumour spawned by the way the unseen virus had dealt a sledge hammer blow to almost everything that we humans had always taken for granted; at the top of this 'everything' being the delusions of our own invincibility and grandeur born out of supreme hubris, and this only took the severest beating. Confusion, bewilderment, bafflement, doubt, scepticism, incertitude, hesitancy, stasis, intense feverishness, ontological insecurity and the dread associated with it; in varying degrees these were the emotions and states of mind that toppled and brought us down to the earth from our ascendant position. We had no armour against the unseen and unseeable demon! We looked for some parallels in history and rummaged through Sophocles, Daniel Defoe and Albert Camus. The spectre of the 1918 Flu Pandemic was also summoned from archives of memories. The doomsayers had a field day.

It was like a long, looping and coiling dark night which seemed to have no end in sight. Videos and images of people dying, the dying and the dead subjected to all kinds of indignities, the living infected with the dreaded virus stigmatized and ostracized, lakhs of migrant labourers trudging back home hundreds of miles after losing their livelihoods, and some of them dying of exhaustion and starvation before reaching their homes and before the virus could get them; these images were the staple food for thought dished out to the virus-shocked public by our news rooms, day in and day out. The exponentially increasing number of the dead with each passing day, this number being plotted in terms of dots on statistical graphs, and our proclivity to check the daily score card on websites such as the Covid Worldometer, pointed both toward our propensity to quantify grief in numbers and also how we were getting inured to pain and grief of our fellow beings. These images of entropy, of dissolution of all order and meaning, did not really mean that like Camus we had accepted the notion of the Absurd as a philosophical category that defined our world; it simply meant that, with apologies to Matthew Arnold, the sea of hope had receded on the darkling plain where the humankind found itself and we were just left to our uncertain survival tool kits; paranoia was obviously an easily accessible tool. And our media focussed largely on how these survival tool kits had brought out the worst in the human nature. Hope in the goodness of the human nature did reveal itself in many ways here and there; Sikh Gurudwaras, many NGOs, many individuals like Sonu Sood, and many among the medical fraternity did uphold the light of hope. But it was generally the pessimistic Hobbesian view of the human nature being inherently evil that was promoted by the mainstream media gone berserk. Undoubtedly we were telling ourselves false stories about who we are and how we have lived and evolved through ages but then the darkling plain we stood on encouraged and abetted us to tell such false stories. More than the pandemic, it was the infodemic of fake and negative news that had us in thrall. The post-truth scenario and what many psychologists call *negativity bias*, which makes us register negative stimuli more readily and to dwell on them, proved a potent mixture for discounting



hope.

But hope is an imperative even in the most troubled times, especially if the portals to hope in our own goodness have sound philosophical foundations, are adorned with painstaking research and make a definitive gesture towards a better future. Hope is what makes us dream and frees us from the false narratives we have constructed around us. And hope arrived in July 2020 in the form of Rutger Bregman's book *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, a text that restores its readers' faith in their own goodness. Bregman is a Dutch historian and author, someone who is, as the inside of the back cover blurb claims – and rightly so – “one of Europe's most prominent young thinkers.” He is already the acclaimed author of *Utopia for Realists* which was published originally in Dutch in 2014 and then translated into many languages.

The epigraph of *Humankind: A Hopeful History* is a quote from Anton Chekhov that serves as the *leitmotif* of the text. It goes like this: “Man will become better when you show him what he is like.” It is clear from this pithy saying that Bregman has sympathies with the constructivists and not people like Hobbes and Richard Dawkins of *The Selfish Gene* fame who posit the idea of our innate selfishness. Bregman makes a very forceful and convincing argument for the innate decency of human beings. To him, the stories we tell ourselves about who we are as human beings define us; if they are cynical stories and suggest that we are essentially Machiavellian, then such stories will tend to subjectivize or construct us as Machiavellian, and if they are good stories then they will impact us differently. It is a pity, however, that we are surrounded by a plethora of bad, pessimistic stories. Hence, as Bregman says, “It's time we told a different kind of story.” His mission in this book is to tell a good story about the humankind so that we can construct our institutions based on such a story. In order to build this compellingly hopeful view of humankind, he takes us through a history of humankind from the prehistory to the present times, and in accomplishing this intellectual journey, he leaves nothing on the way; casting sideways glances, he ventures into many disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, medicine, neurology, anthropology, linguistics, sciences, literature and social sciences. He quotes extensively from all these fields of knowledge to buttress his basic argument and the hope that flows from it – that most people are decent. The book itself, he declares in the introductory chapter titled “A New Realism,” is not a sermon on the fundamental goodness of people for he knows that “[W]e're not angels. We're complex creatures, with a good side and a not-so-good side. The question is which side we turn to” (10). Human beings, he suggests at many places – and he proves it by citing a lot of experimental evidence – are paradoxical creatures and yet he does not accept William Golding's myth in *Lord of the Flies* that if in adverse circumstances we are left to our own devices, we will forget all civilizational values and fall back on our animal past. He declares:

My argument is simply this: that we – by nature, as children, on an uninhabited island, when war breaks out, when crisis hits – have a powerful preference for our good side. I will present the considerable scientific evidence showing just how realistic a more positive view of human nature is. At the same time, I'm convinced it could be more of a reality if we'd start to believe it. (10)

The way innate human nature has been understood in two different ways in the western philosophy is the starting point of Bregman investigations. The two ways of understanding human nature are signified by the contrasting views of Hobbes and Rousseau. Bregman writes: “In one corner is Hobbes: the pessimist who would have us believe in the wickedness of human nature. The man who asserted that civil society alone could save us from our baser instincts. In the other corner, Rousseau: the man who declared that in our heart of hearts we're all good. Far from being our salvation, Rousseau believed 'civilisation' is what ruins us” (43). Bregman places himself obviously on Rousseau's side. He accepts Rousseau's idea that the human beings lived in harmony with nature and the community was bound only by the principles of humility and solidarity before we evolved into an agricultural society. But once we made a transit to agricultural society, it was all strife, avarice, accumulation of property, and injustice. He avers: “Civilisation has become synonymous



with peace and progress, and wilderness with war and decline. In reality, for most of human existence, it was the other way around” (110). He supports this basic argument with copious evidence from archaeology and anthropology.

Hobbesian view, on the other hand claims that the human beings are essentially selfish, untrustworthy and dangerous and hence to save us from our own innate destructive tendencies, we need a strong state administered with iron hand by a strong leader, a recipe for authoritarian leaders and regimes that enjoy unbridled power to control others. Hobbes believed that civilization is only a veneer, a respectable cover-up for our essentially selfish and destructive nature. William Golding's view of the human nature in *Lord of the Flies*, falls under what has come to be understood as the veneer theory of human nature. Bregman goes at great length to debunk not only *Lord of the Flies* but even its author.

*Lord of the Flies*, was mere fiction. No such incident of a plane carrying young school boys crashing on an uninhabited island ever took place. The entire story, Bregman asserts was the figment of a man's crazed imagination who himself was an alcoholic, prone to depression and who beat his kids (5). Golding confessed that he understood the Nazis 'because I am of that sort by nature.' And it was 'partly out of that sad self-knowledge' that he wrote *Lord of the Flies*” (24), writes Bregman. The novel presenting a very dark picture of human nature turned out to be a huge success. Golding won the Nobel Prize for it. The success of the story, Bregman explains is because of Golding's “masterful ability to portray the darkest depths of mankind.” ‘Even if we start with a clean slate,’ he wrote in his first letter to his publisher, ‘our nature compels us to make a muck of it.’ Or as he later put it, ‘Man produces evil as a bee produces honey.’” (23). No doubt, the negativity bias in us predisposed us to accept Golding's story as gospel, whereas the actual reality was quite contrary to what Golding had presented.

Troubled intensely by this fictional tale of humankind's intrinsic wickedness and in order to expose the bluff of Golding's pessimism, Bregman set about to find out if the story of *Lord of the Flies* had an actual parallel in history. The internet search took him to a story in an Australian newspaper edition of 6<sup>th</sup> October 1966: “The story concerned six boys who had been found three weeks earlier on a rocky islet south of Tonga, an island group in the Pacific Ocean ... The boys had been rescued by an Australian sea captain after being marooned on the island of “Ata for more than a year” (26). The captain had even got a TV station to film a re-enactment of this real *Lord of the Flies* adventure. However, this actual story which showed humankind in a positive light remained hidden from the public view and the entire limelight was hogged by the fictional story of humankind's depravity and degeneracy. Bregman found the captain Peter Warner in Australia, travelled to him and then through Peter, he met Mano Totau, one of the six castaways. What Bregman realized was that:

. . . it's a heart-warming story – the stuff of bestselling novels, Broadway plays and blockbuster movies. It's also a story that nobody knows. While the boys of 'Ata have been consigned to obscurity, William Golding's book is still widely read. Media historians even credit him as being the unwitting originator of one of the most popular entertainment genres on television today: reality TV. (36)

But why did it not receive the kind of attention it should have? Answer: *negativity bias* that makes us susceptible to the gloom and doom of the news. Bregman asserts that the negativity bias is ably supported by *availability bias*: “If we can easily recall examples of a given thing, we assume that thing is relatively common. The fact that we're bombarded daily with horrific stories about aircraft disasters, child snatchers and beheadings – which tend to lodge in the memory – completely skews our view of the world” (15). And in a country like India, the unending 'breaking news' is nothing but the news of all kinds of disasters that paint people in the darkest nightly shades.

Not only does Bregman come down heavily on the present-day news culture which dozens of studies reveal is addictive and a mental health hazard, he does not spare literary authors, biologists, thinkers, sociologists and economists for portraying humanity in a bad light. In the process he takes

potshots at big names; Richard Dawkins, Herbert Spencer, Steven Pinker, Jared Diamond, Garret Hardin and many others. He reveals how Philip Zimbardo's prison experiments in the basement of Stanford University and Stanley Milgram's shock machine experiments were manipulated to produce the results the experimenters desired. Both Stanley Milgram and Zimbardo conducted morally indefensible experiments in the name of science to confirm their own biases favouring the Hobbesian view of human nature. Supported by the voluminous evidence Bregman excavates, he is able to prove that "Philip Zimbardo's study wasn't just dubious. It was a hoax" (148). Bregman has devoted two full chapters – chapter 7 and 8 – on Zimbardo and Milgram to uncover their dubious intentions, and he succeeds in his attempt to do so. He says:

I'm going to be honest. Originally, I wanted to bring Milgram's experiments crashing down. When you're writing a book that champions the good in people, there are several big challengers on your list. William Golding and his dark imagination. Richard Dawkins and his selfish genes. Jared Diamond and his demoralising tale of Easter Island. And, of course, Philip Zimbardo, the world's best-known living psychologist. (163)

It is not that he merely explodes the myth of the human nature being inherently bad as is often propagated, he also tries to establish with historical evidence that humans are essentially "friendly, peaceful and healthy". He produces enough evidence to prove that when cities are subject to bombing campaigns, when natural disasters like the hurricane Katrina lay waste vast swathes of land, these calamities bring out the best in human beings. He makes just claim for the fact that in combat situations soldiers find it hard to kill. He counters how Hannah Arendt's thesis of 'banality of evil', which she propounded after attending to and watching Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, has been misinterpreted by most commentators as supportive of Milgram's experiments. He rather points out that far from being an advocate of the view that a common man is capable of extreme bestiality like Eichmann, "Hannah Arendt was one of those rare philosophers who believe that most people, deep down, are decent. She argued that our need for love and friendship is more human than any inclination towards hate and violence. And when we do choose the path of evil, we feel compelled to hide behind lies and clichés that give us a semblance of virtue" (173). Eichmann was a prime example of this. His conformity did not make him either a monster or a robot who did everything unthinkingly. He had simply convinced himself that he was doing something great.

Bregman revisits the infamous case of Catherine Susan Genovese's (aka Kitty Genovese) murder in 1964 outside her apartment in the Kew Gardens neighbourhood of Queens in New York. Her brutal murder is often cited as a case of not what people do, but what they do not do when they should do something. He examines in detail the 'bystander effect' and points out many loopholes in the way the murder was reported to underpin the idea that human beings are callous and indifferent to the sufferings of others. Contrary to how people have looked at her murder, Bregman concludes that Kitty's murder reveals, "One, how out of whack our view of human nature often is. Two, how deftly journalists push those buttons to sell sensational stories. And, last but not least, how it's precisely in emergencies that we can count on one another" (194).

One can go on and on with the way Bregman highlights the essential goodness of humankind. His arguments about the essential goodness of *Homo sapiens* are not only reassuring but harbingers of hope in these difficult times. The remedy he suggests, and again the remedy is supported by evidence from the non-complementary and humane prisons in Halden and Bastøy, lies in telling ourselves good stories, in creating a narrative that foregrounds our essential goodness and that does not feed our negativity bias. In this regard, he holds that our obsession with news is a major culprit. His advice in the Epilogue is "Avoid the news."

Acting upon Bregman's advice I did exactly that, and I can vouch for the fact that shunning the news has worked for me. Bregman grants that human nature is paradoxical, but in the final analysis, he exhorts us to see through manufactured sociopathy that tends to define who we are.

Bregman's text holds a promise of hope in creating a better world.

**Ms. Bipasha Majumder De\***

*Six Haikus*

a hungry vagrant  
peers at the blazing full moon  
his mouth waters.

\*\*\*

curved like crescent moon  
colossal scythe in the sky  
varicoloured bow.

\*\*\*

I pen, unpen and  
repen at last to see  
a parrot's beak blooms.

\*\*\*

reading Tagore  
to dip into the vast blue  
to find precious gems.

\*\*\*

lifeless life's going on...  
splash! one more flatlined, yet I  
look forward to SPRING.

\*\*\*

Silence of the grave  
was unsilenced suddenly.  
Boom! Amphan rumbled.

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**Dr. Supriya Bhandari\***

*Shifting Camouflage*

An invisible presence  
returns like a hibernating stream  
gracefully meandering  
through familiar paths  
caressing the margins of my being  
archives of memories  
moments of bliss  
ever dreamed, rarely realized,  
an undying hope of meeting  
in far off pavilions beyond time  
sans regrets sans remorse.  
Am I awake or buried in reverie?  
Who can tell?

Ringling of bell inches me  
away from visionary self  
and readying  
for acrobatics each time.  
How much am in or out  
Who bothers?  
Performance is all  
That matters.

Enacting regimented peculiarities  
of putting on masks  
till creases become transparent  
show off the scars below  
as fingers raise  
tongues click  
intermission in the show.

As sanctuaries dry  
my self flies  
allies turn callous  
maybe camouflaging  
the suppressed rage  
conveniently directed  
at the sacrificial lamb  
to find an outlet.

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\*Dr. Supriya Bhandari teaches in Postgraduate Dept. of English, Guru Nanak College, Moga, Punjab (India). She has authored two books of poetry and a book of criticism.

**Dr. K. Suneetha\***

*In this small, unnoticed corner.....*

In this small, unnoticed corner  
I vainly search for a path  
that leads to You!

Resigned to the non descript corner  
my blank eyes yearn to fathom  
the spoilt and unspiritual in me  
looking for plans to redeem  
and purge the devil in me!

As my heart continuously bleeds  
and darkness envelops  
sans direction,  
only to realize  
it is more painful to be thus!

All ways and means  
dissipate in thin air  
as I search constantly  
to be glued to you!

My mind is eternally  
seized of Thee  
to give you an idea  
of the 'real me.'

A faint glimmer  
of Thy pervasive presence  
tingles my pores  
next moment Thou art gone!  
Or me drifted away!

In the abandoned attic  
I resolve to stand and wait,  
pray for the divine beams  
to heal my parched soul  
and bless me unlimited access  
to Thy caring, loving self.

*Believing in Your Love for Me!*

Don't You think it's time  
to break open the  
impregnable wall,  
and pick me?  
How long is *mannerful*  
making me wait?

I shamelessly confess  
Even an inch cannot move  
depending on You  
my life breath,  
pondering if  
I am visible  
to you.

You  
drunk on devotion  
pampered by Radha,  
Mira, Chaitanya....  
stop comparisons!  
What makes You think  
that level  
reach I can?

Each day gains  
knowledge  
of innumerable  
shortcomings  
jittery and sad.  
Still, heart refuses  
clarifications  
stubbornly believing  
Your love for me!

-----  
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**Dr. Mehnaz\***

*The Powerful Desire*

Between known and unknown  
love sprang up  
heart pulsated  
rhythmic beats of life  
gained new ascendancy.

Soul's power to find mate  
blew away the power of debate  
Love scared of being abandoned  
scribbled confessions on clean slate..

Was it a choice  
or a compulsion to decide  
frenzy of ecstatic moments  
or heart ache to hide?  
Flights of the spirits revealed  
which road to take  
and which one to seal?

Never my heart agreed  
with what he said  
the rebel inside  
throbbed with passions  
never to subside..

Dilemma was over  
doubts at rest  
as soul soared to zenith  
erasing the uncertainties  
and fetters' fragilities.

As reason dawns with  
all pervasive light  
one discerns  
true love and carnal plight.  
love is the hunger and delight  
a beginning of new flight  
into realms of awareness.

Beware my dear  
don't mock what is left  
keep it as a treasure  
guard it from theft.

The stolen heart

isn't the same again  
as thievish aversion causes  
    undying strain  
    a perpetual pain  
as feelings are trifled  
and voices stifled.

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**Swarnjit Savi\***

*The Pyre of Notes*

'To Bhai Nirmal Singh Khalsa' Hazoori Ragi at Golden Temple

I

The melodious notes of Hazoori Ragi  
wafting from the Harimandir  
the devotional hymns of universal brotherhood  
soothing the scorching souls  
carriers of mellifluous words

The gurus, sages, and holy men  
spent centuries  
preaching

The count of gurudwaras  
did not come down from three  
Neither the graveyard became one

Caste carries one up to the graveyard

II

In singing-conducive environment  
minds bow  
eyes moisten  
mesmerised one gets transported to  
wherever the great ragi makes one go

At farewell  
the graveyard  
that pervades within us stood scared

in the form of caste - surname  
touchable - untouchable

The farm  
spread its arms  
for the body of notes

The notes that  
give salvation  
from caste

Pyre is for bodies...

*The Hacked Man*

In the times ahead  
the micro-bio chip  
shall fill my body  
with a spy-robot

The hacker shall hack  
to administer his eccentric order

The aristocrat did it  
So did the Bazar

War, love, hatred, greed  
too hack

Now the algorithms  
and the biometrics

The common man  
a victim for centuries

Inequality got  
upgraded thus!

\*

At the height of ecstasy  
Your subtle refusal  
bring my feet  
to a halt

I perch on  
the wait-ladder  
draping self  
in ages-long quiet

If you signal  
I shall melt in  
the furnace of a blacksmith  
and flow  
transforming the  
ironlike me into water

\*

Not the toys alone  
but all else is a game

Colour  
Alphabet  
Milk  
Water  
Books  
Bread  
Chocolate  
Laughter  
Weeping

With Cutie around  
taking tablets and capsules  
out from the medicine wrappers  
and placing them back in the medicine box  
too is a game

White  
Yellow  
Brown  
Speak out Nanoo

Nothing bigger than Cutie  
neither game  
nor medicine

(Tr. by Gurshaminder Jagpal)

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\*Swarnjit Savi is an authentic contemporary voice in Punjabi poetry. A poet, painter, photographer and publisher of international stature whose felicity with pen and brush is matchless. Held Painting Exhibitions in India and abroad. He has authored nine anthologies of Punjabi poetry.



**Basavaraj Naikar. *The Queen of Kittur*, Bloomington & New Delhi: Partridge Publication. 2019. pp 410. Rs. 600, pp. (Also Bengaluru: CVG Books, 2016. pp.361 Rs. 495)**

**Dr. Mohan Ramanan**

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Basavaraj Naikar is a writer of historical fiction. In his recent *Intrigue at Ikkeri* (2019) he wrote about the reign of Virabhadra Nayaka and the manner in which the latter foiled the rebellion of Vira Odeya with help from his loyal Diwan, Guru and Prime Minister and his Muslim friends and Dalapatis. Mixing historical fact with a dose of fiction, Naikar in that novel brings alive South Indian History after the Vijayanagara Empire. The same urge to focus on the South, hitherto neglected by historians, is behind his historical novel *The Queen of Kittur* (2016). Here, we move forward in time to the British Raj and its intrigues. South Indian heroes have not been much celebrated and this novel is about the great Kittur Chennamma who rebels against the British and shows exemplary courage and patriotism. In this novel, Naikar has made history a participant so to speak, even a veritable character, and has blended history with fiction. He has by using historical documents freely given that flavour of authentic history and produced a historical novel. This is different from what many writers normally do, where they use history as merely a backdrop for a love story. That kind of writing is Historical Romance. In historical fiction we are firmly rooted, in fact, with a minimum of fictional dressing up.

The novel begins with a description of Raja Mallasarja's court and the entertainment the folk singers provide. Naikar is familiar with these folk songs and translates them and this is a talent he puts to good use in this novel. The novel also expresses his fondness and reverence for the culture of the Kannadigas and presents various aspects of it in detail—the music, dance, the religious rites of the Virasaiva faith of the region, the administrative details of the court and Government, the domestic lives of nobles and common people and details of the Fort at Kittur which Chennamma will make famous. He tells a good story and describes weddings, funerals and coronations with much care and enthusiasm. The scene towards the end of the novel when traitors are put to death by being trampled on by elephants, is gory but well-described. When it comes to depicting the English, Naikar is sharp in his treatment of officials like Thackeray, who is portrayed as evil. There is a tendency to paint the English as villains, in black and white terms. The epistolary conventions followed by the English in their despatches marked by elaborate courtesy and formality which often couch harsh truths, is well imitated by Naikar. Of course, he uses, as part of his effort to create solidity of specification, original documents quite freely.

Raja Mallasarja is indeed a truly representative figure symbolizing the rich culture and reign of the Kittur dynasty. The King is shown as not only administratively shrewd but devout one who spends time discussing spiritual matters with the seers of the Kallumath monastery who are his preceptors. This is a trait Rani Chennamma will inherit, just as she will, the sense of aesthetics and the King's goodwill for all, including his Muslim subjects. She shows this when she helps in the renovation of a mosque from her personal funds. Hindu Muslim unity is strongly hinted at as well as the dissensions between the local potentates which the English exploit in order to divide and rule. In fact, Chennamma's defeat is not because of English superiority but due to traitors in her midst who collaborate with the English. The stage is set early in the novel. Mallasarja is suspicious of the English Government which he likens to a demon which will swallow up Kittur, unless he is careful. This makes him decide to strategically side with the English against the Peshwa. The differences between local potentates—in this case the Peshwa, Kolhapur and Kittur, is exploited by the English in their divide and rule policy and Mallasarja's fears come true when Kittur is annexed by the English in spite

of Chennamma's valour. When Mallasarja is poisoned by the Peshwa, and his successor, King Sivalingarudrasarja is poisoned by the British, it becomes necessary to find an adopted heir apparent. This is Sivalingappa, who is adopted and crowned as Mallasarja II with Chennamma as Regent.

Earlier, Naikar describes Mallasarja's meeting Chennamma in the forest and Chennamma shooting a tiger and love blossoming between them. The marriage ceremony and Rudramma's acceptance of the junior Queen and, indeed, Rudramma's taking it upon herself to narrate the annals of Kittur to Chennamma are all described with great aplomb. Chennamma protects the new King Mallasarja II as Regent because she is aware of English intentions. The English make detailed enquiries about the adoption, indeed interfere unfairly in the affairs of Kittur and heap humiliations on the people. This is because they are looking for an opportunity to annex the Kittur Kingdom on one pretext or the other. Thackeray, the evil English officer, has also an eye on the untold riches of the Fort. The succession and adoption is rejected by the English and they accuse the Kittur Principality of deceit and make plans to annex the kingdom. But they have not reckoned with Chennamma who decides to fight for the legality of the adoption and the independence of the Kingdom. Sardar Gurusidappa, who has served Kittur long, finds the treaties entered into by the inexperienced and now dead Sivalingarudrasarja faulty and disadvantageous to Kittur and reports this to the Rani. Munro has demanded a huge tribute in return for support. The Queen decides to resist the British. Thackeray enters the Fort and tries to take over but the Rani's soldiers drive them back. Thackeray is killed and some of the English are taken prisoners. The Rani bargains with the English for better terms. The Rani treats the prisoners well, particularly the women and children, and as a good will gesture releases them. She finally releases Stevenson and Elliott, two key English officers, on the assurances of Eden, the new Political Agent, that he will negotiate a good deal. But the English renege and the Rani is left with no other option except to fight the enemy to the last. Sivabasappa, who is in charge of the security of the Fort betrays the Rani by carrying news to Eden and at the crucial moment, ensuring that the canon powder in the fort is made ineffective. The superior numbers of the English finally win them the battle. The Rani is exiled from Kittur and put away in Bailahongala. Sivabasappa who had betrayed the Queen meets his just deserts at the hands of the English who put him to death. The huge riches of Kittur are described and we are given details as to how it was transported by the English. The chief rebels are hanged in public from banyan trees. Rani Chennamma gives up food and eventually dies longing for her dear Kittur which she cannot see from her prison. She is, however, heartened by news of occasional rebellions by her people but the English put these down. This remains a green memory for patriots who have immortalized it in songs and legend.

Naikar in this novel brings alive a period in South Indian history and the valour of the brave Rani Chennamma. What remains with us is Chennamma's generosity, even to her enemies, her trusting nature and in contrast the untrustworthiness of the English and their perfidy.

**Rajinder Lehri. *New Reading of Aristotle's The Poetics (Arstu De Kaav Shastar Di Navin Parhhath)*. Gracious Books, Patiala: 2018 pp. 106 Rs. 175**

**Dr. Tejinder Kaur**

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The book titled *ARSTU DE KAAV SHASTAR DI NAVIN PARHHAT* written in Punjabi language (“New Reading of Aristotle’s *The Poetics*”) by Dr. Rajinder Lehri, working as Professor of Punjabi at Punjabi University, Patiala (Punjab) India (Email id. rajinderkumarlehri@yahoo.com) published by Gracious Books, Patiala, 2018, claims to make a new reading of Aristotle’s *The Poetics* (330 BC) originally written in Greek language and subsequently translated and commented in English and many other languages by scholars till date. Each translator and scholar in the reading and translation from Greek into English and from English translations of the book into different other languages and further from those into many other languages have used different verbal equivalents of the target language and made commentaries to convey their own understanding of Aristotle’s concepts and arguments written in the source language or of the translators’ understanding of them, thus leading to multiple discussions about the book. The scholar, Dr. Rajinder Lehri, has used for his reading the Punjabi transliteration by Dr. Harbhajan Singh, ARSTU, KAAV-SHASTAR[ ARSTU DA KAAV-SHASTAR] BHUMIKA TE MOOLPATH, published by S. Chand and Company, New Delhi, 1964 of the Hindi translation of *The Poetics* by Dr. Nagender and Mahender Chaturvedi titled ARSTU KA KAVYA SHASTAR[ ARSTU KE KAVYA SIDHANTON KA VIVECHAN AUR ' PIRI POITIKES' KA ANUVAAD] published by Bharti Bhandar, Leader Press, Allahabad, 1957 based on S.H. Butcher’s translation and critical text of *The Poetics* into English titled *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, Macmillan and Co. Limited, London, 1902, IIIrd Edition, first published in 1895. While arguing his points in his book, Dr. Lehri has quoted and given references from Dr. Harbhajan Singh’s book written in Punjabi and has also given quotes (in parentheses) and references in English from S. H. Butcher’s book and from a few more translated texts in English.

In the Western classical criticism Aristotle’s *The Poetics* occupies a glorified position and is considered a source book about his valuable opinions and theoretical positions on various issues pertaining to the value of literature and a few genres in which the literary works written in Greek language were available in his times and a few dramatic performances of tragedies and comedies. Though there are many issues which form the subject matter of *The Poetics* and have been the reference points of discussion and debates about these but somehow Aristotle’s views about 'tragedy' given in *The Poetics* have gained much critical attention and generated a lot of critical heat.

His definition of tragedy: “Tragedy, then is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in several parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions” ( S.H. Butcher, Ch.vi, 23), has been considered to be the most authentic and standard definition of 'tragedy' as a performable form of drama, comprising six parts – plot, character, thought, diction, song, form of action - and theoretical debates have been going on about explaining the nature, significance, function and relationship among these six components of tragedy. There has been almost a consensus among the translators, commentators and scholars that along with discussing other issues, the major aim of Aristotle in *The Poetics* was to identify, analyse, highlight and suggest the guidelines for the various components of the performance of tragedy on the basis of the available examples of the famous Greek tragedies performed in his times, and to give a method of differentiating and categorizing the form/genre of one work of literature from another on the basis of the differences in the subject/ means/ manner/

object(purpose) of that work, the method later (in the mid of the twentieth century) highlighted, popularized and practised by the major advocates of the Chicago school of criticism called Neo-Aristotelians, under the leadership of R. S. Crane. The translators/ commentators/ scholars of *The Poetics* have had a considered opinion that Aristotle differentiated tragedy from epic on the basis of the differences in the manner of both, the former having the “ form of action” that means it is enacted and the latter having the form of “ narrative” is narrated, though the subject, means and object/purpose of the both are the same. The same formula has been hinted in *The Poetics* to distinguish tragedy from comedy and a few other compositions too of imitative arts.

Dr. Rajinder Lehri in his book interrogates and critiques the assumptions formulated in the earlier translations/ readings/ commentaries regarding the Aristotelian logic of tragedy, explanations about his definition of tragedy and the unclear and unsystematic handling of the subject and parts of tragedy. In the 'Preface' to the book Dr. Lehri has stated : “ The motive behind writing this book is to establish a new opinion about Aristotle's *Poetics* and his dramatic thought. This new reading can deconstruct/ dismantle many pre-established presumptions about Aristotle's dramatic thought and bring forth a few newer assumptions.” (Translation mine) He straightforwardly clarifies that he has raised two very important issues regarding Aristotle's logic and intention as per his definition of tragedy and the overall discussion about tragedy. The first is that according to the definition (quoted above), for Aristotle 'tragedy' is a written/readable form of drama and not the performable art of drama, and the second is that 'tragedy' is a literary form and not a dramatic form, whereas earlier critics have understood and presented Aristotle's views about tragedy as a performable art. According to the scholar, if we read the text of *The Poetics* properly and prove these points, the previous opinions about Aristotle's assumptions about tragedy will definitely change and “we would also know the secret of this issue that Aristotle was considering the art of tragedy as a literary art and not as a performable art.” ((Translation mine)

In the three chapters of his book, Dr. Lehri has made a very incisive reading and insightful observations to argue and prove his points. On the basis of his reading of the various translations, commentaries and critiques on *The Poetics*, his own minute and argumentative reading of *The Poetics*, and a logical analysis of Aristotle's thought- process and views about the different components mentioned in his definition of tragedy and scattered here and there haphazardly in *The Poetics*— Dr. Lehri has very convincingly argued and tried to establish with the help of quotes from this text ( in Punjabi as well as English) a few contradictions, paradoxes, confusions and limitations in Aristotle's views, logic and approach about tragedy discussed in *The Poetics* which, the scholar says, have not been brought to notice so far by the translators and commentators of the book, rather these have been ignored and concealed to impose their own assumptions regarding Aristotle's concept of tragedy. The scholar says that undoubtedly Aristotle's views about tragedy were formed on the basis of his reading and watching the performances of a few Greek tragedies in his times, which, according to the scholar, belong to two different trajectories- tragedy, a written and a readable literary text, and tragedy as a performable art- and hence comprising and requiring different essential components in their artistic armoury. But in his definition of tragedy and many other statements about tragedy available throughout *The Poetics*, Aristotle's major intention emerges to define the readable literary form of tragedy with its six parts, which sound proper for a written form of tragedy. In a tragedy to be performed, the elements of 'spectacle' and 'music' are also the essential components to evoke the desired effect on the audience. Since Aristotle does not make the two components 'spectacle' and 'music' as the integral parts of his famous definition of tragedy, the scholar argues that it clearly shows that for Aristotle the text of the tragedy is primary instead of performance. No doubt, at a few places Aristotle does casually discuss about the performable tragedy and talk about 'spectacle' and 'music' also, thus identifying Eight parts of tragedy but 'spectacle' and 'music' are not considered by him the inseparable parts of tragedy. Dr. Lehri avers that this certainly shows Aristotle's awareness about the written /readable literary form of tragedy as well as its performable form but he has not been

able to separate them clearly and has confused and intermingled their components, thus revealing contradictions and paradoxes in his views about tragedy.

Supporting his above arguments by analyzing the thought-process and intention of Aristotle from his treatment of subject of tragedy in a stray and unorganized manner in *The Poetics*, the scholar emphasizes that the earlier translators, commentators and critics have not been able to see through and point out these contradictions and paradoxes in Aristotle's definition of tragedy and treatment of tragedy. Dr. Lehri agrees with Malcolm Heath's argument given in his translation of *The Poetics* from Greek into English, when he says "A tragedy is a poem, not a performance", i.e, it is a literary form (Aristotle, *Poetics* [Translated with an introduction and Notes by Malcolm Heath] Penguin books, England, 1996, p xix) but the scholar disagrees with Malcolm Heath's many other observations regarding his reading of Aristotle's definition of tragedy as a performable art of drama. Heath's explanation about the parts of a tragedy according to Aristotle: "Spectacle is a part of tragedy in the sense that tragedy (unlike epic) is potentially performable: so the poet has a duty to ensure that his text can be performed without visual absurdity" (p.xix) is not acceptable to Dr. Lehri because according to him, in his definition of tragedy Aristotle does not include 'spectacle' among the essential six parts prescribed by him. This clearly indicates, according to the scholar's reading, that for Aristotle, tragedy is only a readable text because his thought of drama is based on Character, Dialogue/Speech and Hearer/ Listener but not on Actor, Acting and Spectator. Thus, rebutting Malcolm Heath's explanation quoted above, the scholar establishes his argument that the literary text of a tragedy is primary for Aristotle instead of performance, and construction of a text of tragedy is independent for him and does not depend on performance. The scholar has another objection to Malcolm Heath's observation about Aristotle's concept of tragedy when he affirms "Tragedy is poetic imitation in the dramatic mode" (p.xix) because while giving this assumption, Heath has not proved the dramatic mode of tragedy in the context of his reading of *The Poetics*. Hence like other translators and commentators of *The Poetics*, Dr. Lehri opines that Malcolm Heath too has imposed his own understanding and observations about Aristotle's concept of tragedy without connecting the logic of the subject as discussed in *The Poetics* and not analyzing the underlying intention of the author.

Dr. Lehri also argues that since Aristotle meant to define tragedy as a literary and readable text, he developed his definition of tragedy in the comparison of Epic, a literary form already available and which was considered by him to be the source of tragedy writing (so far as subject, means-language- and object are concerned) differentiating the former from the latter on the basis of 'manner'. But the scholar avers that no component of 'manner', essential for performance, has been included in Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Moreover, 'manner' is "form of action" in the definition but 'spectacle' in the further explanation given by Aristotle. This is the major paradox observed by the scholar in Aristotle's views about tragedy.

The scholar's major argument is to establish his point that in spite of the clear-cut paradoxes, contradictions and limitations in Aristotle's concept of tragedy as presented in *The Poetics* and Aristotle's unclear views about two different forms of tragedy, readable text and performable art, his definition of tragedy having six parts, has been followed and recommended as a role model for literary readable as well as performable art in theatre, which is not tenable. The way the arguments have been floated and developed inconsistently in *The Poetics*, the analysis of their interior logic (as done by Dr. Lehri) reveals that Aristotle's definition of tragedy is very much grounded in Literature and does not connect with the performing art of drama. The main reason behind this is, as per the views of scholar, that Aristotle was not well versed with the dramatic art of performance as Bharatamuni, a Sanskrit scholar was, who in his *Natyasastra* ((550 BC), has defined and theorized systematically the different aspects of dramas of various kinds and their components providing guidelines for performing dramas. Moreover, when the newer developments in the forms of tragedy writing and performance techniques have come up, Aristotle's discussion about tragedy can not work as a guide/ role model for writing and performance, as well as for analyzing them because of his lack

of clarity and systematic handling of the subject matter whereas Bharatamuni's *Natyasastra* can. (*The Natyasastra* : ASCRIBED TO BHARATA-MUNI, translated in English by MANMOHAN GHOSH VOL.1 Published by manisha, GRANTHALAYA PRIVATE LIMITED, CALCUTTA, 1967.

Dr. Lehri has already made a comparative study of the theories and methods of drama given in Aristotle's *The Poetics* and in Bharatamuni's *Natayasastra* in his scholarly paper written in Punjabi " NATAK DI PARIBHASHA DE AADHAAR ATE NATYASASTARA" (" The Bases of the Definition of Drama and *Natyasastra* " published in a Punjabi literary journal: KHOJ PATRIKA-SANSKRIT NATAK VISHESHANK-67/ MARCH 2008, in whIch he foregrounds the limitations of Aristotle's method and approach in defining and providing guidelines for the dramatic performance of a tragedy and highlights the theory, method and treatment of the subject by Bhartamuni , establishing the latter more clear, systematic and inclusive.( This article needs to be translated in different languages to understand the comparative analysis of the theories and methods of the two stalwarts of the theory of drama.

To conclude, the scholar's arguments and insights about highlighting the gaps in the earlier readings of *The Poetics* and unearthing newer hidden layers of meanings in handling the subject matter of tragedy in *The Poetics* certainly evince that this book has made a well argued case for the need of re-reading *The Poetics*, and critically examine the earlier readings more minutely and rationally, going beyond the fixed assumptions about Aristotle's concept of tragedy. Dr. Lehri's scholarly and intelligent queries, observations and thought provoking arguments have opened fresh avenues for further theoretical debates about Aristotle's handling of the subject of tragedy in *The Poetics*. The book does make a scholarly and worth read and needs a translation in English and other languages for a wider readership.

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***The Poetic World of Narendra Mohan: Selected Poems (Tr. Prof Seema Jain)***  
**Authorspress, New Delhi: 2020. Rs.295, pp.154**

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*Dr Narendra Mohan is an eminent poet, playwright and critic who has carved an enviable niche for himself as a prominent figure on the Indian Literary Scene. He is a distinguished poet whose twelve collections of poetry, from Iss Haadse Mein (1975) to Rang De Shabd (2017), have earned him wide critical acclaim. He has been a trendsetter in poetry with his singular contribution of Vichar Kavita and Lambi Kavita. His poems have been translated into English and published in four volumes. Dr. Narendra Mohan is a significant playwright too, whose nine plays have been published and staged by eminent theatre personalities and groups throughout India and abroad. His critical works have initiated new discourses on Partition and Manto. Besides English, his works have also been translated into a number of Indian languages. A prolific writer and a versatile literary doyen, he is the recipient of top national literary awards and honours.*

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Translation can never be an exact replica of the original work, but it might evoke a similar emotionally enriching reading experience if the translator makes a sincere effort to delve deep into the spirit of the original. This is the impression that I have gathered from the reading of Prof Seema Jain's recently launched translated work titled *Poetic World of Narendra Mohan: Selected Poems* published by Authorspress, New Delhi. To be honest, I have found this work to be an act of transcreation rather than of translation.

Prof Seema Jain, a well-known bilingual poet herself (writing in English and Hindi) and a Professor of English language and literature for decades, has been able to skillfully transcreate the poetic universe of Dr Narendra Mohan, an eminent Hindi poet and playwright. She has not only made a judicious selection of 76 poems (including a long poem) from the voluminous corpus of Dr Narendra Mohan's illustrious poetic works spanning over almost five decades, but has also dexterously divided the chosen poems into five different sections according to their theme, mood, context, tone and spirit. The five sections-- titled "Each Time I Die Around: Partition and its Agony," "A Window Is Still Open: Search for Identity," "Grief: Political and Personal," "Where is the Open Space?" and "The Word-My Refuge: Aesthetic Experience" --act like the landmarks which indicate the diversity of Narendra Mohan's rich poetic sensibility, and also prepare the readers for the rich poetic vista about to unfold before them.

In almost all of the poems in the book, Seema Jain has employed her art beautifully to transcreate the moods, themes, images and motifs of the original but I find the poems in the section "Each Time I Die Around: Partition and its Agony" (focussing on the trauma of Partition) to be her masterstrokes. They give the impression as if she has suffered the trauma of partition herself. She recreates the poet's anguish as well as childhood memories of the river Raavi very aesthetically, particularly in the long poem titled "A Fire: Shifting Places" ("Ek Agnikaand: Jageh Badlata"):

That river is no longer now on the country's map  
So what!  
How can I accept its not being in the map as its not being in history?

How can I stop the Raavi from flowing inside me?

How can I negate

The feel of its presence and its history?

To maintain the tone and spirit of the original effectively, Prof Seema has, at places, retained the original Hindi words as in the poem titled "Who Might Have Come Here from Outside!" ("Baahar se Kaun Aayaa Hoga?"):

On seeing the *mohalla* become

A slaughter house

People are dazed

And ask each other-

"Who might have come here from outside!"

In another poem titled "In Blood-stained Language" ("Khoon ki Bhaasha Mein"), she once again makes aesthetically effective use of the original Hindi words:

One demon inside the city one outside

No, only one two-faced monster

Chuckling hee-haw chewing

Heads torsos body parts

Hindus Sikhs Muslims

Playing like pawns in its hands

Surrounded by knives *trishuls* and *kirpaans*

Similarly, the poems in the section titled "Search for Identity," amply exhibit Seema Jain's skillful recreation of the poet's portrayal of the eternal human predicament by using the nearest possible equivalent words. I find the poem "Ready to Fly" ("Udne ke Liye") an apt example:

I see

My wings have been clipped

Making me incapable of flying

....

The cup of life has been put before me

And I have been told: 'Forgo your integrity!'

I look at that spot

From where I flew for the first time

....

And I feel

The 'bird' is not dead yet

Prof Seema seems to have taken utmost care to retain the satirical tone of the original, especially in the poems under the section "Grief: Political and Personal." Let me illustrate it with the help of a few lines from the poem "I do not Know Muntazer al-Zaidi" ("Main Muntazer-al-Zaidi ko Nahin Jaanta"):

I do not know Muntazer al-Zaidi

But I know the hand

That threw a shoe

At the face of Bush

Protesting against the vast shame

Of his country

....

But when I shook hands with him

I could feel the pulse of a bleeding nation

And Iraq flowed through my veins

More than this I don't know Muntazer al-Zaidi!

I find the same kind of satirical tone captured brilliantly in another poem titled “On Bursting into Laughter” (“Hansee Phootne Par”):

It so happened I couldn't stand in condolence like everyone else  
Engrossed in a two-minute silence on the death of the leader  
With faces bowed in mourning

....

I had neither exploded a bomb nor fired any bullet  
I had just laughed and was caught

Seema's transcreative skills in the sections “Where is the Open Space?” and “The Word-My Refuge: Aesthetic Experience” are equally impressive. It is because, being a poet herself, she perhaps finds her own voice merged into the poet's plea in “Save me O Poem!” (“Kavita Mujhe Bacha Lo”):

I have 'developed' so much  
That chanting hymns of peace  
I have turned inhuman  
Mould my tumult into creativity  
Save me O Poem!

In another poem “Creative Process” (“Srijan-Prakriya”), she gives the readers a glimpse of Narendra Mohan's idea of the poetic art through her meticulously chosen words:

An iceberg  
Oozing striking against  
The dimensions of time and space  
Inside the poem  
A landmine  
Itching to explode

To conclude, I would like to say that in her work of translation, Prof Seema Jain has been successful not only in presenting the intensity of the poetic emotions of the original, but also in maintaining the rhythm, mood, context and essence of the poetic world of the great poet Dr Narendra Mohan. I am sure Seema's phenomenal work will prove to be of great value in enhancing the reach of the distinguished Hindi poet Dr Narendra Mohan to global audience. It won't be an exaggeration to say that I have found this work of translation, nay transcreation, to be an engaging and enriching reading experience.

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*Dr. Renu Gupta recently retired as an Associate Professor from the Post-Graduate Department of English, D.A.V. College, Jalandhar (India). Her academic interests include women issues, immigrant studies and retelling of Indian epics. She has to her credit several research articles in journals/anthologies of repute. She is a founder member and General secretary of LITSPARK, a literary forum that promotes creative and critical writing in English.*

*Prof. Seema Jain is a bilingual poet writing in English and Hindi, a short story writer and a translator with three books of poems, one book of translation and two edited books. Recently retired as Associate Professor & Head, PG Dept of English at Kanya Maha Vidyalaya (KMV) Jalandhar, she has a passion for Creative writing and has recited English and Hindi poems during World Poetry Festivals, TV and Radio. Recipient of many awards, she is currently the Founder President of Litspark: A Literary Forum.*

**Susheel Kumar Sharma, *Unwinding Self- A Collection of Poems*  
Cuttack: Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute. 2020. pp. 152. Rs. 250**

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“We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves,  
poetry.” – W.B. Yeats

Interrogation is an attribute of a curious mind, and when this interrogation is interspersed throughout poetry, it implies an insatiable thirst towards perfection and self-realization through art. The anthology *Unwinding Self* by Susheel Kumar Sharma is a feast to any mind that wants to colour itself with the multifarious shades of tradition blended with a relentless search for identity. The anthology contains lyrical, philosophical, narrative as well as contemplative poems meandering their way through the physical, the mundane as well the metaphysical. It is a tapestry of images culled from multiple sources defying specific cultures or demographics. It transcends the plain male perspective or an Indian vision to meet the multicultural and humanistic hues of a poet's mind. India and Indianness occupy an unquestionable space in the work, interspersed like the aromatic spices.

'Durga Puja in 2013' shows his deep-seated love for 'Durga Ma', the essence captured from the *Mahabharata* through its characters, setting and messages in poems like 'The Fountain Square,' 'Stories from the Mahabharata' is astounding.

Is Krishna around  
The princes do not believe.  
Draupadi's honour is saved.

(Stories from the Mahabharata')

His wonder at his inner ignorance and the longing to transcend the boundaries of physicality are well discernible in 'Chasing a Dream on the Ganges.' Poems like 'The New Year Dawn' and 'Strutting Around' project a yearning for stasis and equanimity and reveal the grace of the poet's mind in acceptance of life and death on equal platforms. Self-assessment and self-analysis lead the poet to some degree of frustration at times when he wishes his life to be a certain way or wants to retire near the peaceful mountains or rivers and a flurry of his questions end at

'Why was I not born in Prayagraj?' ('The Unlucky')

Being a Professor of English at Prayagraj doesn't appear to have satiated the poet. A yogi yearns for an eternal fountain of nectar within his reach.

His love for tradition, spirituality and even ritualism is visible at several places. He feels like becoming an ardent devotee of gods and goddesses, talks admirably of Hindu pilgrimages like Chandi Devi, Dev Prayag, Har ki Pauri, Hardwar and so on. His devotion cannot be measured on a singular scale, for he passes through several phases from being a helpless puppet in the hands of gods to a merger of divine energies.

After all, somebody is needed  
To clean the dirt as well.

I am Shiva,  
Shivoham. ('A Family by the Road')

'Kabir's Chadar' is a crisp, symbolic self-assessment of how as individuals, we cannot maintain a white piece of cloth, keeping it free of all kinds of filth, physical, emotional and spiritual. He seems to sit opposite to the great Bhakti saint to compare and recount his own karmas and also wonders at the immaculate purity of the minds of saints.

His poetic homage to Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam in 'Ram Setu' traces Kalam's courageous journey from a small coastal town to an unforgettable position in the world. Allusions from history and English literary texts- Cordelia, Scarlet letter, 'Hurry up, please' reminds of *Eliot's Wasteland*, *Joan of Arc* and the mention of Dickens, Anand (as in 'Lost Childhood') shows his love for English literature irrespective of the culture it paints. He seems to embrace all ideologies that teach, train, groom and soothe him. At places, he appears possessive about the lessons learnt from literature to make an optimal use of these allusions in life as well as poetry.

I am looking for an answer  
In Whitman and Pushkin;  
Throwing Ginsberg away  
I have turned to Rajneesh  
To let me try to awaken the snake  
Sleeping so silently for ages. ('A Gush of Wind')

The poet shows ample concern for the societal issues and talks of democracy and the ways of the world that need to be mended urgently. As in 'A Mock Drill', he says,

It hurts,  
Knowledge hurts;  
Brahmanism hurts.  
Election hurts. ('A Mock Drill')

He is moved by the destruction caused by calamities. He questions the will of God in 'Kerala flood 2018' beginning with a Browning-like optimism and eventually questioning the divine will as Guru Nanak did in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in his composition 'Baburvani' after Babur caused great destruction in India. The poet asks:

God is great  
God is all pardon  
God is almighty  
Why could He not choose both?  
Why were people  
Chosen to suffer? ('Kerala flood 2018')

'Me A Black Doxy' looks into an entirely different domain of experience, the struggles of a black woman.

My soul is with me  
My God is with me  
Me ain't contaminated,  
Me ain't a sinner.  
Me is the Lord's faithful bride  
And, thou art the man.

Like the holy sonnets of John Donne, the woman admits her faithfulness to God and proves her purity and innocence through the lens of the divine. Furthermore, entering into the garb of a woman and projecting a rich tapestry of feminine emotions, apprehensions, struggles and laments of a woman as in 'Thus spake a woman' is not an easy task.

Poems like 'The Soul with a new Hat' are autobiographical and tell more about the poet's family members but also delve on his reflections on life and after-life.

Locations like Connought Place, Prayagraj, Haridwar are glorified through the poems just as Wordsworth's Lake District was, where his memories take him over and over again to answer the old questions and pose new ones. An enigmatic journey of the poet through the process of writing poetry is visible in poems like 'A Voice' and 'The Unborn Poem:'

The traffic jam of emotions,

Lines – sweet and sour  
 And the collision of ideas  
 Don't let the pen move.  
 The poem remains a mirror,  
 A shadow, a mirage, a stain.  
 Irony, satire, humour, jamboree  
 Stare at the enjambment. ('The Unborn Poem')

Longer poems divided in sections like 'The World in Words like 2015' (in 8 sections) and 'Bubli poems' in the 11 sections elaborate their themes in a liberal manner, taking the mundane as well as the metaphoric together in the flow.

The language is crisp, flowing and perennial as the flow of the rivers, blending three different colours- of modernity, tradition and spirituality at the Prayagraj destination. The Indian customs, rituals, devotion, myths, deities abound in poems like 'Akshya Tritya,' 'The Fountain Square,' 'Bubli Poems,' 'Chasing a Dream on the Ganges' etc. But there are also references to Jesus, the Bible and mythology.

Vernacular diction such as *chapati*, *Chowkidar*, *Darshan*, *Dharmaraja*, *Dharma*, *Haats*, *ghats*, *mutt*, *mukti* and many such words seem to colour the anthology with a typical Indian hue. Images, symbols, literary and mythical allusions are diffused throughout the anthology, making it a multi-coloured palette sketching a landscape of the ordinariness of life against the silhouette of the mystical and spiritual shades.  
 Similes like-

Like the bird that parches on your wall.  
 Like the breaking of an egg ('Renewed Hope')

Illustrate the mundane activities of life blending into the grave deliberations of existence.

The poems are mostly in a free verse, but carry a rhythm in words at some places, while a rhythm of paradoxes at others. The play of words displaying alliteration as in lines below make the complex look simple.

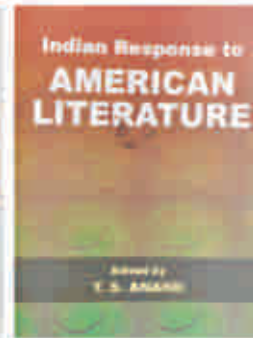
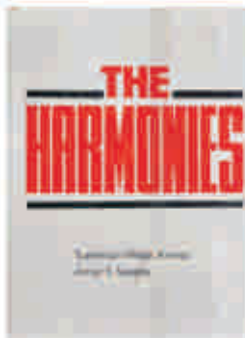
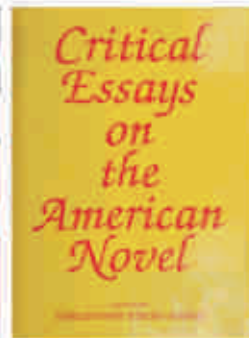
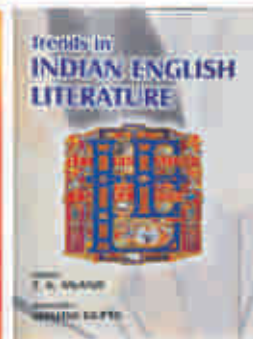
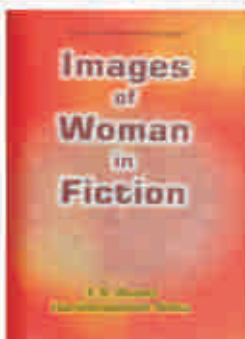
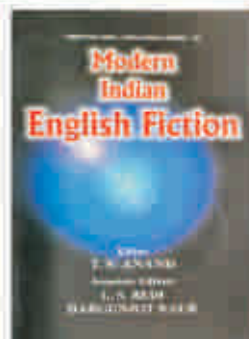
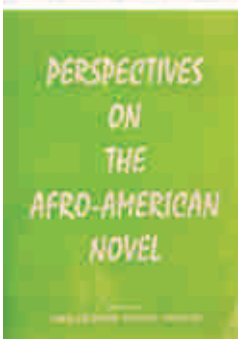
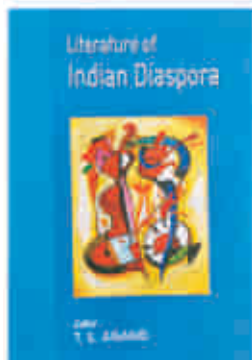
My email cribbed.  
 Laid, Layed  
 Overload, overlayers  
 Crash, crushed. ('Snapshots')

The use of contemporary diction- Flipkart, emails, Ek, Do, Teen (song), Chikni Chameli (song) can be read in contrast with the archaic words reminding one of the 16<sup>th</sup> century stalwarts- Bacon and Shakespeare. The glossary at the end of the anthology reminds one of *The Wasteland* by T.S.Eliot, that looks mandatory in order to match the literary and academic abundance the poets possess. Vast experience of teaching, reading and learning has enriched the poet with profuse knowledge but has also with countless questions to him. Susheel Kumar Sharma adroitly enriches the readers with the art of painting his knowledge and experiences (inner as well as outer) with great conciseness, beauty and variety.



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