

# Literary Voice

A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies

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

ISSN 2277-4521

*Indexed with Web of Science ESCI, Cosmos, ESJI, I2OR, CiteFactor, InfoBase*

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Number 15

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

*The Special Edition December 2021 of Literary Voice is the culmination of our collaboration with Chandigarh University for the successful conduct of the National Conference on Contemporary Perspectives in English Language, Literature & Cultural Studies held on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2021.*

*The joint venture generated response from the scholar community seriously engaged in research at various Indian Universities and institutes of higher education spread over the Indian sub continent. Of three hundred papers presented/submitted on five broad areas for investigation -- Literature of the Marginalized, Women and Gender Studies, Postcolonial and Diaspora Literature, Indian Writing in English, English Language/Linguistics – thirty one papers were selected for publication after rigorous process of internal and external reviews and revisions.*

*Dr. Tanu Gupta, Professor & Head, Department of English, University Institute of Liberal Arts & Humanities, Chandigarh University, the moving spirit behind the National conference, is the spontaneous choice to be the Guest Editor of the Special Edition which has shaped up through the collective efforts of the Faculty of the host university, besides the expertise of our Editorial Board and erudite and dedicated team of Advisors and Reviewers.*

*T.S.Anand (Dr.)*

## ***Introduction***

With great pleasure I present to you the special edition of *Literary Voice: A Peer-Reviewed Journal of English Studies*, comprising select research papers presented at the National Conference on Contemporary Perspectives in English Language, Literature & Cultural Studies, organized by Chandigarh University – Punjab on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2021.

Amidst lurking fears and uncertainties triggered by the incessant waves of the Covid-19 Chandigarh University in collaboration with *Literary Voice* endeavored to infuse vibrancy in academic life through on line interaction among researchers and scholars through the medium of the first National Conference at Chandigarh. It was a matter of immense pride for all of us to host more than 300 delegates, dignitaries and renowned academic personalities from across the country. The two day conclave offered a platform for sharing various thoughts to keep abreast with the latest research happening in the field of English Literary Studies. The select papers have been curated in five categories: Literature of the Marginalized, Women and Gender Studies, Postcolonial and Diasporic Literature, Indian Writing in English, English Language/Linguistics.

The editorial board members of the journal and reviewers from the university were committed to providing unbiased, rapid evaluations of the submitted manuscripts to shorten the duration between the submission and final publication. To have higher-quality submissions, (we hope our authors and reviewers shared a similar vision) we worked with the spirit of continuous improvement through all constructive inputs on streamlining our processes. More than three hundred papers which were presented during the conference were at a first level assessed to see if these meet the criteria for submission. Eleven potential reviewers from the department within the field of research were appointed to peer review the manuscript and make recommendations. The first read was used to form an initial impression of the works. If major problems were found at this stage, the reviewers rejected the papers.. Otherwise they read the paper several more times, taking notes so as to build a detailed point-by-point review. The review was then shared with the authors for revisions before the shortlisted papers were submitted to the journal. The editors/reviewers relayed back to the university their observations/suggestions for modifications/revisions for compliance by the authors. Eventually the papers were finally shortlisted for a double blind peer review process by a team of eminent professors and academicians hailing from Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee; Punjabi University, Patiala; Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar; Rabindranath Tagore University and University of Delhi. The present issue is the result of such a rigorous, constructive, transparent and efficient process.

As Guest Editor of the Special Edition I express my gratitude to all associated with this exercise, and hope the current number like all regular issues of the *Literary Voice* would be of immense value to the prospective researchers in English Literary Studies.

Dr. Tanu Gupta, *Guest Editor*  
Professor & Head  
Department of English  
University Institute of Liberal Arts & Humanities  
Chandigarh University  
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# Misrepresentation of Islam and Subaltern Women: A Critique of Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy*

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## *Abstract*

*While a majority of the literary community is showering praises on Tehmina Durrani which she honestly deserves on the one hand, but on the other hand, it appears that she has romanticised the subaltern plight, whom she is representing in the novel. On flipping the pages of the novel Blasphemy, it seems that as if one is not reading a novel, rather watching a pornographic and horrid movie. Her motive of exposing the hypocrisy of the Pir system in Blasphemy Pakistan is no doubt praiseworthy, but it has also furthered misunderstandings among some sections of the people that Islam per se is responsible for the violence against women. Durrani has failed to narrate explicitly that Pir system is by-product of culture and has nothing to do with Islam. The present paper tries to highlight true Islamic practices/teachings for the proper understanding of Islam. Any violence anywhere in the world is just because of bogus cultural values and misinterpretation of religious scriptures by pseudo religious clerics. The power that cultural structures give to certain individuals/classes needs to be battered, but without romanticising the plight of the subaltern. The present paper also aims to trace whether Tehmina Durrani has objectively portrayed the details of violence against the subaltern denizens (women), or has crossed the limits of objectivity by objectifying the subaltern women too much.*

*Keywords: Subaltern, Pir system, Islam, culture, objectification, objectivity*

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## **Introduction**

In *The Modern Prince* and *The Prison Notebooks* Antonio Gramsci describes the 'subalterns as those who are excluded from any meaningful role in a regime of power that subjugates them. According to a prominent subaltern activist and historian Ranajit Guha, "subalterns are the people which have been marginalised due to various factors like class, caste, culture, and misinterpretation of religious scriptures" ("Preface" 35). Dipesh Chakravorty describes subalterns as those groups who try to resist themselves from the hegemonic power but finally, they have to accept domination. Gayatri Spivak, a prominent critic of the SSG, criticized *Subaltern Studies Group* as itself an elite based school of thought due to its ignorance of the issue of gendered subalternity. She modified the existing discourse of *Subaltern Studies* via her ground-breaking essay entitled "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (1988). She further

generalizes that: “all double colonized, 'black, brown, poor and rural women' are voiceless” (90). Since history and literature inevitably involve representations, therefore like the subaltern historian who enacts a crucial role in resuscitating traces of subaltern experiences, the literary scholar too participates in the task of scrutinizing subaltern characters and experiences in literary narratives. While some writers engage with the subtle obligation to represent the subaltern species, some appropriate and utilize the subaltern experiences and romanticize them to earn fame and material gains by incorporating obscene scenes, and playing with the plight of subaltern women, in particular. What does this excessive pornographication in their narrative content do? It stimulates the senses of young readers and they become more voyeuristic of women's body, rather than developing any true sympathies with their subaltern condition. A similar subaltern exhibition is apparent in contemporary Pakistani English literature, chiefly among the female authors. For illustration, Tehmina Durrani (1953) is chosen to explicate the aforesaid statement.

Tehmina Durrani was born in Karachi, Pakistan. She is the daughter of a former Governor of State Bank of Pakistan and Managing Director of Pakistan International Airlines, Shahkur Ullah Durrani. She was married at the age of seventeen to Anees Khan. She married Mustafa Khar, an influential Pakistani politician, after she divorced her former husband. Mustafa Khar proved to be an abusive husband, but she fearlessly exposed him publically in an extremely conservative Pakistani Muslim society. She instantly became famous when she published her first controversial novel *My Feudal Lord* in 1991. In her other controversial novel *Blasphemy* (1998), which will also be the focus of analysis of this paper, she brilliantly exposes the religious hypocrisy of the Pir system and feudalism in Pakistan. She is one of the few radical activists and crusaders of women's voice in Pakistan. She has tried to speak up for the rights of oppressed women. She has even tried to give them a voice through her narrative, but in the process, it seems that she has got emotional sometimes in the narrative, thereby turning her narratives hyper-real and romanticised by succumbing to the young readers' palatable eagerness to find sexual content in the narrative. The unnecessary pornographic content in her novel validates, “how patriarchal power operates in the field of gender representation” (Kath 85).

*Blasphemy* no doubt reflects the oppressed condition of women in Pakistan. The novel primarily revolves around the binary of oppressed/Heer vs oppressor/Pir Sain. Heer at the age of fifteen is married to Pir Sain as his '*third*' wife. The words of the protagonist Heer for her husband Pir Sain, from the novel unveil the whole story:

To me, my husband was my son's murderer. He was also my daughter's molester. A parasite nibbling on the Holy Book, he was Lucifer, holding me by the throat and driving me to sin every night. He was Bhai's destroyer, Amma Sain's tormentor. He had humbled Ma, exploited the people. He was the rapist of orphans and the fiend that fed on the weak. But over and above all this, a man closest to Allah, the one who could reach Him and save us. (Durrani 143)

## Misuse and Misinterpretation of Islam

Pir Sain misuses the very tenet of Islam that allows a man to marry up to four wives in certain justified circumstances. Pir Sain is a modern sensuous pir of a consumerist society who married Heer because he was captivated by her beauty. With the advent of globalization and the internet, there has been a drastic change toward sexuality in general, and the beauty of women in particular. Women in consumerist societies have been reduced to mere sexual commodities. Meyers contends that the representation of women in consumerist societies is chiefly influenced by “the mainstreaming of pornography and its resultant hypersexualisation of women and girls, and the commodification of those images for a global market” (69). The way Durrani has narrated the sexual encounters between Heer and Pir Sain, a pseudo-representative of Islam, clearly reflects that she is aiming to sell her novel as a commodity at global market, and forgets that she is representing voiceless subaltern women. However, in Rahmani's opinion, “Islam intends to bring parity between the genders instead of fuelling the narrative of commodification” (183-84). Heer's own commodified thoughts can be also summed up in the following lines: “Love's absence ailed me. I could not imagine loving my husband. He was superior and I did not know how to love and be subservient together. Nor had he ever thought of me as a human being, let alone a woman. For no reason had he ever softened towards me, I had stirred him that little” (Durrani 149). In contrast to the commodification of women by consumerist cultures, The Glorious *Quran* says: “O ye who believe! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor ye should treat them with harshness” (4:19). Heer's husband was sexually promiscuous, but still he was Pir in the eyes of people because they were unaware about his immoral nature. The ignorant masses deceive themselves by believing in Pir system and consider Pirs to be infallible and holy. This mythical belief of the masses facilitated pirs to garner immense wealth, opportunity, knowledge and power to “colonize” (Foucault *Power/Knowledge* 99). Power is the very basis for authenticating any kind of knowledge in the minds of people. Foucault says:

Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true.' Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations (“Panopticism” 27).

It is the protagonist (Heer) who occasionally tries to bring out the misdeeds of Pir into the public domain. Heer is trying to raze the fake Shrine of Pir Sain to the ground. Heer is challenging the autocracy of Pir system by her democratic spirit. Fatima Mernissi's idea aptly fits Heer's fight, as Mernissi comments:

That a popular form of mosque-centered democracy existed during the

Prophet's time and that it was the Caliph political system that violated the early Islamic principles. Hence, depending on how it is done, and from which ideological perspective, the recovery of an Islamic past, thoroughly cleansed of the residue of centuries of male-dominated interpretations, can be useful to women fighting for freedom in the Islamic world (qtd. in Anour 331-332).

The subaltern protagonist (Heer) tries to expose the pretenses of her husband Pir Sain who treated women merely as objects of sex. Heer says, "Pir Sain spoke, but only of sex. Planning the next act, discussing the last one, seeking opinions on new one, comparing it to another one, until the matter took up my entire life" (Durrani 138). He forces Heer to prostitution. Masked and branded as Piyari, a whore, she is manipulated by Pir Sain to have sex with weird men. He even videotapes Heer's sexual acts with other men for inscrutable pleasure. Contrary to what Pir practices, Islam says: "Only a man of noble character will honour women and only a man of base intentions will dishonour them" (qtd. in Khan 17). The author, through the character of Heer no doubt, seriously tries to critique the abusive cultural forces that scandalously use the very institution of marriage to dehumanize women and exploit them. Heer is callously beaten up on several occasions. In one such episode she was sent an 'envelop' through a maid called Terhi by her husband's youngest brother. Having seen the envelop Pir questioned Heer and consequently she was beaten mercilessly along with Terhi, the maid:

Terhi was blessed with old age and her punishment was lighter than mine. Ordered to lie flat on my stomach, I obeyed instantly. Two maids held my outstretched arm above my head and another two grasped my ankles. A lighting swing made the *khajji* whip hiss and swish. It was always regulated by his energy, never by how much I could endure . . . To avoid blood clotting, I was instructed to get up and walk immediately. Wondering what kind of mind could justify such severe punishment for no crime. (Durrani 81-82)

This merciless practice of wife beating has ameliorated the misbelief that wife beating is perhaps allowed in Islam. Prophet Muhammad's views concerning wife beating show that he, and implicitly Islam, did not believe in violence against women.

The *purdah* of Muslim women is another complex and contentious issue. Heer is once beaten severely by Pir Sain for not observing *purdah* in front of a minor. Certainly, The Glorious Quran necessitates women to act and dress modestly— but these restrictions apply equally to men. "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and protect their private parts. That is purer for them. Verily Allah is All-Aware of what they do" (24:30). In Anour's opinion, "The veil is a reminder that most Islamic societies are still part of a global neo-colonial order and the collective process of liberation through the recuperation of a mutilated identity is far from complete. The response the veil elicits thus is, to a large extent, a symbolic statement about continuing class struggle in the Islamic world" (340). Pir Sain is a sexual lecher, and a representative of bourgeoisie class who uses religion to satiate his lust. Unfortunately, because of the capital, power and position Pir Sain has, Heer's mother ecstatically announces that their position will change now. It indicates a desperate effort to jump

out of the subaltern location and subjectivity, and gain voice on the basis of capital. When Heer gets her maiden beating by Pir Sain, she is reminded of her father who used to beat her mother. Her mother ironically accepts her position and exonerates her husband by saying, “Employment frustrations, financial worries, social pressures and misunderstandings trigger off his outbursts” (43). Spivak's concept of doubly-colonized women is very befitting here because a subaltern woman is colonised by patriarchal culture besides class. Durrani however, has failed to explicitly describe that whatever happens to Heer is because of sexist culture and capital, and Islam directly has nothing to do with her oppression. If Pir Sain is able to appropriate Islam, Durrani could have deconstructed his discourse at least by representing the alternative perspective of Islam through Heer, or any other character.

### **Romanticising Subaltern Plight**

Heer's character has been romanticised to an unbelievable extent by Durrani. For example, Heer has been shown acting as a tool of her husband's oppression when she provides him little girls to satiate his carnal desires. How could a subaltern woman do that? One fails to understand why Durrani has not infused any agency in her characters to batter the bogus patriarchal culture. An important unsettling question that lurks in the minds of readers is about the role of an author. Is it simply to expose the oppressive culture by creating docile characters, or s/he has to provide bold characters as role models that can subvert the oppressive cultural forces?

### **Breaking down under the Discourse of Patriarchy**

Toward the fag end of the novel, Heer decides to expose the pornographic videos in which she was forced by Pir Sain to gratify other men. However, her adult son, Rajaji stops her, for he is afraid of losing his own position and status in the community if his father (Pir Sain) is proved to be a fake pir. The fear is manifested in the following words: “Never before has an exalted and revered family such as ours been shamed like this. There can be nothing more grim. We walk like thieves instead of pirs. Soon, we will be buried in scandals instead of in holy tombs” (Durrani 213). None of Heer's arguments and evidence affect her son's patriarchal mind-set. He chooses to refute his father's wrongdoings, claiming that since his father cannot be seen anywhere in the films, he has nothing to do with the pornographic videos that Heer claims to possess and expose. Finally, Heer breaks down under the pressure of the discourse of patriarchy. It is imperative to understand Heer's change from resistance to restraint as a response to her being in the center of a continual patriarchal feudal gaze. Heer is now under constant gaze of her son Rajaji and his uncles. To one's mind comes Michel Foucault's famous “Panopticism”. How investigational laboratories of power in which behavior can be modified corresponds to the notion of inspection in Durrani's text. Foucault writes, “One can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a

sort of social 'quarantine,' to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of 'panopticism'" (206). While Foucault hubs his claim on specific institutions that act to police and monitor bodies, his theory is attributable to the system of "enclosed disciplines" that limit Heer's movement in the novel; she has to work under and within her son Rajaji's watch and, Rajaji operates both as an observer and patriarchal authority, given his command, disciplinarian. Heer's only reality is that she is a woman. If she has to survive, she has to part from her past and forget that she was exploited by Rajaji's father, and comply with those of her new master, her son that is reflective of the subaltern plight of the women in general. The women exist like animals, who are used, sold, and slaughtered depending upon the will of their master — whether the master is husband, son or any other male relative, hardly matters. Heer's connection to Pir Sain and Rajaji clearly reflects the subordinate positioning and lack of agency of subaltern women. Zaidi also endorses this view, "tradition and manipulation of religious dogmas along with essentialist construction of women as a lower species, give patriarchal structures fertile ground for positioning women as the other in their respective societies" (17). It is projected by patriarchal social structures that female body needs reconnaissance and control. Beauvoir in her widely acclaimed text *The Second Sex* writes, "Representation of the world like the world itself is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth" (175). Women, therefore, have to live according to the prescribed social rules of the patriarchal society. Zine opines, "Women in Pakistan continue to be disciplined and regulated by tradition, religion and state authority" (10). The bogus patriarchal culture authorises adult males to assume power and oppress even one's mother, but the question is whether it is written in the teachings of Islam, or not.

## Conclusion

In the end, Heer is projected as an emancipated being. She is clandestinely united with her childhood lover Ranjha. Heer is propagated dead and in the closing scenes, she is shown praying at her own fake grave under a veil with Ranjha. Ranjha's entry into the narrative has diluted the objectivity of the plot. Despite Spivak's warning not to romanticise the subaltern plight. Tehmina Durrani has. The narrative design and character of Heer and Pir Sain have been romanticised to such an extent that the reader starts doubting whether Durrani is writing about the plight of women, or is writing pornographic content, or a romanticised version of her own plight. The novel, no doubt, arrests experiences of subaltern women living in coercion. However, the fate of the protagonist and other women in the novel clearly shows how the subaltern women are rigorously silenced by patriarchal machinery. Tehmina Durrani has failed to create characters as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and other great women novelists have created. Their protagonists have agency and power to resist oppression and emerge triumphantly. Durrani's narrative has somehow increased the negative perceptions about Islam, because Durrani has not categorically stated what

actually Islam stands for. And what rights a woman has in Islam. Islam gives equal rights to males and females. It is right time for Muslim women to take part in the affairs of Islam and read the scriptures of Islam so that they could expose the wicked design of pseudo-clerics of Islam, and become true representatives of Islam themselves, rather than being continuously misrepresented and silenced.

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**Socio-Political Predicaments of the Santhal Tribes: A Study of Hansda  
Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories***

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*Abstract*

*Human lives are always under the influence of political, social, and economical forces which have an inevitable impact on their subjective and collective identities. The social spaces interact with the hierarchy of class structure and contribute to the emergence of issues like domination, oppression and exclusion which eventually result in the subaltern identity crisis. The primary aim of the research paper is to discuss the complex issues confronted by the Santhal community in Jharkhand through the select short stories from Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories*. The unheard voice of the Santhal tribe, the social subjugation imposed and their resistance against political and cultural domination are analysed. The paper further focuses on the female experiences of the Santhal community who are subjected to hegemonic oppression. Hence, the study employs the conceptual framework of Conflict Theory to analyse the social exclusion of the Santhals in the hierarchical system practiced by the majoritarian group. The socio-political factors that impose intense suffering on the Santhal tribe and their relentless struggles to overcome the obstacles in establishing their ethnic individuality are analysed with the theoretical armature of conflict.*

*Keywords: Socio-political issues, tribal identity, subaltern, santhal community, conflict theory, power and powerless*

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## **Introduction**

“There's really no such thing as 'the voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard.” – Arundhati Roy

The origin of the term subaltern dates back to the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci who introduced the concept of socio-political power of the elite in controlling the economically impoverished people. Later, the very term subaltern has gained

momentum in every aspect of societal disparities such as race, class, religion, ethnicity and caste. Ranajith Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are the major propounders from India who took this concept to a higher level of understanding the class struggles. Power is ineliminable in a socially constructed entity that demarcates social lives of human beings. Andrew Robert in his work *Hitler and Churchill: Secrets of leadership*, states, “The ability of one person to make a hundred others do his [sic] bidding is the basic building block upon which all collective human endeavour is based” (xv). The prevalence of oppression in the plural society will terminate the harmonious relationship among people, if the troubled voices are not acknowledged. India's heterogeneous society incorporates diverse cultural, ethnic, racial and linguistic communities. The indigenous clans of India are scattered across the country but positioned in the peripheries of the mainstream society. The country recognises these communities as tribes or adivasis due to their distinct cultural and social patterns. The adivasis have always been socially marginalised and restricted from accommodating the privileges of the mainstream society. At present, they struggle to preserve their cultural identity and the traits of nativity from the supremacy of the majoritarian groups. The social and cultural rights of the tribal groups are constricted to their geographical boundaries. The study investigates the identity crisis encountered by the Santhal community of Jharkhand through the select short stories from Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories*. Shekhar is a distinguished contemporary writer who voices for the rights of adivasis in Jharkhand through his writings. The agonies of conflict and systematic oppression imposed on the Santhal tribes are innumerable. The paper deals with the elements of power imposed through diverse mediums on socially degraded Santhal people. The ramifications of modernity in the indigenous landscapes of Santhals direct towards the distortions in their sense of identity and belonging. The subaltern consciousness of the minority community is subjected to introspection through the fictional characters in the select stories. The paper further discusses the social exclusion of the Santhals through the conceptual framework of Conflict Theory.

## **Conflict and Indigenous People**

Conflict pervades as an ineluctable factor of social life due to various disparities. Conflict Theory traverses through power relations between the construction of the majority and the minority that fabricate economic and social differences. Conflicts arise at various levels of social circumstances such as intergroup discrimination, bigotry, ingroup love and outgroup hate. Race, class, ethnicity, culture, religion, language and political affiliations are some of the prominent causes for the conflicts in society. As Diehl observes, “conflict occurs specifically because of geographic factors and geography as a 'facilitating condition for conflict’” (qtd. in Kumar T. 1). History vividly highlights the drastic changes brought by conflicts in different societies and cultures over a period of time in occupying power, territories and resources. India is a habitat to a large number of indigenous communities or

adivasis who preserve the rich resources and heritage of the country. However, the fundamental rights of the people are being ignored and the people of mainstream see them as uncivilised communities. Felix Padel claims “Obviously, the term 'Scheduled Tribes' is a colonial construct” (164). Being constructed under the colonial space, the conflicts between the tribal and non-tribal communities arise because of subjugation and discrimination. The hierarchical system in the country is the root cause for the unequal distribution of rights to the people. Eventually the livelihoods of the minority communities are jeopardised. Disputes that arise in various aspects of social, political and economic levels become a threat to the survival and tribal identity of the people.

### **Food – The Factor for Religious Conflict**

Food practices of a particular community are the symbols of their shared cultural identity as they vary from culture to culture. Food customs of indigenous communities are always unique and reflect their traditional ethnic behaviours. Food has a special place in the socio-cultural occasions of the tribes and it is passed from generation to generation to preserve their native beliefs. With the advent of modernity at all levels of society the adivasis are braving the predicaments of supremacy. Food is the basic need of an individual for survival. However, it is also used as a tool of subjugation, violence and exploitation of the minority communities, thereby leading to their identity destructions. In the views of Alonso & Krajsic,

. . . people are experiencing external pressures on their culture and tradition, including the threat of losing their food culture heritage or identity. In these gastronomic interactions, a region's heritage foods form a valuable 'blueprint' of its people, whereby food represents not only the physical need but also local culture and custom. (qtd. in Ramli 519)

Food is one of the cultural symbols for many communities. However, the external elite factors target the food practices of indigenous people to control them through their power of dominance.

In the short story, “They Eat Meat!” Shekhar portrays the identity suppression of the Santhal family who migrates from Jharkhand to Vadodra in Gujarat. Here, the female protagonist Panmuni-jhi who belongs to Santhal tribe is extremely obsessed with the non-vegetarian food habits of her indigenous community. She says, “If I don't get food cooked to my satisfaction, I will not eat.” (2) which highlights her concern towards food. In Vadodra, the house owner Mr. Rao who is a non-tribal, attempts to suppress the cultural identity of Biram-kumang Soren and Panmuni-jhi through his strict restrictions on the non-vegetarian food practices. The strong discriminative practices of the socially superior class towards the tribal community of Santhal are explained through the words of Mr. Rao as he mentions,

Vadodra is a strongly Hindu city,' Mr Rao continued.

People here believe in purity. I am not too sure what this purity is, but all I know is that people here don't eat non-veg. You know? Meat, fish, chicken, eggs. Nor do they approve of people who eat non-veg. (6)

In this line the word 'purity' reflects the elite characteristics of vegetarian food patterns. Economically and socially acclaimed people grab power in all possible ways to dominate the impoverished communities. Though the tribes raise voices against their supremacy it is unnoticed and heard only at the periphery level. "Panmuni-jhi asked in outrage, 'How can people dislike those who eat meat? We need haku or simjill every Sunday, and eggs nearly every day!'"(8). Her statement marks the indignation towards the authoritative society for restraining their revelation of identity through food habits. The reference to the collective 'We' in the above quote reflects the emotional and cultural traits of Santhals associated with food systems. Anthropologist Robin Fox observes,

. . . cooking becomes more than a necessity, it is the symbol of our humanity, what marks us off from the rest of nature. And because eating is almost always a group event (as opposed to sex), food becomes a focus of symbolic activity about sociality and our place in our society. (1)

Cooking and eating are the collective practices of certain groups that resemble their ethnic behaviour. But the tribes are forced to follow the commands of the suppressors to survive in the mainland society through hiding their ethnic identity.

The article titled 'They are forcing us to become Hindu': How beef is being used to target Adivasis in Jharkhand" by Shoaib Daniyal discusses the real incident involving an Adivasi professor Jeetrai Hansda from Jharkhand who was accused for posting, "Dear comrades, can anyone tell me where I can buy beef in Jamshedpur?" wrote Jeetrai Hansda in Hindi. "I want to organise a beef party." (Daniyal). This public statement on Facebook created a huge outcry in Jharkhand and in social media. Jeetrai Hansda who hails from Santhal community is an activist standing for the adivasis of Jharkhand. "As a Santhali, eating beef is part of my culture," "If Santhals are Indian, there should be no laws to force us to adopt Hindu customs. I reject that." (Daniyal). This emotional assertion emphasises that food is religiously associated with tribes. "We not only eat beef, cattle sacrifice is a part of the Santhal festival of Dason. Even the Mundas sacrifice cattle," he said. "Any ban on beef is an attack on our culture. This law forces Hindu customs on us." (Daniyal). Food system is a part of tribal civilisation and heritage. The religious subjugation towards the tribal community delineates the characteristics of hegemonic patterns of mainland society, thereby the tribes live as subalterns. The above-discussed incident stands as contemporary evidence on how food customs are being used as a controlling factor of resisting the Santhals in revealing their identity.

### **Tribal Women and Body Space**

In the power structured society women are doubly affected when compared to men. Analysing the histories of the past, it is understood that women are portrayed as mere objects. The concept of gendered subalternity examines how women have been doubly subalterned based on their communal and gender identity. Tribal women are prone to confront gendered subalternity. Gender difference is basically constructed on

the physical embodiment of human beings. The word body is the physical representation of existence and survival. In Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi", the central character Dopdi Mehen, is a rape survivor who turns her violated body as a tool of resistance to subvert her power against the authoritativeness. In the views of Devi, the body is an entity of struggle and resistance. In the short story "November is the Month of Migration", the physical struggles of Santhal women are portrayed in a realistic picture by the writer. Talamai Kisku, a twenty year old girl from Santhal community is a bodily victim who satisfies the sexual desires of men. She is forced to accept her fate to fulfil the basic needs of her family members who struggle amidst migration and poverty. The policeman criticises the Santhal women by saying "Saali, you Santhal women are made for this only. You are good!" (41). Without any emotive reactions, she silently receives the woeful words. In the case of Talamai, even though she neglects internally, the physical body has become a source of survival rather than resistance. Bell Hooks observes, "Being oppressed means the absence of choices. It is the primary point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor" (5). Similarly, Talamai cannot escape her plight but is forced to endure the torture for her survival. Therefore, she accepts the words and abuses induced to him only for bread pakoras and a fifty-rupee note. This is the routine experiences of Santhal women constructed by the non-Santhal people. The poverty and powerlessness of these tribes have forced them into this sphere of brutal dominance. This bodily conflict of women exists at the periphery of the society and unnoticed by the world.

In the short story, "Merely a Whore", Shekhar vividly highlights the excruciating experiences of women who were forced into the profession of prostitution by the hierarchal power structured society. The influx of modernity into the tribal regions is actually creating displacement of the people instead of enriching their livelihoods. At this juncture, the predicaments of women are massive and they are pushed into the world of darkness. Jharna, a tribal woman and her dance troupe entertain the elite people of her village for the betterment of livelihood. The Zamindar of the village, through his power, forces these tribal women to become prostitutes, which later turn out to be their profession.

What Jharna and other dancing girls like her, would have to do with just one man, they were forced to do with many men several times a day once the mines began operations. The musicians who once accompanied them during their performances became their pimps. (147)

This is the critical situation where a woman becomes the disabled body to resist the violence committed against her. Such women have none other choice than accepting the cruel behaviours of men for survival. Otherwise, they will become economically vulnerable in the society. Their individual identities are concealed because they are collectively identified as pleasure providers or prostitutes.

The physical and mental sufferings of the tribal women occur not only because of the interference of others but also of their own community people. Santhal women were marginalised and discriminated within their groups. This is evident in the story "Getting Even" where the Thakur man utters, "They are Santhals, sir. Kristians,' the

man continued. 'And this is what they do. They bring Santhal girls from villages on the pretext of giving them education and training and work, and sell them away'" (54). "They make their money out of selling girls" (55). Women are treated as commodity to make money and they are viewed as vulnerable section of the society. Mishra Mitra remarks that every year around ten thousand children are trafficked from Jharkhand to work as slaves, domestic labours and prostitutes. Even the young tribal girls were forced to conceive babies in Jharkhand to make money (qtd. in Goswami 10-11). The trafficked women are not provided with adequate facilities and are tortured unempathetically. Lack of education and opportunities are the principal hindrances for tribal women to improve their livelihood and individuality.

Women from indigenous regions are always within the sphere of threat and insecurity. It is noticeable from the above-considered incidents that women (Santhal) are judged based on the physical appearances of humankind, thereby, excluding them from society. Pramod K Nayar states, "The body is the referent for all the cultural, social and economic trauma in a particular social order. It is the immediacy of the body, and its visible damages and behavior that serve as the referent to something as 'abstract' as 'cruelty' or oppression (42). Analysing this observation with that of marginalised female section, the abused body serves as a sign of non-verbal communicative agent to comprehend the turmoil underwent by them but invariably unheeded by the humanity.

### **Displacement and Deprivation**

The geographical locations of the adivasis are the primary reasons for their exclusion from the mainstream society. Though their landscapes are visually appealing, they remain disregarded from the basic rights of the country. The ecological circumstances are the sources for their livelihood. They possess a deep and holistic relationship with their land. The habitats of the tribes stand as the evidence for their cultural and traditional practices. Tribal areas are identified as places for the production of coal, mica and other rich valuable minerals. In the name of progress and development, the adivasis are coerced to migrate from their land without any indemnity for their subsistence. The short story, "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" highlights the act of forced displacement imposed by the developmental forces and the angst experienced by the Santhal people. The narrator of the story Mangal Murmu, an old Santhal man bursts out with the collective anguish of the community against the false negotiations of the nation state. Murmu describes his state as, "I am a farmer. Or . . . Was a farmer. Was a farmer is right. Because I don't farm anymore. . . . Only a few of us still have farmland; most of it has been acquired by a mining company' (170-171). Their landscapes are rich in minerals which are exploited by the oppressive powers. Santhal tribes are skilled in the profession of farming and agriculture. The sudden displacement from their territory deprives their economic status, social power, culture and identity. The ignorance of the tribes (Santhals) utilised as a medium by which the powerful agents manipulate them in the name of social and political

growth. “Which great nation displaces thousands of its people from their homes and livelihoods to produce electricity for cities and factories? And jobs? What jobs? An Adivasi farmer's job is to farm” (185). In this statement Shekhar condemns the country for inflicting diplomacy over the people of Santhals by pretending that would lead to the development of the nation and indigenous communities as well. Padel and Das in their article mentions that,

For Adivasis in particular, displacement means cultural genocide, because when they lose their land, every aspect of their social structure is in effect destroyed: their economy and identity, because of loss of status as self-sufficient farmers; their political structure, because from being mainly self-employed they become dependent on corporate and government hierarchies, . . . (336)

The dislocation of the adivasi communities leads to destruction of the indigenous systems of human life and cultural identity. Murmu's disquiet on losing their rights to land is expressed as, “We are losing our Sarna faith, our identities, and our roots. We are becoming people from nowhere” (173) describing the torments of displacement from their native land.

### **Ecological Genocide**

According to 1987 Brundtland Report, economy, society, and environment are identified to be the three pillars of sustainable development (qtd. in Padel 162). Padel condemns the report by saying,

This formulation essentially puts the terms wrong way around, allowing a mining project to be termed 'sustainable' if it can make a profit for the next few years. If healthy ecosystems are the basis for life on earth, shouldn't environment come first? And shouldn't society come next? Human society existed long before 'economy' was defined as a separate domain . . . (162)

It is only the economy of the nation which is given priority rather than the ecology and the society. Healthy environmental societies indulge in huge economic production of the state. In Jharkhand, the coal mining and quarry companies expropriate the lands of the Santhals in the name of progression. The coal mining industries of the Santhal habitat have damaged the entire ecosystem with the emission of black chemicals. The ecological elements such as trees, shrubs, leaves, stones, rocks and flowers become prey to these evil industries. “This coal company and these quarry owners, they earn so much money from our land” (172). In the conflict between the power and powerless, the powerful group becomes richer by ruining the identities of the poor and the powerless adivasis are left with unhealthy environment of diseases and poverty.

## Conclusion

Cultural conflicts, marginalisation, displacements, identity crisis, violence against women, social exclusion, poverty are some of the major obstacles experienced by the indigenous communities in day-to-day life. These turmoils of the Santhal tribes in Jharkhand are clearly elucidated in Shekhars' short story collection *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories*. The socially and culturally constructed gender dynamics encourage men to subjugate and women to be subjugated. The problems faced by the literary characters in the stories can be identified in the real society of Jharkhand in the contemporary era. The predicaments faced by the Santhals are inconspicuous in the society. They are voicing their angst against the conflict binged society mainly to sustain their tribal identity. Attacking any of the beliefs and practices of an individual or a group is attacking their identity and sense of belongingness. Because of illiteracy and ignorance, their legal rights are denied by the hegemonic authority. The country should aim at offering equal rights and opportunities for the adivasi people along with the mainstream society. At this state Padel quotes, "When equality before law becomes a reality, and adivasis or dalits can go freely to the courts and expect justice, even when the perpetrator is a government servant or corporate executive, then real development is guaranteed, since the law would turn against the exploiters" (175). Adivasis can truly enjoy their rights only when the judicial system prioritises justice and equality for everyone neglecting the economical status.

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## The Quest for Citizenship: Traumatized Realities of Dalits in Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Bama's *Karukku*

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### *Abstract*

*Dalit personal narratives have emerged as an effective literary tool of interrogating and critiquing the persistence of social hegemonic structures that sustain the stigmatizing social practice of untouchability and perpetrate humiliating social behaviors based on caste/gender stereotypes. The lives of Dalits are still entrenched in the vortex of chronic material deprivation, social exclusion and everyday humiliation in a caste-ridden society. The paper shows how the image of India as a free and liberal democracy, ensuring equality, liberty and fraternity, has failed to integrate these disadvantaged social groups, as they are seen struggling to achieve the emancipatory ideals of an inclusive citizenship that could give them a sense of belonging and a mental affiliation to the nation-state. The paper examines Valmiki's Joothan (2003) and Bama's Karukku (2012) as a point of reference to highlight how Dalits continue to be treated as stigmatized social beings, devoid of any subjectivity and human dignity by the dominant caste groups. The denial of fundamental rights to Dalits relegates them into the status of second-class citizens, thus depriving them of a sense of belonging, social integration and empowerment. The paper demonstrates how Dalits' claim for an inclusive citizenship goes unacknowledged even after conversion, as they continue to experience humiliation and otherisation in their quotidian existence due to their caste legacy, thus severely undermining their ability to achieve an emancipatory identity.*

*Keywords: Caste, dalit, discrimination, Hindu, inclusive citizenship, marginalized*

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### **Introduction**

Many democracies like India continue to face insurmountable difficulties in managing the issue of citizenship's rights of their inhabitants, as the “egalitarian promise” of citizenship has failed to reduce the socio-economic gaps, thus thwarting the seamless integration the socio-economically vulnerable groups into the mainstream of the democratic order. The conflicts of citizenship continue to persist, with new social groups trying to vent their collective anger against the modern nation-state for miserably failing to uplift the socio-economic order of and to prevent majoritarian violence against the socio-culturally vulnerable groups across the continents (Holston 3). India, which is called the largest democracy in the world, is not free from such burgeoning problem of conflicts over citizenship. Though India has implemented the constitutional safeguards for the socially and educationally vulnerable groups in its progressive constitution, yet the collective state of

historically social groups in general and Dalits (the ex-untouchables) in particular has failed to improve as the hierarchical social order of Hindu society continues to oppress and exclude them from all avenues of socio-economic empowerment, thus undermining their transition from the outcastes into active agents of socio-political transformation.

The idea of “democratic citizenship” which allows equality and an emancipatory belonging to all inhabitants of the nation continues to elude them, thus pushing them further into the ghettoized location. The socio-spatial segregation, educational deprivation and economic exploitation still mark the everyday lives of Dalits. The condition of Dalit women becomes more problematic as they face oppression and violence from multiple sides due to their vulnerable location as a woman and as a Dalit. The expansion of the neo-liberal order, the increasing income gaps between the rich and the poor, the exclusion of the constitutionally-protect social groups from all the fields of society have intensified the resentment in the socially marginalized groups who depend heavily on the active protection of the modern state for the very existence. In India, the idea of “differentiated citizenship” is implemented to protect the vulnerable segments of Indian population from multitudes of discrimination, exclusion, social inequalities and exploitative social orders, yet such system of “marked citizenship” has failed to eradicate the animosities among the social groups and to create a harmonious social order based on the “horizontal comradeship”, which Ambedkar described as “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Ambedkar 260).

While the idea of “democratic” and “inclusive” citizenship is aimed at remedying the historic social difference and economic gaps, yet it falters in cultivating a sense of friendship among citizens in India. Dalits in particular face violence and oppression and otherisation in myriad forms in everyday social living, and discrimination and exclusion in accessing economic and political rights as enshrined by the Constitution of India. The transformation of Dalits as democratic citizens of India from the untouchable subjects still remains unfulfilled as the struggle for equality in all dimensions and human dignity is unachieved, thus keeping Dalits in the state of “inferiorised” citizens in the country.

The emergence of Dalit literature in the recent past and its ever-growing popularity mark a paradigmatic shift in the cultural/intellectual imagination of the people of the nation, exposing the 'grey areas' of Indian democracy and the exclusionary practices associated with the literary expressions of the mainstream writers. It not only articulates the individual stories of humiliation and oppression of Dalits, the ex-untouchables under an unjust, hegemonic society, but also uses the medium of literature to showcase the resilience and resistance of the marginalized social group against the normative socio-cultural forces that deny Dalits a rightful, dignified space in Hindu society and prevent them from beaming an equal citizen in the democratic country. Dalit literature strives to carve out a space for emancipatory identity for the historically depressed communities by rejecting the prejudiced, negative representations of Dalits by the upper caste writers in the mainstream

writings.

The rise of Dalit autobiographies, in particular, breaks a new ground in Indian literature that insists “on the need for a new and distinct aesthetic . . . that is life-affirming and realistic” (Limbale 19). Such voices are not mere individual self-expressions, but transcend the narrow confines of “I” to assume the attributes of “we”, thus representing the collective voice of the entire community. It brings the marginal voices to the centre of literary/intellectual activities, thus widening the space for democratization of knowledge productions in India which breaks the “epistemological privilege” of the dominant social groups. Dalit autobiographies in particular are specifically driven by the desire for self-representation and self-recognition, as Dalits of the country have never been accepted as dignified citizens, rather hated upon by the dominant caste groups as “polluted” or “ritually impure” beings, thus denying subjectivity, agency and freedom to them.

The emergence of Dalit autobiographies is modeled on the literary traditions of the slave narratives of the Black African-Americans of the United States of America, who faced systematic racial discrimination and economic exploitation under the White rule due to their racial background. The rise of Dalit literature can be traced back to the radicalism of Dalit Panthers, who imitated a revolutionary cultural and political movement in the state of Maharashtra in the 1970s as a mark of resistance and opposition to the dominance of caste ideology in Hindu society that segregates Dalits and relegates them to the stigmatized ghettos in a systematic manner. The emergence of such “explosive counter-narratives”, which are full of anger, rebellion and non-conformism, calls for an end to caste-based discrimination and otherisation of Dalits in Hindu society, laying bare the hidden structures of caste-based oppression and class-based exploitation.

Dalit writers demonstrate the past events and the painful memories which are “true to their lived experiences” and utilize the narrative techniques of autobiographies as a mode of self-expression to build solidarity among the oppressed against caste/gender/class-induced oppression and otherisation. Dalit writers mock the tradition of “bourgeoisie individualism” and “genteel expression of the existing literary standards” of the upper caste autobiographical writings, as it fails to do “justice” to the tragic lots of Dalit living. The self-assertion of Dalits via the personal narratives attempts “to evolve a new aesthetics” in Indian writings (Kumar 68). Raj Kumar argues that since non-Dalits don't have the privileges of the subjective experiences of lived realities, therefore any representation of Dalit lives by non-Dalits makes such efforts inauthentic and lacking the quality of being genuine. Kumar said that the principal objective of Dalit writers is “to bring marginal voices to the centre” which “denies a majoritarian Hindu mentality and affirms freedom” (Kumar 69).

The ultimate aim of Dalit literature, Dalit scholars argue, is the creation of a just and free society based on “egalitarianism” and “universal humanism”. The Constitution of India was promulgated with the aim of establishing the communitarian feeling of equality, liberty and freedom for all. But the most

unfortunate fact is that even India of today is still divided along caste, ethnic and religious lines in which one segment of society is spewing the venom of hatred against another segment, thus preventing the nation from becoming socially cohesive one of inclusive nature.

It reminds us of the fact that the normative universe of Indian society is still dominated by parochialism, communal hatred and group animosity. Instead of ensuring a dignified identity for every citizen of the country, the ugly politics of caste and hatred still keeps many people away from realizing the dreams that the founding father of the nation had once seen, while fighting against the tyranny of British colonialism.

Even after the seven decades of India's independence and the promulgation of the Constitution recognizing rights of every citizen of the country, the erstwhile called untouchable groups remain deprived of the emancipatory ideals of equal citizenship. Despite being nominally recognized as citizens of the country, Dalits still face discrimination and social indignity from the fellow citizens. The emancipatory ideals of citizenship that guarantee equality in all spheres of human life and social recognition have failed to provide this marginalized group the much-needed sense of equality and friendship in the country. They still experience social segregation and economic deprivation, thus preventing them from enjoying the privileges and rights of being a citizen in a free and democratic country.

Roy argues that the idea of citizenship “goes beyond legal or formal membership to concerns around substantive membership and terms of belonging” (xiii), which attempts to reduce inequalities based on caste, class, gender and ethnicity. Yet, such emancipatory ideals are not available to Dalits, who are living like the second-class citizens in the country deprived of their basic human rights and entitlements. Jayal shows how the “egalitarian promise” (15) of citizenship is consistently “undermined by the social inequalities” that persist along the caste lines in Indian society. Here, the role of caste is seen to be playing a pivotal role in maintaining such socio-economic inequalities in order to preserve the hegemony of the caste Hindus. The substantive meaning of citizenship allows the possibilities of resistance and collective mobilization against the social injustice and economic denial, yet Dalits have been hardly able to utilize them to enhance their transformative potential in a democratic country. In the normative universe of Hindu society, the low caste people are not given the feeling of a psychological belonging to the nation-state, as they are consistently harassed and oppressed by the dominant populace. It resulted in the “exclusion” of the marginalized social groups from “substantive citizenship”, thus perpetuating the status of Dalits as “only nominally citizens” in the democratic nation-state.

In an interesting way, Yogisha and Narendra Kumar examined the predicament of Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular as articulated in the Dalit feminist texts such as Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2008). They looked at the intersectionality of caste, class and gender to locate and understand the traumatized predicament of Dalit women in Indian society. Dalit women still struggle

to get equal treatment and human recognition of their specific predicament in their quotidian existence as they face both caste hegemony and patriarchal dominance in everyday living. The rise of Dalit feminist standpoints has underlined such interlinkages between labor, exploitation, violence and the notion of purity and pollution in the hereditary caste society, thus calling for an emancipatory politics of Dalit women which addresses both gender subordination and the caste-linked oppression of Dalit women. Rao showed how Dalits continue to struggle for social emancipation and political empowerment as “ascriptive identities” such as caste keep them in the state of perpetual material dispossession, economic deprivation, political exclusion and social humiliation. Their fight for an inclusive citizenship is seen as “a sustained effort to transform the *structural negativity* of the untouchable into *positive political value*” (Rao 134).

### **Dalit: An Outcaste in Hindu Society**

In a caste-inscriptive society, Dalits are treated like members of an enemy country, which leads to the withholding of basic human rights for them as the “permanent impurity” has been attached to the Dalit bodies, thus forcing the so-called “pure caste” groups to practice social and physical distance against the former. Their nominal recognition as a mere citizen, without ensuring equality, liberty and fraternity for them, ultimately proves to be a misnomer and a futile exercise. The very lack of freedom and recognition as human beings with self-respect has relegated them to the status of second-class citizens of the country, which makes a critique of procedural democracy as prevalent in the country. Dalits do not receive respectful behavior from the upper castes, which consider the former as unworthy of being called “human”, due to their lowest position in the caste-inscribed Hindu society. Such denial of human attributes to Dalits is condemned by Limbale, who considers Dalit literature “as a means of human liberation” (Limbale 35).

Everyday pain and humiliation constitute a daily routine in Valmiki's life, as Dalits are never treated with love and empathy in Hindu society due to the prevalence of caste-based mentality. They are forced to render all kinds of stigmatizing jobs under the caste-ordained society, as they rely on the dominant castes materially for their sustenance. He demonstrated how Dalits were forced “to dispose of dead cattle in the village”, which is seen as an impure occupation in caste-divided Hindu society. Poverty was another predominant vulnerability for these communities as they suffer from acute paucity of material resources in their living, with the spectre of landlessness playing a major role behind such precarious condition of Dalit living.

He is not like other normal citizens, as an indelible stigma is attached to his social identity in the exploitative caste system. Poverty and humiliation have been written on his forehead since his birth in a caste-ridden Hindu society, which doesn't love its people rather classifies them according to the notion of purity and pollution. Such gradation or hierarchicalisation of social groups based on the superficial measures is bound to perpetuate stigma and social discrimination against the servile

classes in the psyche of the dominant groups. Valmiki narrated an incident in which his mother was publicly humiliated for asking some extra *joothan* or leftover: “Don't forget your place, Chuhri. Pick up your basket and get going” (Valmiki 11). He is seen to be less than a citizen and more like a sub-human fighting for equal rights and social recognition. He fails to exercise the constitutional rights as guaranteed to each citizen so that s/he can ensure holistic development of personality in society, thus according them the position of second class citizenship (Yengde, *The Hindu*). The burden of casteism was so intense that Dalits are forced to follow anonymity in order to evade the wrath of casteism and social ostracism. Valmiki's surname turned into the perennial source of headache for Valmiki, as it reminds the upper castes of his low-caste origin and his impure status in caste ranking. His birth-ascriptive identity trumps over his identity as citizen of the country, thus automatically denying him the basic human rights in everyday living.

Bama recalled her past memories and showed how her village was segregated along the caste lines with clear-cut demarcation being made to protect the purity of the upper castes from the physical touch of the untouchable communities. Bama showed how Dalits were forcibly kept within the ghettos by the dominant communities by strictly controlling the physical movement of the former. She wrote: “. . . the upper caste communities and the lower-caste communities were separated. But they kept themselves to their part of the village and we stayed in ours” (Bama 7). Even she sarcastically remarked that the touch of Dalits is seen defiling and ritually polluting for the upper caste groups. This turns into a ready-made excuse for upper castes to perpetuate socially divisive customs such as the practice of untouchability which in turn continue the stigmatization of these marginalized groups. Despite being citizens of the country, Dalits hardly receive any humane treatment and respectful behavior from the upper castes, thus stripping Dalits off all human dignities and treat them as the sub-humans. This forces Bama to assert that “we are too human beings” (Bama 16) and should be treated like fellow citizens with dignity and respect.

Dalits are hardly given a dignified spatial location to live, and this discrimination could be traced to the general ignorance of society about the wellbeing of the marginalized groups and how such step-mother-like outlook forces Dalits to inhabit the most unhygienic and inhospitable territorial locations. Wankhede commented: “For these communities, the idea of citizenship is farcical as the dominant social and economic order hardly allows them to operate as a free beings” (Wankhede 18). The egalitarian ideals of citizenship have so far failed to uplift them from the den of ignorance and to protect them from relegating into the stigmatizing socio-spatial locations in which they have been hardly successful in enjoying the liberal values of citizenship. Valmiki showed how there has been “muck strewn everywhere” in his village, showing the extent of systematic deprivation and structural ignorance perpetuated on the marginalized social groups by the state. It is seen as a stark violation of the holy trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity as espoused in the Constitution.

In Hindu society, the dominant groups enjoy the rights and privileges granted

to them via the ownership of citizenships, whereas the servile and dispossessed communities are systematically relegated to the status of second-class citizens or non-citizens in extreme cases, despite being formally recognized as citizens of the country. The persistence of stigma, inequality of all sorts and social ostracism forced these poor groups to live under the disciplinary surveillance of the dominant communities without any human right attached to their social identities. Jayal writes about how the inclusionary visions of the Constitution, providing equal citizenship to members of diverse social and religious groups, are being undermined by “acts of routinised violence” executed against the lower castes with impunity and how the second-class citizens are being created “based on caste and religious identity”, thus implicitly keeping them as impoverished as the lesser citizens of any country.

The normative universe of Dalit groups is marked by social indignities as Dalits are forced to perform all sorts of degrading occupations in society which are hardly recognized in society as respectful or dignified labors. The involvement of Dalits in such “ritually impure” occupations such as manual scavenging, rag-picking and skinning of the dead animals created a strong social repulsion in the psyche of the dominant castes against Dalits, thus deepening the social stereotyping against these groups. It denies freedom “to engage in social and cultural communication in everyday life”, thus permitting “the social diminution of Dalits” in the nation (Guru 38). Dr Ambedkar called Indian villages as the den of ignorance and the sink of casteism, in which the upper castes practice the divisive ideology of purity and pollution and segregate Dalits based on untouchability. The social repulsion created through caste hierarchies hardly allows Dalits or the low castes any opportunity for self-improvement or collective emancipation, thus making a mockery of the democratic and liberal values that the constitution tries to enforce in a pluralistic society in order to achieve social integration and an ambiance of community solidarity.

Dalits can be called the 'precariat' in Indian society, who do not, enjoy labor security, face maximum unemployment and materially precarious condition in their social life. As Dalits lack the ownership of landed properties, they have to rely on the wages given to them by the upper classes. Like precariats, Dalits face “the lack of community support in times of need, lack assured enterprise or state benefits, and lack of private benefits to supplement money earnings” (Standing 12). In caste-stratified society, the dominant groups flourish materially by depriving these marginalized groups of their rightful share in the material base of the country, which Marxists call the exploitation of the proletariat by the privileged classes. The quotidian living of these marginalized communities is characterized by a precarity as the powerful classes siphon off all the state resources to further their parochial class interests, thus putting Dalits in the perpetual state of multifaceted vulnerability in the social interactions.

Whereas Dalits fight chronic deprivation, malnourishment and physical exploitation, the dominant castes enjoy a life of stability and prosperity on account of their unquestioned material advantages in society. Bama wrote: “Most of the lands

belonged to the Naicker community. Each Naicker's fields were spread over many miles" (6), thus showing the skewed nature of material relations in favor of the dominant communities which results in the landlessness of the marginalized groups. At the same time, the land-owning communities are seen unwilling to execute the equal distribution of land resources as the land becomes synonymous with power and the tool of sustaining class dominance in society, thus automatically denying the servile classes a solid material base, which keeps them under the monopoly of the dominant castes, thus preserving the unequal material relations in order to preserve their class hegemony in society. It can be called a violation of fundamental rights of citizens as enshrined by the Constitution which in turn perpetuate the socio-economic inequalities in society, thus seriously undermining the egalitarian principle of citizenship in a democratic state.

Valmiki faced many terrifying and humiliating events in his life. One day, he went to the house of his upper caste teacher and dined with them, but somehow they discovered his real social identity at the end. It infuriated them to such an extent that they even contemplated killing him in a brutal manner for showing disrespect to the caste-based segregation. But somehow Valmiki along with his friend was able to escape such collective rage against Dalits. This incident created a deep and permanent scar in the psyche of the little Valmiki, who afterwards stopped chasing the upper caste teachers for education due to their inherent caste bias against pupils belonging to Dalit backgrounds. It shows the extent of violence and caste hatred prevalent among the high castes, as they are not hesitant to apply any means to preserve their ritual purity and class dominance.

Valmiki experienced social discrimination and humiliation in his every turn of living and struggled against spatial segregation as he was denied rented houses by the upper caste landlords, as he is an untouchable by birth. Every time, his caste-ascriptive status becomes the ground for his disqualification, thus preventing him from renting a house in a democratic country, in which any discrimination based on caste and religion is considered a punishable offence, yet such social practices continue unabated across the country, which violate citizenship rights as guaranteed by the Constitution of our country. The curse of untouchability consistently haunts him everywhere which incapacitates him from enjoying the emancipatory potential of citizenship. Even his love-affair with a Brahmin woman ended in a miserable failure, as the spectre of caste cropped up between them, thus paving the way for their mutual departure from an emotional relationship.

### **Exclusion of Dalits from Education**

Despite the Right to Education is formally acknowledged as a fundamental right for all citizens, Dalit children are still denied access to an equitable education. Education is seen as a tool for achieving social mobility and realizing a destigmatised identity in a caste-ordained society. It is used as a deterrent against social indignity and discrimination of all sorts. The brother of Bama is seen echoing such

transformative role of education and how it can be utilized to address deprivation and stigma facing Dalit communities: “. . . if we study and make progress, we can throw away indignities. So study with care, learn all you can” (Bama 18).

Even today, the highest drop-out rates of school-going students are found in the students belonging to socially marginalized groups such as Dalits which confirm the persistence of “discriminatory practices” and “institutional biases” against students belonging to marginalized communities (Trivedi). Dalit students in particular become the worst victims/ sufferers of such evil social customs based on caste identities. In schools and colleges, Dalit children face discrimination and ghettoization at the hands of upper caste teachers and supporting staff, which frequently leads to suicide of Dalit students. In the Hindu caste order, Dalits are not entitled to read, write and speak, as they occupy the lowest rung in the caste ladder, which brands them as the “most impure and polluted” beings in Hindu society, whose touch has the capacity to defile the upper caste Hindus, who consider themselves as “ritually purer” persons. Though the Constitution opened the door of schools to the hitherto untouchable communities, yet such spheres of learning are not immune to the persistence of caste discrimination and systematic mental ostracism as faced by Dalits. Even today, the centres of learning are under the monopoly of Brahminical Hindus, who try every means to stop Dalits from entering the educational fields. Education not only imparts knowledge to the ex-untouchable communities, but also enhances their self-confidence to boost up their cognitive capacities. But opportunities for education are hardly available to Dalits as they are excluded from the avenues of education in the myriad ways by the socially privileged castes, thus hampering the holistic development of Dalits, which effectively impedes the pace of social transformation in the modern nation-state. Instead of receiving motivational teaching from the upper caste teachers, Dalit students receive “all sorts of physically and psychologically corrosive language” from the insensitive teachers belonging to the oppressing castes (Paik). It denies these servile classes an opportunity to transform themselves into active citizens of the country, thus helping create a congenial and fraternal atmosphere in society which ultimately strengthens the national unity. Both Bama and Valmiki recounted numerous instances of such inhumane treatment and malignant behavior meted out to Dalit students by their upper caste teachers in their respective autobiographical sketches.

As the caste-based prejudices still thrive in the spaces of education, Dalit students continue to face alienating and humiliating experiences in school and colleges. Bama showed how the upper caste students used to look at her with contempt during her entry into the school. Even the supporting staff members are seen tormenting them in order to publicly humiliate them in front of other students. This forced Bama to remark: “We too paid our fees like everyone else, for this and that. Yet we had to listen to all this as well” (Bama 20). Valmiki was very critical of his upper caste teacher who forced him in rendering stigmatizing menial works such as sweeping the whole playground of the school (Valmiki 5). Such involvement of upper caste teachers in the performance of child labor of the marginalized students is a

common picture in Indian society, which signified the cruel nature of teachers.

### **Caste Oppression and Christianity**

Dalits, over the years, embraced different religions in order to feel the empowered sense of an equal citizenship devoid of any stigma and inequality. Dr. Ambedkar, the central figure in the anti-caste movement in India converted himself to Buddhism as he found that emancipation of Dalits is impossible within Hinduism. Conversion is seen as a pragmatic approach towards realizing the spiritual transformation of the tortured inner self and attaining dignified citizenship. Dalits for ages have taken this route to escape the collective plight within Hinduism. Bama, too, left the Hindu fold and entered the Christian order in order to get human dignity and a sense of equality, yet such emancipatory potential remains non-available to her during her stay at the Christian order. Here, too, she experienced caste discrimination and observed the hegemonic control of the Upper Caste Converts in the affairs of the church. As a result, Dalit Christians like Bama, who converted themselves to evade the pangs of the caste oppression, ended up “only to find that things were the same on the other side” (Ameerudheen).

The egalitarian teachings of Lord Jesus have failed to offer her a sense of freedom from social injustice and chronic oppression. Life turned into a hellish experience, which forced her to leave the Christian faith after seven years of her formal entry, as it didn't help her in her quest for equality and human dignity. She showed how casteism is sustained within the Christian fold, thus depriving Dalit converts a chance for a better and dignified life. She compared her stay at the convent to “a bird whose wings were broken” (Bama 121), thus showing the extent of pressure and bondage she experienced within the convent.

Bama witnessed a forced subservience to the superiors in the convent, thus denying her equality, agency and autonomy in decision-making. She said: “Nobody was allowed to think differently or speak differently. We had to accept only what our Superior told us, as if it were God-given Scripture” (114). Inspired by the philanthropic vision and a concern for anguishing humanity, she wanted to care for the poor, but in reality, she had no freedom within the church, with no freedom was given to her to serve the languishing humanity. She gradually became fed up with the highly-routinized living of the convent, which started to oppress her instead of liberating her from the material anxiety and spiritual crisis. Bama ultimately realized that there is nothing humanistic in the activities of the church, and the vows that she was forced to chant was nothing more than “a means of control and enslavement” (Bama 113), Bama observed a rampant prevalence of discrimination and inequality within the church in which the privileged get special treatment and the poor disaffection and denial. She observed how the clergies identified themselves with their upper caste Hindu lineage as a matter of showing their ritual purity. Such acts or behaviors contradict the emancipatory ideals of equal citizenship as guaranteed by the Constitution.

## Conclusion

The above-mentioned two Dalit autobiographies testify to the fact that Dalits are still treated like second-class citizens in India and are very far from enjoying the perennial fruits of social equality and economic stability in society. The liberal ideals of citizenship have failed to alter the socio-economic inequalities and pervasive stigma being faced by Dalit communities as the caste-based social prejudices continue to remain in force in the country. They are hardly acknowledged as equal citizens in Hindu society, with step-motherly treatment being meted out to them. Their claim for equal and inclusive citizenship is consistently ignored, and, as a result, Dalits continue to face class exploitation and socio-cultural inequalities in their quotidian existence. Even the democratic state has been so far dismal in its performance while addressing the multifarious handicaps that Dalits experience in the social, economic and civil spheres. Though Dalits formally own citizenship in the country, yet they still remain largely disenfranchised and their basic human rights stand violated on the daily basis, as the social universe of caste-based segregation and discrimination still plagues them, thus denying them the egalitarian ideals of inclusive citizenship. Dalits are still waiting for the day when they will be treated as equal citizens of the country, and when the boundaries of inequality and discrimination get dismantled for the creation of a new egalitarian society based on the liberal ideals of equal citizenship.

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## **Inequality and Discrimination: Sociocultural Predicaments of Naga Community in Avinuo Kire's *The Power to Forgive and Other Stories***

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### *Abstract*

*Nagaland is one of the distinct states in the Northeastern region of India that has experienced severe turmoil due to ethnic and political conflicts. The invasion of modernity and dominant cultural practices pose a serious threat to the tribal communities of this region. However, the tribal people of the Northeast region struggle hard to retain their unique ethnic and cultural values. On the other hand, inter/intra communal conflicts pertaining to race, gender and class contribute to their physical and psychological crises. Though both men and women invariably experience the hardships created by ethnic and political tensions, women suffer more because of religious and cultural beliefs within the community. Avinuo Kire is an emerging literary voice from the Naga community who unravels the social and political experiences of Naga people within the cultural landscape of Nagaland. In her literary works, the painful experiences of Naga women are placed at the centre of the narrative to expose the implicit and explicit forms of violence prevailing in Nagaland. Hence, this paper attempts to analyse the social experiences of Naga people such as racial inequity, class discrimination and gender disparity manifested in the select short stories from Kire's *The Power to Forgive and Other Stories*. It further seeks to offer an overarching study of the psychosocial disruptions of Naga community.*

*Keywords: Racial discrimination, class inequality, gender bias, psychological imbalance, Nagaland, Avinuo Kire*

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### **Introduction**

The Northeastern region of India is known for its linguistic diversity, religions, rich culture, ethnic varieties and intriguing landscapes. However, the cultural, geographical and political differences play a crucial role in creating discord between the Northeast and the mainstream society. Northeast people are subjected to violence and they experience uncertainties because of the political and ethnic clashes that continue to exist for decades. Violence, insurgency and extremist activities have unfortunately become part of their routine life. The Northeast region had only three states during the initial years after independence but in 1963, Nagaland was offered separate statehood as it possesses unique linguistic as well as ethnic traits which are different from other states of the region. Nagaland, even after becoming a separate state, continued to experience violence because of the conflicts in the name of ethnic identity. The trauma of relentless violence and bloodshed found significance in the rich literary tradition of Nagaland. Literary narratives from this region gained attention in the

public consciousness because of their authentic and vivid representation of Naga people's social, political, and cultural experiences. Preeti Gill, in a news article highlights,

Northeastern writing is in an exciting place. Backed by a strong literary tradition, many young writers continue to grapple with these issues. Having grown up in the shadow of the gun, their desire to analyse the common people's reaction to insurgency is as strong as ever. (para. 3)

Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire are considered to be the most prominent writers of the Naga community. Their literary narrations are primarily focused on themes such as ethnic conflict, violence, trauma, and survival of human spirit as well as the beauty of the landscape. Some of their notable works include, *Laburnum for my Head*, *These Hills Called Home*, *When the River Sleeps*. Avinuo Kire is a promising and emerging writer from the Naga community who represents the status of contemporary Naga society through her distinct narrative style. Many of her literary works are considered as a part of the collective experiences of the Naga community. Kire's literary narrations “have their origins in actual historical events that the writers have witnessed, or events that have transpired and remembered in people's collective memory” (Luikham 116). Similarly, it is also an established notion of many Northeastern writers to voice their concern for the region through literature as it helps to bring out the hidden melancholy of the marginalised state.

Apart from the political and ethnic disruptions, Naga people encounter racial discrimination, class inequalities and gender disparity within as well as outside their communities. Though it is categorically stated that every citizen is equal before the Indian constitution, multiple cruel incidents of communal bias and discrimination continue to happen against the marginalised sections of the society. In this regard, the paper attempts to shed light on the social and communal unjust like class and racial discrimination and gender inequalities imposed on Naga community through the select short stories of Avinuo Kire's from *The Power to Forgive and Other Stories*. The paper continues to analyse the relentless struggles of Naga community in constructing individual and ethnic identities amidst social disruptions. The collection of stories selected for the study deals with various aspects of social life such as gender and racial bias, class struggle, ethnic, spiritual and ecological consciousness of the Naga community.

## **Thematic Analysis of Select Literary Narrations**

### **a) Racial discrimination**

The story “Nigu's Red T Shirt”, discusses the complex theme of racial discrimination. It is based on the true incident of a young Naga boy who migrates to Delhi for his higher studies and is mistreated by the urban people. Thurgood Marshall notes,

. . . twentieth century racism was blatant, intentional, and its existence generally undisputed. . . . Twenty – first century racism, on the other hand, is more subtle. It is harder to prove intentional racial discrimination, and as a result, its existence is widely disputed. (qtd. in Brown 1485)

Though racial intolerance is not restricted to any part of the nation, the north-eastern people experience discrimination and exclusion because of their distinct physical appearances and cultural practices. Duncan McDuire-Ra, points out, “the north-east are the only category of citizens to be construed *at the national level* as a separate racial group with a dubious

connection to the rest of the nation –'mongoloids', 'chinkies', 'Chinese'" (3). This scenario contributes to the emergence of complex questions about citizenship and national identity. Neingulie, the protagonist of the story, who stays in a rented room in Delhi, is subjected to humiliation and discrimination by his house owner. The tenants insist him not to cook his traditional cuisine in their residential area. "Baiya Nigu is cooking his Naga dish again'. He had been warned by the landlord not to cook his strong – smelling traditional dishes" (52). People always threaten and condemn him not to make any food with a strange smell in the name of cooking traditional dishes. After he is warned for the third time, he stops preparing his native dish. He feels that the people from the capital city are difficult to handle. "Everything in this city felt strange; the buildings and its people, the language, food, even the weather" (55). His life in Delhi has become challenging. Though he studies in a prestigious educational institute, he is mocked because of his regional identity. When he is asked his name in the classroom, he feels inferior to reveal because his fellow mates might make fun of him. Such incidents force him to stay away from his regular classes. He cannot even share his discomfort with anyone in his family because of their ignorance about the urban lifestyle. When his father spontaneously questions about his insincerity, he busted out and said, "Father, it's very easy for you to talk! You don't know what it's like here. I don't have any friends in college and most of the teachers teach only in Hindi. I can't understand a word they say! It's a waste of time even attending their classes" (54). The author manifests the undeniable fact that racial discriminative activities cannot be controlled even in progressive educational institutions through her powerful narrative. According to the Bezbaruah Committee Report, 2014, Hoineilhing Sitlhou and Salah Punathil mention that the metropolitan cities are the worst "when it comes to racial discrimination against people from the Northeast" (96). Most often, people of the Northeast are discriminated and abused because of their "physical structure" (Thounaojam 10). When the protagonist goes for shopping, he is ridiculed for his physical features. "Someone shouted '*Oye chinki! Hato yarr!*' . . . His dignity was slowly being robbed and he felt helpless to do anything about it" (58). Without showing any resistance, he leaves the place. Such discriminatory attitudes question the basic tenets of nationhood. Later, the protagonist brings a new red T-Shirt with Chinese letters printed on it. When he uses it for outing, everyone believes him as a foreigner and he gains a positive response from society. This experience offers him "new confidence under the borrowed identity of his T shirt" (59). The positive response from society forces him to wear the shirt often. Though he does not know the meaning of the Chinese words he feels comfortable with it. The pathetic observation is that the borrowed identity (Chinese red T shirt) provides him respect and dignity where as his own ethnic identity is suppressed within his own country. Sadhana Nadathur Jayakumar in a digital intersectional media named "*Feminism in India*" rightly points out, "people from the northeast are supposed to go through this (racial discrimination) at least once in their lifetime because it's a normal process" (para. 6).

The story "Nigu's Red T Shirt" unravels the miseries of migrant students who experience racial discrimination in the metropolitan cities. An Indian citizen from Nagaland who feels comfortable with a borrowed national identity (Chinese red T shirt) finds it difficult to project his own ethnic identity among his own countrymen. It exhibits the necessity to respect every ethnic clan rather than discriminating based on geographical origin and physical appearance. Such racial identifications lead to an identity crisis of the citizen in his own country. The 'Bezbaruah Committee Report, 2014, highlights a few incidents where the racial unjust over Northeast students in the mainstream society seem to be intolerable. The

report states,

. . . cases of physical atrocities and physical assault against Northeasterners, a 29 years old Manipuri BPO employee was beaten to death by five youth in South Delhi on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2014. Six months prior to death to this incident, a 19 years old Arunachal Pradesh student Nido Tania died after beaten with iron rods and sticks by some men. (qtd. in Sitlhou 93)

Similarly, another digital newspaper named “*The Better India*” sheds light on a real incident happened in Bangalore. Two students from Nagaland named, Awang Newmei and Aloto Chishi, were tortured and beaten up for hours by the local men and ill-treated. (A Woman from the Northeast Writes . . . , para. 9). Racial discrimination pervades even among the student community due to a lack of understanding about ethnicity and diversity. The cruel acts of intolerance cause unbearable agony among people who belong to the vulnerable sections of society. The writers from Naga community including Ao and Kire use literary narratives as a tool to communicate the social conditions of Naga people in the mainstream society. Literary narratives are one of the powerful mediums to project the social reality without any bias and prejudice. Kire attempts to show how Naga people are tyrannized for having a distinct physical appearance and cultural practices.

## **b) Class Inequality**

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic define, “Many modern-day readers believe that racism is declining or that class today is more important than race.” (9) The story “Dielienuo's Choice” discusses class discrimination experienced by a ten year old orphan Naga girl who lost her parents and lives under the guardianship of her uncle. Her family is represented as “there was a poor family in one of the more remote Naga villages who was struggling to make ends meet” (119). They struggle to live a dignified life because they are poor. Kalpana Srivastava, states in her research, “Poverty is one of the important factors for this problem” (3). Due to Dielienuo family's economic instability, she is forced to go for domestic assistance in urban areas. Though she is a little girl, she has no other choice than accepting her fate for the wellbeing of the family and herself. At her first work in Dimapur, Dielienuo becomes miserable as she is new to the urban area and found hard to get along with the changing circumstances. Moreover, she finds it difficult to communicate with the people due to language barrier. So she returns home and later joins for domestic assistance in a doctor's home. When she is left alone in the doctor's home, she “seemed sad but did not cry” (119). She is aware of her economic condition, and understands her need to be strong. Child labour is against the law, however, at times children are pushed into labour and domestic works due to poor economic condition of their family. Similarly, in the context of Dielienuo's family, “poverty had compelled them to send her away a second time, this time to us” (120). Therefore, Dielienuo begins to work as a house servant in the doctor's home.

The doctor's daughter is the narrator of the story who belongs to the same age (ten) as the protagonist. At first, the narrator hates Dielienuo's presence around her; she states, “I did not want her inside my room. Her unflagging admiration not only irritated but shamed me as well” (122). However, the narrator gradually befriends Dielienuo and begins to spend time with her. Though Dielienuo, is playful, she has never failed to finish her chores. She wakes up early in the morning even on weekends and during winter times too. Her activities surprise the narrator as how a girl of her same age can do all the house works. But the class inequality begins when the narrator arranges birthday party; she ridicules Dielienuo for not

understanding the concept of celebrating birthday party. The narrator humiliates Dielienuo when her friends ask about her designation. The narrator addresses the protagonist, “‘Oh, she's just a servant', I replied airily” (124). Dielienuo is shattered by the abrupt change of behaviour in the narrator. She can understand the reluctance of the narrator to introduce her as friend to her sophisticated friends. Class conflict is the primary cause to terminate their harmonious relationship. After a few months, Dielienuo's uncle arrives to take her to home for Christmas holiday. He tells to the doctor that she would be returned after Christmas. When the doctor, the narrator's father inquires Dielienuo's interest to come back to work after Christmas, she maintains silence because “‘she had never been asked for an opinion about her own life” (127). Though Dielienuo is provided with good living conditions by the narrator's family, she could not tolerate the way people see her as a poor and fragile servant. She is emotionally shattered because of the class inequality. However, Dielienuo knows well that she could not lead her life without this job and if she does not tolerate the inequality she will be sent for other menial works. Hopefully the protagonist returns as expected by the narrator. When they meet up at the stairs, the narrator questions whether she had watched the stars at night when she was at her hometown. Dielienuo replies, “‘Yes, every night. And do you know? They're the same everywhere I go” (128). The author symbolically represents that like stars human beings are same and equal to one another. In the context of Dielienuo's story wealth and prosperous life of the narrator are the factors that divide the two children as rich and poor. This symbolically represents the unending monotonous nature of Dielienuo's life. It is well known that child labour is a solid violation of civil liberties of children and it is a serious social problem but they are forced to do work due to illiteracy and economic demands.

N. Neetha rightly points out, “‘There are regular traumatic incidents of exploitation of adivasi domestic workers in the cities by agencies as well as employers” (239). Though these jobs provide basic requirements, they never improve their living conditions; rather they are given meagre wages and sometimes physically tortured by the owners. Such sufferings keep the growing children away from attaining their survival rights, education, sports activities and seize the opportunities to grow physically and mentally.

### **c) Gender bias**

Gender inequality plays a prominent role in the patriarchal structure of tribal society where the stature of women is considered to be inferior within the purview of their customary practices and beliefs. Chimamanda Adichie, says, “‘our ideas of gender have not evolved very much” (18). The notion of intersectionality which was originated from Critical Race Theory is taken for theoretical understanding of gender struggle. United Nations once defined the term intersectionality as a concept that, “‘specifically addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, economic disadvantages and other discriminatory systems contribute to create layers of inequality that structure the relative position of women” (qtd. in Doyin para. 2). Kire, as a contemporary writer, visually renders the ordinary lives of the Naga community through her literary narrations. The stories “‘The Power to Forgive”, “‘Fallen Bird”, “‘Promise of Camellias” and “‘Bayienuo” discuss the impacts of gender discrimination of Naga women within as well as outside their communities. The portrayal of the psychological and physical trauma experienced by the female characters of these stories is critically analysed in this study.

The story “‘The Power to Forgive” discusses the predicament of the unnamed female protagonist who is a rape survivor. She forgives her father who failed to punish the rapist (the

girl's paternal uncle) to protect the honour of the family. Kikon rightly states,

Every Naga woman has experienced humiliation and insults from the men on the basis of her womanhood. These men are not outsiders or strangers. They are their 'respected' uncles, cousins and in some cases their fathers and brothers who never fail to remain them about the predestined inferior roles that have already been slated out for them. (qtd. in Manchanda 179)

The protagonist had encountered brutal abuse when she was twelve years old. She was unconscious and fallen into oblivion when her paternal uncle raped her cruelly. The community including her parents blatantly criticised her ignorance instead of punishing the perpetrator. Therefore, the protagonist had to undergo psychological trauma throughout her life. Sixteen years after the incident, the protagonist read a newspaper titled “FATHER FORGIVES MAN WHO RAPED DAUGHTER” (Kire 2) which led to her emotional outburst and psychological instability. When the crime was committed, “her mother blamed her for what had happened” (4) while her uncle was left free. No one had opposed the decision of her father but criticised the poor girl. “It only became intolerable when society 'shared' the shame” (5). The author brings out the collective negligence and indifference of the patriarchal society through the experiences of the unnamed protagonist. The protagonist's mother criticises the society as it puts the responsibility only on mothers to take care of girl children. The saddest part of the story is that the rape victim decides to forgive both her father and uncle after a certain period. This reflects how the traditional and customary practices of the society have deprived women from their rights, forcing them to unconsciously surrender to the barbaric conventions of the society.

The story “Fallen Bird” unearths the despotic nature of patriarchal society within the Naga community. The protagonist who married a man from another tribe loses her identity within her clan and is projected as a caged bird by the narrator. Though women in this region experience significant freedom, yet they undergo other kinds of oppression by means of customary traditional practices. Buongpui comments,

There has been a perpetuation of a notion from an outsider's viewpoint that women in the region enjoy a higher status, quality of life, and mobility when compared to their counterparts in the rest of the country. This may be true on a superficial level as there is an absence of rigid caste system, dowry and the Purdah system but there is lack of awareness that women in the region are oppressed by binding customary and traditional practices. (qtd. in Luikham 92-93)

People of the Naga community believe that only a man can bring honour to the family, whereas they prefer to have a girl child only for domestic assistance and to look after their younger siblings. Ajailiu Niumai, states, “birth of a boy is generally preferred in the Naga society as the customs and traditional rules imply that the lineage of a clan and family is through a male child . . . male as the bread winner and the protector of the society, and women being subordinate to their households” (347). Similarly, when the protagonist's family is blessed with a boy child they celebrate it as a grand event. “Finally! a male to carry on the family name and give you pride! the grave old man who was held in high esteem by the entire community had exclaimed” (43-44). Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty, documented the customs and traditions of tribal women in the digital newspaper “*The Wire*”. It contains the personal experiences of Naga women who are subjected to discrimination and emotional abuse in the name of cultural practices and beliefs. One of the subjects of the study during the documentation said, “My husband fed me with the meat of bigger animals when I gave birth to boys, but when I delivered a girl; I was treated to a smaller-sized animal for namesake”

(para. 1).

Therefore, the dignity of a Naga woman is identified to be associated with the gender of her child. The protagonist of the story “Fallen Bird” begins to experience identity crisis because of her lost mother and the extra marital affairs of her husband. These incidents create psychological fear about her future and also make her understand the social conditions of a dependant woman who loses identity and feels helpless due to familial disruptions. The protagonist heard the sound of a wounded bird during her chores. The bird had no external injuries but it could not fly. Though water and food were served to it, it lost its life the next day and was buried with prayers. When the protagonist closes her eyes to pray for the fallen bird, she felt like “praying for the bird was like praying for yourself. This small being buried underneath had become a part of you” (50). Here, the author, through the symbolic representation of the fallen bird, conveys the helpless situation of the protagonist. This story reveals how women in tribal society are treated as caged birds in the name of traditional and customary norms. Even though she is denied equal status in her community, she never fails to fulfill her social roles at different periods of time.

Likewise, other stories, “Promise of Camellias” and “Bayienuo” project the status of women within the Naga community. Ruth Lalsiemsang Buongpui, rightly comments, “In the name of preserving traditional customs and tribal identities, very often individual and gender choices get foreclosed and women are relegated to the lower status” (79). Women are least considered while taking any decisions in their families. This is mainly because of the customary norms that make them silent observant and their suggestions cannot be taken into consideration. In the story “Promise of Camellias” a young teen girl named Vimenuo is forced to get married even though she is not interested. Vime's grandmother Sebu consoles and teaches her the significant traditional traits of women in her community. When Vime shares her interest to go for a job, her grandmother opposes. She advises Vime that women should not go for jobs. Vime's Grandmother says, “As far as girls are concerned, it is better to marry an officer rather than become one” (72). She believes that the real security for a girl comes only if she is married to a government servant. With no other option Vimenuo gets married for the sake of her family's happiness. However, the marriage fails to bring happiness to her life because of her infertility and the extra marital affair of her husband. The unwilling and forced marriage ruins the life of Vime and also subdue her personal identity. Adhering to customary norms and traditions of the Naga community has brought tragic turmoil to her life. Vime expresses her dismal situation and states that she was emotionally abused by society. “I have become attached to my special sadness. People look at me with sympathy, regarding me like a martyr wife. They call me ex husband all kinds of awful names” (77). Similarly in “Bayienuo”, the teen girl is not allowed to wander around the woods, rather she is forced to stay inside her home. Kekhrielelu, the protagonist's mother points out, “You are a woman adult and, more importantly, a young woman. Your place is to stay home and help Mother around the house” (86). Again, the joy of equality and the rights of women to express their views are restricted because of the customary norms. Pou highlights the status of Naga women as, “Though women in Naga society are often said to enjoy a better status compared to most societies in other parts of India by the fact that infanticides or dowry deaths are not heard of, the level of freedom endowed may be debatable (164-165).

Thus, these narratives manifest the suppressive experiences of Naga women at different phases of their lives. The Naga women undergo “structural intersectionality” (“World Conference against Racism” 14) whereby their individual status in society is in great debate. The problematic roles of Naga women limit their lives within the closed boundaries of

their community and make them the victims of double marginalization when compared to other societies across the nation. Buongpui states, “Customary and traditional practices are strictly observed and preserved at all costs and, as such, since these practices are patriarchal in their motivations, they affect the welfare and undermine the status of women in tribal societies” (qtd. in Luikham 43). Meanwhile, in another article, he comments, “A Naga woman is considered to be good if she is obedient, humble, and submissive. She is expected to 'perform the role of wife, mother, child bearer, food producer and household manager'” (167). Naga women are forced to be the cultural custodians of the community in the name of tradition. This scenario illustrates the status of Naga women in patriarchal society and systematically projects their struggle to attain personal as well as social identity in modern society.

## Conclusion

Democratic India is rooted in diversity. The marginalised histories of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and religious minorities construct the political structure of India. The concept of social justice mentioned in constitutional laws aims at assuring equality to every citizens of the nation. However, due to traditional practices and social status people find hard to accept the nature of equality which eventually leads to the subjugation of minority communities. The textual interpretation of Avinuo Kire's *The Power to Forgive and Other Stories* manifests the social problems of the Naga community. This paper examines the social evils including racial discrimination and class inequality which demarcate the social connection between the people from tribal communities and the mainstream society. Compared to the experiences of people from mainstream society, the tribal communities are ill-treated and discriminated by geographical demarcations, physical appearances and distinct cultural practices. Further, it has concentrated on gender disparities of Naga women within their clan. Niumai states, “gender is a multifaceted reality that is culturally constructed and socially determined by society” (347). Women's writings from this region project the invisible stories of female experiences happened during various social and familial situations. Jasmine Patton, in *The Curious Reader* suggests that more writings should come up from these under represented regions “so that people understand them for what they are not for how they have been mis/branded” (para. 4). *The Power to Forgive and Other Stories* by Avinuo Kire portrays the collective sufferings of Naga community through the personal experiences of the characters. In accord with Kire's literary rendition, the stories from Northeast showcase the tribal people's cultural history, beliefs, practices and also the contemporary social issues experienced by them. Thereby, the authors create space for the tribal communities in the nation's history to register their cultural significance in protecting India's diversity. In an interview with TNT Bureau, Kire reveals that she finds writing as the best medium to express her emotions and feelings about her province, which is least discussed in the mainstream literature. Kire states that “I am a firm believer in the greatness of ordinary people. As modest as my stories are, they have been inspired by these remarkable lives. I like to believe that I can appreciate splendor in the mundane” (para. 2). Her narrative presents racial, class and gender issues with genuine concern. These narratives also function as interpretations of socio cultural milieu which bring to light the causes for the emergence of racial, ethnic and cultural issues.

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## **Transgressive Sexual Identity of Indian MSM Community in the Selected Works of R. Raj Rao**

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### *Abstract*

*Along with heterosexuality, homosexuality is one of the major types of sexual orientation. Acronym MSM refers to men who participate in sexual activity with other men, regardless of how they identify themselves. The MSM category includes a range of gender and sexual identities and behavior among people in different socio-cultural contexts. It is a behavioral attitude of the men who have an emotional or sexual relationship with other men. For them, the active/passive dichotomy is very important during same-sex activity, and MSMs are even married to women and have kids. R. Raj Rao, a queer writer, theorist, and one of India's prominent gay-rights activists, gives insight into the MSM community in his works. This paper aims to offer information regarding this particular community's sexual identity and behavior by analyzing Rao's Criminal Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics in India (2017), Whistling in the Dark: Twenty One Queer Interviews (2009) and The Boyfriend (2003). These works are used as a point of reference to highlight how the MSM community exists and identifies itself in India.*

*Keywords: MSM, homosexuality, active-passive dichotomy, sexual identity, sodomite*

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### **Introduction**

The pioneers of queer theory are Michel Foucault (1976), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), and Judith Butler (1990). Foucault's revolutionary connection of knowledge and sexuality to power and Butler's denial of stable gender identities and sexual orientation regarding everyday performance remains a foundational concept. According to Sedgwick, standard binary oppositions constrain freedom and understanding, particularly in the context of sexuality. She believes it is extremely simplistic to limit sexuality to heterosexuality or homosexuality in a structured binary opposition. Queer theory is primarily concerned with the conflict between gender and sexuality categorization. Queer theorists argue that identities are not fixed because they are made up of several different components and that categorizing anyone based on only one attribute is incorrect. MSMs identify themselves as heterosexual men and are often grouped into separate categories. It is a behavioral distribution of men who report having sex with other men regardless of their own identified sexual orientation. It is an abstracted category that is driven by operational definition rather than by self-identification. This research paper will examine Rao's ideas about the MSM community, their behavior and

preferences, and how these transgressive sexual identities identify themselves in India. He defines MSM in an Introduction to the book *Whistling In The Dark: Twenty-One Queer Interviews* (2009) as:

MSMs are those for whom sexual activity with persons of their gender neither constitutes an identity nor a preference. At best, they see it as a tendency, something they have got addicted to like tobacco or alcohol, and find it hard to relinquish. Obviously, there is an implicit sense of denial in their stance, in their perception of themselves that needs to be dealt with through counseling. (xx)

Epidemiologists coined the term MSM in the 1990s to describe the transmission of HIV disease among men who have sex with other men, regardless of their sexual identity. This term is frequently used in the public health discourse to represent such men as a group for research investigations without considering their self-identification. However, the term 'MSM' has evolved as an identity later. There is a difference between sexual identity, orientation, and behaviour. MSM diminishes the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy by concentrating on sexual practices rather than sexual identity, and it remains entrenched in binary understandings of sex and gender. They try to establish heterosexuality as a normal practice. MSMs are transgressive because they distort social components of sexuality, contradict lesbian, gay, and bisexual people's self-labeling, and failed to reflect changes in sexual behavior properly. It is essential to understand that a man whom another man penetrates is severely stigmatized, both by the penetrator and society as a whole. Individuals who are perceived to be the victims of penetration are frequently treated with disrespect. The receptive person is perceived as a 'not-man,' transcending gender boundaries and breaking social taboos, despite being biologically male. As a result of this mindset, a large segment of the MSM community is socially marginalized and subjected to abusive treatment.

### **Active-Passive Dichotomy for MSM Community**

Judith Butler emphasizes the social construction of gender. In her famous formulation, “gender is performance” (Butler 1990), Butler calls gender a performative gesture. Rao in his nonfictional work *Criminal Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics of India* (2017) extend Butler's formulation of gender and apply it to sexuality. He proposed:

If gender is a performative gesture, can the idea be extended to sexuality? Can we say that sexuality, and especially, heterosexuality is also a performative gesture based on performance? . . . I call sexuality a social construct because it is society that expects a male (a state of being) to grow into a man (a state of becoming). Furthermore, such obligations are more incumbent upon the self-identified heterosexual man, rather than on the self-identified homosexual man, who, potentially at least, is freed of the obligation to perform by virtue of his non-normative sexual orientation. (3)

Unlike other queer identities, the active/passive dichotomy is essential to MSMs during same-sex activity. They always project themselves as a penetrator. Rao compares them to Foucault's Sodomite. To Foucault, “it is immoral for a free man to be fucked” (Lotringer 1996). Rao calls MSMs a counterpart of the Sodomite of ancient Greece because they too consider it immoral to be in a passive role. They regard their passive partner as neither moral nor free and connect active role with their masculinity. In *Whistling In The Dark: Twenty-One Queer Interviews* (2009), a respondent Satish Ranadive, who is married and has kids, thinks that passivity in the same-sex act can damage the male psyche. He says:

I believe in strict gender roles. Nature made man be the penetrator that's how it should be without this, how can be life cycle continue? I may be homosexually inclined, but I'm still a man. I'll never agree that I'm a *Koti* even if you convince me that my body language is that of a *Koti*. (67)

Similarly, another respondent Avinash Gaitonde affirms that passive sexual role is against his masculinity. "I must be the one who screws. I would never let another man screw me. It would violate my manliness if that ever happens" (158).

In the novel *Boyfriend* (2003), the protagonist Yudi always offers the active role to his same-sex partners. He knows that these men are like the sodomites. They exert their patriarchal privilege as free and moral men by not allowing their masculinity to be challenged despite their sexual attraction for their own gender. Rao states that:

However, regardless of what their fantasies and fetishes might in truth be, the blow suffered by their masculinized notion of self at being penetrated, or even touched in the 'female' zones, (like nipples and anus) can provoke MSMs into homophobic violence. The violence could take manifold forms such as guy bashing, blackmail, extortion, and so on. (*Criminal Love?* 23)

So in the novel *Boyfriend*, a freelancing journalist Yudi identifies himself as gay, gladly takes a passive role in bed whenever he has sexual encounters with strangers:

Whenever Yudi picked up strangers and took them home, he gladly offered them the active role in bed. He had a theory based on years of experience. As long as men were allowed to penetrate, there was no fear of their returning afterwards to demand money or beat you up. Some even thought it beneath their dignity to accept cash from someone they had bugged. For such a person, according to them, was at best a hijra. And their heroism and sense of valor did not permit them to assault a eunuch. It was only when these men were penetrated that they became wounded tigers. They felt emasculated. They could then even murder. Currency notes, wristwatches, walkmans, sneakers, were not compensation enough; these couldn't restore their lost masculinity. (11)

On the other hand, Milind constantly takes an active role. He feels confident that his manhood is not threatened when it is he who penetrates actively. He represents himself as an underground queer.

MSMs do not undergo a gender identity crisis, and during penetrative sexual acts, they are unable to distinguish between men and women. As long as they are penetrators, it does not matter whether their sexual partner is a man or a woman. Avinash Gaitonde replies to the editor about his sexual behavior:

I was in an all-boys school run by the city corporation. I started screwing some of my juniors. Afterwards, I screwed girls also, but did not give up on boys. It's the act of screwing that I really enjoy. It does not matter if it's a boy or girl. (*Whistling in the Dark* 158)

Rao thinks that the reason for being MSM in India is heterosexism, which insists on segregating the sexes until marriage. There is a culture of arranged marriages throughout the Indian mainstream. Boys and girls are not allowed to have any sexual connection before marriage. There are separate seats and queues for men and women in trains, buses, cinema halls, religious places, etc. He asks, "In such a scenario, how does an Indian male gratify his sexual desire?" (*Criminal Love?* 21). He concludes:

The fallout of all this is that homosexuality flourishes, albeit by default. It does not take institutions like the military or jails, where men are denied the company of

women for extended periods, for them to turn to one another. All of India is like the army, or a prison, where men and women are sexually quarantined. Female sex workers, of course, who inhabit the red light district of most towns and cities, may provide an option, but many men prefer causal sex with other men to visits to female sex workers, because the former is free of cost and the chances of contracting VD or HIV are, in their view, less. This, in fact, is how an MSM community comes into being. (*Whistling in the Dark* xx)

A respondent named Aslam Shaikh, in the book *Whistling in the Dark: Twenty-One Queer Interviews* (2009), also confirms that due to the unavailability of women, men turn to other men:

If women are not easily available, any man turns to other men. It's common, and there's nothing unusual about it. But we don't talk about it the way we talk about our encounters with women, or even boast about them. If we did, the person opposite will think we're mad and should get our heads checked. (124)

According to Rao, heterosexism or compulsory heterosexuality belief of India serves the interest of MSMs. Two men can hide their sexual identity on the name of *yaari* (friendship):

Two men can make out in a house in which the extended family, including parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins is present, and they would be suspected of nothing. The family would think of the men as yaars and of the relationship as nonsexual (if at all sex comes to their mind), because sex after all! cannot happen between two people of the same gender. Thus, MSM sexual activity is far less complicated than heterosexual sex for the natural alibi it provides. (*Criminal Love?* 21)

This heterosexist culture somehow unintentionally supports the existence of MSMs. Rao talks about different homosocial spaces which cherish these non-heteronormative activities safely:

These homosocial spaces include the nukkad or street corner, the public urinal, the beer and country liquor bar, the paan-beedi (betel nut and cigarette) and gutkha (tobacco) stall, the haircutting saloon, the auto-rickshaw stand, the chai tapri, the second-class local train compartment, and so on, where mischief rules, where the watchword is masti and the idiom macho. (*Whistling in the Dark* xx)

Foucault sees the homosexuality of the ancient Greeks and Romans as sodomy, not homosexuality. Because a homosexual man can be both the penetrator and the penetrated in bed, but a sodomite is merely a penetrator. The man who gets penetrated is regarded as a slave. He is usually a beardless boy and is consigned to play the passive role in bed. A male who performs a passive role in sex with a man is often identified as a Kothi in India. While Kothis are usually differentiated from Hijras as separate sexual identities. Hijras often dress and act like women and use feminine language to refer to themselves. The preferred partners of Kothi's are strong, masculine men who identify as a normal male who penetrates. The male partners are typically married, and any relationship or sex with Kothis is usually kept secret from the community. Kothis are both penetrated and penetrate and are usually married to women. According to Foucault, "To be fucked is a necessity for a slave, a shame for a free man, and a favor returned for an emancipated slave" (Lotringer 1996). So, for Rao, it the slave or Kothi, rather than the Sodomite, who deconstruct the idea of sexuality as a performance. It is the slave who is responsible for destabilizing the normativity. "Ironically it is the slave rather than the free man who is given the onerous task of toppling a conservative social order

and destabilizing normativity. The free man, then, emerges as not substantially different from the patriarchal heterosexual man” (*Criminal Love?* 41). Shitole identifies himself as gay. Despite being married to a woman, he does not relate active/passive sexual roles to his masculinity. His masculinity is not threatened by what he calls top/bottom dichotomy:

Masculinity is prevalent everywhere. The acid test of whether a man is gay homosexual or not is his insistence on being a 'top only guy. That's what most men insist on, and it leads me to the conclusion that very few people are genuinely gay/homosexual. To these men, being “bottom' guys challenges their masculinity, leaving them with a sense that they are not manly enough. And this they simply can't accept about themselves. To a real gay or homosexual person, this top/bottom dichotomy shouldn't be so important . . . Why should being active or passive assume an either/or framework in their scheme of things? What's the harm in being versatile and playing both roles in accordance with one's bodily responses? But what interferes here is the male ego and male identity. It ensures that things remain at the level of sexual activity and do not blossom into full-scale relationships. So apart from society and its hostility (that I spoke of earlier), it's masculinity that also comes in the way of gay love in India. (*Whistling in the Dark* 80)

So it is the men like Sitole responsible for the destabilizing of heteronormativity and reconstructing the idea of normal. So, “MSMs neither invert the hetero/homo binary as required by gay theory nor go beyond it as queer theory advocates” (27).

MSMs are generally married to women but seek unmarried man to have sex and treat them as wives, like Satish Ranadive and Aslam Shaikh:

The same-sex partners they seek it who frequently are unmarried men, kotis perhaps, are not also seen as husbands but as 'wives'. The heteronormative paradigm is thus replicated here, with all its attendant ills of gender discrimination. Potentially, the effeminate male partner, then, could be the one who does not go to work to earn a living, but stays home to do the cooking and washing. In some cases, the effeminate male could also become a victim of gay bashing by his MSM partner, which may be seen as the equivalent of wife-beating in a heterosexual alliance. (*Criminal Love?* 27)

## **Heterosexual Marriage of MSMs**

In India, queer identity has always faced the dilemma of whether to be or not to be. As Dasgupta states,

Identities are complex to begin with and become more complicated when relating them to the nation and sexuality. Contemporary Indian sexual identities are constructed out of the multiplicitious effects and perceptions of tradition, modernity, colonisation and globalisation that are more often than not in conflict with each other. (651)

However, it is a widely known fact that gender fluidity and homosexuality have always been there in Indian. Be it mythology, or Kamasutra, or several folkloric tales originating from different regions, India has a long association with queerness.

In India, many MSMs are either married to women and have kids or expect to marry. They use marriage as a veil to carry out their same-sex activities without arousing any kind of suspicion in the Indian homosocial landscape. Some of them are making marriage a conscious decision because they want to live heterosexual life like Ganesh Holay, who is a homosexual

and wants to marry a woman:

I have never ever thought of or wished to get married to a man. It's ridiculous. I may have thought of having a steady male companion. But I have thought of marriage in the normal sense, which is to say, to a woman. This is for the sake of the family, but also because, like anyone else, I have the desire to settle down. I can't imagine settling down with another man. It doesn't happen in India . . . I do wish to have my own kids as well. Can I have kids by another man? (*Whistling in the Dark* 177-178)

However, some homosexuals are being compelled or pressurized to get married by their families. As Sushi Patil puts forward that he has no option other than getting married “in middle-class families, our parents decide about our lives. I had no choice” (23).

Some homosexually inclined men are seen having sex with their wives as a duty and are mainly concerned about their ability to satisfy their wives sexually. They do not want the wife to suspect them, so they try to behave as heterosexual as possible like Shitole:

I have given my wife no clue about my gayness. Within the family I try to behave as normally as I can. Very few times in the last two years or so, have I spent a whole night with a friend (read lover). If I make this a regular practice, my wife might start to doubt me. I usually make out with a male friend only when she's away with our daughter at her parents' place. To deflect suspicion, I have sex with my wife whenever she demands it. There are really very few times when I want to have sex with her. I do it just to please her and keep her happy. Sometimes I try to avoid it by giving excuses. I tell her I'm tired, or that it is very late, or that the neighbours might suddenly drop in! But I cannot do this too frequently. Otherwise, she might begin to doubt me. (*Whistling in the Dark* 77)

Shitole does not have adequate sexual encounters with his wife because he does not feel sexually attracted to his wife. He takes it as just a duty to fulfill:

Whenever I have to sleep with her, I need time to prepare myself mentally. I never get emotionally involved in the act. It tends to be mechanical from my side. Very rarely, very rarely indeed do I initiate sex with her. It's always she who does so. Moreover, my wife is the only woman I am willing to satisfy sexually. (78)

MSM like Aslam Shaikh and Avinash Gaitonde are having highly patriarchal and heterosexist thoughts. Shaikh, views his same-sex activity as a male privilege and thinks that male prostitution does not exist because men are not commodities like women. “Women are commodities, not men. I don't know what do you mean by male prostitution” (*Whistling in the Dark* 124). When the editor asks him whether his wife has a clue about his same-sex activity outside the marriage, his answer is:

Are you out of your mind? Do men go and say such things to their wives. How should she suspect? What I do outside is my business, not hers. I'm a man, not a woman. It is my male privilege to do as I please. Moreover, she will never be able to find out anything about me, especially as my conduct with her at home is above board. (129)

And for Avinash Gaitonde, it hardly matters with whom he is having sex. “Girls have to accept the husbands that fate gives them. Moreover, I didn't say I don't like having sex with girls. For me, a hole is a hole is a hole, whether it belongs to a boy or a girl” (160). Gaitonde represents himself as a typical MSM.

## Conclusion

The sexual identity that a person presents in a social environment is known as his

public sexual identity. And a person depending on his social environment, decides either to maintain a homosexual private identity and a heterosexual public identity or combine both private and public sexual identities into a single identity. MSM is an abstracted category that is driven by operational definition rather than by self-identification. Rao concludes that MSMs do not invert the hetero/homo dichotomy, as required by the gay theory, nor do they move beyond as queer theory proposes. In contrast to race, class, caste, and gender, sexuality is not an axis on which MSMs can plot their identity. In fact, MSMs dismiss the notion that sexuality may be anything other than the fulfillment of desire (*Criminal Love?* 27). MSM is less a sexual identity than a behavioral category because MSMs reject their same sexual identity and present themselves as heterosexuals like Aslam Shaikh, Avinash Gaitonde, and Satish Ranadive. They structure a masculine-feminine role during same-sex activity. In this structure, the male-male sexual relationship is patterned in such a way that one male is considered to have a female role, and the other male has the male role. MSMs always take an active male role, and they connect it to their masculinity. So they always try to present themselves as heterosexual men.

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**From Outcast to Paradigmatic Being: The Lives of Transgenders in Julia Serano's  
*Whipping Girl***

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*Abstract*

*Transgender are those whose biological change makes them behave differently from stereotype of male and female. i.e., their gender expression is different from the sex assigned at birth. Julia Serano is an American writer, activist and biologist whose writing particularly focuses on LGBTQ issues. As a Trans woman she combines feminism and other gender issues along with her personal experience to support her views. Trans women are treated like a backward community who are being rejected and socially excluded. This paper is about the lives and struggles of transgender in Julia Serano's work Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity. People who identify as transgender encounter numerous obstacles in society, including lack of awareness, understanding, and acceptance of their gender identity. Through this work, the intention of the author is not to seek any sympathy, but to make the society aware of the fact that the transgender are also humans who have their own feelings, opinions, thoughts and emotions.*

*Keywords: Transgender, feminism, third gender, rejection, discrimination, excluded*

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The terms 'Sex' and 'Gender' are puzzling expressions which give out more narrow definition. The word 'Sex' refers to categorizing a person whether that person is male or female by looking at his or her physical appearance. But the word 'Gender' refers to “the state of being male or female in relation to the social and cultural roles that are considered appropriate for men and women” (Collins dictionary). People who understand and acknowledge themselves differently from their biological sex are transgender. The physiological male who adopts the feminine gender identity and other feminine gender roles is known as trans woman.

When a person defies mainstream society, that person is considered to be not-straight, and is included in queer. He is delegitimized by the mainstream society because he is perceived to be different from the majority. Queer is an umbrella term to be valid to the individuals who are often associated with the categories of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and

Transgender [LGBT]. Because queer is interested in the linkages between the politics of cultural representation and institutional-state interpretations of sexual orientation, queer theory is more useful in the field of cultural studies. It's concerned with the power dynamics, societal evaluations, and institutional prejudices that underpin heterosexual and homosexual depictions and what draws them together on one platform of queer is their shared dedication to centre the underprivileged, emancipation for the underprivileged, oppressed, and social justice. The term 'queer' encompasses not only gay/lesbian concerns, but also other behaviours, personalities, and communities that have been historically excluded, such as bisexuality, sado-masochism, transgendered people, and transsexual people.

Julia Serano is an American writer, LGBTQ activist, biologist who brings out her personal experience as a bisexual trans woman. She was born as male, but at the age of eleven she started feeling the feminine qualities inside her. She transitioned in 2001 with the help of hormone tablets and other medical treatments. As a Trans woman, she combines feminism and other gender issues along with her personal experience to support her views on transgenders. Transphobia acts as one of the major reasons for the discrimination towards the transgender and according to Serano, the term transphobia means

...an irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against people whose gendered identities, appearances, or behaviours deviate from societal norms....transphobia is first and foremost an expression of one's own insecurity about having to live up to cultural gender ideals. The fact that transphobia is so rampant in our society reflects the reality that we place an extraordinary amount of pressure on individuals to conform to all the expectations, restrictions, assumptions, and privileges associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. (Serano 12)

Serano mentions that there are two types of sexism named 'Oppositional Sexism' and 'Traditional Sexism' that exists in society and bring aversion towards the transgender. Oppositional sexism means challenging or excluding those who threaten the gender binary of male and female category. The 'Traditional Sexism' means the principle of male being the supremacy and females as inferior. The one thing that is general in both these sexism is placing the male as the dominant gender and female as the low-grade one.

Transgenders often suppress their subconscious sex as the cultural and societal ideas and beliefs play an important role in determining and considering one's own sex. Transsexual lives are full of obstacles and they are being isolated and marginalized in this inhospitable world. Serano states "sexualisation of trans women's motives for transitioning not only belittles trans women's female identities, but encourages the objectification of women as a whole" (Serano 44). Trans women are frequently considered as fake because they wear female clothing, makeup and other things. The word 'Trans-misogyny' expresses the sexual assaults and other discrimination towards those who are not just transgender, but towards the trans woman. According to the societal and gender binaries point to view, trans women are not considered as women, but only as a transgender who were born as male but later who adopts and decide to live as women only through the transition from male to female. In trans-misogyny, trans women are mocked and dismissed not just for deteriorating to live up to the gender principles, but also for their expressions of femininity and their love for being a female, thus they are being pushed to be considered as the victims of discrimination.

The most popular image of trans women is often derogatory as they are described as "the one with masculine physique with feminine clothes, garish make-up, a coquettish walk, loud attitude . . . They use overtly sexual and vulgar language when people deny giving them money as begging is their dominant source of income" (Tanupriya 30). The society never

makes an attempt to understand the distinct gender identity of transgenders and the suffering they undergo in their daily lives goes unnoticed. Society is taught that if a child is born with phallus he should be considered a boy, who should wear men's clothes, behave and adopt the characteristics of a man. "When a child is born the medical discourse identifies/declares/enunciates it as 'male' or 'female'. This names the child, but also identifies the role s/he will have to play. It constructs the child in the very act of saying 'it's a girl' or 'it's a boy'" (Nayar 191). When some of the men come forward to assert their inner sexual identity as a woman and not as a man, the stigma and discrimination begin. Cultural beliefs, notion and their outlook play a central leading role in designing how one's sex is determined.

The society does not know the facts and hardships about being a transgender. People do not have proper knowledge about them which leads to the unacceptance of their cultural diversity. This is the main reason behind the marginalization and harassment towards the transgender in a well-developed society. There is a huge bridge between the public knowledge about the community and their realities. This gap is very dangerous as it adds to the prejudices of the society, which later can be a great threat to the peaceful existence of the transgenders along with the mainstream culture. Public ignorance in a country continues to oppress, mock and harass them, where it is difficult for the trans people to survive. It is necessary to vary society's cognitive content and lack of understanding about the transgender individuals.

Gender differences and the issues of sexuality have created deeper divisions in the society which staunchly believes in a binary gender system and therefore the existence of the third gender community proves that the division between sexes is not binary. The gap between male and female sexes is filled with a third space which consists of people who are neither male nor female. While the ancient texts and mythologies have celebrated the coexistence of the masculine and the feminine in every human, the man-woman binary still persists in the society which censors the space of the third gender community. The dyadic male-female codes and norms make them outsiders, an oddities and perhaps wretched creatures that have no rights to live in this society. The failure of the hetero mainstream to realize the distinct gender and sexual identities and agendas of third gender community has made their lives a dire strait. This makes them the victims of various prejudices and violence.

In order to maintain the control of domination, the rules or the concept of gender-binary was brought where the women are inferior to the male. The inequalities between the men and women are social, not inherent and pre-ordained. Because they don't appear repressive, structures like religion, family, education, and knowledge systems are successful at perpetuating male dominance. Socialization primarily focuses on the division between masculinity and femininity, not just to bring up the gender difference, but the main intention is to create the scenario that masculinity and femininity belong to opposite genders where the former is powerful and the latter is dependent on the powerful. Serano mentions that those who are regarded as transsexuals will definitely face the problem of two different things when it comes to gender equality. They are "the gender we consciously choose to identify as and the gender we subconsciously feel ourselves to be" (Serano 78). She uses the term "we" which refers to all the transsexuals including herself, who were born as male, but later neglecting the societal point of view, transitioned according to their subconscious sex, i.e., female.

Queer and feminist theories provide a basic thinking about the LGBT topics rather than defining the groups' identities. The central idea of these theories is profoundly rooted; it succeeds not only in promoting tolerance and equal rights, but also in questioning institutions and establishments. The irresolvable and constantly re-negotiable clash constantly happens between the so called the 'original', biologically-given bodily form and the re-made,

performed bodily style, unaccomplished identity in the case of transgender people.

In today's society, identity functions to provide coherence to the subject for the purpose of self-presentation to others. In consumerist culture, identity serves the purpose of controlling, commodifying, and marketing the subject . . . In being, as they must, adopted and acquired through imitation, all identities will fail to satisfy and will be constantly loss, hallmarked by others fragility, and segregate the individual into discrete categories. (Kuzniar 62)

The importance of the corporeal experience and embodied selves in determining the construction of identities, perception of the world, and understanding of reality are emphasised by trans embodiment. The transgenders identity's emphasis on the body suggests a thought provoking instability of the psyche-physical division, which is far different from the traditional biologism. Right from the beginning of their childhood, the transgender people struggle with the complex psyche of being in between two genders. This distressing feeling of in-betweenness is termed as gender dysphoria. From childhood, a transgender person may have persistent feelings of gender dysphoria which is defined as a “feeling of incongruence between the experienced (psychological) gender and the sex assigned at birth” (Kaltiala-Heino).

The identity of the self is lost when they have been caught in the influence of various cultures and ideologies of the society. Placing transgender in a liminal space between transsexual and queer admits far more ambience around the notion of home and belonging. Serano mentions, while the cis women are subjected to prejudice because of their gender representations, the trans women are subjected to transphobia because of the misrepresentation of their genital status. The dyadic male-female codes and norms make them an outsider, an oddity and perhaps wretched creatures that have no rights to live in this society. The failure of the hetero mainstream to realize the distinct gender and sexual identities and agendas of third gender community has made their lives a dire strait, and it also makes them the victims of various prejudices and violence.

Among the most oppressed minorities, the community of third gender is far more prone to be marginalised and oppressed than the heterogeneous mainstream. It is said in an article “Lost in Trans-Lation Interpreting Systems of Trauma for Transgender Clients” that “more than half of transgender populations experience violence at one time in their life” (Richmond 47). According to research, gender and sexual minorities are more likely to witness emotional and sexual abuse as children, as well as physical and sexual violence as adults.

The social exclusion, discrimination, sexual abuse, harassment and various other forms of violence felt by the people of third gender land them in the most severe issue of psychological trauma. It is said that nearly forty percent of transgender people attempted suicide, comparing to 1.6% of the general population. This higher number can be attributed to a variety of factors. Mainly, for being a person whose body does not match their gender, they always feel disoriented and guilty of their own gender identity which leads them to drastic psychological trauma. Society always fails to realise this pain and trauma and treats them as an oddity. The anxiety and the confusion felt by the members of transgender community are same and the difficulties they face in their day to day life results in the cultural shock, which in turn results in the trauma such as fear and sense of loss of identity. Gradually they adapt to the circumstances by maintaining a balance between their emotional and psychological feelings.

This performance of gender is, of course, social in the sense it is enacted, validated and accepted by the society. But what is important is that the role is open to

negotiation and alteration, to conflict and contest. By arguing that gender is a performance, the theorists were able to suggest that gender is not a fixed category: Its meaning depends on the location, time, cultural frameworks within which it is performed. In other words, gender is a continuous performance whose meaning can never be fixed for all time or as universal. (Nayar 91)

Trans women face a biological change which makes people behave differently from stereotypes of males and females. Because of this biological change, they face discrimination, different treatment and undue attention in their each and every phase of life. In order to mention trans people, Serano uses the phrases male-to-female as MTF and female-to-male as FTM. Being a trans woman, she quotes “I am often confronted by people who insist that I am not, nor ever can I be, a real woman. One of the more common lines of reasoning goes something like this: There's more to being a woman than simply putting on a dress” (Serano 35).

The non-normative heterogeneity of the transgender self is an undeniably important personality trait. As a non-gendered third-person singular denotation, the sex-changed narrator chooses the personal pronoun 'Sh-he' or even 'them.' S/he considers oneself legally as a woman but is occasionally socially misinterpreted as a biological male, identifying herself as 'a female who was raised as a male'. The psychological trauma and the resultant nervous disorder have become the part of a transgender's life. They carry a lot of pain but most of them still move on with courage, strong enough to face reality. Vidya, an Indian transgender writer says, “we wanted to live like other women . . . nature decreed a neutral existence. It was a sad burden we had to bear” (Vidya 91). The people with non-traditional gender identities find it difficult to express themselves and are marginalised. DelliSwararao has quoted in an article “Hijra's and their social life in South Asia”:

Seldom, our society realises or cares to realise the trauma, agony and pain which the members of transgender community undergo, nor appreciates the innate feelings of the members of the transgender community, especially of those whose mind and body disown their biological sex. Our society often ridicules and abuses the transgender community and in public places like railway stations, bus stands, schools, workplaces, malls, theatres, hospitals, they are sidelined and treated as untouchables, forgetting the fact that the moral failure lies in the society's unwillingness to contain or embrace different gender identities and expressions, a mindset which we have to change. (DelliSwararao 519)

The conventional idea of gender binary considers the man-woman dichotomy as fixed and absolute. This binary system marks the distinction between men and women, and assigns their roles in the society. It rules almost all the ways of the society by moulding the perceptions and attitudes of the people and it also codifies everything from language to the dress of the people. Those who deviate from the code set by this binary are treated as an oddity and as an unsocial being. They are compelled to live their life as outsiders. The belief that there are only two gender identities existing in the society leads to the neglect of many other non-normative identities which needs attention. The explanation for these disparities is that femininity and femaleness are not valued or appreciated to the same level as masculinity and maleness in our culture.

The lives of transgenders are bound by a number of unwritten rules and regulations, which should be broken and hence the basic needs of an individual are satisfied in that society. As a part of a complex society, it is the duty of every human being to accept and embrace diversities of each culture. Through the writings of the transgender people, the trauma faced

by the transgenders can be understood and thus it will help in recognizing the sufferings they face because by the mainstream society's rules and norms.

Since people are not even aware of the transgender existence, most of them will be thinking ill of transgenders and the only way to eradicate and to bring equality to them is totally the responsibility of the entire society. Through the activities of various groups and organizations their rights are being slowly considered by the government one by one. But the procedures behind it seem painful for them as the common people are unaware of their pain and realities. Every transgender has talent, but in order to find the talent, there is the need of a deep understanding and empathy along with right opportunity and context.

Because males are the preferred gender in our patriarchal society, most men take gender for granted and do not endeavour to understand what it means to be a woman. Women seem to be taught and considered as the 'second sex,' the distaff gender, and their lives are a daily struggle with gender issues. The system of the gender binary is the trap for women where the bi-polar gender system puts men in power as more privileged. Every trans woman ought to be respected as a woman. Most of the trans writings emphasize the transgender community, which is coming out of its own cultural context and the members do not want to be labelled as gay or even as third gender. Becoming a woman is the way they seek normality and hence they wish to be identified as woman and not as a third gender. They seek respect and acceptance from society. Society should let them be what they are and try not to harass or humiliate them, as they require support from the mainstream in order to strengthen their social position.

MTF transitioning would become a self-empowering act and it may potentially empower femaleness itself, if trans women were seen and treated as women, rather than seeing them as changing their sex mostly because they desired to be female. This sexual objectification of trans women's intentions not only minimizes their own female identities, but also emphasizes that women as a group have no worth beyond their potential to be sexualized by men. Trans women's life writings speak for the whole world, urging people to work together to create a society where everyone can live in harmony and openly express themselves, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Trans women rise up from ashes each day and try to stick on to their gender identity in spite of the aversion from society. Revathi, an Indian trans woman writer in her book *The Truth about Me* says:

I did know that I behaved like a girl, it felt natural for me to do so. I did not know how to be like a boy. It was like eating for me- just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat, I felt I could not stop being a girl, because others told me I ought not to be so. (Revathi 7)

Serano stresses the point that for the emotional well being of the each and every transgender people, their individual identity must be affirmed. They should be given space for identity awareness and performance with the support from the hetero mainstream. Therefore she brings out the genuine portrayal of the plights and pains of the entire community of not just trans women, but also transgenders. Thus Serano became the spokesperson of the entire community by addressing the various issues they face in their day to day life. Through her works she raises the key issues such as the status of transgenders, their identity and struggle for survival. Serano stresses the point that feminism must be included in trans activism not just to bring equality, but also to challenge the old norms and ideas that female is lower than male. They are not the mere record of the memories and the experiences of these people but it is the record of the common plight of several marginalised transgender people.

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**“De-Stereotyping Body and Desires”: A Study A. Revathi's  
*The Truth about Me***

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*Abstract*

*Ever since the narratives of human existence have been recorded, every creature is supposed to have belonged to a particular gender. This heteronormative gender colonization has resulted in the suppression of the voices of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and other such populace. A. Revathi, while disclosing the maze of the lives of one such category i.e. transgender in her autobiography, *The Truth about Me*, has valiantly tried to establish her identity in heteronormative society which has its own specific dimensions. Defying the norms and expressing her utter disgust towards masculine body and her desire for female genitals, A. Revathi is the first transgender in India to write an autobiography. This study through multiple layered discussions of Revathi's autobiography in the light of queer theory encapsulates her journey towards “de-stereotyping body and desires” (Rao 12) and configures the effect of the constructed male and female categories on transgender people.*

*Keywords: Heteronormative society, transgender, queer, body, desires, gender*

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To perpetuate its hegemonic gender discourse of male/female, heteronormative society employs every tact. The purpose of this paper is to study the effect of this constructed binary opposition i.e. male/female and the performative nature of monolithic gender categories on transgender through an understanding of A. Revathi's *The Truth about Me*, originally written in Tamil and translated in English by V. Geetha. Born with a male body, having feminine sensibilities, Revathi challenged the culturally legitimate definition of gender itself. Almost untouched by the critics, the autobiography punctures the teleological narratives which have compartmentalized the people into specific gender identities. The study will also unravel the bizarre economical, social, ethical, moral, and cultural practices which have pushed the transgender people to the fringes of the main stream society. They are ridiculed, hooted, rejected and jeered and were not even having equal rights before April 15, 2014 in India. Commonly known as *hijras* which refers to “a transgendered person, a physiological male who adopts a feminine gender identity, women's clothing and other feminine gender roles” (Samanta 220), they are marginalized in socio-political context in India. A. Revathi while raising her voice against all such social practices and cultural politics of gender introduced the “third sex”.

Queer theory as propounded by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Adrienne Rich mainly appears to be a Western import. The Indian critics like Brinda Bose,

Pramod Nayar, Niladri Chatterjee and so on have interpreted it, yet there is a need to develop an indigenous queer theory. R. Raj Rao, an Indian gay-rights activist and critic represented this queerness through the phrase “de-stereotyping body and desire” (Rao 12) which is quite similar to Oscar Wilde's anti-essentialism, to Derrida's idea of deconstructing the binaries, and to Foucault's destabilizing normativity. The transgender people live with an ambivalence between their biological body and psychological desires as is observed in the case of A. Revathi. The socially approved categories of gender assume and expect different language, dressing sense, behavior, attitude, culture and so on from both the gender which is just “a performative gesture” as formulated by Butler. This “compulsory heterosexualization of desire” as said by Adrienne Rich (Sedgwick 36) is responsible for the ghettoized lives of other gender categories.

The word “hijra” is derived from Semitic Arabic root 'hjr' meaning “leaving one's tribe”. Usually, a transgender is an effeminate man, inclined to attain the identity of a woman and thereby leaving his status quo given at birth. Baptized as Doraisamy by her parents, Revathi “was born last in a family of five brothers and three sisters” (Revathi 2). Now the question is how to refer to the child Doraisamy – he/she – in the binary system of language, constructed for and by the heteronormative society. There is no pronoun which can be used for the third gender which shows that these people have only epistemological existence without having any ontological existence. For this particular paper, the pronoun “he” has been used for the child Doraisamy and “she” for the grown up Revathi. Doraisamy grew up imagining himself to be a girl:

I think I must have been around ten, studying in class 5. I would go to the village school along with the girls from the neighbourhood and return with them. I played only girls' games. I loved to sweep the frontyard clean and draw the *kolam* every morning. (Revathi 3)

From his childhood he felt uneasiness while negotiating his body's incongruity with his inner desires. The family structure did not allow him to grow up with such body and desires and for his every flaw physical punishment used to be the answer. He was scolded, beaten, and warned time and again to mend his ways and to behave like a boy. Even the teacher in his school punished and reprimanded him for his feminine behavior:

I remember being canned for 'not being brave like a boy' . . . I didn't know that I behaved like a girl; it felt natural for me to do so . . . It was like eating for me – just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat. I felt I could not stop being a girl, because others told me not to be so. (Revathi 7)

This strange desire to be a woman within the male body always left him perplexed and he used to question himself “Would the world accept me thus?” because he longed to be with women but used to feel ashamed by that feeling. The desire to look like woman within him is to realize the true self.

As a child, once he got a chance to play the role of Chandramathi in the play Harishchandra, and in that role of a woman, he felt like enlivening himself, “to the world, it appeared that I was dressing up and playing a woman, but inside, I

felt I was a woman. (Revathi 12)

The dress is a significant marker of heteronormative gender code; 'cross-dressing' is regarded as primary step towards fulfilling one's desires. Revathi in her autobiography narrates multiple instances where she dressed like a girl. Doraisamy let his hair grow, used to "twist a long towel" around his head and "let it trail down" at his back "like a braid" (Revathi 4). The gender specific dressing pattern through its binary norms again creates a hegemonic discourse. The lives of "others" oscillate between two dressing patterns. The heteronormative society perpetuates "two contingent boxes of genders, male and female, considers those hanging outside the boxes as outcasts" (Boxi 298). On many occasions, he used to dress up like girls and when later on somebody pointed out that he looked like the actress Revathi, he immediately became conscious of his femininity. He imagined that his name was Revathi. He looked at himself in the mirror and felt a glow of pride. He felt like a woman. It was at that moment that he was convinced he was indeed a woman.

Even when he joined the *hijra* community, he found this dress code playing power politics there also, as only the sari-clad people were given respect. This shows that the transgender people also try to fit into the constructed homogeneous gender categories and are quite unaware of the idea of fluid or heterogeneous gender identity which the queer theorists propounded. Doraisamy's anxiety and desire to lead a life of woman made him leave his native place and join a group of people like him which soon made him realize the difficulties of being a transgender. The *Guru* christened Doraisamy as 'Revathi', accepted her as her daughter and as a woman. When Doraisamy as a woman came back home, he was harassed and beaten up mercilessly for bringing shame to the family. Doraisamy, now Revathi, prays to the shrine:

"Amma! Why I must suffer like this . . . I have known only pain . . . It was you who made me in form, but with female feelings. And now, for your crime, I am being punished in your own shrine. . . . Can't you understand another woman's feelings?" (Revathi 57)

Transgender, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual individuals have existed in every race, culture, class, nation, caste etc. In the so called "civil societies" in India, the transgender people are not only denied employment, accommodation, public toilets but also harassed, exploited and murdered. A biological disorder i.e. a bungling up of X and Y chromosomes in the human body make them a menace, a nuisance or even extra-terrestrials in the eyes of an average Indian. A. Revathi was even not allowed to take a husband or steady man. "Why did I love men? Was I the only one who felt this way? Or were there others like me . . . if indeed they were there?" (Revathi 14). Under her *Guru*, after leaving her family, she had only three options, either to beg, or bless or indulge in sex work:

. . . men and even women stared at us and laughed, and heckled us. I realized what a burden a *hijra's* daily life is. Do people harass those who are men and women when they go out with their families? Why a crippled person, a blind person - even they attract pity and people help them . . . but we - we are not considered human. (Revathi 83)

Each step she took for de-stereotyping her body and desires – from leaving her family to nirvana or castration – she felt constrained and controlled by the rules and demands of the society. She moved from city to city in her desire to live freely and to be a woman.

She fights against all odds, stands against all obstacles, voices against all unfair only to stay true to her feeling by breaking all social and cultural politics of the concept of gender and introducing the third sex. (Das 086)

Commonly known as *hijra*, *Chhakka*, *Bambaiya*, *khusra*, *kojja* and *Aravani*, these transgender people are ghettoized in India. Their hoarse and appalling voices at railway stations, bus stands and market places reveal their wretched life while creating an unknown terror simultaneously. They are forced and thwarted to live their lives by singing “badhai” songs on ceremonies. The “. . . biological dissimilarities push them towards an unkind zone of the society where in they are betrayed and forced to lead a treacherous life” (Gowda 23). Revathi was not given right on the ancestral property and when she showed her inclination towards a man, she was chided.

As a result the transgender opt for nirvana, a process through which they try to liberate themselves from entrapped gender identity, and eventually find themselves in another trap. They are ostracized and as a result remain illiterate so they lack even what Gramsci calls “conscious leadership” or “the restless impulse or instant to revolt”. In case of Revathi, this nirvana operation added to another misery. It was not like dressing up as a woman to fulfill one's desires, rather a life-threatening operation which was carried out in unhygienic conditions also: “I lay writhing in pain for nearly two hours and then felt a huge pressure on my chest . . . bile rushed up to my throat . . . at that time it seemed as if I would surely die” (75).

After the nirvana operation, when Revathi decided to be a sex worker, she was harassed and assaulted by the clients as well as the police. She was even stripped by a rowdy and saved herself by running to the nearest building. The ordeals and torments she experienced because of her body and desires are heart-rending. Her choice of taking up sex work which she initially took up in order to fulfill her sexual desires later on proved havoc for her as belonging to the category of sexual minority in itself resulted in torture. The brutality was inflicted in the form of the assaults, the rapes and the violence committed on her body not only by male clients but also by the policemen.

I fell at the policeman's feet. He kicked me with his boots. He then asked me to take my clothes off – right there, while the prisoner was watching. I pleaded with him and wept . . . when I was standing naked, he struck his *lathi* where I had had my operation . . . struck at that part with his *lathi* . . . there was not a soul there to take pity on me. (Revathi 206)

In the same autobiography while narrating her own trauma, Revathi expresses the concerns of the people like her. She mentions how one of her acquaintances used to hide his feminine feelings, used to keep moustache as a mark of masculinity but used to wear saris secretly. He being the only son in the family couldn't leave his

family. Revathi expresses his helpless condition in relentless words: “. . . hiding his feminine feelings, expressing them only on the hill fort.”

The physical, spiritual and the emotional traumas which Revathi felt because of the oppressive Gurus, her desire to have gender identity in a stereotypical society, her family conflict over the parental property, and many such issues made her to move towards *Sangama* where she raised her voice for the people like her.

Under the acronym LGBT, many organizations in modern India have now come up to unearth the lives and concerns of transgender people, their education, marriages, income, job opportunities and other related issues. However, they fail to challenge the rigid definition of gender. Judith Butler questions the stability of binary sex and suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders.

Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of 'men' will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that 'women' will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. (Butler 345)

Revathi is now one such activist who works with *Sangama*, a Bangalore based NGO for sexual minorities facing oppression. “Revathi defied *hijra* custom by taking a paying job at *Sangama*, where she learned about her rights, about what could be done to educate other people about those rights. *Sangama* gave Revathi the language to express her dissatisfaction and her desires, her need for her *hijra* sisters as well as her discomfort within their confining homes. . . ” (Gowda 26). By joining this wider world with new perception and changed attitude, she is doing every possible effort to reclaim the identity of the transgender people in the heteronormative society. Although her whole life is a conflict between her body and her desires, but she finds a true self and a new dimension by fighting for the general acceptance of her community.

The autobiography is a direct, honest, heartfelt and frank expression of her grave thoughts and feelings. The purpose is not to gain sympathy rather to make the heteronormative society aware of the fact that the transgender people are also human beings. While narrating the ruthless practice of the stereotypical society, her fierce and passionate espousal of the rights for dignity, acceptance and respect as a human being, is quite evident throughout the autobiography. In the *Preface* she writes:

In our society we speak the languages of rights loud and clear and often. But do the marginalised have access to their rights? Individuals are denied their rights in the name of sex, sexuality, caste and religion. They have to either arrive at compromise or engage in a struggle. I am one such individual who has been marginalized because I was born a male and wanted to live my life as a woman. *The Truth about Me* is about my everyday experience of discrimination, ridicule and pain; it is also about my endurance and my joys. As a *hijra* I get pushed to the fringes of society. Yet I dared to share my

innermost life with you—about being a *hijra*... my aim is to introduce to the readers the lives of *hijras*, their distinct culture, and their dreams and desires. (Revathi v)

The immeasurable sufferings and agonies of the transgender people because of being abandoned by the heteronormative society are still unknown as even the grand narratives set through literature and cinema only add to the jaundiced view of them by depicting them in the same roles which are assumed for them by the society, the notable exceptions are Pooja Bhatt's film *Tamanna* and Akshya Kumar's film *Laxmii*. There are references to Kinnars, Shikhandi, Brihannala and so on in ancient Indian scriptures but their purpose was to serve the larger community. They have never been found speaking for themselves. Eli Clare, a transgender poet, expresses:

Grappling with this lack of self-writing by or accurate information about these individuals . . . I want to hear the stories, but like the stories of other marginalized people, they were most often never told, but rather eaten up, thrown away, lost in the daily grind of survival. (78)

Transgender people are quite visible both in popular literature and daily life, still they face discrimination, stigma and systematic inequality not only in India but across the world.

Despite a recent U.S. Supreme Court Decision that makes it clear that trans people are legally protected from discrimination in the workplace, there is still no comprehensive federal non-discrimination law that includes gender identity—which means trans people may still lack recourse if they face discrimination when they're seeking housing or dining in a restaurant. ("Understanding")

Along with poverty, transgender people face enormous health disparities, including staggering rates of HIV infection, lack of primary care (including individualized, medically necessary transition-related healthcare), and high rates of attempted suicide. Black transgender women in many countries experience frightening levels of physical violence. This is particularly true among transgender people participating in sex work and other informal or criminalized economies. Brutal murders of transgender women occur with such alarming regularity, often with little response from law enforcement, that the American Medical Association declared violence against transgender people an epidemic in 2019.

Thus, everyday experiences of the transgender people are filled with shame, discrimination and harassment which make them vulnerable to violence, rape and sexual assault. A. Revathi's autobiography *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* has brought the question of transgender community in literary field and turned the attention of the readers towards their denigrated status. This autobiography, "a travelogue of travails" (Galani 75) is still waiting to be hailed by critics. Having a male body, expected to exhibit masculine traits and behavior, expressing the desire to be a woman and declaring the arrival of third sex, A. Revathi broke the stereotypical categorization of male and female. While establishing her identity through her self-narrative which is not only a grim tale of her experiences but also an expression

against the established traditions, norms and taboos of the society, she de-stereotyped her body and desires. She brings to light the agony, torture, trauma and pain of being forced to live in the fringes of the society.

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**A Critique on the Institution of Marriage with Reference to Mahesh Bhatt's  
*Arth* and Mahesh Manjrekar's *Astitva***

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*Abstract*

*This paper is an attempt to look at the construction of the institution of marriage and how it has been depicted in films. By examining Mahesh Bhatt's *Arth* (1982) and Mahesh Manjrekar's *Astitva* (2000) as cinematic texts, the paper seeks to explore the issue of cinema as a propaganda tool for patriarchal hegemony and looks at the availability of an alternative discourse within the cinematic medium. The vital role played by fantasy within Indian marriages is explored and the focus is on commercial Hindi films which fall within the genre of 'melodrama.' The paper also aims at exploring the viability of the alternative cinematic discourse providing positive insights into a steadily changing socio-cultural discourse within urban Indian middle-class society.*

*Keywords: Gender, Marriage, Feminism, Identity, Feminist Film Theory*

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“Films are one of the great storehouses of society's stereotypes about women.”

(Blewett 12)

Marriage and family, as a set of institution, encompass formal and informal, objective and subjective aspects. It is often stated that the main purpose of marriage is to establish a family, produce children, and further enhance the family's economic and social position and achieve the family's transcendental goals. Though the relationship between the two individuals is expected to be mutual and respectful, yet the existence of power dynamics can be seen in the relationship, which has been mediated by patriarchy and social norms. Over the years due to globalization, westernization, and modernization, the institution of marriage has undergone gradual changes and modifications.

Contemporary cinematic works have become an important set of identity-defining narratives for culture. In cultural products like cinema, the plots, the relationships between characters and the personalities of those characters are written within the framework of a few dominant ideologies. For example, men are mostly the subject of the narrative. Comparatively, women merely serve as the object or a submissive, passive, and docile

opposition of their male counterpart. This negative depiction of women has implications that have reached far beyond the entertainment industry. Films have played an important role in popular culture and society, “motion pictures largely reflect prevailing cultural attitudes about gender roles, norms, attitudes and expectations” (Simonton 781). Film is often considered to be a realist medium to educated masses and create awareness. Films reach a wider audience than literature as they move across the barriers of class, literacy, religion and even language. This is the medium of mass consumption, which has penetrated successfully, huge diversity of the different societies across the country. As stated by Nidhi Sendurnikar, “Cinema is a popular media of mass consumption which plays a key role in moulding opinions, constructing images and reinforcing dominant cultural values” (2012). Films have ability to showcase the realities of life truthfully and convincingly. It also serves as a mirror to the society by virtue of posing difficult questions, questioning the understanding of customs and values. As stated by Ian Kunsey in *A Study of Gender Inequality*, “Depictions of minority groups in film and the media can be influential in the dissemination of stereotypes” (28).

The understanding of gender relations has been a subject of discussion and debate. Gender relations emerge as an issue that not only affects human relations but also leaves a mark on society all over the world. “Power’ is seen as the central characteristic of the Gender relations” (Singh 79). The study of the portrayal of the gender relations in Indian popular cinema, showcases the perspective of power, seldom there is any radical representation. There exists a relation of dominated and dominant, through which it is quite easy to identify the role of man and woman. The society in India, like the rest of the world, is predominantly patriarchal where women are considered inferior to men in almost every sphere of life. As stated by Soma Chatterji, “women have mainly played decorative, degrading, humiliating, violating and stereotypical roles against men. Or, even in films where they had important roles, they are more, victims and martyrs or victimisers of other women.” When we talk about ancient Indian scriptures, women have been ascribed a higher position than men, whereas in reality the case is just the opposite. Even today women are prohibited from participating in many domestic as well as external matters especially which require decision making. Women find it difficult to have any free will, when it comes to marriage alliances and mostly; they have to submit to the demands of their family and parents when it comes to choosing a matrimonial match. Films clearly showcase, how women are under the influence of their husbands after marriage. A preferential treatment of boys in family right from their birth can be seen in cinema. The desire and preference for a male child is a common thing in an Indian family. Bell Hooks in her essay *Understanding Patriarchy*, moves away from the model of powerful and powerless. According to her, patriarchy represents men as powerful which is a pseudo representation of males.

This preferential and biased treatment is often reflected in popular media in general and Indian cinema is also not unaffected by this false representation of males. The Indian film industry is a male-dominated industry (Ganti 2004). Women who pursue a career within the Indian film industry are majorly working as actors or playback singers. In recent years, women have ventured into the fields of choreography, costume designing, editing and scriptwriting, but the number is much lower when compared to their male counterparts. Although a few of them have ventured into film direction, not all have been able to attain a commercial success like their male counterparts. In an industry where a very few women makers are behind the camera, it can be assumed that the onscreen portrayal of women by male film makers is bound to have gender bias and stereotypes.

In their study of Indian movies, Gokulsing & Dissnayake (2004) found that women

were majorly given two kinds of stereotypical roles in commercial films, one that of a mother (the Goddess) and second, that of a devoted and dutiful wife like *Sita*. Similarly, Richards (1995) observes, “The Hindi film upholds the traditional patriarchal views of society which, fearful of female sexuality, demands of the woman, a subjugation of her desires” (3).

Marcia Landy put forth Antonio Gramsci's observation on the mass culture that is relevant to analyze the positioning of women within Indian cinema.

Gramsci anticipates not only the question of how women are positioned... in cultural images... Gramsci's concern with the position of women is related to his reiterated preoccupation with the suppression of women: . . . they are relegated to a marginal position within the culture. . . He is particularly perceptive in his recognition of the role of theatre and film in positioning women as images and objects of exchange in sexual politics. (36)

The validity of this observation can be predicted through the protagonists of films like *Arth* (1982) and *Astitva* (2000). Almost two decades apart, these two films belong to a group of very few films in Indian film industry which have probed the institution of marriage and have presented women protagonists questioning their role and position in their respective marriages. As stated by Hankin, while it is important for women to be able to tell a varied degree of stories, feminist films “explicitly or implicitly challenge, rather than subscribe to, dominant representations of female identity,” thus differentiating itself from traditionally masculine films (60). *Arth* is a story of a middle class woman named Puja (Shabana Azami). She is a well-educated girl who grew up in an orphanage and lives happily with her husband Inder (played by Kulbhushan Kharbanda). She has been imbued with the norms set by society. Since her childhood, she has given paramount importance to setting up a family and building a home for herself with her husband by her side. Puja is happy in her married life and the marriage provided her with financial and social security. On coming to terms with Inder's clandestine extra-marital affair with an actress named Kavita (played by Smita Patil), Pooja decides to leave her husband's home with the paltry amount that she had saved before her marriage. She starts living in a women's hostel and finds a job for herself.

There are other odds that she faces now in the world all alone. She is duped by a friend in the hostel, who introduces her to someone looking for sexual favours in exchange for a job offer. Such state of affairs depicted in the film, clearly shows how single/divorcee/unmarried women without a male figure (father/ brother or husband) would be viewed as 'available'. Puja questions her friend as to why is she dealing with and working for men who are immoral and unethical in every respect. She replies that she does not want to struggle in her life. She wants a luxurious life, a choice that she has made and has no qualms about making certain compromises to fulfil her desires. During this time, she befriends Raj (played by Raj Kiran), a struggling singer, who helps Puja to get a job in a reputable film.

As Raj develops a liking for her and also proposes to her for marriage, he tries to convince her to choose a life of companionship over singlehood. Any woman who decides to remain single in a patriarchal society is deemed dangerous and tempestuous which in turn is frowned upon and is unacceptable. However, Puja remains firm on her decision and refuses Raj's proposal. She announces that she would prefer to stay independent and is going to look after her maid's daughter, while the maid has been sentenced to life-time imprisonment for murdering her unemployed, alcoholic, gambling, and philandering husband after he stole her entire savings, meant to put towards her daughter's education. The notion of looking after her maid's daughter provides meaning to Puja's life and gives her a

sense of independence to become a nurturer and provider. In one scene, her maid servant (played by Rohini Hattangadi) tells Puja about her husband's affair with another woman and how she is still being bullied and tortured while staying with him. To this Puja comments that she would have left her husband if she were in her position. There is a common trajectory in the lives of both Puja and her maid servant and they undergo similar situations, but both react in different ways. On one hand, the maid servant avenged her husband by killing him, without bothering about her life or her daughter's future, whereas Puja decides to walk out of her marriage and starts a new life altogether.

In the climax, Puja's husband, now rejected by his lover Kavita, comes back to her thinking that she would forgive him and take him back, to which Puja responds subtly by asking Inder (her husband) a question, whether he would have forgiven her had she had a relationship with another man. In response, Inder accepts that he would not have forgiven her. Puja declares, "If you cannot forgive me, then how can you expect me to forgive you?"

On the other hand, *Astitva* (2000) is based on the extramarital relationship and showcases the independent identity of a woman. Malhar Kamat (played by Mohnish Bahel) is a music teacher, now dead, who has nominated his property in the name of Aditi (played by Tabu). Aditi receives a bequest of the property at her place by post. This happens when a party is going on at her place and the entire family which includes her husband, Shrikant Pandit (Sachin Khedkar), her son Aniket (Aunil Brevé) and Revati (Namrata Shirodkar) who is Aniket's girlfriend and proposed wife are present. They are accompanied by Shrikant's friend Dr. Ravi Bapat (Ravindra Mahkani) and his wife Meghna (Samit Jaykar). Shrikant opens the letter and is surprised that Malhar had left all his property in Aditi's name. Shrikant has a habit of maintaining a diary on daily basis and when he refers to his diary, he realizes that twenty five years ago Aditi did not give birth to his son rather the boy is fathered by Malhar Kamat. Shrikant demands an explanation from Aditi and the entire story unfurls in flash-backs. In those days, Shrikant was often traveling abroad due to work and Aditi used to feel lonely. She tried to seek Shrikant's permission to work so that she could get rid of boredom, but Shrikant did not permit her as the women of the family were not allowed to work. However, to get rid of loneliness, Shrikant recommended Aditi to pursue her hobby, music. As Shrikant was away for months, Malhar and Aditi came closer to each other. Upon realizing that she has conceived Malhar's child, she decided to tell the truth to her husband. Shrikant on returning was so happy to know about her pregnancy that he didn't give her a chance to reveal the truth. On knowing the truth twenty-seven years later, Shrikant decides that they should separate but will keep on living together in the same house. Upon realizing the truth, Aditi's son develops hatred and disgust for her. When Revati comes to know about the entire story, she decides to break her engagement with Aniket as she sympathises with Aditi and is not happy with the way Aniket and Shrikant are treating Aditi. *Astitva* ends with Revati coming to pick Aditi while Shrikant and Aniket are standing at the door, staring at them, leaving.

*Astitva* highlights the identity of a woman's existence. Generally, a woman in Indian society lives her life as per norms set by the society, as a daughter, mother, or wife of her man. Considering this notion, men are the bread earners and women are considered as bread makers. This was the reason that Aditi had to seek permission from her husband for a job. Shrikant clearly denounces her stating, "No woman has ever taken up a job in our family. The responsibility of earning is of man and I am earning the money." This notion of not allowing women to work hinders them from being independent and free, thereby depriving her of a strategy to establish her existence and be independent of the husband. This points to

the fear that men hold that if women start working and become financially independent, they will not obey their orders and then, there is a possibility that they can even leave them. Thus, under the banner of family tradition, they do not allow women to earn money. Shrikant was a dominating man who wanted to keep his wife imprisoned at home. Shrikant advised his son not to allow his wife to have a job.

There is a scene in the film, where Shrikant and his friend Lapat are drinking openly in the garden, whereas Aditi and Meghna are talking in the kitchen. The two different places clearly demarcate the existing difference between men and women. The open ground represents how men are allowed to live a free life as per their desire. Contrary to this, women are imprisoned in the kitchen and cannot live life as per their wish.

For Shrikant, his ambition and career are of paramount importance. He even ignores the desires of his wife, who yearns for a romantic relationship with her husband. This brings to the limelight that the notion of enjoying sexual pleasure or physical gratification is acceptable for males but for women, it is denied. Aditi is an honest and brave woman; she is ready to disclose the fact and she readily accepts the truth after twenty-seven years. Aditi remains loyal to her husband; she wants to maintain the sanctity of her marriage. She wants to disclose the truth about her conception to her husband, but her honesty and devotion are not appreciated by her husband and her son. Shrikant's friend confronts him that he also had an affair with another woman, to which Shrikant replies, "My case is different. I am a man." Earlier, Shrikant did not want to divorce Aditi due to social ignominy and tried to keep everything secret. But when his son's engagement is broken, he feels that now everyone will know and therefore to maintain his dignity and reputation, he decides to divorce Aditi.

On the other hand, Revati was able to sense this male chauvinism and dominance, so she decides to break up with her fiancé. In the last scene of the film, Revati tells her fiancé that if one incident is proper for a man, it is also proper for a woman. If it is improper for a woman, it is also improper for a man. It means if the pre-marital relationship is improper for a woman, it is improper for a man too. When Aditi and Revati are leaving the house, Aditi says, "Today I feel as if I have been reborn."

Both the films, *Arth* and *Astitva* revolve around the structure of marriage. Protagonists in both the films initially believe ardently in the institution of marriage. To begin with, both women have to suppress their inner will and desire just to maintain the sanctity of marriage but later they chose not to. These films have portrayed women in a different light; they have brought forward the problems that women face in Indian society. Moreover, these films have portrayed women as individuals having desires, opinions and most importantly these women have the willingness to stand up for themselves. In addition, both the films highlight the importance of educating a woman. Education helps women to become financially independent. Puja and Aditi both decide to walk away from their respective marriages, something which is not readily accepted in Indian society. Both these films have shown an alternate path chosen by the protagonists.

*Arth* and *Astitva* are two of those rare Indian films, which refuse to define worth in terms of marriage. A woman's identity and her existence are not limited to or defined by the matrimonial alliance that she forms with her husband. *Arth* refuses to present marriage as the ultimate goal of a woman's life. The film ends with Puja walking alone by the sea, happy and that's all it matters.

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## **Mental Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Religion as a Tool for Social Coding**

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### *Abstract*

*This paper strives to consider the ideological representation of the events and after-effects of apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The segmentation of the various events grooved deeply in the novel leaves numerous traces to be explored. Behavioral constraints of the characters as extrapolated in the plot seem more committed to throwing back what they do not voice than what they utter. Such nonconformity engenders the scope of vertical study of the text to explore the hidden mental causes of the effects that readers discern on the surface of the story. The way Atwood perceives the future, shrinking individual identity of her characters, plays a significant role in communicating her concerns related to the patterns, she was able to identify in the society around. Symbolic coherences and chain of actions of the oppressors and non-reactive response of the oppressed present a hidden and academically neglected human tendency to such occasions. Such comportment of the characters in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* may be reviewed as mental and existential collapse which can further be delineated as a mental apocalypse followed by the environmental one. A detailed qualitative research to scrutinize the above mentioned concerns as well as observations will not only contribute to the expedition of the text that has been taken for the study but will also attempt to go beyond the traditional and linear pattern of using theories in literature and will explore the content's purpose to show the mirror to the society as the idea of religion being used as a tool to alter the social order holds potential learning for the society in general.*

*Keywords: Apocalypse, dystopia, existentialism, self-destructive, obedience, religion, social coding*

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### **Introduction**

History is full of the events and dialogues about the unexpected. Post-Apocalyptic writings have contributed to the same chain of thought process where what has never happened is conceived and visualized to narrate the story of tomorrow. This attitude has given

birth to a neo possibility of narration and artistic representation of today. Fears and worries are found to be the basis of such portrayal. The origin of the idea of apocalypse has its roots deep into the mythologies. Almost all the religions have talked about apocalyptic events in one or the other way like *Sanatan* belief states that the time is cyclical and destruction of one part paves a path for a new beginning, in Christianity, *Book of Revelation* states of doomsday which will be followed by the end of the age, Islamic reference states that the earth will be shaken as it is destined to be shaken and the day is referred to *Qayamat*. On one hand, these ideas have served as strong forces to make followers disciplined and remain concerned about their deeds, and on other hand, this very idea has inspired many literary figures to write on this subject. Some of the authors have visualized and written about the apocalyptic events whereas some have portrayed the post-apocalyptic society. Their imaginations have been showing their concerns related to the current status and the direction the society is heading towards. Such representation accommodates variety of sub themes based on cause of apocalypse as portrayed in the texts. Ecological imbalance, War, Disease, Alien attack and Monsters are some of the repeatedly perceived causes of apocalypse as portrayed by the authors. Post WWI & II, war remained the prominent subject like *The Lost Continent* (1916), *Tomorrow's Yesterday* (1932), *The Death Guard* (1939) whereas post epidemics, disease is found to be the core interest of the authors like *The Last Canadian* (1974), *The Girl who Owned a City* (1975) and in modern era the concerns related to ecological imbalance fascinated post-apocalyptic writers like *Aftermath* (1998), *The Rift* (1999), *The Last Book in the Universe* (2000), *Oryx and Crake* (2003).

Post-Apocalyptic writings require the creation of intense situations in the texts which stipulates the characters to bring out two stories— one that is on the surface of the setting and the other that has its origin from the minds of the characters. Such binary keeps the readers aware of the happening and the potential it carries to impact the psyche of the characters. The continuous struggle of the characters to survive in a traumatic situation brings forth the existential collapse in the lives of characters as well as in the story line. The term 'Existentialism' refers to the philosophical inquiry about human existence. It becomes an area of investigation for one who strives to see the monotony of life, be it full of comfort that one enjoys or any struggle for survival that one undergoes. The term was coined by the Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard who rejected the absolute nature of reason and raised his voice against the absurdity of pure thought. Those who have contributed or followed this idea are called existentialists. Humans strive to find the meaning of their being in variety of ways and actions. Existentialists say that anything can be taken as a meaning of one's being but nothing actually makes life meaningful because humans have no pre-dictated purpose and they find their essence on their own.

Margaret Atwood, one of the most celebrated names in the field of feminist, Dystopian and Post-Apocalyptic writings, presented a handful of vision that serves as an alarm to attract the readers' attention to some of the most powerful spectrums of the society in general. She puts the Canadian voice on the world map of literature. And her ideation about the subject of apocalypse has given birth to some of the splendid pieces of writings in the history of Canadian literature. Atwood received Governor General's award, Bookers Prize, and many more for her contribution to literature. Her commitment to keep the literary spirit alive by her famous work, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is widely appreciated both in the readers as well as critics' lobbies. Atwood herself states about the text, "The Handmaid's Tale is a slight twist of the society we have now" (quoted in Swale). Atwood's perception might seem scary but her concerns for the society in general seem quite close to the very nature of

the power that we live under and also strive to educate as Angela Carter mentions, “The Handmaid's tale is both a superlative exercise in science fiction and a profoundly felt moral story”.

The structure of the society presented in the text is found demolished by an apocalyptic event caused by ecological collapse as a result of radiation and chemicals. A post-apocalyptic society is reconstituted by group of orthodox who believe in some obsolete and creepy idea of religion. New establishment considers reproduction as the only role of women in society. The narrative is presented through the glance of a female protagonist, Offred who is the oppressed in the system of Gilead, locale of Atwood in the text. Howells mentions of Gilead that “Gilead is a totalitarian regime run on Patriarchal lines from Old Testament”. Offred's struggle to survive and recapitulation of the past when things were normal can be correlated with a common human response to cope up with severe circumstances. By doing so one strives to escape from the unpleasant present to comparatively comfortable past. As Offred reminds herself of the garden she once owned:

I once had a garden. I can remember the smell of the turned earth, the plump shapes of bulbs held in the hands, fullness, and the dry rustle of seeds through the fingers. Time could pass more swiftly that way. (Atwood 18)

Offred strives to bring back some of the pleasant memories to her in order to remind herself whatsoever is happening is not the standard of life she is to live. Her very attempt to keep remembering past on one hand allows her to break the limitations levied by the state of Gilead and on other hand offers her a kind of shelter to escape her 'self'. It seems as if she is trying to associate herself with the pleasant objects she possessed in the past. Offred's attempt to keep her identity separate from the things intentionally kept around, gives her strength to distinguish the reality from her own passions and zeal like while in the handmaid center she thinks of the room she used to stay in: “The door of the room-not my room, I refuse to say my – is not locked” (Atwood 13).

In this way Offred keeps on reminding herself not to form association with the people or the objects around because of a common human tendency that she understands well which vaults one to start relating self with the surrounding to increase one's acceptability for the situation. Her ideation about her being holds the attention of the readers and it looks as if one is looking for surface while balancing on the tightrope.

Religion is one of the deep-rooted institutions in human society. Many sociologists have attempted to define religion as in order to understand any civilization, we have to study religion also. Emile Durkheim, a renowned French sociologist, recognized it as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, beliefs and practices that unite into one single moral community” (Durkheim). Religious beliefs and practices become the integral part of the society and potentially influence human nature, behavior as well as cognition. The way one is going to perceive something to a great extent is influenced by the teachings of the religion one belongs to. This very understanding and fact related to human nature has been used to exploit people in general as its usage as a tool of soft power diplomacy, to control the masses. It plays a havoc role in constituting the narration by using it as a tool for social coding in the state of Gilead. The factual phenomenon about the strength of religion in altering the structure of the society is evident in the text which as a result demonstrating a peculiar kind of culture of which Atwood herself states that- “Not only civil liberties but humanity itself is threatened by an increasingly degraded and dehumanizing culture”. To convert fertile females into handmaids and that too in a way that they should accept this transformation, training centers titled 'red centers' are established. Handmaids are supposed

to listen to instructors but were not allowed to talk to each other like in chapter I, it mentioned, “We tried to sleep in army cots that had been set up in rows, with spaces between so we could not talk” (Atwood 10).

The locale is twined with the threads of religion and all the practices which from the perspective of a reader or critic seem inappropriate, are supported with justifications from interpretations of Old Testament like having sex with handmaids is given a strange title of 'ceremony' and considered right in the state of Gilead. In one of the incidents when Moira happens to raise a question if the handmaids are meant to have intercourse with their commanders, Aunt Lydia responded exuberantly mentioning the references of Jacob, one of the biblical patriarchs from the book of Genesis, “Go in unto her, And she shall bear upon my knees, that I may have children by her” (Book of Genesis 30:3 quote in bible ref). The reference clearly states the way opted by the state to practice the power. While explaining the ceremony to her, Aunt Lydia speaks of the chain of events which are supposed to happen during the ceremony like, “Once a month on fertile days, the handmaid shall lie between the legs of the commander's wife, the two of you will become one flesh, one flower will be waiting to be seeded” (Atwood 198). The approach to make these types of practices acceptable is strangely justified with the societal and metaphysical approvals. Nothing is hidden nothing is under cover. Practices and suggested conducts by the state are supported with so called justifications which are intended to be engraved in the psyche of the people not only for the sake of initial acceptance but also to convert them in a kind of carrier and promoter of same approach. Like the character of commander's wife, Serena who is relatively higher in the ladder of female status in the state of Gilead and as per description of pre-Gilead days by Offred, she used to be a gospel singer. She is also found unhappy many times but instead of forming a healthy relationship with others who are oppressed, she continues her feelings of love for her husband and hates Offred which can be seen as a clear case of taking the side of oppressor to survive. Though it seems unintentional from her side when it comes to the approval of 'ceremony', her silence and participation in the same could be retaliated in other ways also which she strived not.

The state of Gilead has laid its foundation on the ideas which are justified by their own understanding or intentional projection of religion. This fact allows them to broadcast and practice the same in the way they wish to. Whatsoever is happening in the text is actually a kind of clash between two different ideologies. The ideology backed with liberal thought process which is represented in the interior monologues of Offred and the second is Gilead's idea of religion. Religion is trying to alter the social coding which as a result has changed the aspiration of individuals who live in the state of Gilead. The handmaids are trained to find the purpose of their lives in their role as handmaids only. In one of the incidents Aunt Lydia “this may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary” (Atwood 189). That is why handmaids start feeling jealous with their co-handmaids who are pregnant because conception is given ultra recognition in the state and ultimately this very special attitude of the state towards conception is found altering the ambition of every female in the state of Gilead. The incidents happening while shopping hours and descriptions shared by Offred potentially prove the same. The conformist approach of Janine, another known of Offred in the 'red center' who later on was given the name 'Ofwarren', clearly states not only her surrender but also her commitment to comply what Gilead wants from her. Her attitude cannot be restricted within the boundaries of survival strategy but can also be read as her own will to support the same narrative because of the religious color of its roots.

So, it is also evident that some of the handmaids in the training center and also when they are deputed to the members of elite class, exhibited loyalty for the state which can be categorized as a case of Stockholm syndrome or Self-Destructive Obedience. The term 'Stockholm syndrome' was coined by a Swedish Psychiatrist named Nils Bejirot in 1973 during an investigation of a bank robbery case where hostages defended their captors and also refused to testify against them. This syndrome is a kind of psychological response of victims who bond with their abusers. Over a period of time some of the victims develop positive feelings toward their captors. And the term 'self destructive obedience' is discussed in detail by Ergan Tarnow (1999) where he talked about Milgram obedience experiment which demonstrates that the willingness of people to obey authorities regardless of consequences is found to be very strong and high. Numerous instances are witnessed in *The Handmaid's Tale* where characters that are abused by the state are found contributing positively to the flow of Gilead narrative. Their obedience is found uncommon and their loyalty to the oppressor is strange. As Serena Joy, wife of the commander, despite being aware of the unwillingness of Offred and willing approval of the commander for the 'ceremony', develops hatred for Offred instead of the commander. She obeys the instructions of the state to play the role in the ceremony and keeps spoiling her 'self'. Janine, who is also named Ofwarren, is described as one of aunt Lydia's pets who would tell everything to her. Despite all the mental and physical torture, she tolerates, her commitment and loyalty to the state are not shaken. Offred describes Janine as "by that time Janine was a puppy that has been kicked too often" (Atwood 129). And it is also mentioned that "she would tell anything" (Atwood 134). Her compliance nature can be considered as stupidity on surface level but the profound meaning conveys a kind of mental state that makes her do this either for survival or for her newly formed bond with her new role in the society. This very tendency of some of the female characters in the text can be correlated with many of the females' mental state round the globe. The severe and uncommon incidences influenced by Stockholm syndrome are easy to identify like the famous case of Patty Hearst in which she was found assisting the member of SLA (Symbionese Liberation Army), a group which aimed to incite a war against U.S. government, whereas the same group actually kidnapped and abused her for long (Psychpedia) but the common traces of the syndrome in everyday life can also not be neglected. Very commonly such type of flavor can be witnessed in the self excuses commonly made by females like; "He hit me because he thought I was cheating on him but then he also got a card on our anniversary or I know what he has done to me but still I love him" (Psychpedia). The text allows the readers to follow the above stream line and implore the possibilities and symptoms if any to refine their being.

## Conclusion

The research brings forth some of the most relatable points which are worth paying attention to as the idea of social coding through the narrative of religion is not new in the text; it is prominently prevailing in the contemporary time also. The shift from one type of social structure to the other can be witnessed transparently in the text because it is quick and major in nature but in the society around shifts are slow and gradual which one avoids considering them just a reaction to some event or the necessity of the time. These avoidances and excuses potentially harm the society in long run and the gradual flow keeps the eyes of witnesses away from the reality. Atwood herself remarks, "Society of today where choice is too many may lead to a totalitarian future that prohibits choice" (quote in Sudipta). Technological advancement gives a kind of freedom to do something comfortably but the same confines the users in the

rush of gadgets and limits the freedom from the same. This very approach can be related with one of the speeches of aunt Lydia, “There is more than one kind of freedom, freedom to and freedom from” (Atwood 30). Very nature of reaction in adverse circumstances that is portrayed in the text through female characters can also be correlated with common human survival instincts which can further be noted with approval from Milgram experiment on obedience to authority. The text also warns about the nature of establishment that there is no one room which witnesses the planning of an ideology but it comes into existence out of the aspirations of a class for their self-convenience or interest. It is introduced through negotiations and practiced initially in bits and pieces to later, trade off with what is not as per their interests.

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## **Interdependence of Emotion and Narration in Married *Jaat* Women Folk Songs, *Geet***

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### *Abstract*

*Geet are the folk songs sung mostly by rural Jaat women. These songs are used since time immemorial as a means of entertainment, knowledge preservation, communication and for cultural appropriation. Coming from a patriarchal society, the Jaat women are rarely allowed to speak or share their thoughts publicly; hence, these songs are also used as resistance from the hegemony. These folk songs, like any other folklore, are dynamic and keep updating with the changing time and society. There are several themes available in these songs. These songs are sung by women belonging to different castes but this paper would focus and analyze the folk songs sung by married Jaat women. This paper with some examples of Geet would attempt to examine the various emotions which find an outlet in these folk songs. The analysis would be based on Alan Dundes' theory of "Text, Context, and Texture" and would help to analyze the society and culture of the Jaat community.*

*Keywords: Folklore, folk songs, emotions, women, patriarchy*

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### **Introduction**

Folk songs have been part and parcel of every culture across the world. In India too there is a wide variety of folk songs. Folk songs are used for several purposes. First, the songs fused with musical elements help to entertain people. The aesthetic aspect of the songs makes them delightful. Second, as folk songs are based on one's culture so they help to preserve the cultural values and beliefs of their cultures. They are effortlessly passed down over generations. Hence, they become a tool for knowledge and culture preservation. Third, the songs are made by the folk, for the folk, and of the folk so the folk gets a platform to share their thoughts which they are unable to express otherwise. It suggests that the marginalized section uses it as a platform to voice out their opinions which is generally not paid attention to by the people at the center. Hence, the songs become a voice to the voiceless. It can be used both as "an instrument of consensus and contestation" (Nenola 1999). Finally, the prominent American folklorist Alan Dundes asserts that:

the folk know and use folklore without bothering to articulate their aesthetic evaluations. For some types of oral literary criticism e.g., symbolism, an indirect method of eliciting might be recommended. It is often the taboo activities and ideas which find expression outlets in symbolic form. (Dundes

1978, 47)

The folk songs have aesthetic attributes that express some significant patterns which are “brought together in aggregate, traced historically and socially, identified and compared textually, understood in their cultural context, appreciated for their texture or performance, and mined for structure, belief, and symbol” (Bronner 2007). These patterns can help the folklorist to discern and indeed analyze the folk songs. Dundes explained the relevance of studying folklore “because of the range of materials in the subject and the significance of the expressive tradition, and how speech takes on multiple meanings” (Dundes 1989). Similarly, Ben-Amos (1982) uses three basic components to define folklore: “a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, or a kind of art”.

This paper studies the folk songs which are sung by women living in the Northern states of India like Delhi, Haryana, and Rajasthan. These folk songs are called *Geet*. These folk songs are sung mostly by rural women belonging to different castes but this paper focuses and analyzes the folk songs sung by married *Jaat* women. These *Jaat* women, a major proportion of whom were illiterate, have used these songs since time immemorial to communicate their thoughts among their people and society. Despite growing literacy rate, the *Jaat* women are rarely allowed to speak or share their thoughts publicly in the patriarchal society. Hence, these songs provide them a cathartic space to share and enjoy in gatherings where only women are present. *Geet* thus, are not simply a means of entertainment, but also serves as a means of socio-cultural knowledge preservation for them. Singh argues how the songs “produced and disseminated by women are key academic resources which 'record' their perceptions and dilemmas” (Singh 2017). Thus, academic study of folklore and by extension folk songs become important.

The emotion and narration of the songs play a huge role. There is an interdependence of emotion and narration in these songs. This paper examines the emotions these *Jaat* women feel while singing these folk songs. As Alan Dundes has argued that “folklore is an autobiographical ethnography— that is, it is a people's own description of themselves” (Dundes 471). Through the study of folklore, one can see another culture “from the inside out”, instead of looking at it 'from the outside in'. The paper uses some examples of *Geet* to analyze how and to what extent the emotions of *Jaat* women shape the content and meaning of these songs and how this kind of study can be useful in providing them a platform to share their voices globally.

The analysis of this paper is based on Alan Dundes' concept of three forms of folklore (Dundes 25): Texture (how): the language used in the folk songs, the phonemes and morphemes employed, rhyme, meter, stress, pitch, alliteration, juncture, tone, onomatopoeia and other linguistic features; Text (what): Structural analysis of folk songs; and Context (who and where): historical and cultural analysis of these folk songs. These three forms are interlinked and can influence each other. To understand the texture of *Geet* the paper focuses on the words or the vocabulary used in the songs, the language in which they are sung, the multiple versions, how the rhythm is maintained without using many musical instruments, how the narrative

style is altered as per the mood and the tone of the song. As for lyrics, these songs are remarkable for their brevity, melody, alliteration, interjections, and regulated repetition of lines. “Repetition of melodic elements evokes the feeling of insistence” (Panasenko 146). The text of *Geet* is comprehended by identifying the structural analysis of these songs, the different occasions on which these songs are sung, the time and place used for singing these songs, the different types of songs, and the nomenclatures used for the songs. The songs are sung collectively and hence are anonymous. The energy of the songs is phenomenal and becomes “the best indicator of the intensity of emotion” (Jamdar 41). The context of *Geet* helps to comprehend how these songs are considered festive and an integral part of their culture. It also helps to understand how these songs are relevant for each woman. The “songs sung during ceremonies tell us about the everyday life of a household” (Tewari). For example, *Jakari geet* is related to the general life of a woman and hence becomes relatable for almost all types of occasions (Kumar).

The overlapping of these three forms (texture, text, and context) gets reflected in the songs used as examples in this paper. The songs express several emotions through the narration: joy, happiness, anger, frustration, disgust, sadness, etc. “The subjective experience of music across cultures can be mapped within at least 13 overarching feelings: amusement, joy, eroticism, beauty, relaxation, sadness, dreaminess, triumph, anxiety, scariness, annoyance, defiance, and feeling pumped up” (Anwar). The sample songs in this paper exemplify how these forms are interlinked and influence each other. For instance, the song given below exemplifies the happiness of a woman when her brother comes with gifts on the wedding day of her child's marriage. She feels happy and triumphant comparing her brother with her sister-in-law's brothers:

*Meri jethani ke paanch bhai,  
Mere meri maa ka jaaya ek se.  
Woh te paanch aaye pachaash laaye,  
Mangi te laaye bebe chundadi.  
Woh te ek aaya, laakh laaya,  
Heere bandh-laaya bebe chundadi.  
Woh te bhaat bharke chaalan laage,  
Uti te dede mhaari chundadi.  
Woh te bhaat bharke chaalan laagya,  
Audh dikha de bebe chundadi.  
Audhun ta heere moti jhad ke pad ja  
Dhar dun te lalchae mera ji re,  
Main te vaar audhun, tyohaar audhun  
Audhun bhatije ke byaah me.*

Translation:

My sister-in-law has five brothers;  
I have just one.  
All five of them came and brought 50 thousand rupees,  
And got a rented dupatta.  
He came alone and brought one lakh rupees,  
and oh! Sister, he got a diamond-studded dupatta.

They started to leave after the *Bhaat* ceremony,  
 And asked her to return the dupatta.  
 He started to leave after the *Bhaat* ceremony;  
 Oh! Sister, show me enshrouding the dupatta.  
 When I enshroud the dupatta, the diamonds fell off,  
 I am allured when I keep it.  
 I wear it every day and at every festival;  
 I wear it at my nephew's wedding.

The song is narrative in nature where a woman is narrating (to a silent listener) about one day's experience when her brother came to her marital home. She compares how her single brother proved better than the five brothers of her sister-in-law. The sense of happiness, proud and triumph is achieved through comparing several things that her brother did and what her sister-in-law's brothers did. Generally, the women share a very lovable bond with their brothers. The siblings' affection and fondness also become the focus of this song. Similarly, performers or singers across cultures (Rouget and Buckner 2011; Thompson and Balkwill 2010) can reliably convey intense feelings with songs and instruments of different kinds and often do so by relying on acoustic features and associated percepts—pitch, loudness, pace—characteristic of the human vocal expression of emotion (Juslin and Laukka 2003) and speech (Schwartz et al. 2003). This song uses several alliterations (*meri maa ka jaaya*, *paanch aaye pachaash laaye*, *lakh laaya*, *bhaat bharke*, etc.) to enrich the aesthetic aspect of this song.

The following songs also display a sense of happiness, as well as pride, a married woman feels when her maternal family members come to her marital home on different occasions. The occasion mentioned in the following lines of a song is the *Bhaat* ceremony. *Bhaat* is an occasion when the brothers (and also some other members from the natal home) bring gifts on the wedding day of their sister's child and the brothers are referred to as *bhaati*:

*Bhaati ban ke aaya hai, meri maa ka jaaya;  
 Aane te uske aaye bahaar, aangan me chaa gyi khushiyaan hazaar;  
 O Saasu ki saree laaya, laaya susre ka suit nyara nyara;  
 do tole ki kanthi laaya; laaya haar gale ka pyara pyara...*

Translation:

My brother has come as a *bhaati*  
 He brings happiness along, my abode is in ecstasy  
 He brought a saree for my mother-in-law and a unique suit for my father-in-law  
 He brought a two-tola gold necklace; a beautiful necklace...

This song demonstrates how a sister feels proud when her family members visit her. The woman in the song is extremely happy to see her brother as a *bhaati*. Her brother has got several gifts for all the members of her marital family: he has got clothes and gold jewelery for her mother-in-law and her sisters-in-law; he has got clothes for her father-in-law, her brothers-in-law, her husband and for her. She proudly showcases the extravagant gifts that her brother has brought along to every woman from the neighborhood who is present on the occasion. In *Jaat* community, the number

and value of the gifts from the maternal family are considered as directly proportional to how a woman is respected or regarded by her marital family and the society. The song uses a narrative tone to express the enthusiasm of the woman. This song becomes a catchy one with the use of the rhyme scheme: aabb, abab, aabb, abab, aabb, abab...

The following lines from another song are full of praise for the grand gifts given by a woman's maternal family on her child's birth. This occasion is referred to as *piliya*:

*kisi jagmag jagmag ho rhi; tum gaon lugaaiyon geet  
piliya diya badey zor ka.*

Translation:

How radiant is it? Oh! Ladies, please sing songs;  
My family has given exceptional gifts for my child.

The woman in the song is showing off the gifts received from her maternal family to her neighbors and is asking them to sing songs and celebrate this occasion. The song again reiterates a sense of joy that women feel whenever their maternal family members come to their marital homes and the joy turns into a sense of pride with the gifts that they bring along.

Not only one's happiness is expressed through these songs, but the songs are also used to portray one's dissatisfaction or unhappiness. The women might be dissatisfied and unhappy about certain issues in their lives but when they sing songs related to those issues, they feel a sense of enjoyment. Eerola et al. (2018) show how songs and music can make people enjoy sadness and make it pleasurable. For example, in the following song there is a woman who is unhappy with her husband's looks:

*Main toh gauri-gauri naar, baalam kaala-kaala ri;  
Karam fut gye mere bebe, hogya chaala ri.  
O jeth mere ki bariya saasan ke khaaya tha ri,  
Tere jeth ki bariya bahuadd laadu khaye ri,  
Woh te laaduan ka maara deekha peela peela ri.  
O mere dewar ki bariya saasan ke khaaya tha ri,  
Tere dewar ki bariya bahuadd barfi khaye ri,  
Woh te barfiaan ke maara deekha dhaula-dhaula ri.  
O mere baalam ki bariya saasan ke khaaya tha ri,  
Tere baalam ki bariya bahuadd jamun khaye ri,  
woh te jamunaa ke maara deekha kaala-kaala ri.*

Translation:

I am fair and beautiful, my husband is dark;  
My life is destroyed, it is havoc.

Oh! Mother-in-law, what did you eat at the birth of my elder brother-in-law?

Daughter-in-law, I ate spherical Indian sweets at your elder brother-in-law's turn.

Oh! Mother-in-law, what did you eat at the birth of my younger brother-in-law?

Daughter-in-law, I ate square-shaped Indian sweets at your younger brother-in-law's turn

Oh! Mother-in-law, what did you eat at the birth of my husband?

Daughter-in-law, I ate Indian blackberry at your husband's turn.

The woman in the song believes herself to be a fair and beautiful woman. She is complaining in the song to her mother-in-law about her husband's looks by drawing comparisons between his complexion and the complexions of her brothers-in-law. She is trying to analyze what caused the difference in the looks of the siblings; while her husband's siblings are good and fair-looking men, her husband is not. Instead, he has a dark complexion. Through this song, she is questioning her mother-in-law: what did her mother-in-law eat during her pregnancy.

This song is presented as a dialogue between a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law wherein the daughter-in-law is asking questions and the mother-in-law is responding to her questions. The emotions of anger and frustration are prevalent in this song. But the mock tone used throughout the song helps to have pleasure listening to this song. The manner and tone in which she ridicules her husband is not rude rather it is funny. The use of repetition adds value to the emotion expressed in this song. Generally, in the patriarchal society men are considered superior to women and the former also dominates the latter. But this song very effortlessly contests this superiority wherein a woman finds herself superior in looks as compared to her husband. Thus, through mockery, the woman is ambivalently contesting the patriarchal society in this song.

Despite being songs about dissatisfaction and complaining; when women sing and listen to these songs, they find pleasure in them. It is difficult to explain and point out one reason for this “pleasurable music-related sadness” because emotions are “complex and constructed experiences” (Eerola et al. 2018) but the use of mockery could be one of them. “Music can not only elicit various emotions, but can also be a tool that people can use to regulate their emotions” (Cook et al. 2019, 145). The choice of words and the tone also make them pleasurable.

## Conclusion

This paper examined how folk songs are used for several purposes by the married Jaat women of the Jaat community. These songs have aesthetic as well as literary qualities. The songs are mostly used to delight, entertain, preserve, or teach the social order. But the same songs can contest, and even question the same social order. The songs have thus served as a medium to express the taboo topic of society. The songs are observed by women as a joyful and unconditional happy setting which is free from the male gaze. Hence, this setting provides these women a platform to meet and enjoy together in a free and carefree manner.

Without using many musical instruments, there are several emotions expressed through these songs. The narration, content, theme, and tone of the song change as per the occasion on which it is being sung. The separate nomenclatures of these songs – depending on the theme and the occasion like *bhajan geet*, *jakari geet*, *vidayi geet*, *khoriya*, *seetne*, *jaccha geet*, *lok geet*, etc. – also depicted the richness of this art form. The wide range of materials and themes used in the folk songs and the substantial expressive quality of this art form can take multiple meanings. This

diversity validated how the text, texture, and context of these folk songs can be studied and analyzed to get a detailed impression of the functionality of their specific culture.

The paper examined the interdependence of emotions and narration in the folk songs sung by the married Jaat women. The songs used as examples demonstrated the vocabulary, tone, rhyme, theme, etc. of the songs. The songs were then analyzed to identify the plethora of emotions that the songs convey. On one hand, the songs expressed joy, happiness, triumph, pride, humor, etc. and on the other hand, expressed anger, sadness, disgust, frustration, etc. Several different ways were employed in the singing of these songs to accelerate the emotions of these songs. For example, the use of repetition and exaggeration enhanced the expression of these emotions and also depicted the dire need to speak and share their minds via these songs.

This paper suggests that folk songs have immense potential as they provide an insight into one's culture from the inside. Thus, they deserve academic attention. The academic platform could boost the hitherto ignored or silenced voices of the marginalized section of society. This paper focused on one of the marginalized groups - women - but if studied intricately the same songs can demonstrate many other social-cultural nuances. Hence, these songs should not be considered old and outdated. Rather, one must analyze the potential that these songs carry within them to project as well as to interrogate the society that one lives in.

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## Uncovering the Book Cover: An Analysis on Judging a Book by its Cover

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### *Abstract*

*“There's much to uncover that's not on the cover!”*

*Before a reader turns the pages of any book, his/ her eyes behold the jacket of that book and the author's name on it, which has a bearing on the mind of a possible reader even before the words inside begin to influence. Writers of books don't write books, they write manuscripts. Designing a book cover is the process of getting an author's manuscript into the hands of a reader, by materializing it – giving it a form. Moreover, the covers determine the primary way in which books are marketed and promoted. In addition to other factors, the gender of the writer plays a significant role in the designing of a book cover. Certainly, the covers of books written by women on the whole are differently curated, in illustration and lettering both – the images are ambiguous, painted or misty or eccentrically drawn, and for some unknown reason, 'serif' font is used much more liberally as compared to the covers of books written by men. In this paper, apart from taking into consideration the gender of the writer of a book, book covers are being analysed in two aspects. First, the appearance of book covers which includes the colour scheme, font size, font style and pictures used on the outer jacket. Secondly, it will also be investigated whether the cover of a book also plays a role in deciding the literary merit of the book, which also includes the reasons for winning or losing a literary award.*

*Keywords: Culture, reader-response, reception theory, authorship*

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### **Introduction**

“If the process of writing is a dream, the book cover represents the awakening” (Lahiri 9). Jhumpa Lahiri, in her book *The Clothing of Books*, which is a profoundly personal reflection, explores the complex relationships between author and designer, text and image, and art and commerce. Moreover, she emphasizes on 'Naked Books' that discourage all preconceptions. Roberto Calasso, the legendary Italian publisher, wrote in *The Art of the Publisher*, the cover must draw in the potential reader and also meet the expectations of the reader who has already read the book, that is, someone now in a position to judge the cover by

the book. It can fairly be concluded that the covers determine the primary way in which books are marketed and ponder upon the state of gender in book publishing. Cover is writer's primary contact with the potential reader. Author wants to get noticed, make the reader pause and contemplate, and read the book.

Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva have spoken of reservations about, even demurred to, the 'essentializing of gender' and consequently of 'writing as a woman.' But, before the reader turns the pages of any novel, his/ her eyes encounter the jacket of that novel and the author's name entailing exercise of his/ her biased approaches even before the words inside begin to impact. It is advocated not to judge a book by its cover; however, inclination is towards critiquing that way. There is a dichotomy in the relationship between the book jacket and novel/ book. It is connected intricately with the novel as well as detached from it at the same time. Just like Roland Barthes in *The Death of The Author* says that birth of the text/ reader/ book/ novel comes at the cost of the death of author, birth of book jacket symbolizes the death of the author at the hands of designer or illustrator of the cover and publisher.

Books by a female author or gendered book covers are bound to be subject to biased eyeballs & minds and alter their reception to a great degree. Moreover, women themselves are viewed as subjects and passive entities. The word 'subject' holds an inherent ambiguity within. As a verb, it describes 'the process of being defined and controlled by external forces', but as a noun, it indicates 'self-determining agency.' Such ambiguity is seen alike in the reception of books written by female authors where the content inside plays a minimal role, as the outer jacket seems to steal all the attention. Some of the covers of novels by women writers have a young girl in a meadow of wildflowers, laundry hanging on a line, tainted pinkified décor, a vacant swing on the entranceway of a timeworn yellowish house, a set of shoes on a seaside etc. When these are compared and contrasted with the typeface – only jacket of Chad Harbach's novel, *The Art of Fielding* or the oversized letters inscribed on *The Corrections*. Such covers convey to the readers that: 'This book is going to be an event.' Eugenide's golden ring in *The Marriage Plot* might seem to be an exception, though it has a geometric notion about it – the Möbius band ring advocating that an unsolvable, Escher like puzzle awaits inside. If it had not been labelled a key literary undertaking, the design may have been further conventionalized and embraced a woman's slender fingers and wrist. The ring barely registers as a 'wedding band', even with that title sitting on top of it — instead it seems calculated, not a commentary on fidelity, rather on infinitude. Certainly, the book jackets by women are on the whole more subtle, in illustration and lettering both — the images are ambiguous painted or misty or eccentrically drawn, and there appears, for certain reason, to be considerably lot more 'serifs' than on the men's covers. 'A Visit from the Goon Squad' forms a noteworthy exception, which with its huge block letters, unfeminine colors, and bold and simple design seemingly fits in the upper (male) bookshelf. Deplorably, perhaps that plays part in the abundant attention the book got. (Fairly, that and its pure genius, of course.) Similarly, Arundhati Roy's 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness' appeared on the long list for the Booker Prize in 2017 which can be attributed to the colour choice i.e., white which creates minimalist aesthetic along with the large font size opted for. Kiran Desai's win in 2006 for 'The Inheritance of Loss' can be viewed on the similar grounds as her book cover had large, bold font.

The book jacket certainly acts as a non-verbal cue and has a strong visual appeal. The choice of colours, background images, font size and style, do have a large part to play in terms of readership as well as recognition. The visual appearance speaks louder than the actual title or the content inside. This has time and again overpowered the influence of gender also.

## Analyzing the Appearance of Man Booker Prize Winners and Shortlisted Books from 2010 to 2019

“A photograph is a message deprived of a code” (Barthes 196).

If the nominees and award winners of Booker Prize for over a period of 10 years i.e., 2010 to 2019, are keenly observed some of the intricate details and politics involved ranging from gender of the author to the alterations in subsequent prints can be decoded. In the year 2010, Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* bagged the Prize, which was written by a male author. The appearance of the cover is somewhat convincing. The title of the book is written in dark blue color. It is believed that seeing blue also brings thoughts of trustworthiness to mind; always a good thing. Also, a set of men's clothing and accessories hung are also seen which suggests the novel deserves to be a part of the upper shelves which are presumably restricted to books by male authors. Consequently, it leaves behind others in the nominations for the year like *Room* and *The Long Song* which are firstly penned by female authors and secondly had somewhat feminine choices of colors and fonts. The cover of *Room* has house with pinkish roof and the jacket of Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* is colored in a darker shade of yellow color. Both the colors mentioned a feminine and moreover, 'mustards' may be accepted in kitchens because warm colors stimulate the appetite.

In the year 2011, Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* won the Prize, defeating some of the excellently penned novels with amazing covers like Carol Birch's *Jamrach's Menagerie*. This can be attributed again to the fact that the author of the winning book was male. The dust-jacket shows numerous dandelions spread all around suggesting that some sort of mystery is there inside the novel which deserves to be uncovered inviting the potential reader to do so. Moreover, the cover seems to be inviting and alluring to the reader and excites him/her. Such colors do not reveal anything at the first glance, rather realities need to be unraveled. This book manages to defeat other nominees due to reasons that can be thought of on similar grounds. Carol Birch's novel has a reddish cover and red color is provenly thought to suggest passion and sexuality which are in turn thought of in relation to females. Though the picture on the cover is a very strong element, however the color choice goes wrong and defeats the entire purpose. Julian Barnes' novel also managed to defeat Patrick deWitt's *The Sister's Brothers* and Stephen Kelman's *Pigeon English* even though they were penned by male authors. This can be understood through an analysis of the type of colors employed while designing the jacket. Both have a red background, a color of sexual passion and sexuality. Also, the color is said to attract spontaneous purchasers though, but its capability to do so remains in the background. If it had been in the center image rather than in the background, it would have been more impactful. Moreover, the other color in the second one is a kind of mustard shade, which suggests cowardice, deceit, warning and criticism.

Talking of 2012, this year witnessed that the Prize was bagged by a female author's novel Hilary Mantel's *Bring Up the Bodies*. The color choice of this jacket is well thought and a darker, less vibrant shade of red is chosen as the color of eagle rather than the feminine bright shade. Moreover, the eagle is often a solar symbol, and can be linked to all sky gods. It signifies inspiration, release from bondage, victory, longevity, speed, pride, father and royalty; it is often an emblem for powerful nations. It represents the spirit or the intellect in conflict with the physical. Often its opposite is the owl the bird of darkness and death. The background is a shade of white, more impactful than any other color on a palette. White represents purity and innocence and creates a minimalist aesthetic. It's also the most neutral

color of all and can be quite non-descript as a base for other, more exciting, colors. The white background also represents a 'tabula rasa' that welcomes the potential reader to assess the content within and write their critical views on the blank slate, giving some space to the reader. The color choice as well as the picture selection make it possible for the book to win the Booker Prize even though it was authored by a female writer. Moreover, the title and name of the author are written in large font sizes suggesting the boldness and confidence embedded in the content being served within the magnificent outer jacket. Comparing this powerful cover with others in the nomination list for the year, it is noticed that the female on the cover of Deborah Levy's book restricts its appeal and potential readership.

The year 2013 again saw a woman author taking the Booker Prize. This time it was Eleanor Catton for her novel *The Luminaries*. In an interview, the designer of the book cover, Jenny Grigg said:

I knew it was a concept that could survive various incarnations. I knew that the grid of moon shapes communicated the novel was experimental, and would provide a vehicle for historical imagery . . . We explored many type options. In fact, the moons in various iterations remained present all the way through the design process; it was the type that was thoroughly tested. Serifs gave a softer, historical, predictable feel; sans serif a more modern, small type positioned vertically more idiosyncratic . . . In the end, the large, confident, sans serif (in combination with four moons) communicated a modern, confident book. We found a good balance between historical and contemporary. (Grigg)

The cover is very interesting with 12 moon faces and an intense, placid and neutral whitish background. The background suggests wholeness and illuminating as well as representative of a virtual space for readers. In Colm Toibin's *The Testament of Mary*, the woman figure on the cover seems to suggest that the content is female oriented and thus functions to limit the potential readership. Probably, this contributed to its failure.

2014 witnessed tables turned again and a book authored by a male author won the Booker Prize – Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Though the jacket of this novel had a huge red flower, but this was overlooked by readers as well as critics and the fact that the author was a male seemingly contributed to its success along with its neutral whitish background and bold font of the title. A commendable book by Ali Smith, *How to Be Both*, which was one among the nominees for the year lost because its cover design was not well thought, pictured two females restricting the target readership and was by a female author. A number of issues contributed to its eventual loss.

If the list of the nominees and winners of the year 2015 are analysed, similar probable reasons can be found out on the basis of colors, symbols, pictures, etc. The book that won the Booker Prize was *A Brief History of Seven Killings* by Marlon James. Though, the cover is bright as it has a vibrant yellow background instead of a darker shade as in Andrea Levy's *The Long Song*. The bright shade of yellow is symbolic of confidence, wisdom and logic mixed with a tinge of green as green is one of the most favored shades among men and women alike. So, the colors chosen was intelligently decided and worked well. Moreover, there is a picture of a hummingbird right in the middle. A hummingbird is a very strong symbol as it symbolizes or represents energy and self- confidence. This picture plays a dominant role in convincing the potential reader about the book's worth. Also, bold font is used to make a bold statement about the book. All such factors along with the fact that it came from a male author led the book to victory, leaving behind others like beautifully jacketed Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*.

Hanya Yanagihara's book had an amazing cover though, and it carried a sort of mystery. But the female author could not make it and ultimately lost to a male author. Seemingly, the gender had a dominating effect.

In 2016, Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* won the Booker Prize. It has a very clever design. The design was obviously a clever one, full of secrets and symbols, and loaded with conflicts. A powerful whitish shade is used as background on the jacket and it has a uniform design which looks much sorted. All these factors contributed towards making the book the winner, but the gender of the author definitely played a major role and this aspect cannot go unnoticed. The list of nominations had an exceptionally written book by a female author which is worth the attention. It was *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* by Madeleine Thien. The jacket of this novel is a colorful one and has a picture of a womanly figure and a bird with varied patterns in different shades. Womanly figure functions negatively to limit the readership because though the book is about cultural revolution which is about both men and women, but the cover only depicts half of the population. As stated by Dr. Gayle E. Pitman, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at Sacramento City College in California and author of several LGBT-themed books designed for kids:

There's a concept called symbolic annihilation in psychology and sociology, which is the idea that if you don't see yourself represented or reflected in society or in media (television, movies, books), you essentially don't exist. . . . (Fairington)

This seemingly reduced the power of the book to appeal to its potential readers. The jacket made the male readers feel that the book was meant only for women readers as they could not relate well with the visual image.

2017 witnessed the win of *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders. In an interview, Saunders, when asked about the cover design said:

I got a few designs, and this one just leapt out at me as being so weirdly in the spirit of the book. . . . I see it as being at dusk, and I thought it picked up the feeling of America in the mid-19th century — half pastoral, half burgeoning industrial. And it just had a feeling of mystery that I really liked. (Saunders)

The reason that the book talked about the entire America of the mid-19th Century and the whole population could experience a sense of belongingness as it was 'they' who were being talked about in the book was the major factor that led Saunders' book to win the Man Booker Prize. Also, the colors chosen are neutral and large font has been used which allows the novel's cover to speak for the greatness of the novel. Moreover, the author was a male. All of this collectively functions to convince all potential readers to go ahead and read the book.

Fiona Mozley's *Elmet* and Ali Smith's *Autumn* were among the nominations for the year. Firstly, both were by female authors. Secondly, the covers did not hold any mystery and were not appealing to a great degree to the potential readers. Moreover, the cover of *Elmet* pictures a 'flawed paradise'. The jacket of Smith's 'Autumn' merely depicts changing of seasons suggesting a simple plot/ story lying inside with nothing new and it feels like: 'Here is an old story that is still in the middle of happening.'

In 2018, Anna Burns' *Milkman* received the Man Booker Prize leaving some of the well designed and exceptionally written novels by male authors like *The Overstory* and *The Long Take* behind.

The outer jacket of Burns' novel shows an atmospheric photograph of Belfast Lough in the sunset at low tide, with the docks and Cave Hill in the distance. The picture credit does not specify the location but, for those who recognize this

landscape, the paratextual detail of this image has the effect of specifying and confirming the setting at an early stage in the reading process. . . . The anonymity of the setting means that the work can transcend the conditions of its making in order to speak a more universal truth. (Hutton 362)

The universality of the pictorial design on the jacket of the book is what worked for the novel and potential readers could uniformly form a connection with the theme. This also overpowered the gender of the author. Talking about the outer jacket of Richard Powers' *The Overstory*:

A golden, glowing forest is cut into concentric circles and spun 180 degrees, a whirlpool pulling you into the focal point and title. . . . Though slightly unsettling, the design is a beautiful spin (no pun intended) on a classic woodland scene. (Schaulis).

The cover is unsettling and develops a feeling of discomfort and disquiet in the readers' minds.

2019 has proved to be historic as it was not just one female author's book that won; rather it was shared by the novels of two female authors at the same time. Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* won the Man Booker Prize for 2019. Though there is an image of a female/ womanly figure which might have worked to restrict the readership, but it didn't due to the intelligent color choice and kind of portrait used won the attention of potential readers. Talking about the other winning book of the year, *Girl, Woman, Other*, the novel's geometric shape gives it a solid form. The book is like an abstract painting, exploring the routine subjects from a range of viewpoints. The blend of intense colors, bold font style, reminiscent images of proud black females managed to capture and convince the reader.

### **Role of a Jacket in Deciding the Book's Literary Merit: Can Cover Make it Loose or Win Booker Prize?**

Publishers are usually the doorkeepers who resolve which books will go in our literary realm. Publishers employ varied venues to entice readership and purchasers and the typical kind of advertising tool for a piece of literature is a book jacket. In the publishing world, books are commodified. Publishers try to interest and preserve the book market by manipulating the para-text in the work (Yampbell 360). Cat Yampbell in her article "Judging a Book by its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature" states: "A book's grabability factor is anything paratext related, which inspires intrigue, innuendo, and sensationalism" (Yampbell 358). Moreover, a potential reader negotiates meaning when presented with the paratext of a novel.

In *By Its Cover*, Ned Drew and Paul Sternberger argue that "a book cover is not just a protective sleeve; book covers have the power to reflect, propagate, and inspire cultural values and ideals about sexuality, gender, and individuality". In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes elucidates a subliminal persuasive power of a picture on the cover. He describes a photograph as "a message deprived of a code". This means, the pictures on the book jackets are detrimental as it subtly conveys a message to the reader. Book Industry Study Group conducted a survey in 1984, which showed that 29% of readers specified that the book jacket was "very important" in making choices. Catherine Ross, Professor, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, at The University of Western Ontario, in her paper titled: "Making Choices: What Readers Say About Choosing Books to Read for Pleasure" examines 194 open-ended interviews with dedicated readers in which the responses concluded to a

common understanding that “Covers are important. Covers are detrimental.”

Val McDermid, one of the judges in the panel for 2018 Man Booker Prize in an interview with The New York Times discussed how books are actually 'judged'. The interview made it clear that books are read by the judges in order to reach to a conclusion which reiterates the fact that in that case the judges are also assessing the books in the capacity of a reader. It may be consequently argued that the intentions and context of cover artists or designers/ illustrators hold insignificant relevance in its interpretation. Barthes breaks this down into three aspects: linguistic message, literal message and symbolic message. It can be lucidly understood, therefore, that the cover has a similar threefold impact on judges' psychology as it has on the mind of a general reader/ consumer; even though this idea is not widely realized yet.

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## Self-Denial Vs Self-Acceptance: A Study of Anita Desai's *Fasting Feasting* and Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi"

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### *Abstract*

*The paper focuses on the constant journey of a woman from the "Angel of House" to a "New Woman" by comparing the protagonists of Anita Desai's Fasting Feasting and Mahasweta Devi's short story, "Draupadi". Both the women characters have to contend with identity crisis, oppression, and exploitation but both the writers have represented them differently. The main objective of the paper is to scrutinize the two protagonists in the light of feminist literary theories of Elaine Showalter and Helene Cixous to show a paradigm shift from self-denial to self-acceptance. The self-oscillating between denial and assertion – tries to create and recreate itself. Desai depicts gender discrimination and woman subjugation through the character of "Uma" in Fasting Feasting, while Devi in the short story has taken the mythical woman figure, Draupadi from the epic Mahabharata to deconstruct and demythicize the narrative discourse and give rise to unorthodox and turbulent "Dopdi".*

*Keywords: Self-acceptance, self-denial, feminism, oppression, patriarchy, revolution, transformation, individuality*

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The present paper focuses on the construction of the discursive identity of a woman dwindling between self-denial and self-acceptance with special reference to Anita Desai's "Uma" and Mahasweta Devi's "Dopdi" in the light of feminist literary theories. Both the protagonists become victim of the cruel society but the difference is that Uma cannot come out from the patriarchal structure and formulate her identity while Dopdi remains bold till the end and accepts herself with pride and dignity despite all the scars and bruises. Elaine Showalter as a feminist critic has shown the transformation of women writing that has become a canon different from phallogocentric writing. Earlier the writings were male-centered only, where the sufferings, as well as triumphs of women, were ignored. It was only the man who used to be either glorified or sympathized. According to Showalter, in the third phase "women reject both imitation and protest – two forms of dependency – and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" (Showalter 4). She further adds, "Now we are free to come and go as we please, not in sorrow but laughter" (Showalter *Aam Boli*). This line suggests that women have become vocal in the third phase where they took "voice" as the weapon and do not accept "silence" anymore. Similarly, Audrey Lorde in her essay, "Transformation of Silence into Language and Action", suggests every woman to overcome oppression and violence by raising their voice to make their existence visible and not to be silent out of the fear of judgment or animosity. Audrey advises not only a woman but everyone

belonging to the marginalized section to be vulnerable enough to make themselves visible and be a part of the society by standing against all the injustices and overcoming them by rejecting silence over voice. Therefore, the objective of the study undertaken is to analyze how Anita Desai and Mahasweta Devi in their works dealt with the oppressive system, highlighted the challenges of the patriarchal society, and eventually tried to give voice to their muted female protagonists.

Both Anita Desai and Mahasweta Devi belong to the modern period but their writings depict a transition from the “feminine” to “female” phase respectively as propounded in Showalter's essay, “Towards a Feminist Poetics”. Anita Desai is a critically honored 20th-century feminist writer. Her writing style is less conservative focusing on the inner lives of men and women highlighting gender issues. She focuses on the exploitation and oppression due to patriarchal norms in society and thereby portrays both male and female characters to reveal gender discrimination. Along with imagery and symbol, Desai's use of flashback narrative makes her work more appealing and interesting. Apart from the gender issues, her novels revolve around the themes of marriage, patriarchy, isolation, and women's subjugation. Her *Fasting Feasting* depicts the same where the sufferings of the women characters are exposed to change the mindset of the male-dominated society and to provide women the equal status as that of men. In the novel, women are the victims of suffrage and are dependent on male intervention.

Mahasweta Devi is a renowned 20th century Bengali writer and social activist. Her style of writing is more of a radical form where the body of a woman plays an important role not as a weakness but as a weapon. Her main focus is on the lives of the subalterns who remain ignorant most of the time. Her pen acted as a sword to bring a revolutionary change in the lives of the voiceless and downtrodden beings. In her works, the women characters stand against oppression and give an insight into their history and experiences. This brings her work close to those feminist writings where the author is only focusing on the life of a woman character and glorifying her presence. This is a canon that is more “self-contained and experimental” according to Elaine Showalter. The female characters in Devi's works reach the saturation point where nothing worse can take place further in their lives and by the end, the women characters bring a revolution in their lives as well as in their personalities. Devi has taken the mythical woman figure, Draupadi from Mahabharata in her short story “Draupadi” and deconstructed it in a new and revolutionized manner to show the transition from subordinate Draupadi to turbulent Dopdi. In *Fasting Feasting*, Anita Desai has portrayed the sufferings of women characters and highlighted the gender concern. The women characters in this novel symbolize sacrifice, humility, silence, and tolerance. Uma has been depicted as the “angel of the house” because she is the victim of patriarchy and its subjugation and at the same time she is the displayed object for marriage. She is the eldest daughter of Mama Papa, so she has undertaken many responsibilities. Since Uma failed many times in her exam so she was not allowed to study further and was kept as the caretaker of the house. She has to look after her baby brother, Arun, and do other chores as well. Mama explains her in a manipulative tone saying,

You know you failed your exams again. You're not being moved up. What's the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother. What is the use of going back to school if you keep failing, Uma? You'll be happier at home. You won't need to do any lessons. You're a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you. (Desai 32)

When a daughter grows up she is mainly treated as the domestic product which needs

to be sold to the customers, and the deal gets sanctioned in the name of marriage. Marriage is one of the vital institutions in the role of patriarchy. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* opens with such lines, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1). Similarly, Uma's parents begin the quest to get a good husband for her to whom they can offer her and as such reduce the burden from their shoulders that too without Uma's consent. Her desires are unheard of as she is a woman and she is meant to live the rest of her life under the reign of a man. Uma is a simple and childlike girl who is not good at flirting or seducing a man. Moreover, her beauty is not conventional, so she is frequently rejected by men. The parents considered Uma responsible for this and couldn't tolerate her presence in the house and as a result, she is taken not as a daughter but as a maid. Beauty is one of the most important parameters for women to survive in the patriarchal world. Therefore, since her childhood she has been taught how to maintain her beauty and chastity for a successful marriage. Mary Wollstonecraft rejected such an idea in her popular essay, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" where she advocates formal education for women which is utmost essential for their living and spurned the idea of private education which doesn't allow women to reason rather makes them the puppet of the norms of patriarchy.

Uma's brother, Arun lived a life that is completely different from Uma. He enjoys all the luxuries and comforts and he has been given the liberty to mould his life on his own unlike his sister. Arun becomes the figure of ambition and aspiration while Uma is just meant for apathy and aversion.

A career. Leaving home. Living alone. These trembling, secret possibilities now entered Uma's mind—as Mama would have pointed out had she known—whenever Uma was idle. (...) But Uma could not visualize escape in the form of a career. What was a career? She had no idea. (Desai 120)

Desai has exposed the gender bias which has stigmatized the gender roles both for men and women. Judith Butler's gender theory signifies that gender is performativity. Gender has no foundation or essence, it is all constructed socially. Hence, the body has no role to play in gender formation. Uma is assigned the roles according to her gender exploring the cultural bias of the society. Once, Mama scolds Uma after returning home drunk with Ramu. The fact that she is drunk is not the concern but the problem is that she has returned home with a free spirit by enjoying herself to the fullest. Mama couldn't tolerate this as Uma is not meant to be happy because she is a woman and not supposed to move out of the cage. She says, "You, you disgrace to the family—nothing but disgrace, ever!" (Desai 56). Mama herself is the victim of patriarchal norms and exploitation. Her husband always wanted a son who could be the symbol of pride and take forward the heir. After having two daughters, Mama was forced to give birth continuously until and unless it's a boy. Her rampant pain was neglected and shrouded under societal conventions.

Mama was frantic to have terminated. She had never been more ill and would go through hellfire, she wept, just to stop nausea that tormented her. But Papa set his jaws. They had two daughters, yes, quite grown-up as anyone could see, but there was no son. Would any man give up the chance of a son? (Desai 27)

Here the author highlights two major issues. First, the gender trouble, where a son is a pride and a daughter is a burden to the family. Second, a mother being a woman gets convinced of the constructed norms of patriarchy and becomes a part of it. This suggests that women themselves become the carrier of patriarchy.

Uma always loved to be surrounded by people who are independent and always desire to know about them. Unfortunately, she remained suppressed and let her desires burn in the

ashes. She became the embodiment of sacrifice who restrained all her dreams and desires and devoted her time to the family as a maidservant and couldn't even stand for her rights and hence trapped in the abyss of patriarchy. Uma represents the “feminine phase” which is full of suffrage where women just live their lives as it is offered to them. Women were still convinced with such self-denial because society and patriarchy have trapped them in the “false consciousness”, a term coined by Engels. Women consider this oppression to be their “karma” of the previous life and hence accept it as their fate. In addition to this, Simon de Beauvoir's notion is quite appropriate where she asserts,

It is perfectly natural for the future woman to feel indignant at the limitations posed upon by her sex. The real question is why she should reject them: the problem is rather to understand why she accepts them. (Beauvoir *Goodreads*)

Mahasweta Devi in her short story “Draupadi” published in 1978 in the collection, *Agnigarbha (Breast Stories)*, has deconstructed the narrative of Draupadi by representing a subaltern woman who saved her honour by herself and not by any male intervention that we find in the epic of Mahabharata. The protagonist of the narrative named Dopdi, belonging to the Santhal tribe, emerged as a 'new woman' breaking all the conventions of society. She has been portrayed as a vulnerable woman who doesn't accept the humiliation that is instilled by the men rather she took pride in her wounded body after being raped by multiple men at a time and stood strong and naked before the perpetrators without having any shame or dishonor. This act has evoked a kind of shock and astonishment to the culprits and her wounded body served as a weapon to fight against them.

The narrative deals with the lives of the Naxalites residing in the forest of Jharkani, who was revolting against Surja Sahu, the feudal landlord who owns two tube wells and three well dugs. Yet he didn't allow the natives to have access to unlimited water sources at the time of drought and famine. Hence, Dopdi and her husband, Dulna killed Surja Sahu for radical revenge. Since then, all the army officers were in the search operation and all the Naxalites were trying to escape for their survival. Soon Dulna gets countered while drinking water from a stream and eventually he was shot dead. Such was the painless punishment for Dulna while Dopdi victimizes the worst damnation as soon as she gets captured. However, Dopdi remained fearless and sacrificed herself by surrendering to the officers to save her native people but not suppressing her needs rather by fighting against the evils to seek justice for the exploitation faced by her community. She faces the political punishment as ordered by Senanayak “a specialist in combat and extreme left politics.” (Devi)

Draupadi Meihen was apprehended at 6.53 pm. it took an hour to get her to camp. Opening her eyes after a million light-years, Draupadi, strangely enough, sees sky and moon. Slowly the bloodied nailheads shift from her brain. Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under her ass and waist. Her own blood. Only the gag has been removed. Incredible thirst. In case she says 'water' she catches her lower lip in her teeth. She senses that her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her? In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts, and understands that, indeed, she's made up right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. Draupadi closes her eyes. She doesn't have to wait long. Again the process of making her begins. Goes on. The moon vomits a bit of light and goes to sleep. Only the dark remains. A compelled spread-eagled still body. Active pistons of flesh rise and fall, rise and fall over it. (Devi n.p.)

In Mahabharata, when Draupadi is disrobed, Lord Krishna saves her honour while in this short story, Dopdi is raped day and night brutally yet she is the one who saves her dignity

and accepts herself and embraces her wounded body as a matter of pride.

Senanayak walks out surprised and sees Draupadi, naked, walking towards him in the bright sunlight with her head high. The nervous guards trail behind. Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds. (Devi n.p.)

In a patriarchal society, rape has always been seen as a crime where the victim is considered to be more responsible than the perpetrator. A woman is always judged or questioned after being raped by a man. Her honour gets stained when society looks at her. This harsh reality has been portrayed by Shashi Deshpande in one of her novels, *The Binding Vine*. In this novel, all women characters are similar to one another in respect to suffrage and exploitation received by patriarchy. One of the woman characters, named Kalpana gets raped brutally and as a result, gets herself hospitalized at the stake of her life. Her mother Shakutai, instead of showing constant support and concern, considers her daughter to be responsible for such an unfortunate circumstance. Kalpana loves to wear makeup and enjoy her life to the fullest and this is what her sin is. Being a woman, she crosses her limitations that are constructed by society. Her mother blames her saying, "If you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll leave you alone?" (Deshpande 67). Here the author underlines the counterfeited laxity and pervasive allegations that are highlighted after such wicked acts. On contrary to this narrative, Devi's short story comes forward with a revolutionary act where rape is no more a disgrace for the victim rather the culprit himself becomes a figure of humility. Dopdi in "Draupadi" rejects the humiliation done by the officers, maintains her dignity throughout the story, and denies covering her with a cloth in front of every man whom she considers nothing less than an animal.

Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting and sharp as her ululation, what's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man? (Devi)

In the essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) Spivak states that "If the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow and cannot speak at all" (Spivak 83). She further argues that the abolition of Sati practice by the British was a way to control the Indians and to rule over them by stating "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 92). Here, the British spoke not for the protection and the well-being of the subalterns but to glorify themselves and their presence. But in "Draupadi", it is Dopdi herself who stood for her honour without any other mediation. This triggered Spivak to analyze the fact that subalterns can really speak, be it man or woman doesn't make a difference.

Dopdi, throughout the short story, shows her leadership quality, as she goes to the extent of killing Surja Sahu, and surrendering herself before the army officers even without disclosing the names of her natives. She remains unbothered in her punishment rather she is concerned only about justice and equality as she says, "What will they do if they catch me? They will counter me. Let them" (Devi). Lastly, Dopdi ruptures the traditions through her distinctive way of tackling the oppressive system where her body becomes the only armour to fight her battle. Here, Devi demolishes the gender stereotypes emphasizing the fact that women should liberate themselves from the fetter of patriarchy and come out as independent strong individuals who could face injustice openly and boldly like Dopdi.

Helen Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of Medusa" suggests women to be self-independent both in gaining authorship in their writing and also to stand as an individual entity. Since women's writing and their bodies were meant to be hidden, she advocates women

to write and to acknowledge their bodies by themselves and not by men. Her “écriture feminine” strongly opposes Lacan's phallogocentric language. Freud's theory of penis envy revolves around the phallogocentric language and Cixous' main objective was to oppose such language and liberate women from patriarchy where women's writing would be considered as a separate genre with recognition and appreciation. Since the female body was objectified sexually in the masculine gaze and the women's role was limited to that extent, Cixous in the essay asserts that women should use writing and the body as sources of power and inspiration. So, she tried to equate the body with writing. Similarly, Mahasweta Devi took the female body in her writing as a tool representing strength. In this short story taken up for the study, she solemnizes the female body as an eminent asset to overcome exploitation and objectification. On contrary, Desai has shown the female body of Uma as a weakness and hence she becomes the submissive one.

The comparative study of both the protagonists, Uma and Dopdi, presents them as embodiments of self-denial and self-acceptance respectively as Uma chooses to remain silent and submissive while Dopdi becomes vocal and vulnerable. The two women characters face identity crisis, oppression, and exploitation but the narrative is different. Desai has drawn attention towards gender discrimination and women's subjugation by unleashing her protagonist as she states, “My style of writing is to allow the story to unfold on its own. I try not to structure my work too rigidly” (Desai, *BrainyQuotes*). Mahasweta Devi has given the solution to such oppression and enslavement by giving voice to the voiceless beings. She says, “All through my life, I have done whatever I felt like doing” (Devi, *Pioneer*). This quote rightly characterizes her bold and unconstrained mind. Both the writers while depicting the women protagonists with entirely different outlooks have finally projected them as victims of the cruel structure of the patriarchal society. It is observed that the in-between identities of both the characters were constructed while facing the challenges in the patriarchal set-up has resulted in their dualities and oppression.

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## Exploring Gender Fluidity in Indian Literature: From Ancient Myths to Mahesh Dattani's *Dance like a Man*

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### *Abstract*

*The perpetration of gender-based inequality is a despicable practice; it is often normalized in the name of cultural norms that exacerbate favoritism to a particular gender and tyrannical prejudice against the other. Judith Butler, one of the most celebrated theorists contends that gender fluidity is conspicuously relevant for ages and persists to be a popular and significant area of research for various researchers. It is striking that most people perceive sex and gender roles as biologically determined. Judith Butler rejects this idea and tendentiously and tenaciously argues that gender is a social construction. She thus gives a new direction to the debate of Gender Identity. She suggests that anyone can be male or female indifferent to his or her biological sex. Interestingly Indian epics are found supporting Judith Butler when a close reading of famous Indian epics is made. Lord Shiva who is known for his masculinity is also known for his half woman form. His 'Tandav' is admired. Lord Vishnu is well known for his feminine associations. Ironically it happens in the same society where dancing men are humiliated as it is aptly highlighted by Mahesh Dattani in his renowned play Dance like a Man which highlights a man's agony as he finds his passion in dance, so called feminine sphere. Dattani problematizes these issues and compels the reader to contemplate on various stereotypes. The Indian epics with all their magnanimity and plurality create enormous scope for the re-interpretation and re-presentation of gender fluidity across genre and media. The present paper seeks to re-examine various mythological figures who display a broad understanding of gender identity that modern society hesitates to accept.*

*Key words: Mythology, gender fluidity, transgender, deconstruction, classical literature, dance*

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### **Introduction**

Aristotle defines literature as an imitation of life and life can never be without problems therefore authors who use literature as a tool to address certain social issues are performing a commendable job. There was a time when literature was used to portray aesthetic aspect of life therefore it was full of romantic tales, divine creatures and all types of beauty. Devaki Nandan Khatri's *Chandrakanta* is one of the best examples of such novels. It is known as the first modern Hindi novel. The novel is over laden with magic, disguise and adventures. The common folks and their agonies were not discussed directly. But with the passage of time various changes were observed in literature and common folks with the burden of their anguish started to have a significant place there. Mahesh Dattani is one of the well known contemporary writers who write for a cause therefore he is considered the voice of

urban India. He is one of the best modern playwrights, director and actor, known for his plays like *Final Solutions*, *Night Queen*, *Dance like a Man*, *Tara*, and *Thirty Days*. He is interested in addressing painful realities of life. He always stimulates significant ideas through his writings. The truth of life which is entrapped within the chains of cultural norms is unlocked by the playwright through the key of his plays. His plays are known for gender sensitivity. He is so passionate regarding his plays that he explores issues which have been made normalized in the society and are not even seen as problems until discussed by Dattani in his works. Interestingly the same idea of gender sensitivity is explored in Indian ancient books too. Though there is a trend of rewriting ancient writings in a new perspective as highlighted by Dawson Varughese in 'Bharati Fantasy':

This postmillennial catalogue of new writing in English draws heavily on Hindu epics and literary traditions and interestingly spans the genre labels of 'fantasy' fiction, 'historical' fiction and for a certain audience 'postcolonial writing'. (Varughese 201)

Dattani has his own way of writing. The gagged voice of the sufferers is being released uniquely indifferent to their status, race or gender. The play *Dance like a Man* investigates the suppression that a man faces in society for being a man because he wants to make his career in the sphere which is considered feminine.

## Gender Identity

Society comprises men and women, the authors of its being, are complementary to each other and their union is the foundation of the universe but their journey is the tale of endless clashes caused by numerous inequalities that engender their being. Judith Butler is a seminal figure who has given new meaning to various ideas like masculinity, femininity, gender identity and production of identity etc. She enjoys the same position in Gender Studies as *Bible* in Christianity. She is renowned for many terms which have been revolutionized by her. Gender performativity is the key word that describes gender as a social construction. She highlights the artificiality of the whole idea of gender as she finds it quite similar to the role play activity where everyone is acting according to the situation. Thus she raises questions against the notion of gender roles which are determined on the basis of sex. Céline Leboeuf also highlights the same ideas quoting Simone de Beauvoir:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. (139-147)

Judith Butler looks at the differences in terms of the idea of gender as defined by the thinkers like her and deconstructs the definition of gender across different points of time. Thus she revolutionized the idea of gender identity. An attempt has been made to analyze gender roles how they are messing with the lives of the people and the things have fallen apart. Mahesh Dattani is an expert in bringing such stereotypes to the lime light and lays into it hard. He is realistic and more concerned with the society and its individuals rather than being mythical and imaginative. All the plays of Mahesh Dattani are dealing with wide range of contemporary social issues like gender discrimination, religious tensions and homosexuality and this has imparted a universal appeal to his plays. In his *Dance like a Man* the playwright challenges the society which considers Jairaj, the protagonist, effeminate as he wants to fulfill his dream of being a dancer but he is mocked at because dance is

considered a woman's territory as his own father says, "A woman in man's world may be considered progressive. But a man in woman's world is pathetic" (Dattani, *Collected Plays*, 427). The play raises a question on such society and its unwritten laws which compel Jairaj to live the life of frustration and dejection although the idol of Natraj is worshipped there. Mahesh Dattani does not believe in art for art's sake rather he writes for society's sake. His works are the studies of the individual in their relationships with the society, the common man and his never ending battle to gain stature amidst corrupt social values. The focus of the playwright is not on individual criticism but on the society which promotes perverted values and ultimately destroys the individual. His plays unfold, identify and come to a logical conclusion through sensibility and reasoning.

### **Gender Roles and *Dance like a Man***

Womanhood has a significant place in literature. The agonies of women have been highlighted in literature through various tales revolving around gender roles. An effort is being made here to display the sufferings of a man whose life is messed up due to fixed, rigid and illogical gender roles. Crossing the boundaries of gender means a bitter criticism and humiliation. Those men who do not fit into the pre decided roles of man will have to go through mental harassment as they are humiliated in the society and *Dance like a Man* is one of the best examples of it. Even the title of the play suggests that the play is a comment on the exclusive association of dance with women and femininity. 'Tandav' is a dance form performed by lord Shiva and it seems as if it is pointing out towards the 'Hijra community' who dance in feminine robes. It is acceptable if a woman dances as Bharatnatyam and many other dance forms are associated with the 'Devdasis' who used to dance in the temple to earn living. It is not seen a decent profession for a man. So the problem occurs when there comes a man who is passionate about dance and opts the role of a team dancer. Ratna and Jairaj Parekh, husband and wife who have a daughter Lata are in their 60s when the play opens. Both of them are famous Bharat Natyam dancers. They not only dance but have the similar dream for their daughter Lata also. There is another character Viswas who is the son of a sweet seller. The play opens with the possibility of an inter-caste marriage. Lata feels that her parents will allow her marriage to Viswas if he allows her to dance. So dance is very important for them. Amritlal Parekh is the head of the family, a renowned politician and a patriarch who believes dance, specially Bharatnatyam, is the profession of prostitutes as he says, "The craft of a prostitution to show off her wares- what business does a man have to learn from such a craft? No use when compared with dance" (Dattani, *Collected Plays*, 416). Though he is a reformist, he does not allow his daughter-in-law Ratna to go to an old Devdasi Chinnamma to learn dance. Eventually he allows Ratna to learn dance but on the condition that she will help him in discouraging Jairaj from dancing as he believes in stringent gender roles. He says, "Help me and I'll never prevent you from dancing" (Dattani, *Collected Plays*, 427). He scolds his son when he finds him dancing: "Do you know where a man's happiness lies? In being a Man" (Dattani, *Collected Plays*, 425-426). He feels ashamed of his son as he wants to do something feminine i. e. dance. He is annoyed and states, "Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance, I thought. I didn't realize this interest of yours would turn into an obsession" (Dattani, *Collected Plays*, 441). A man holds the authority to dominate the family in Indian society and he is expected to keep himself at a high platform to display this authority as Amritlal does. He is a politician and politics is seen as man's territory where he is performing the role of a reformist as he boasts of himself, "We are building Ashrams for these

unfortunate women! Educating them, reforming them.” (Dattani, *Collected Plays*, 416). He even boasts of himself for participating in freedom struggle movement although he himself rejects his own son's freedom for choosing his career. It seems as if Amritlal does all these activities because they make him manlier otherwise he is a conservative fellow who cannot digest the fact that his son dances. The playwright highlights gender inequality here as he explains that gender is constituted by some acts which are repeated and give shape to a particular gender identity.

Amritlal Parekh not only dislikes Jairaj but also the “Guru ji” who comes to their home to teach Jairaj art of dancing. Amritlal finds it unbearable the way the teacher walks, the clothes he wears and even his behavior as he says, “I have never seen a normal man with long hair. I have also noticed the way he walks” (Dattani, *Collected Plays*, 417). Dance is something which is used here as a tool to separate men and women. Because it is seen as an inferior kind of activity so it was left for women only as feminine identity is always kept at a low status as compared to Masculinity. Ironically it happens in the same society where Natraj is worshipped with great reverence. Lord Shiva the best of all men is fond of dancing and Krishna, incarnation of lord Vishnu is surrounded with women and often disguises himself in feminine form. No one takes pain to analyze and understand the meaning rather the same society makes the life of trans gender pathetic as they are not accepted anywhere. People like Jairaj suffer and live with the frustration of failure. Everything in his life is decided either by Ratna or his father because he is pursuing a profession which is not found fit for a man in the society as well as in his family. He is not earning money so he does not have the authority that his father has. Jairaj often blames his wife and the bitterness of their relationship is exposed when he says, “You took it away bit by bit. You took it away when you made me dance my weakest items. You took it away when you arranged the lightening so that I danced in your shadow” (Dattani, *Collected Plays*, 461). Thus the play begins with an effort to dance like a man and ends at a pessimistic note at the failure of Jairaj in being a man.

### Gender Identity in Indian Mythology

Mythology which is often perceived as Mithya (fictitious) is in fact a mirror where the solutions of unanswered questions can be sought. As it is seen by Chatman:

...which were selected (and possibly rearranged) the units that formed the plot, *mythos*...This kind of distinction has of course been recognized since the *Poetics*.(295)

Creativity is a special characteristic of a human being which brings him closer to God, the supreme creator of the universe. From God to man, everyone is preoccupied and allured by this concept. Literature is one of the creative discoveries of man and he claims more attention and invites more explanation. It is always entitled as the stream of intellectuals. Man delves deeper and deeper and tries to find the derivation of every concept. However, in this journey of realization of self, all the stories connected to man's history, his potentiality, decisions, intentions, his status up to God and down towards a demolished devil, his highness and his bleakness is revisited multiple times. The stories are repeated from one generation to other and this repetition continues from one generation to other with slight transformation, making it a myth. This is the law of nature; everything is compiled in a circle. From where it begins, it finds its end. So, in quest of completion, myths are studied in a new perspective. Amish believes, “Myths are nothing but jumbled memories of a true past. A past

buried under mounds of earth and ignorance.” (Tripathi, mahadev-myth). In this way myth can be called a cultural resource that people are actively re-analyzing by being re-involved to get a new meaning of existing concepts. It satisfies their rational mind; demystifies concepts and decodes symbols. Vikram Singh, a scholar also discloses “. . . mythology is perennial and keeps growing in terms of perspectives and connotations” (Singh, *Modern Retelling of Indian Myths*).

If the history and mythology of India are looked at, there are many illusions which lead one to a broader understanding of unsolved mysteries. Natraj, the wrathful figure of Lord Shiva, who lived on the snow clad mountains is fond of dancing and it invites more reverence to the deity. Lord Shiva is known for his anger (Rudra) but at the same time he is known for delicate emotions like love. When he lost his beloved wife Sati, the way he behaved is the characteristic of grief stricken woman who is overwhelmed with grief. A man is expected to be composed and calm even at the death of his dear ones especially of his wife. According to Shivpurana, a religious book, the deity comes on the earth in the feminine form multiple times like once he comes as a midwife to help one of his devotee. He comes on the earth as a 'Gopi' to enjoy Krishna's Rasleela where no other men were allowed. It is not only lord Shiva but there are many superheroes from Indian mythology who give a beautiful and explicit example of gender fluidity which claims that a man can be female and a woman can be male. Krishna who is considered as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu is surrounded by beautiful young girls (gopies). He is famous for his image of Mohini, Gopa Devi and Achyuta. No man is allowed when he performs 'Ras' therefore once when Shiva also expresses his desire to enjoy Ras, is advised to join Krishna in the disguise of a Woman. Everyone is well familiar with the image of 'Ardhnarishwar' image of Shiva where Shiva is blended with His female counterpart and acknowledged as a single identity. Pattanaik points out:

The divine inside you is God

The divine around you is Goddess

Without either there is neither... (“Shiva to Shankara” 139)

All this is accepted on the land where the people face bitter criticism if they violate gender roles. These Indian myths need to be decoded in order to understand the significance of these classics in transforming society into a better one. When mythical symbols are redefined and reanalyzed they take a different form. Though it is not an easy task to decode ancient myths, a systematic research and further study may give multiple meanings to the rituals and objects related to religion which are worshipped.

## Conclusion

Gender is a social construction and has nothing to do with biological characteristics. A man can have female characteristics and woman can have that of a male. The references are there in Indian classical literature also. Lord Vishnu is renowned for his “Mohini” image and the friendship between Arjun and Krishna is being analysed as a pair of lovers. When the men like Jiaraj from Dattani's *Dance like a Man* are seen, it is expected from the society where the epics are given sanctified place that the people understand and accept fluidity of gender but reality is just opposite of what is expected. Thus the questions Mahesh Dattani raises through his play *Dance like a Man* which problematizes rigidity of gender roles, have the answers in the ancient classical texts.

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**Trauma and Re (construction) of the Self in Arundhati Roy's  
*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness***

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*Abstract*

*Trauma studies as a literary field of study gained popularity in an intensive way in the beginning of mid 1990s, though earlier the term was used to denote a pathological condition. However, in the present trauma is used to signify events ranging from simple to catastrophic. Individuals who experience trauma or loss start perceiving altered worlds. Survivors often revise their mental models of identity and adapt to new circumstances. When the emotional disturbance has been very high, people often resort to unique ways or efforts to develop new self-concepts. Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) is an interesting novel in which the protagonist Anjum, a transgender woman, faces a highly traumatic experience of being a Gujarat riots survivor. She is completely shaken by the happenings and finds absolutely no way to come at peace with herself. Finally, she finds peace and solace in a graveyard with the dead ones and from there she manages to move on a path of self-recovery and re-construction. This paper aims at reading Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in the light of trauma theory and investigates the journey of a riot survivor from loss of identity to recovery and reconstruction of lost identity.*

*Keywords: Narration, bereavement, dissociation, identity, recovery, trauma*

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## **Introduction**

The word *trauma* stems from Greek word, meaning 'wound' and in contemporary medical and psychiatric literature—the term is described as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind—a wound inflicted by an emotional shock so powerful that it breaches 'the mind's experience of time, self and the world and eventually manifests itself in dreams and flashbacks (Caruth 1996). Thus, an occurrence is described as a traumatic experience not only because it is so forceful but also unthinkable and something that cannot be described in words or understood in established frameworks of understanding. Thus, trauma includes mental and emotional wounds opposite to the physical injury that is more visible and can be cured. In the field of literary studies trauma theory has gained significant attention and initiated new modes of reading and interpretation of texts. Trauma Studies has emerged as field of study that aims at reading and interpretation of the mental wounds in order to promote healing.

The core concepts in the contemporary theory on 'trauma' were laid on the basis of therapeutic practices of late nineteenth-century European neurologists such as Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Joseph Breuer, and Sigmund Freud. These men developed a range of

theories to account for abnormal behaviors by their patients, none of which showed any obvious connection to immediate physical or organic causes (Kurtz 3). The psychoanalytical understanding of 'trauma' defines it as an event so overwhelming that it cannot be processed normally at the time of occurrence, so that its memory is effectively blocked but returns to haunt the victim until it is appropriately confronted and dealt with (Kurtz 3). Trauma in literary studies owes much to psychoanalysis, modernism, deconstruction, and post-structuralism.

The ideas of Freud are significant in understanding 'trauma' as a pathological condition. He first associated trauma with hysteria in women, later he adapted this term in an attempt to explain the long-term, recurring effects of industrial and transportation accidents. This notion was further modified and elaborated in connection with his treatment of victims of trench warfare during the First World War. In all these cases, trauma refers to a real occurrence, a physical or emotional blow that overwhelms the senses and against which the mind and body must defend itself. In addition to numbness, it is like a condition where the capacity to feel pain is temporarily suspended, amnesia and repression are defences of the mind against such an intrusion. The victim simply forgets or denies that anything that has occurred. In developing a dynamic model of trauma, Freud called this forgetting a period of latency, where the trauma victim can appear quite normal in carrying out everyday routines. There is no exact time frame for the latency period, it could last for days or years, but the effects of the original experience will at some point emerge and manifest themselves, either in nightmares or some otherwise inexplicable abnormal behavior (Eyerman, ).

'Trauma' is further explored in modernism. Roger Luckhurst in his book *The Trauma Question* (2008) goes on to outline the origins of the concept of trauma across psychiatric, legal and cultural-political sources from 1860s to the coining of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in 1980. He further explores the nature and extent of 'trauma culture' from 1980 to the present, drawing upon a range of cultural practices from literature, memoirs and confessional journalism etc. Roger Luckhurst argues that there is a strong connection between modernity and trauma. He quotes Micale and Lerner in suggesting how trauma is 'responsive to and constitutive of modernity' (Luckhurst 20). He claims that although psychological wounds are not new to human experience but the changes in social conditions post Industrial Revolution like political alignments, rise of nation state, the supplanting of the relations and traditions of village life by urbanization, rise of capitalistic economic relations, technological innovations and new machine altered landscapes along with our senses of time and space. The advent of films, cinematography and the telegraph changed standards and pattern of communication. These markers of modernity have contributed in violent assaults on human sensibilities and on individual's personal and corporate identity, all of which evoke a traumatic vocabulary (Kurtz 4).

'Trauma' according to Cathy Caruth, is never fully understood and it is not even fully experienced when it takes place because of its obvious unexpected nature. It is just not available to awareness until it returns in the form of dreams, hallucinations or memories that assault the victim at any moment. In this sense, it can be stated that it is not possible to ignore psychological trauma, because it becomes intertwined in the structure of the victim's personality. In opposition to this traditional paradigm of trauma theory, Michelle Balaev suggests a more 'more nuanced and flexible concept of trauma.' (Balaev 3). According to Balaev, it has been proved that individuals react to trauma in many different ways. Therefore, the inability to talk about a traumatic event immediately after it happens may not be due to the

unspeakable nature of trauma but due to a wide range of individual, social, or cultural reasons. Hence, dissociation or isolation should not be considered only as the possible response to trauma, as Cathy Caruth states, even if it is frequently represented as the universal reaction to trauma in literature (La Capra 41-2). Further, the actual trauma itself, however, is not the only aspect which is harmful to the victim; it is the repression of its memory which brings forth the symptoms. Thus, trauma and memory are also deeply connected. In the present with growing interest in the field of memory studies and study of literary forms such as memoirs, testimonials, confessionals and historical documents the overlapping is very much inevitable.

### **Analysis of the Text**

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is encoded with contemporary issues on history, politics and culture of India. A gripping tale of Anjum, Tilo, Musa and Saddam connected with a common bond and that is that each one has suffered a traumatic past and that past has in some way connected the four of them. The traumatic experience has resulted in bonding that leads to the process of reconstruction and road to healing of the self.

The paper aims at exploring the character of Anjum in the light of trauma theory. The study deals with an investigation of how trauma can often reshape an individual's identity and subsequently influence the relationships they have with others and the course of action they pursue after the traumatic experience. In this regard, Arundhati Roy's transgender character Anjum's identity is affected by violence and bloodshed during Gujarat riots, and by the recurrent, unwanted and uncontrollable memories linked to the evocation of the traumatic moment. It is generally observed that the consequences of such violence often lead the character with a sense of isolation. The harrowing experiences that characters had to undergo often resurface in their psyche as dreams or nightmares. As a result of the traumatizing nature of the events, the characters are often forced to rebuild and reshape their own identities.

The novel begins with the story of Aftab alias Anjum-a transgender woman. Born as the fourth of five children to Jahanara Begum and Mulaqat Ali in Shahjahanabad, Aftab was declared to be a boy upon his birth. Soon her mother Jahanara Begum noticed that he was born with both male and female reproductive organ – a penis and a small unformed vagina. Her world was completely shattered and it took some time to get over the trauma of having produced a *Hijra* or *Kinnar*. Soon Aftab realized that his place was not with his family but with the other tall, slim-hipped women of Khwabgah-the House of Dreams. This was the beginning of his transformation from Aftab to Anjum. It was in the Khwabgah, Anjum realized that he is different and over the years Anjum became “Delhi's most famous *hijra*. Film-makers fought over her NGOs hoarded her, foreign correspondents gifted her phone number to one another as professional favour . . . ” (26). By now Anjum had become permanent resident of the Khwabgah. It was in her forty-sixth year Anjum announced that she wanted to leave Khwabgah and live like an ordinary person. She developed maternal instincts when she found Zainab-an abandoned orphan- at the steps of Jama Masjid. Zainab became her only love and she kept herself busy growing the abandoned child.

The usually healthy 'Bandicoot' [Zainab] went through a patch of ill health. Though not very serious but it was one after another illness she suffered. Each bout of illness made her more vulnerable to the next one. First Malaria, then two separate bouts of viral fever left the child lifeless. This somehow made Anjum convinced that someone “who envied her (Anjum's) good fortune had put a hex on Zainab” (38). And so she decides to pay visit at the

dargaah in Ajmer Sharif. Zakir Mian who was in his seventies agreed to travel with Anjum to the Ajmer Sharif Dargaah and from there to Ahmedabad in Gujrat as he had some business with his wife's family. Anjum goes along with him to Ahmedabad in order to avoid harassment and humiliation of travelling alone. It was in Gujrat, Anjum faced the worst trauma of her life. The communal riots in Ahmedabad shook her completely. The incessant killing of innocent people that went on weeks left an indelible impression on her mind soul.

It is often seen different types of traumas produce different responses, such as dissociative amnesia or intrusive recall, which are a result of the social valuation of the traumatic experience, created in a particular culture (Kirmayer, 184). This is what happened to Anjum too. The altered behavior, “the brooding, the rudeness, the reading and most seriously, the insubordination” (55) of Anjum was beyond comprehension for Ustad Kulsoom Bi and others at the Khwabgah. The once jolly and vivacious Anjum became more quiet and slowly quietness gave way to “something else, something restless and edge. It coursed through her veins like an insidious uprising, a mad insurrection against a lifetime of spurious happiness she felt she had been sentenced to” (56).

The post-traumatic responses are often highly unpredictable. Theorists are of the view that it is not clear what causes particular traumatic response in particular individuals. Some traumatic experiences can produce dissociation, while this is not the only response to devastating violence in the trauma. The psychologists working in non-Western parts of the world have found, many of trauma's symptoms are universal, occurring throughout time and in many cultures. Balaev believes that intense grief, numbness, affect deregulation, dissociation and survivor's guilt are seen among trauma survivors around the world. It is also believed in Anjum's case as it was first dissociation and then the re-creation of a new identity and place to survive.

Anjum was no longer the same person. The Gujrat riots inflicted wounds on her soul and left her numb and stoic. It was attack on her identity first as she was forced to dress like a man which indicated her injured self. She had to take a haircut like man “a junior bureaucrat in a pair of dark brown men's terry cotton trousers and a checked, short-sleeved safari shirt” (46). Critics and theorists have emphasized that trauma is not only to be understood as an individual, psychological and/or physical response, but also as a collective, political, and cultural condition with far-reaching material and immaterial dimensions (Kurtz, 126). Anjum's response to the trauma she suffered was also far reaching. As expected the traumatic experience made her a recluse and she preferred isolation. Freud writes in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*:

When something unpleasant has happened to the subject or when he himself has done something which has a significance for his neurosis, he interpolates an interval during which nothing further must happen—during which he must perceive nothing and do nothing . . . the experience is not forgotten, but, instead, it is deprived of its affect, and its associative connections are suppressed or interrupted so that it remains as though isolated and is not reproduced in the ordinary processes of thought.

Freud speaks of isolation and in this case it is a crucial one. The motor isolation is meant to ensure an interruption of the connection in thought. It is also believed isolation is way to ensure normal defence. The normal phenomenon of concentration provides a pretext for this kind of neurotic behavior. Anjum did this in a subtle manner and in different ways. First and foremost, in the initial days she spent most of her time with books and in a week she made Zainab learn and recite '*GayatriMantra*' in order to escape a riot situation and pass off as

Hindu.

The traumatic experience kept haunting her for some time but more than that the effect of the trauma made her weary of the world. It altered her mental condition. Resigning from all the social duties as a member of Khwabgaah, at last she finds peace in a graveyard. On the first night in the graveyard, after a quick inspection she placed her belongings near Mulaqat Ali's grave and unrolled her carpet and bedding between Ahlam Baji and Begum Renata Mumtaz Madam's grave. The memories of the riot kept haunting her in the graveyard. She had witnessed large scale killings of innocent people in the violence during Gujrat riots of 2002. She tries hard to dismiss the memories horrifying experience. The memories of riots kept haunting her and she kept dismissing them as pretending them to be 'unknown.' "She tried un-know that little detail as she rattled through her private fort" (63).

Memory indicates a relationship to past events that is shaped by, and in turn profoundly impacts, how we think, feel and live in the present. However, the classic model of trauma conceptualizes memory as an actual trace of the past, characterized by involuntary flashbacks by a "literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits" (Caruth 5). While on one hand memory can be seen as 'building redemptive and therapeutic power, however, what cannot be denied is that its impact can also shatter all "representational capacities, leading only a flood of terrifying affect and disrupting an individual's coherent sense of self" (Simine 141). Theorists of memory studies have suggested trauma as "temporary or permanent interruption of the ability to represent the traumatic event and to make meaning of it" (Simine 141).

Anjum's response to the traumatic event was not speaking about the happening at all. Her illusion regarding world and people is shattered and unlike victims of trauma who often narrate their tragedies are redeemed. She clearly wishes to un-acknowledge what happened in Ahmedabad during riots:

She [Anjum] tried to un-know what they had done to all the others—how they had folded the men and unfolded the women. And how eventually they had pulled them apart limb from limb and set them on fire. But she knew very well that she knew... thirty thousand parakeets with steel talons and bloodied beaks, all squawking together: *Musalman ka ek hi stan! Qabristan ya Pakistan!* (62)

Anjum escaped death by feigning dead. She pretended to be dead among the corpses along with dead Zakir Mian. But the rioters found her out and tried to kill her when someone amongst them declared that killing a *hijra* might bring them ill luck and thus she was left to live longer to bring them more good luck. This is how Anjum was allowed to live. And after this harrowing experience she wanted to get rid of the memories that haunted her in some or other way, "She [Anjum] tried to un-know that little details as she rattled through her private fort. But she failed. She knew very well that she knew very well that she knew very well" (63).

Anjum's response was entirely in contrast to Saddam's response. She never spoke about her traumatic experience. She simply went on creating a different world in the graveyard; a safe haven for all the victims, "This is the place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place of falling people" (84). It is observed by theorists that traumatic events result in some kind of haunting that creates physical and emotional pain, but also victims as way of overcoming the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may move ahead to create new self-concepts. Anjum reconfigures objectives of her life. She is no longer interested in dressing and self-grooming. She had lost interest in the material world.

Thus, it can be stated that, trauma, refers to a person's emotional response to an

overwhelming event that disturbs previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society and the different ways trauma impacts on re-creation of self-identity in this novel is worth study and analysis. Anjum faces the traumatic event incomprehensible at the beginning, harsh and horrifying when finally faced, but leading to a new way of understanding oneself and the world around. The other response to trauma is therapeutic process through the creation of a new character which in this case happens to Anjum after shifting into the graveyard. The journey from graveyard marks the beginning of road to recovery and recreation of new identity.

## Conclusion

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a “trauma novel”. This is because as a work of fiction it conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels. A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of the self-ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world (Balaev 150). Anjum is such a character who goes through a turning point in her life that changes her as a being.

In conclusion, the impact of traumatic or traumatizing experiences can be severe and direct, at other times hidden and subtle. They may reach from individually endured severe harm (victims of torture; victims of rape) to the psychological effects of secondary witnessing, from cultural memories of genocide to personal exposure to paralysis in damaged families; from repetitions of politicized communal trauma narratives to unacknowledged losses passed on generation after generation; from the post memories imprinted by family members to the felt-memory of continuous threats to one's physical and emotional integrity. Arundhati Roy too, uses different subtle ways of portraying how Anjum responds to the traumatic events and tries to overcome her past with a hope of new life and experiences.

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## Postcolonial Matrix of Folklore in Jeanette Armstrong's 'This is a Story'

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### *Abstract*

*The indigenous tribes of Canada, popularly called the First Nations people, are a subjected underclass community whose history, culture and practices were colonized by British and other European settlers who settled in the land in 17th and 18th Centuries. The First Nations people are a culturally diverse population whose literature was primarily oral forms of narratives, transmitted from one generation to another so that the culture remained intact. The oral narratives were considered 'savage' by European colonizers who engaged in indoctrination of Western culture in the children of First Nations children through Residential School system. They also banned the languages of the First Nations and their trades and food practices. But, many First Nations writers like Jeanette Armstrong, Thomas King, Lee Maracle, Peter Blue Cloud and Nicola I Campbell have been re-writing their history and reclaiming their identity. They often use symbols, stories and characters from their mythology and folklore in order to address the cultural void and abuse they have suffered for years. This paper attempts to study Jeanette Armstrong's short story 'This is a Story' in order to demonstrate the colonial dominance and cultural genocide inflicted upon the Okanagan First Nation Tribe to which she belonged to. Armstrong uses the narrative technique of reimagining folklore and mythology to reclaim her 'native' identity from colonial erasure and challenge the consensual submission to colonial hegemony.*

*Keywords: First nations, hegemony, cultural genocide, oral narratives, identity, mythology*

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### **Introduction**

Literature is often not defined by its written nature. Literature can be oral or even the spoken form. Earliest forms of human settlements like the First Nations people also recorded their life, events, the discoveries they made and the rules that they followed. But their literature was not written. It was mostly oral or spoken. The caves were decorated with their hieroglyphics and other forms of art. It was a pictographic form of language. The British and other Europeans who made contact with these tribes in Canada saw the lack of written literature and lifestyles proof of their savagery. When the Europeans established their colonies and settlements in the land of the First Nations, the population of the First Nations slowly diminished and soon they were just reservations. The language and the literature of the Colonists took over the land. The legends and the cultural literature of the First Nations were replaced by those of their conquerors. It was their adventure stories, their conquests and their religious and lifestyle lore that became the literature of the Canadian land.

The indigenous tribes of Canada had an important part in the history of the country and its literature as well. Story-telling was an important tradition of the northern North-American tribes where the central characters included the Raven of the West Coast, the Coyote

(Kyoti) in the Plateau region, the Old Man in the Prairies and the Nananbush in the East. These stories were once meant for a didactical purpose but now, these have been published in various languages for critical attention and appreciation.

Several postcolonial critics of literature have noted that 'literary' form of writing was another enforcement of western ideals upon the indigenous tribes of Canada whom the Settlers considered to be "savage". They had hoped that written literature would educate them and make them more 'civilized' (Hamill 19). This came with the severe disregard for the history, language, culture and ethics of the native Canadians. For many centuries, the Indigenous tribes of Canada have suffered what the United Nations called 'Cultural Genocide'- their culture was cut out and threatened by missionaries who took over their land, punished them severely for speaking their language, following their religion and rituals, changing their lifestyle, and forcing welfare and residential schools upon children, forcing them away from their parents. This gave rise to the Lost Generation of Children who felt strange and alien in their own land, without knowledge of their own race and culture. Literature stems from expression of thoughts, emotions and ideologies. The First Nations writers understood their legacies and sought to educate Canadians about their culture and how disintegrated it has become due to constant government policies and discrimination.

Jeanette Armstrong is one of the most prolific artists and voices of indigenous culture in Canada. Not only she is a professor and a writer, but also heads the En'owkin School of International Writing, managed by and for indigenous writers. As a representative for the indigenous practices and cultural knowledge in post-colonial Canada, her contribution to the pedagogy of writing, documenting and citing indigenous literature is a matter of pride for the modern First Nations people. When First Nations writers like Jeanette Armstrong retell the folklore of their community, they connect different planes of time in order to validate their cultural identity assimilated by the colonial settlers in their path to modernization. They offer an alternate history which views the indigenous people as the original inhabitants of the land with a culture, a history and social milieu rooted in traditions of environmental ethics.

An alter-history does not imply a counter history but rather another version of history, which does not propagate absolutist notions of truth and power. Consequently, one must take cognizance of the 'self' in order to arrive at an understanding of responsibility towards a particular narrative. What readings are there after all except the personal? To quote postcolonial critic, Gayatri Spivak, who explains in an interview, published in 1990, "The idea of neutral dialogue is an idea which denies history, denies structure, denies the positionality of subject" (72). Colonial perceptions of Aboriginal people have formed such an oppressive and pervasive presence in their lives that for many, self-identification is dialogic by necessity and therefore contextualized by extension. Armstrong's short story 'This is a Story' is therefore an aboriginal writing that forms bridges and connections across pervasive stereotypes and revitalizes the indigenous community links. 'This is a Story' presents the story of indigenous resistance without any explanations regarding cultural practices, mythological characters or language. It clearly indicates the self-identification of Armstrong as a person whose culture belongs to Native Canada. She does so to show that her work does not require any explicit illustration or explanation as they have always belonged to the land.

### **The Awakening of Kyoti**

Jeanette C. Armstrong's short story 'This is a Story' is a retelling of the Kyoti (Coyote) myth of the Okanagan Tribe to which she belonged to. The story begins with an

indigenous tradition of women's gatherings at bonfires where the tribal myths are narrated as part of the oral tradition. One of the women narrates the story of Kyoti within the oral tale. The narrative is direct, simple and without an introduction to the character Kyoti, as if Armstrong expects the reader to be aware of her culture and their tales. Her narrative de-colonizes her subaltern identity to demolish the dichotomy of racial identity, renewing her native identity.

Kyoti, in Armstrong's short story, wakes up from an unusually short nap, in order to eat salmon with 'the People' only to realize that the people of Okanagan no longer remember him, their identity and their tradition of going on the 'salmon run' because the land has now been taken over by the 'Swallows'. Kyoti understands that the people are poisoned from the Swallow food they eat and gathers them together to break the dam on the Okanagan River so that the traditional food, salmon can be eaten by 'the People'. Armstrong reimagines Kyoti, the trickster figure of the Okanagan folklore, as a symbol of postcolonial revolution against the oppressive settlers—the Swallows. She once again brings the subaltern to the mainstream narrative as she refers to the settlers as 'Swallow people' while the natives were referred to as 'the People' with a capital letter, reclaiming the identity as a person belonging to the Canadian land.

The dam constructed in the Grad Coulee comes as a shock for the Kyoti who represents the mythic time of the Natives who lived as one with the land. He is unable to connect with the strange construction. The intrusive nature of the dam, blocking the salmon from reaching the Okanagan region is symbolic to the settler's culture that denies the people their tradition of salmon run and fishing their food. The settler's culture or Swallow people are constantly compared to the Monsters in the original stories that must be fought against. Kyoti appears in this story as a symbol of their traditional values, reminding them that they must never surrender to. When he walks far to reach the Okanagan Reservation, he is shocked to see that the young ones could only understand the Swallow language and not their own.

Kyoti's difficulty to be respected and understood within his own people is the most significant part of the story. In one of her essays, Armstrong remarked that her “experience of the land is indivisible from the language” and also adds that, “the Okanagan language shapes that connection” (Haladay 34). Kyoti's material disconnect with the young ones in the Okanagan reservation is seen when the boys speak the crude version of the Swallow language and even laugh at Kyoti when he asks to see their headman, claiming that they had none. Their houses, their food and even their ignorance about traditional practices are used by Armstrong as a metaphor for the Colonizer's 'pacification of the primitive', as an attempt to erase the structure of their thought.

The only person who could understand Kyoti's language of the People, the old lady in the village is overwhelmed by his appearance and explains how the Swallows are like the Monsters of the origin myths that built walls to prevent salmon running. She makes it a point to tell him that while he has saved them from those walls made out of clay and spit, these walls were made from something worse. Armstrong makes a strong point against the settler's dams, commenting on the ecological effect that the manmade structure had upon their land and their staple diet, the salmon.

The Okanagan trickster Kyoti appears in various works of Jeanette Armstrong including her second novel *Whispering in Shadows*, where the native trickster god acts as both a symbol of community support and a strong figure fighting against environmental imbalance. In the novel, it is also how the trickster figure is not just a playful character but a character who teaches the natives about the value of change in the world and how to cope with it (Haladay 40). The protagonist in the novel, Penny, an artist, is guided by the spirit of her

great-grandmother Tupa whose death has affected Penny deeply. It is her grandmother's constant shadow that inspires Penny's art, helps her stand out in the world of European-western artistic imagery. It is Tupa's spirit that educates her on the Okanagan language and philosophy, enabling her to congregate her natural world with the art that she creates. When Penny is diagnosed with cancer after being exposed to pesticides (while working on a farm), the characters from her Tupa's stories like the Fox and Coyote become central characters in the novel. At this stage, the novel is no longer magic realism. The tricksters appear in her dreams and fight with animated faces, a symbol for the cancerous cells that invade her body. The reference to the Coyote and her Okanagan traditions is seen once again as we see Penny compare her cancer to the flesh-eating monsters in the creation myths that Coyote narrates to her. Through the character of Penny, Armstrong explains in the novel *Whispering in Shadows*, that the world would end if the flesh-eating monsters survived and the only way to get rid of them was to maintain the "balance" (247). She goes further on to say "The balance is the natural order in this world. Now everything is out of balance. We are causing another transformation. Our old people say they're back. In all kinds of different forms" (247).

Dr. Haladay observes here that the creation stories of the Okanagan tribe have been emended in the modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century setting where the narrator emphasizes on an ecological balance that human beings must have with the environment around them. She even goes on to say that the flesh-eating monsters are metaphorically compared to the colonizer whose presence has brought about an imbalance in the ecosystem (42-43). She calls it the "activist project of literary decolonization" (43) that disproves the wrongfully presented history of the native Canadians.

Similarly, in "This is a Story", Kyoti tries to convince the leaders and so-called headmen of different reservations explaining the value of their traditional food and how the Swallow food is poisonous for them. He plays the role of an agent of community revival and traditional values.

The people, irritated with Kyoti's rebellious ideas of community revival, refuse to support him. Their response insinuates a consensual, submission to the hegemonic power of the colonizing settlers. Vasilis Maglares observes that the Gramscian theory of consensual hegemony views the act as a loss of autonomy by individuals of society whose goals are occupied by that of the capitalistic state. The theory also states that the dominant class of the society modifies the living conditions of the people in the civil society in order to enforce an ideological power. This would, in turn, generate the consent of the workers who would work for the benefit of the capitalistic economy. But there is an indicator that there will be class struggle for a change in the hegemonic consciousness (Maglares 2). A reflection of the theory in Armstrong's short story is seen. The leaders and people of the Reservation use crude language with Kyoti and accuse him of instigating their youth against the white settlers. This reflects the corrosive nature of the other's totalizing hold on the Natives of the region; consensual oppression as Gramsci would describe it.

A sense of self that opposes the hegemonic control and oppression of colonialism is what Dr. Victor Li looks into in his research on postcolonial resistance. Li uses the theories of French philosopher Glissant as he notes that the Self is an identity that does not accept the hegemonic consciousness but shapes itself into an identity that is autonomous and removed from the cultural erasure (178). Li notes that in Glissant's perspective, it must not lead to separationism or seclusion. It must promote cultural articulation and imagination. In his research, Li quotes Glissant's poignant line, "[t]o declare one's identity is to write the world

into existence" (178).

When we speak of narrativization of creation and existence, we are naturally reminded of mythology, that mythology that articulates a culture into existence. To go into specifics, one must look into the theories of Hispanic anthropologist Lluís Duch, specifically the communicative functions that myth offers to connect the present and the absent past. (Morales 34)

In the two scenes where Kyoti uses communicative function of myth is when he is shocked that the people have forgotten their Okanagan traditional hospitality practise and their traditional greetings in their language. He questions their passive nature, putting the subjectivity on them once again and makes them look into the lenses of reality and understand that they now fit the 'savage and brutish' narrative that colonization used to stereotype them. When Kyoti tells the Native youth to take him to the old man of the village, Kyoti is devastated to learn that the food, clothes and etiquettes that shaped their indigenous identity have been 'othered' by the settlers. The story ends with Kyoti gathering the youth of the village together to fight back against the colonizers. His staff, with rainbow ribbons tied to it, makes the land tremble with anticipation and power. This fight is not the violent fight of two warring communities, but a war of epistemics that resists the dissolution of their culture and traditional rituals. The usage of a mythological character to initiate this change is significant because as Duch points out, the political purpose of mythology to facilitate self-identity and consciousness of the self or the community (Morales 35).

Other than the characters, Armstrong's novel and short story both contain identical terms and phrases that speak strongly against the settler's anthropocentric, colonial nature. During his travel around the Swallow land, Kyoti observes that the Swallows (the settlers) have not transformed from monsters into people. He continues to say that their pretense of being People has not fooled him. It is clear that Kyoti could sense the monster within them as they do not live in harmony with the ecology around them. He concludes that it was the monster in them that destroyed mountains and water bodies. He follows up his observations by saying it was his duty to change the Swallows as he was the trickster. Kyoti asserts his faculty, reclaiming his position as a change maker who reckons he could even change the colonizer into his People who lived as one with the land and the environment. The onus of 'self', that is usually seen with the colonizer is placed upon Kyoti, in these lines. His commitment to the land ethic and the Indigenous people gives him the space of a resistance, challenging the notion of labels placed upon them. R.Radhakrishnan draws on Spivak's theory of subaltern representation and explains that the coalition of subaltern was "re-presenting to itself its own coherent vision of the world" (85). Armstrong's construction of Kyoti as a revolutionary aboriginal can be argued through Radhakrishnan's theory that when 're-presentation' is applied to the cultures of the world, it would enable the 'other' to acknowledge the 'subject' within themselves. Linda Revie's research on the mythological Kyoti's trickster nature, is that of a 'shape-shifter' whose part is to question the audience, confuse them and change the direction of the tale in order to establish a truth. So, the audience plays a role that is almost synonymous with the teller of the story (5).

### **The Native Way**

In his novel *Green Grass Running Water*, Thomas King, the popular Canadian First Nations writer writes, "So/ In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water/ Coyote was there, but Coyote was asleep/That Coyote was asleep and that Coyote was dreaming/When

that Coyote dreams, anything can happen/I can tell you that” (qtd. in Hamill).

In his book on the history of Okanagan Ranching and Rodeo, William Cohen notes that writers like Jeanette Armstrong and Douglas Cardinal describe the process of creative expression as “enrichment process” (31) as it enlightens the group with traditional knowledge that would lead to self-determination and sustainability within the culture. Cohen also goes on to describe the Coyote as the teacher who taught the Okanagan their language, ceremonials, rituals and even the everyday activities that connected them to their environment (50). The position of Kyoti as the voice of the creator is noteworthy within this short story as he takes the form of a re-creator, creating a dialogic medium to solve the spiritual and ecological turmoil of the People once again. The process of creation, teachings, mythology begin once again with Kyoti as the theological and philosophical base of the Native people's ethics and knowledge.

The rainbow ribbons of Kyoti's staff play a powerful role in the story. The tradition of rainbow ribbons tied on staff and trees is an indigenous practice by the First Nations people, honoring the Earth and the landscape that give them resources. The array of colours is said to represent the cardinal directions and the elements of the world like water, sun, lightning, rain and so on. The indigenous culture considers it to be sacred due to the prayers and aspirations that it represents ('Ribbon Trees: A Traditional Indigenous Practice'). When Kyoti ties the colours to his staff, it is a symbolic act of revolution, calling on to the powers of Nature to challenge the colonial absolutism that has oppressed the People. Being a demi-god and a trickster figure in the Okanagan Mythology, Kyoti's 'coming back to life' is a figurative means of representing reflection, agitation and empowerment of the younger generation (Cohen 9). In her paper on constructing myth in mediated culture, Dr. Morales observes that Gilbert Durand who studies the symbolic anthropology of myth, states that translation of myth from an archetypal discourse into a logical one invalidates the myth. He further goes on to say that the text within the myth is impoverished when the myth is translated into logic (36). Duch takes a similar approach to logical conceptualism and states that mythology has been a successful medium through which a culture has come to terms with reality and structure without having to adhere to the authoritarian and logical discourse (Morales 37). The dissemination of knowledge within the Okanagan Community uses the myth of Kyoti as a channel that connects one generation to another, providing their minds with a paradigm for sustainability and welfare.

## **Conclusion**

The works of Jeanette Armstrong bring out a perfect balance to the mythological revisiting of the Kyoti's awakening and construction of identity. Through Kyoti, Armstrong gives the Indigenous people a paragon of revolution that would rouse their consciousness. The reconceived Okanagan myth during times of colonization bridges the gap between the 'mythos' and the 'logos' of displaced, oppressed Native communities. The mediation between the colonizing reductionism and the native ideology is explored by Armstrong through various indigenous symbols, language and the metaphor of the 'salmon run'. In conclusion, the mythopoetic nature of Armstrong's short story demonstrates an innovative, active and action-based form of decolonization and kinship.

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## **Abjection and Forced Displacement: A Study of Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah***

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### *Abstract*

*The socio-political representations of Palestinians especially of those living in the West Bank and Gaza are problematic when positioned within the context of Israel/Palestine conflict. They are often misconstrued or dehumanized in the unremitting context of territorial disputes. The process of decolonization followed by the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 had altered the territorial affiliations of Palestinians. The Palestinian catastrophe (al Nakba) which also includes massive displacement is articulated through discourses highlighting the problem of alterity in territorial conflicts. A humanistic discussion of (West Bank) Palestinian exilic history and diasporic experiences is critical to synthesize the consequences of forced displacement at subjective and collective levels. This study aims to address the abjection of Palestinians corresponding to displacement and exile through textual interpretation of Palestinian writer Mourid Barghouti's memoir I Saw Ramallah. Barghouti's existential account of the Palestinian predicament discusses the notion of permanent uprootedness imposed on Palestinians since decolonization. His experiences in exile and lament for repatriation are painstakingly narrated in the memoir which exposes the untold stories of al Nakba. The study employs the sociological implications of abjection theory proposed by Julia Kristeva and Edward Said's reflections on Exile to construe the states of abjection and forced displacement of Palestinians as reflected in Barghouti's life narrative.*

*Key Words: Forced displacement, diaspora, West Bank Palestinians, exile, abjection*

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The political and literary articulations of the unsettling Palestinian predicament encounter ideological and humanistic contestations as they are often stereotyped when in analogous interpretation with the Israeli discourses of nation and territory. The notions of home and belonging are quintessential tropes of Palestinian narratives yet are problematic in their representations. This study approaches the Palestinian question of home by posing it against abjection and forced displacement through the life narrative of Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti (b.1944). The concern here is to critically examine the state of abject and exile to place the Palestinian experiences of post-war periods against the belonging to Palestine. Though the Palestinian resistance literature (*adab al-muqawama*) is primarily attributed to Ghassan Kanafani (Rabbani 275) writers like Mahmoud Darwish (b.1987), Emile

Habibi (b.1974) and Barghouti manifest diverse aspects of Palestinian dilemma through powerful counter narratives. Barghouti stands unique in the Palestinian literary canvas for his rush of intense emotions that echo the agony of forced detachment imposed upon Palestinians. His literary works occupy Palestinians as victims of the political unrest whose unjust displacement is exegetically berated and their history is attempted to be reclaimed (Parry). The portrayal of Palestinian predicament in Barghouti's memoir *I Saw Ramallah* is indeed political but as Edward Said states in his forward to the text, “none of it is either abstract or ideologically driven: whatever comes up about politics arises from the lived circumstances of Palestinian life” (viii). The memoir places two aspects of forced displacement to its foci, first in relation with exile and second in connection with the notion of home. The title of the memoir reflects this complexity as the author is forced to enter his own city as an outsider even after his anticipated return from exile. There is detachment in Barghouti's use of the words “I” and “Ramallah” in the title which reflects his identity being cast-off from the city itself. Here, exile is not the only trope of detachment, but the notion of home itself is contested and analyzed in analogous with displacement. Said defines exile as a historic experience and refuses to limit its implications to subjective level. He states in *Reflections on Exile* that the historical experiences of exile, dislocation and migration facilitate diverse approaches to the “invigorating presence of a banished or forgotten reality” (Said). Similarly, Barghouti's personal predicament of dislocation and his struggles of repatriation can be interpreted as a historical experience shared by the collective to revisit the forgotten Palestinian reality. The memoir narrates Barghouti's (and Palestine's) reality through his repatriation albeit it is fragmented. Barghouti's Palestine as Anderson states is an “imagined political community” (6) because the divided population of Palestine (refugees, Israeli Palestinians, residents of West Bank and Gaza) carries in their minds the image of their communion. His return to Palestine however unravels the distorted reality of their nation which makes his communion ambivalent. The indecisive position of the author in the liminality of national attachment and detachment is of interest to this study to contextualize his (and the collective's) experiences in the conflicted homeland.

The defeat of the Arab camp in the 1948 Arab Israeli war followed by the Palestinian exodus constitutes *al Nakba* or the catastrophe of Palestinian people. The word *Nakba* has been in use to describe the repercussions of the establishment of Israel in 1948 (Achcar 28). But for the Palestinian residents of West Bank and Gaza, the *Nakba* begins with Israel's victory in the Six Day War of 1967. Israel occupied the remaining land of Palestine after the war and refused to allow Palestinians to return to their homes imposing upon them displacement and exile. Said states in his forward to the memoir, “Every Palestinian today . . . is in the unusual position of knowing that there was once a Palestine and yet seeing the place with a new name, people and identity that deny them altogether” (viii). This disproportion between the Palestinian past and the present emerges throughout Barghouti's life narrative. Like many Palestinians who were forced to exile, Barghouti's right to return was possible only through the Oslo Agreement (1993) between Israel and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) which allowed Palestinian self-governance in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Shoabi 100). However, Barghouti's postcolonial repatriation in 1996 is complex as the law denies his right to become the resident of his homeland which symbolically makes his return to Palestine impossible. The images of Barghouti's disfigured homeland concretize his dilemma of detachment and contemplate on mutilated belonging.

Here I am, entering Palestine at last. But what are all these Israeli flags?

I look out of the bus window and I see their flags appearing and disappearing at the

repeated checkpoints. Every few meters their flag appear.

A feeling of depression I do not want to admit to. A feeling of security refusing to become complete. (Barghouti 21)

Thirty years of exile and the long awaited return turned out to be an unpleasant experience for Barghouti because of the changes his homeland had undergone due to the strong political undercurrents. The streets of Palestine stuck with Israeli flags reminded him of the disproportion between the Palestinian past and the present. The feeling of being defended that one ought to experience in his homeland was deprived off the author as the symbols of the conqueror prompted his defeat. Barghouti's feeling of depression which is antithetical to the emotional rush of an expatriate is identified to be the abject or what represents the author's reaction to the disfigured meaning of his homeland. Julia Kristeva infers abject as human reaction to the threatened breakdown in meaning. She claims that abject has to do with "what disturbs identity, system, order" (4). The "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4) which is inherently traumatic constitutes the abject. The uncanny abject here is Barghouti's feeling of depression which he refuses to admit. His return to the homeland is unfortunately a return to the foreignland that creates abjection through its uncanniness.

And now I pass from my exile to their . . . homeland? My homeland? The West Bank and Gaza? The Occupied Territories? The Areas? Judea and Samaria? The Autonomous Government? Israel? Palestine? Is there any other country in the world that so perplexes you with its names? Last time I was clear and things were clear. Now I am ambiguous and vague. Everything is ambiguous and vague. (Barghouti 12)

Barghouti's ambiguous emotion towards his homeland as a repatriate manifests the expression of abject. Barbara Creed suggests that the abject is placed where the meaning collapses, "the place where I am not" (65). It threatens life and should be placed on the other side of "an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self" (65). The author encounters abject when he is exposed to the liminal space between the reality and what was once his past. Liminality or the quality of disorientation was introduced in Anthropology in the early 1900s but the significance of the concept was rediscovered by British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (Thomassen 14). Turner states, "The attribute of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous" (81) as it is a "period of scrutiny for central values and axioms of the culture where it occurs (156). In such contexts "the very structure of society [is] temporarily suspended" (Szokolczai 142). Barghouti finds himself in this liminality when he returns to Ramallah. He is uncertain about the stature of his homeland and struggles to place himself within it. His position as an expatriate is contested because the notion of homeland itself is contested. The West Bank is passed to the status of occupied territory and is unofficially retitled as Judea and Samaria, which are unfamiliar to Barghouti's cultural identity. The author feels misery and degradation reflecting the unfortunate condition of his homeland. The sense of helplessness is identified in author's abjection as he is concerned with himself and his homeland's state of transition from a culturally signified territory to a mutilated occupied territory. Kristeva locates the abject in the liminal state between two positions. Similarly Barghouti's state of abjection can be located in the liminality of his pre-exilic disposition in homeland and the post-exilic ambiguity.

Said has described the modern age "as the age of refugee, the displaced person and mass immigration" (*Reflections on Exile* 174). His narration of the third-world exilic experiences exposes how people are insignificantly treated and denied of identities. Said

rejects nationalistic ideology in the articulation of exilic experiences because it fails to “touch the [singular] predicament the exile” (177). The exile's nomadic existence claims Said “must cultivate a scrupulous subjectivity through writing” (181-184). Following the lead of Saidian critic, Barghouti's memoir can be construed as a subjective account of exile and occupation. Barghouti's position as a dispossessed writer slides in with Said's voice in his memoir *Out of Place*.

I responded by saying that I left Palestine in December 1947, accenting the word “Palestine.” “Do you have any relatives here?” was the next question, to which I answered, “No one,” and this triggered a sensation of such sadness and loss as I had not expected. For by the early spring of 1948 my entire extended family had been swept out of the place, and has remained in exile ever since. (xii)

Similar to Barghouti's experience as an expatriate, Said articulates the agonising aspects of returning to one's disfigured homeland. The passage above describes Said's visit to Jerusalem in 1998. He was confronted by a few Israeli officials who met him with routine questions such as when after birth he had left Israel. Said in his reply refers to Palestine instead of Israel as a form of resistance against the injustice forced upon them. However, the realization that no family of him had remained in Palestine since 1948 puts him in great sorrow. Barghouti's metaphoric conversation with the Israeli soldier shares similar tones of loss and helplessness.

Can he notice my humanity? The humanity of the Palestinians who pass under the shadow of his shining gun every day? We are here on the same bit of land, but he has no bag in his hand, and he stands between two Israeli flags that fly freely in the air and in international legitimacy. (Barghouti 12)

The plausible conflict between the oppositions reflects the complexity in contextualizing the crisis. It is difficult to distinguish the victim from the perpetrator. The soldier of occupation is a potential enemy for Barghouti but he is bound to his duty as a protector of his State which was once the author's homeland. The author contemplates on the plight of Palestinians who are forced to survive in their own land at the mercy of Israel. Barghouti brings in the dichotomy when he differentiates himself from the soldier. Both claim rights to the same land but the soldier's right to the author's homeland is accepted under legitimacy whereas the author had to wait for thirty years to return even as a visitor. Said's encounter with the Israeli soldiers at Jerusalem also reiterates the state of helplessness that one feels under oppression. Both the narratives reflect the detachment of exile and home on subjective levels.

The subjective dimensions of exile are similar in both the memoirs despite the differences in their historical contexts. Anna Bernard posits the significance of subjectivity in Barghouti's narration of exile and displacement. She claims that the narrative does not manifest the images of unified shared identity but captures the multiple facets of Palestinian dilemma in the contexts of 1948 and 1967 exiles (81).

I tried to put the displacement between parentheses, to put a last period in a long sentence of the sadness of history, personal and public history. But I see nothing except commas. I want to sew the times together, I want to attach one moment to another, to attach childhood to age, to attach the present to the absent and all presents to all absences, to attach exiles to the homeland and to attach what I have imagined to what I see now. (Barghouti 144)

Each sentence of the passage begins with “I” which establishes the centrality of the author as an individual in the articulation of displacement. Barghouti's intense subjective

voice invites readers to his personal experiences and demonstrates how multiple personal stories can constitute the collective as multivocal elements. Literary theorist Louis Renza suggests that the “writer's present self-identity” (3) is critical in recording the past. It is the present “I” that seek connection between the past and the present. The poetic manifestation of Barghouti's displacement posits his present self-identity in connecting with the past. However, his liminal position in the state of abject challenges his attempts to connect the two positions. On the other hand, Leila Aboulela discusses the limits of individual accounts in contributing to the collective.

. . . when I write I move away from myself, touch something common, universal, something that includes me but is not exclusively me. If I don't go away from myself how can I produce something strange, something surprising, something lifted up from the ordinary. (3)

Aboulela's observation is contested because it rejects the ability of an individual to speak to the collective. Barghouti has never distanced from himself rather he places “I” at the center of the narrative but this does not suggest that his unique experiences of displacement are incapable of conversing with the collective. He often contemplates on the shared implications of the narrative of his return. Unlike Barghouti, his deceased brother Mounif could not return to Palestine. Mounif represents those Palestinians for whom homeland is still a distant dream. However, Barghouti wonders if his return had bought back all of the Palestinians in exile.

They are here. Do they look with me out of the window? Do they see what I see? Do I rejoice in what gives them joy, make fun of what they mock, object to what they object to? Can I write with pens on their snow-white paper the things that come to my mind now that martyrs also are part of reality, and that the blood of the freedom? (Barghouti 34)

Here Barghouti deals with a serious aspect of subjectivity. He brings in the collective through drawing a parallel with his personal experiences. Barghouti approaches his return through the prism of the collective. He envisions shared joy and sorrow though his experiences are unique to himself. Barghouti makes the collective, the canvas to paint his thoughts on reality. American author Rosemary Betterton says, “an autobiography creates a strange aura of impersonality” (103) which is margined out by the specific histories of the author and the other. But Barghouti's life narration insists on personalization which imbibes the other within his “I”. Passages like this abound.

After how many more thirty years will the ones who never came back return? What does my return, or the return of any other individual mean? Is it their return, the return of the millions that is the true return. Our dead are still in the cemeteries of others. Our living are clinging to foreign borders. On the bridge, that strange border unmatched on any of the world's five continents, you are overwhelmed by your memories of standing at the borders of others. (Barghouti 34)

Barghouti's emphasis on the “I” is transferred to the collective as each of his experiences of exile and return are validated on communal level. He compares his life with the lives of displaced Palestinians and hopes that his repatriation will carry the collective gaiety of his community whose metaphorical participation in author's victory destabilizes the boundaries of subjectivity. The inclusion of multiple individuals within the author's “I” delineates the ability of subjective stories to document the experiences of a community. Similar pellucid representations of Palestinian exile can vividly be seen in the poems of Darwish. His poem “We Travel like Other People” begins with the line “We travel like other

people, but we return to nowhere” (stanza 1). Though the “we” here explicitly refers to the collective, it still imbibes the two separate entities; the speaker and his collective. The “we” as a collective is identified to be constantly on the run but nowhere to return which refers to the Palestinian predicament. Said in his text *After the Last Sky*, claims that Palestinians “are migrants” and their continuity as a “nation in exile” is “constantly on the move” (164). Such narratives emerge from the “forceful geographical, cultural, and physical shuffling of people and their identity from one place to the other” (Al-Saleh 88). They imbibe the fluidity of exile and reflect the terrorizing aspect of return as it is manifested in Barghouti's memoir.

Here I am walking toward the land of the poem. A visitor? A refugee? A citizen? A guest? I do not know Is this a political moment? A surreal one? A moment of the body? Or of the mind? . . . There is very little water under the bridge. Water without water. As though the water apologized for its presence on this boundary between two histories, two faiths, two tragedies. The scene is of rock. Chalk. Military. Desert. Painful as a toothache. (Barghouti 10)

The return is presented on an ambiguous scale. It is terrifying as it is in the exile. The return to one's disfigured homeland unsettles the mind of the repatriate rather than evoking the sense of attachment. For instance, Barghouti feels displaced and dispossessed on his return. He is uncertain of his stature at his homeland. He has unfortunately been severed from his fundamental right to the homeland and is forced to identify himself with new titles which are problematic to his cultural identity. The Palestinian reality appears through the author's concern that the homeland of displaced Palestinians is subjected to divisions, filled in with Israeli settlements, and “periodically locked down by a sophisticated closure regime” (Parsons 198). Though the author feels immense satisfaction for being surrounded by his people, his happiness is short-lived as he must return to Egypt which is his home after exile. This momentariness of Barghouti's return is placed well within the title that reflects the author's vision of Ramallah which is temporary. Barghouti “saw” Ramallah which is merely a short-lived vision that cannot transcend the limits of an expatriate. This leads to the dialogue between the displaced author and his Israeli counterpart who is responsible for the author's momentary vision of his homeland.

The houses built on top of ours gallantly declare their willingness to understand our odd predilection toward living in camps scattered in the Diaspora of gods and flies, as though we had begged them to throw us out of our homes and send their bulldozers to destroy them in front of our eyes . . . their fighter jets forgive the graves of our martyrs in Beirut. Their soldiers forgive the tendency of our teenager's bones to break. Israel the victim polishes its hot, red knife with the sheen of forgiveness. (Barghouti 157-158)

There is angst in the author's sentiment towards the treatment of Palestinians. He repudiates Israel's victim narrative while arguing that the State's survival is at the cost of Palestinians who are unapologetically expelled from their own homeland. Here, Barghouti engages in a dialogue with Israel through his responses to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's speech on the Jewish tragedy. Rabin addresses Israelis as absolute victims which is antithetical to Barghouti's position as a displaced man. “We are victims of war and violence” states Rabin that the Israelis “have not known a year or a month when mothers have not mourned their sons” (Barghouti 156). Barghouti feels that the Palestinians have been physically and emotionally robbed by Israel since their collective losses have also been claimed by Israel as theirs. “Rabin has taken everything, even the story of our death” (Barghouti 156). The conceptualization of these contradicting narratives is complex as one's

truth is the other's lie. In *The Question of Palestine*, Said reacts to the state of Palestinian exile as “sheer persistence” (222). He claims that the Palestinians still believe in their “right to return to Palestine” despite being “dispersed, driven out and conquered . . .” (222). But the Saidian discourse does not conflate with Barghouti's account of return. The erasure of Palestinian symbols from the homeland terrifies Barghouti as he feels distanced from what was once his past. He converses from his position of exile with the Israeli counterpart that they “occupy our homes as victims and present us to the world as killers” (Barghouti 156). This circumstance reflects in the words of Darwish who exclaimed,

Do you know why we Palestinians are famous? It's because you are our enemy. Interest in the Palestinian question flows from interest in the Jewish question. Yes. People are interested in you, not me . . .! The international interest in the Palestinian question merely reflects the interest people take in the Jewish question. (153-154)

Darwish might sound exaggerated but as Barghouti reiterates, the public representations of Palestinians are largely dominated by Israeli narratives. He condemns their portrayal in the public discourses and records his resistance against such representations. Barghouti is forced to posit himself between two positions; exile and home. The abject is identified as the author realises the collapse in the meaning of home. The images of Barghouti's mutilated homeland become a remnant of Israel's occupation which augments his detachment from the homeland. His exile is transferred from its subjective implications to the collective predicament of Palestinian displacement as the author imbibes the experiences of his people within the self-images. Barghouti's record manifests the complexity of Palestinian displacement, noting that the Saidian notion of return is problematic in the continuing state of Israeli occupation. The memoir in its entirety represents Barghouti's collective concern of the Palestinian tragedy in the occupied territories. The displaced Palestinians are identified to be in the state of abject like Barghouti for whom belonging is mutilated in exile and homeland.

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## **Rewriting Postcoloniality: New Narratives of Nationhood**

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### *Abstract*

*As part of popular literary trend, many established and emerging Indian English writers returned to the oeuvre of Indian mythology and folklore and produced their own creative retellings of India's mythical past and culture. After witnessing a slew of works, some of these writers like Amish Tripathi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Ashwin Sanghi, Vineet Bajpai, are seen turning to historical events and figures for bringing out stories of unsung heroes and heroines to the contemporary readers. The present paper focuses on the works of Tripathi, Divakaruni and Bajpai and their contribution to the emerging genre of historical fiction in contemporary Indian writing in English. Since literary works are often a cultural product of their times, this paper attempts to analyze the select works in view of altering political orientations and new cultural statements in postcolonial how these literary works appear corresponding to such impassioned calls. These works turn into constant spirited reminders and deliberate cultural reviving of the local heroic leaders, freedom fighters and illustrious figures from the nationalist past. The present paper aims to discuss these fictional narratives marked with historical streak as a fresh point of literary confluence of postcolonial writing and popular fiction in India.*

*Key words: Historical fiction, postcoloniality, rewriting, nationalism, popular fiction*

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Historical fiction as a genre is marked with its dichotomous subject of assimilating factual past with inventive storytelling, a predication that has its advantages for the craft of writing, for writers only need to refer to a pliable site from the vast expanse of history to situate and churn out a creative narrative. The piece of fiction thus created could either be an account of a (significant) historical event, with characters real and imaginary or it could be an attempt at revisiting documented facts from a perspective different from the official version, thus often bringing out a marginalized, even forgotten, voice and experiences.

While the origin of such historical novels in English is credited to Walter Scott, the genre of has branched and progressed much since the early-nineteenth century Scottish historical novels. The works thus produced are often found to potentially overlap into

recognizable mini genres such as historical romance, thrillers, drama, and even, alternatively, mythology and fantasy. A quick review of popular social online database cataloguing published books, current and classic, Goodreads, confirms the copious production and consumption of these sub-genres of fictional writings worldwide, based on or around historical periods, often, of wars, conquests, subjugation and strife.

In a recent interview inquiring into what some of the critically and commercially acclaimed Indian authors think of the future of fiction in India, phrases such as “timeless stories” “reinterpreting their past” surfaced, perhaps all hinting at the forthcoming contention by novelist Devapriya Roy, then working on a graphic history of the Indian freedom movement (“very much keeping with the trend that history has to be popularised”), as she reiterated the publishers' assessment stressing the public's preferred interest in reading about history, which she claims “has become a contested site because of the place we are in as a country” (Madhok).

This visible upswing in works centred on national history, heroes and heroines, has spread beyond real-life figures to include mythical and even religious legends and beings, bringing about a simultaneous push to the genre of mythological fiction and retellings. An interesting observation in this regard would be how not only some of the works being produced seem to blend elements of history and mythology, but also how the set of writers dealing with historical novels and mythological retellings seem to overlap. From among these, prominently, Bajpai, Divakaruni, and Amish, have recently made forays into the fertile fields of historical fiction as well, with Amish's *Legend of Suheldev* (2020), and Bajpai's *Mastaan: The Fallen Patriot of Delhi* (2019), speedily becoming decent commercial successes. Divakaruni's *The Last Queen*, released in January 2021, and is the newest addition to this slow surging stream of historical novels, with the author's characteristic feminist streak of writing lending critical relevance to the work.

While a substantial section in the genre of historical fiction is based on and around the country's colonial past and struggle for independence, writers from the genre, perhaps, as a measure to go beyond the colonised memory, are both pursuing up forgotten historical periods and leaders, and as examined earlier, are also commemorating even the (Hindu) mythological history of the country, perhaps, as an attempt to remind of ancient India's golden past through a body of fiction which Dawson Varughese's coinage describes as 'Bharti Fantasy':

This postmillennial catalogue of new writing in English draws heavily on Hindu epics and literary traditions and interestingly spans the genre labels of 'fantasy' fiction, 'historical' fiction and for a certain audience 'postcolonial writing'.  
(Varughese)

Amish's *Suheldev* is an interesting literary experiment in this regard in a couple of ways. First: the choice of the central figure for the novel, second: the socio-political context for its release. Having previously offered strikingly alternate narratives for the popular Hindu religious gods and mythical figures of Shiva and Rama, and simultaneously using these immensely popular novels to affirm himself a loyal Shiva devotee, the author promulgates the half-historical, half-legendary figure of eleventh century Pasi king, Raja Suheldev, too, as a follower of the Hindu god, citing the novel as an attempt to “tell the story of one of His greatest devotees”. The historical identification of Suheldev, in contrast, is relatively complicated to ascertain, with his ambiguous character and caste identity often becoming politically appropriated tools for furthering specific ideologies over the decades, that have either fuelled the polarisation between Hindu and Muslim communities from the geographical situation of the narrative, or

led to various political groups capitalizing upon his inconclusive subaltern background for votes. Suheldev's identity, largely, is understood best when posited in opposition to another legend-like historical figure of Salar Masud, known popularly as Ghazi Miyan, often projected as the nephew of barbaric Turk invader, Mahmud of Ghazni.

Salar Masud in Amish's novel, perhaps, in a curious attempt to assimilate the many contrasting narratives found in the lore and ballads surrounding the Turk and the King of Shravasti that draw largely upon Abdur Rahman Chishti's *Mirat-i-Masudi* or *Mirror of Masud*, becomes a character with an evil twin brother. Such tactical narrative device of creating two Salars – Masud and Maqsud, and bestowing each with extreme opposing qualities in form of a brave Muslim warrior with a Sufi heart, Masud, who joins Hindu leader Suheldev's camp and helps with the battle and strategy for protecting India, and the latter, his brother and a barbaric invader out to plunder and mercilessly massacre Hindu temples and countrymen, seems a continuation of Amish's exercise suggestive of communal pacification (possibly, even for commercial purposes) by avoiding an exclusive dependency on either the Hindutva narrative where “the confrontation between Masud and Sohal Deo is a story of intolerant Islam seeking to root out Hinduism, the defenders of which arose, Sohal Deo-like, to protect their faith” (Ashraf, 2017), or the folk versions where Masud (known in the novel as Aslan in Suheldev's camp) is later enshrined and celebrated as Ghazi Miyan, whose supernatural healing powers beckons followers from both religions alike. Thereby, sourcing his historical fiction as a placatory, counter narrative to the conventional history's binary narration of who defeated who and conquered what.

In an effort to cement this blend of history and fiction as a narrative of ancient legacy of Hindu-Muslim unity, the author's hearkening back to a classical nationalism of 'united we stand' is repeatedly voiced through various characters:

Abdul's voice shook with emotion . . . 'Ashvaghosh, remember this—India will remain secure only if there are enough men who choose India over everything else...If I have to choose between my religion and India, I will choose India. Every. Single. Time. As long as there are enough Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians who think like that, our country will be safe.' (Tripathi 160)

Abdul, a Muslim, fierce and loyal confidant to Suheldev, is seen giving a rousing talk to Ashvaghosh, a brave Buddhist monk practising non-violence, rationalising the killing of the Turks after forcefully rejecting the idea of them and himself sharing brotherhood based on common Islamic religion. Such embracing of nationalist identity and using it to draw upon conflicting sources of history to forge a grand tale of heroic valour and patriotism, has at its centre the idea of reviving “heroes and heroines (who) have been airbrushed out of our history books” whose stories, the writer insists in the foreword, we need to hear “today, more than ever” (17). And yet, today, the majoritarian BJP government in power has for decades had its party workers to national level leaders working with a specific Hindutva agenda that also entails reviving Suheldev like figures from history, thus, making the conflicting narratives a prime case for study, especially in light of Roy's (and many others') apprehensions regarding history becoming a contested site in the country.

Amish is not alone in this literary revival of national heroes and narratives. The exploration of the subject, however, differs considerably with each writer's storytelling. Vineet Bajpai's *Mastan: The Fallen Patriot of Delhi*, situated around the historical event of the rebellion of 1857, reminisces the fragmented glory of the provinces of Hindustan under the diminishing stature of Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, as East India Company was fast gaining hold on both trade and territories. But, unlike Suheldev, the central figure,

Mastaan, is a fictitious character based on what Bajpai affirms as the unsung heroes of the Great War of 1857.

While *Mastaan* may not prominently endorse the idea of reviving great historical figures as a central theme, with the plot resonant with much creative intrigues and mystery intertwining awakening and violence of the freedom struggle with an uncommon romance between the protagonist, a sepoy, and a British woman, the parallel significant relation in the novel, between the protagonist and a historically significant patriot, Mangal Pandey as that of a cousin, lends both a nationalist and political rim to the work. Moreover, as Mastaan's character graph in the story suffers a radical fluctuation after being informed about Pandey's rebellion, affecting his immediate actions and apparently the consequent course of history, an examination of Pandey's character as portrayed in the novel becomes imperative.

Introduced as a “shy brahmin soldier” (Bajpai 106), the character of Mangal Pandey appears almost immediately threaded with the idea of fate and astrology predetermining one's life when Pandey finds the palmist remark, “Bharatvarsha or Hindustan will always remember your name. You are timeless . . . eternal!” (106). The genre further allows the writer to embellish the many irretrievable crevices from history, especially for contestable heroic figures from the past, such as, Mangal Pandey. One such episode with Pandey worshipping the Shiva-linga while another man pays his obeisance to the deity from afar, serves twin purposes to Bajpai's narrative. The gesture of Pandey reaching out to let the man worship and touch the deity promotes both: the idea of an ancient legacy of “Sanatana dharma” (107) and that Pandey endorses this morally positive conduct of equality and non-discrimination well before he would go on to attain the fame and heroic stature of a martyr. Thus, assuring readers that while Pandey may not be the hero in the novel, “Mastaan's much-loved cousin” Mangal would certainly continue to be “remembered by every Indian as the greatest soldier of the first war for independence from the British” (178).

As observed with the figure of Suheldev, the historical legacy of Mangal Pandey has also been the subject of much academic and social contestation, with visible common parallels to him in terms of religious and ideological endorsements through both history and cultural memory.

Against the current backdrop of a culturally ascendant, though contested, ideology of Hindutva - according to which authentic citizenship of the modern nation state of India is effectively reserved for Hindus - the celebration of Brahmin Pandey as the nation's first religio-nationalist martyr cannot be viewed as a politically neutral gesture. (Forster 2)

Extensive investigation into either the critical or mythic narratives around the historical figure of Mangal Pandey is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, Bajpai's creation of a fictitious universe dominated with a similar machismo and patriotic colour in form of the characters and actions of the protagonist, Mastaan, his closest friend and comrade in the regiment, Chhagan Dubey, and more significantly, Mastaan's familial association with the martyr Pandey, appear markedly complicit with the popular nationalist narratives eulogizing historical figures by often overriding (or, in Bajpai's case, overwriting) the factual accounts of the figures from past, significantly and often erroneously overplaying their contribution. The fictional genre of a novel, however, exempts a writer from any obligations to veracity, historical or otherwise. Yet, writing is rarely an apolitical act, and Bajpai's endorsing to the point of literary commemoration of a contested populist narrative, while contributing to the scene of contemporary cultural production and re-production of history, appears a case for another postcolonial prudence.

Divakaruni's *The Last Queen* (2021) is both similar and relatively distinguishable from Amish and Bajpai's historical fiction. Written in a first-person narrative, Divakaruni's biographical rendition of Rani Jindan Kaur is an attempt at retrieving from history, a figure and gender that has remained more forgotten than the most. Continuing with her characteristic forays into a female's subjectivity to bring out her voice, perspective and story, Divakaruni carves a vivid life-account of the last queen of Punjab.

Rani Jindan has found scant mention in either the historical accounts or the fictional writings based on the memorable ruler of the Sikh empire, Maharaja Ranjit Singh or even his youngest son and heir, Maharaja Dalip Singh. The last and beloved wife of the former, and the mother to the latter, Jindan's brief references in accounts of history or art have been limited to and defined by her relations to these prominent men in her life who led her to become, firstly, a queen, and later, queen regent. But through her novel, Divakaruni chooses to go beyond these conventional figurehead statuses afforded by history to Jindan (and numerous other women), by creating an equally striking life and story for when Jindan was still an obscure, impoverished child in a small village and daughter of the royal dog trainer.

By sectioning her narrative into four both private and socially defining thresholds shaping Jindan's life: Girl, Bride, Queen, and Rebel, Divakaruni creates a space to detail and refurbish the historical personhood of "one of the most fearless women of the nineteenth century" (Divakaruni 343). The process of narrating Jindan's story in all its extensive episodic significance in an absence of adequate documented historical accounts renders Divakaruni's work both challenging and creative. Yet, the same paucity of historical resources, while establishing the literary and cultural significance of her work, also warrants a deeper critical examining of her portrayal of those more historically oblivious periods of Jindan's life.

While some of the qualities may even be regarded with historical accuracy, in order to bring about a composite literary resurrection of Jindan Kaur, the writer, perhaps as an effort to repudiate the tendency of victimising a (historically) marginalised, and here, even colonised individual, chooses to portray the last queen an undaunted, sharp, and stubborn woman who ascends from a humble village to Lahore, making a space in the heart of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, becoming his last wife and finally a regent queen. Yet, as the story is a work in fiction, as opposed to merely an unadorned, objective historical accounting of the past, Jindan's life and story is woven with numerous difficulties and political intrigues that allow the writer to reconcile a broader history of the Sikh Empire's resistance and battle with the British and its adjoining confederacies, with Jindan's private tussles in the court, beginning from surviving the many conspiracies in the zenana to fighting for her son, Dalip's right to the throne, first, from within the family and kingdom, and later from the British annexation.

Divakaruni describes her effort to tell the story from Jindan's perspective as a move to "right certain wrongs". In this regard, the inclusion of seminal postcolonial writer and critic, Chinua Achebe's quote: 'Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter' (5) in her foreword attains critical consequence. While Achebe's remark clearly alludes to the exigency of writing, rewriting and writing back to the history and narrative of the victors and colonisers by the colonised, Divakaruni's retelling of history in the contemporary postcolonial space does not end with solely reminiscing the past glory and legacy of the nation's resilient Sikh Empire in the face of the colonizers assault and injustice. Instead, by memorializing a forgotten woman from the colonial reign, and giving her the voice to narrate her history, the work seeks to 'right' the slander of renouncing a fearless queen by the British and wrongly defaming her the 'Messalina of the Punjab' perhaps in an attempt to quell her fight for the independence of her land and protecting the legacy of her son and heir to

the throne.

This effort, however, does not stop with rewriting 'the history of the hunt'. The traditional popular narratives of history have much to extol on the lives and feats of past kings and male historical figures of significance, with the parallel contribution of women from history often becoming side-lined, diminished, or in Jindan's case, forgotten in oblivion and superimposed by the grander narratives of her husband and son.

People revered his father as the Lion of Punjab, but his mother is the one they should have called Lioness. In her way, wasn't she braver than Ranjit Singh? Didn't she fight greater obstacles? . . . 'I will not forget you, Biji,' he says. 'I will not forget what you taught me. I will not allow the British to trick me anymore.' (339)

The acknowledgment in the epilogue by Dalip while laying her mother's ashes in the Godavari is perhaps Divakaruni's concluding effort towards restoring Rani Jindan Kaur's place, simultaneously, in both history and socio-cultural memory of the twenty-first century India.

The well-paced narration and inventive storytelling of certain culturally cognizant themes from both historical and mythic past of the nation, scribed in a readerly language that blends traditional stories and annals with the relatable contemporaneous of popular fiction, may be one of the reasons for the proliferation and a burgeoning popularity of mythological and historical fiction in contemporary Indian literary scene. Additionally, the rapid marketability that often immediately accompanies the popularity of a genre also becomes a cardinal motivation for more writers to pursue and adapt the said themes into their own creative ventures. Incidentally, each of the writers included in this paper have incurred much commercial, and to an extent, literary success for their multiple writings on history and mythology.

Similarly, since an artistic or literary production rarely remains uninfluenced by the socio-cultural and ideological forces of its time, the select writer's works, representative of the larger contemporary trend of historical and mythological rewritings, too, become pertinent cases for a critical exploration of these forces on the works. Amish and Bajpai's novels, especially, bear literary corroborations to a deliberate reviving of a politically mainstream and populist narrative of heroes from the nationalist past, while Divakaruni's work appears to circumvent any present nationalist and political influence in its composition by foregrounding the novel's concern of reviving a forgotten woman of significance from history. Nonetheless, all three works share a sense of imperativeness with regards to the writers telling their and their hero and heroine's versions of the story and history, keenly forging new vanquishers and narratives in postcoloniality.

### Note

Postcoloniality might be defined as a time and mind-set occurring after the historical time of colonialism, a time when the colonial, decolonializing, and postcolonial processes and effects can be expressed and examined in literary and political narratives. (Shands 5)

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## Resisting Neocolonisation, Reclaiming Epistemologies: An Ecocritical Reading of Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*

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### *Abstract*

*Postcolonial ecocriticism as a branch of literary studies seeks to look into the intersections of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism by considering the gaps that both the domains have left out when pursued separately. It engages in discourses that are crucial to postcolonial spaces like India where the notion of traditional first wave ecocriticism that primarily hinges on nature as 'pristine' does not hold well. In most postcolonial spaces including India, nature/environment and human beings are related to each other in terms of co-constitutive ties. Over the years, Indian English Fiction has actively engaged in looking into the close ties shared between nature and humans and in mapping and representing the effects that changes in the dynamics of this relationship have brought forth. In this paper, an attempt would be made to read Anuradha Roy's novel *The Folded Earth* (2011) through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism. The text in consideration focuses on the impact that a sensitive ecology like the Himalayas has sustained in the wake of 'development lore' sweeping across postcolonial spaces per se, and the subsequent socio-economic and cultural changes that have emerged as a result.*

*Keywords: Ecocriticism, cultural, postcolonial, socio-economic, change*

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Ecocriticism, as a concerted theoretical approach, made its appearance in the early years of the 1990s with the founding of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment in the United States in 1992. Cheryl Glotfelty notes that “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Fromm and Glotfelty xvii). In its formative years, ecocriticism was largely a movement that was concentrated in the US and the UK and focused on the representation of 'nature' in literary texts. But, over the years, ecocriticism has come to address a lot of other issues and has largely become cross-disciplinary in its approach.

As Swarnalatha Rangarajan points out, “ecocriticism has since emerged as a truly rhizomatic movement grappling with issues of race, class, gender, animal rights, toxicity and other categories” (2). It may be understood that ecocriticism, as a theoretical branch of study, takes into account not just representational analysis of nature in literature but also seeks to understand how cultural and political perceptions work out in a society. In so doing, “the field undertakes a critical reconceptualisation of dichotomies like nature and culture, self and other, and body and mind that have been ingrained in Western thinking since the Enlightenment” (Rangarajan 1).

Nature/culture binary has been at the root of the conceptualization of ecocritical

studies but over the years, newer perspectives have enhanced the expanse of ecocriticism greatly. Lawrence Buell and Scott Slovic have identified distinct 'waves' of ecocriticism to highlight the trajectory it has covered over time. According to them, the first wave of ecocriticism tentatively begins in the 1980s with a firm focus on representational studies of non-human nature, thus, stressing on its preservation and protection. The second wave, roughly running through the mid 1990s, “move[s] away from dichotomized discourses of 'nature writing' to a more inclusive dialogue...” (Rangarajan 10). Following these two phases, ecocriticism, from being concerned with representational studies of nature, has now moved to include more political concerns. Charles Bressler notes that ecocriticism has started “raising an awareness of class, race and gender through ecocritical reading of text” (236).

Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic define the third wave as a movement that “explores all facets of human experience from an environmental view point and as the insurgence of a 'diversity of voices' contributing to the understanding of the human relationship to the planet” (6-7). Rangarajan associates it with having “diversity of themes, approaches and epistemological positions regarding multiple gendered approaches like eco-masculinism and green queer theory, material ecofeminism, animality studies and posthumanism” (10) while the fourth wave, as defined by Slovic, focuses on “the fundamental materiality of environmental things, places, processes, forces and experiences” (11-12). Contemporary ecocriticism has thus branched out to include several other domains of which the coming together of postcolonialism and ecocriticism is significant because, as a consolidated domain, it engages with the “questions of power and privilege” (Rangarajan 90). As Rangarajan points out:

. . . postcolonial ecocriticism builds on insights of diverse domains such as environmental justice, ecofeminism, political ecology and other discourses of decolonization. Its main objective is, however, to resist and critique the homogenization of spaces, which is a result of the practices of colonialism as well as global capitalism. (90)

In this paper, an attempt would be made to read Anuradha Roy's novel *The Folded Earth* (2011) through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism. In so doing, the paper would engage with the representations of the various facets of postcolonial ecocriticism as can be found in the novel.

Set in Ranikhet in the Kumaon Himalayas, *The Folded Earth* combines nostalgia and history of its colonial past with the challenges of the time in which it is set. The novel traces the journey of Maya, a young woman from Hyderabad, who settles down in Ranikhet after taking up the job of a teacher in a local Christian school. Maya's move from the big city of Hyderabad, the cradle of post-liberalized India, to the picturesque Himalayan town of Ranikhet is also symbolic of the transition from one socio-economic and cultural system to another. The choice of places made by Roy becomes crucial to the narrative as these help in foregrounding the changes that a postcolonial country like India has to undergo in the face of socio-economic switches. Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee says that, “contemporary India, then is postcolonial in the sense that it is the site of an intensified exploitation by a globalized ruling class” (6). In this regard, Ranikhet becomes a microcosmic representation of a postcolonial place that suffers from what Mukherjee terms as “uneven development” (13). Roy sets up a fictive universe that brings together postcolonial and environmental issues which, in turn, calls attention to how neocolonial practices challenge postcolonial places like Ranikhet.

At the core of the novel lies the idea of 'life-place' which Robert L. Thayer defines in

the following terms:

A *bioregion* is literally and etymologically a 'life-place' – a unique region defined by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting unique human and nonhuman living communities. Bioregions can be variously defined by the geography of watersheds, similar plant and animal ecosystems . . . and by the unique human cultures that grow from natural limits and potentials of the region.

(3)

Place is integral to the life and being of individuals as it outlines the kind of relationship an individual shares with both human and non-human beings. Explaining the importance of 'life-place', Rangarajan remarks, “place is integral to community, identity, purpose and a sense of connection with nature” (64). Geographic and ecological data thus form an intrinsic part of the narrative and also help in mapping the changes that sweep across Ranikhet.

The novel is replete with descriptions of the flora and fauna that Diwan Sahib, a repository of knowledge about Ranikhet, passes on through his conversations. Having experienced two different worlds – pre and post Independent India, it becomes easy for him to gauge the changes that have taken place in Ranikhet over the years. His association with Ranikhet can be understood through the concept of 'bioregionalism', a term coined by Peter Berg and Raymond Dassman who define it as “a distinct resonance among living things and factors which influence them that occurs specifically within each separate place on the planet” (399). Rangarajan extends the meaning of 'bioregion' and terms it as “a terrain of consciousness” (65).

Diwan Sahib's knowledge and understanding of non-human nature and his perception of Ranikhet as a place reach a full circle at the annual function of St. Hilda's, the local school, where he makes a long speech tracing the natural history of Ranikhet. He speaks about the vibrant forests and animal life, migration patterns of various birds, the indigenous culture etc., and also of the changes that have swept across the place with the passage of time. In his scathing monologue, he talks about the infringement of the rights of both humans and non-humans by referring to the colonial practice of declaring land as *terra nullius* to be later owned by the government thereby turning the residents as “uninhabitants” (Nixon 151). As Rangarajan notes:

. . . the term 'uninhabitants' is used by Nixon to denote the people who inhabit a place that has been declared a *terra nullius* through erasure of culture and memory caused by myopic government policies. (97)

The passionate speech of Diwan Sahib, delivered in sickness, is perhaps his final attempt to salvage whatever is left of his land. The concluding statement, in which he says that animals have lost their voices in the face of unprecedented human intervention, brings to light how anthropocentrism has laid out the table for neocolonialism and how it is causing as much environmental distress as was caused by colonialism. Such a process has been termed as “domestic imperialism” (vii) by Arnold Krupat who opines that it “is responsible for the appalling conditions under which native people still continue to live” (vii). Similarly, Nixon terms it as “slow violence” (2) and defines it as:

. . . a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. (2)

Diwan Sahib, thus, becomes an important agency through whom Roy conveys information not just of the life-place or bioregion that Ranikhet is but about the “subjective experience”

(EntriKin133) of it. Knowledge of his bioregion and its elements is a part of Diwan Sahib's environmental consciousness and corroborates to one of the cardinal contentions of postcolonial ecocriticism that brings to light the close knitted relationships between humans and non-humans wherein the former do not claim dominion over the latter.

Another important character through whom Roy highlights the dichotomies of a postcolonial space is Puran whose existence is disregarded by Mr. Chauhan, the administrator of Ranikhet. Puran's position in the novel can be understood through Nixon's concept of 'spatial amnesia' which is used to refer to 'surplus people' whose "relationship to the land is historically deep but legally informal" (Nixon 151). They are people "who do not fit into the master narratives of nation and resource development are not only displaced but also imaginatively expelled" (Rangarajan 97). Mr. Chauhan finds it difficult to understand Puran who, though a male but not really masculine, stands as an antithesis to Mr. Chauhan. Mr. Chauhan, thus, is a representative of what Val Plumwood terms as "master model", an identity construct that benefits from domination of nature, thereby creating a "master identity" which depends on "dualised structure of otherness and negation" (42). The pitching of Mr. Chauhan against Puran hints at the self/other binary which is a cardinal aspect of postcolonial ecocriticism. Mr. Chauhan perceives Puran as the 'other' to his masculine self; Puran is the subaltern, the non-normative male who does not claim control over non-human nature and hence, does not conform to the quintessential idea of heteronormative masculinity. Puran's ordeal at the hands of Mr. Chauhan is an example of how the self/other binary operates in postcolonial spaces which reel under the dualities and confusions of contesting world views and how it can lead to changes in epistemological perceptions. As Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee points out, "the 'post' in postcolonialism marks not an end of colonialism, but an end of a particular mode of colonialism which then shifts its gears and evolves to another stage" (5-6). Mr. Chauhan, with his neocolonial ideas and his perception of Puran as the 'other' becomes a perfect manifestation of the idea of neocolonialism as discussed by Mukherjee.

In his bid to teach Puran a final lesson, Mr. Chauhan 'arrests' the former's pet, a barking deer named Rani, which he had rescued and raised with tender care. Mr. Chauhan, citing conservation rules and the Wildlife Protection Act, commands that the deer should be sent to the Nainital Zoo. He even threatens to arrest Puran for catching and "fattening a barking deer in order to kill and eat it" (Roy 171). Puran, unable to bear the separation, sinks into sadness. Rani, the deer, back in the zoo, stops eating. The zoo vet suggests that Puran should be brought to Nainital so that he could feed the deer. When this news reaches Mr. Chauhan, he brushes it off saying that as the administrator of Ranikhet, he doesn't have time for such petty matters. The deer eventually passes away on the thirteenth day, suffering from "malnutrition, dehydration and grief" (Roy 172).

Ramchandra Guha points out how the implementation of the ideas of western environmental movement and Deep Ecology in the largely postcolonial space of the Global South has displaced humans and non-humans from their natural habitats. Postcolonial ecocriticism has always critiqued this Western ideology of conservation and through Mr. Chauhan's tussle with Puran, Roy offers a counter to the Western discourse by highlighting its ineffectiveness in the Indian or the Global South context. Mr. Chauhan's decision to put the deer in a zoo rather than releasing it into the wild is an example of asserting control upon non-human nature which further brings to light the man/nature binary. Randy Malamud opines that zoo is almost a model image of the institution of colonialism as it is built on the idea of unilateral power exertion and control of non-humans by humans (58). Putting that deer in the

zoo is a display of normative power that can control both humans and non-humans.

Mr. Chauhan is also a representation of the reductionist tendencies of Western environmentalism that challenge local epistemological systems. Vandana Shiva speaks about reductionism in the following terms:

. . . the basic ontological and epistemological assumptions of reductionism are based on homogeneity. It sees all systems as made up of the same basic constituents and it assumes that all basic processes are mechanical . . . Reductionist science is a source of violence against nature and women because it subjugates and dispossesses them of their full power, productivity and potential. (21)

Mr. Chauhan's ideas are an extension of the colonial project that perpetuated hierarchical standards. By pitching him against Puran, Roy basically highlights two disparate world views that have stood against each other, turning postcolonial spaces into sites of struggle.

One of the cardinal aspects of postcolonial ecocriticism is its decentralising tendency. *The Folded Earth* too breaks down a lot of master narratives through its treatment of themes. By considering two male characters – Diwan Sahib and Puran, as mouth pieces of the oppression caused by uneven development, the novel brings to the fore how patriarchal and masculinist methods lead to the domination, exploitation and oppression of men as well. Having put Puran at the receiving end of violence and oppression, Roy moves toward a more inclusive narrative which suggests that colonial hierarchical contentions can be damaging to both humans and non-humans. The death of the deer or for that matter, Diwan Sahib's documentation of the loss of non-human nature stands testimonial to how the notions of hierarchy can be all-consuming and overpowering.

The two prominent women characters in the novel, apart from Maya, are Ama and Charu. For Ama, her daily struggle of managing the household is more important than anything else. She is bereft of any formal education, yet her approach towards life is practical. She is aware of her hardships – poverty, difficult terrain, water crisis etc., and wants solutions for these which can be possible only through political and administrative interventions. Gurpreet Kaur critiques the position of ecofeminists who perceive women as custodians of nature or “earth stewards who have a privileged understanding of nature” (Rangarajan 119), thereby essentialising them as a homogenous entity. Kaur opines that such claims “completely obscure the rural-urban divide as well as the conditions of poverty the rural women live in” (32). Kaur notes:

. . . women, nature, development and globalization are not straight-forward and linear categories that complement or contradict each other in totality. Globalization is then best seen as a contradictory development where it integrates women into myriad spheres of global capitalism and simultaneously loosens the grip of traditional patriarchy on women. (33)

Ama does not have fanciful ideas about nature nor does she have any opinion about the changes that Diwan Sahib so vociferously talks about. She is well aware about her problems and wants solutions. Even her granddaughter Charu, despite all her love for Ranikhet, leaves it behind to go to New Delhi to live a better life with Kundan Singh, the man she loves. Both Ama and Charu thus exert their choice and are embodiments of the ambivalent positions that Kaur talks about. The jam and jelly making unit in Maya's school also becomes a manifestation of Kaur's argument as it not only employs local women but disseminates their skills across a larger section of the society. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, while talking about postcolonial ecocriticism, notes:

The analytics of place, power, knowledge, and representation are vital to

postcolonial studies, which has engaged in an ongoing critique of the homogenization of global space from European colonialism to its aftermath in neoliberal globalization. As a result, postcolonial approaches to environmental thought tend to highlight alterity, difference, and rupture, which are vital methods of deconstructing the discourses of Enlightenment universalism. (321)

*The Folded Earth* engages with all these notions to create a fictive universe that not only challenges the ideas of western environmentalism but also stresses on the interconnections between human and non-human nature. The novel foregrounds the “rhizomatic structures” (Deleuze and Guattari 2), symptomatic of postcolonial spaces like India which do not conventionally 'otherize' the non-human in relation to human in terms of hierarchies. The novel lays emphasis on how indigenous people have their own epistemological systems which stand in contrast to western systems of knowledge. It further deconstructs the notion of nature/culture binary by inverting the same.

Scott Slovic introduces the idea of “narrative scholarship” to define a form of writing that combines “academic scholarship about environmental realities with lived experiences as a strategy to contextualize both the aspects into an integrated whole” (28). *The Folded Earth* is an example of narrative scholarship through its representations of lived experiences that inform the theoretical paradigm of postcolonial ecocriticism. The novel articulates the “postcolonial ecological context” (Opperman 111), thereby communicating the experiences of people who live in ecological fringes.

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**Mirroring Love and Magic: A Delve into Gabriel Garcia Márquez's  
*Love in the Time of Cholera***

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*Abstract*

*Magical realism is the mode that weds myth to realism and fact to fiction. The style combines a realistic mode of writing with marvellous events treated as perfectly ordinary happenings. Gabriel García Márquez, a great exponent of the technique is a master in transforming the fabulous into true existence by fusing the fantastic with the factual. The research paper explores the wild and ridiculous roller coaster of emotions that inspires Márquez's Love in the Time of Cholera. The influence of the existence of human beings among themselves and the homeland they inherit is the prime focus. In the exordium, the researcher discusses magical realism as a postcolonial narrative technique. Magical realism, with its binary portrayal structure, is capable of presenting the context of postcolonialism from the perspectives of both the colonizer and the colonized. The paper has also dealt with familiar concepts like magic and fallacy, individuality, rationality, perspectives and narrative techniques used by the author in the chosen work. In the core of the paper, the researcher has attempted to excavate Márquez, the magical realist who portrayed the realities of the world through the elements of 'myth, imagination and fantasy.'*

*Keywords: Magical realism, postcolonialism, love, myth, fantasy*

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The term 'Magic Realism' encompasses two contradictions - 'Magic' and 'Realism' and is defined as the use of fun and wonderful events in an earthly setting in the novels. Warnes defines Magic realism as a:

. . . mode of narration that naturalises or normalises the supernatural; that is to say, a mode in which real and fantastic, natural and supernatural, are coherently represented in a state of equivalence. On the level of the text neither has a greater claim to truth or referentiality. (6)

Magic Realist texts are basically regarded as 'historical' and 'political' that bring in the boundaries of politics and colonial histories of the globe in narration. Jorge Luis Borges's collection of short stories, *A Universal History of Infamy* "marks the birth of Magical Realism" (Flores 112). Roh coined the oxymoron "magical realism" (15) to elucidate post-

expressionist German paintings. Earlier it was used in a different connotation, to illustrate the contemporary romance by Massimo Bontempelli, an Italian novelist in 1927.

As postcolonial discourses, magical realist narratives too consist of elements like hybridity, proprietary questions and a combination of “the marvellous real” (Carpentier 104), true and mythical binaries, space and history as well as political or nationalism. Postcolonialism acquired a kind of rhetoric related to the ministerial point of view that defies the effects of the results of imperialism in the literary backdrop. According to McLeod, “‘postcolonialism’ recognizes both historical continuity and change. On the one hand, it acknowledges that the material realities and modes of representation. . . . also recognizing that important challenges and changes have already been achieved” (33).

Magical realism is a good tool to depict the historical and cultural events that cannot be easily epitomized by other literary approaches. Leal opined that Carpentier “has paid this phenomenon the most attention” (120). It is a form with aesthetic style where magical elements are blended with normal incidents, which will further optimize the understanding of reality. These elements of magic are explicated like conventional happenings as suggested by Faris, “magical realism can be seen to open up a space of the ineffable in-between that accommodate the camouflaged presence of the spirit and material reality” (68). The style used will be uncomplicated that permits the identical flow of the current and the amazing events. It even depicts the earth where the socio-religious ministerial bodies go obstreperous. As stated by Zamora and Faris, “Magic Realism is a mode suited to exploring and transgressing-boundaries, whether these boundaries are ontological, political, geographic or generic” (5-6).

The multiplicity of magical texts are often delineated as postcolonial discourse as they deliberate the impact of victimisation. Magical realism questions the political facet of the authoritarian imperial perspective and attempts to undermine the view of imperial power. The close affinity of the genre to the victimisation in the post-colonial aspect is elucidated by Boehmer, “Drawing on the special effects of magic realism, postcolonial writers in English are able to express their view. . . . Magic effects, therefore, are used to indict the follies of both the empire and its aftermath” (235).

Postcolonialism, like magical realism, is also a complicated locution that has been reworked and debated heretofore. Primarily it mentions the opposition of the provincial power in the socio-political context, acknowledges the implications of exploitation on alternative kingdoms, and particularly refers to the nations which gained self-governance from colonial rule, “that corresponds to the deep historicity of Spanish America” (Fuentes 26). Initial debates on postcolonialism can be traced back to the works of Henry Martyn where he draws parallels between the 1970s' North American nation and the Africa of the 1950s and 60s portrayed by Chinua Achebe. These postcolonial narratives rethink the unity of the country that was once self-determined and obvious, and reveal the hatred towards the exploitation they have been subjected to. “The colonial city . . . seems to be a metaphor for the colonial and neocolonial mentalities that determine the character's actions” (Williams 111-112). The consequences of exploitation in postcolonial criticism and theory are not simply the inflicting of a country's power against the other, its enclosure also tries to vary the inhabited population's style of reasoning and faith and compels them to receive the traditional views and interpretations relating to the power of the colonizers. It also comprises the attempts of the colonizers to outline the historiography of the inhabited individuals and the country from the colonialists' point of view and thereby foist an unvaried, authentic, recorded and customary individuality upon the inhabited land. Such unquiet replacing customs in the cultural lifetime of the inhabited country are the foremost tough facets of exploitation to vary.

Abundant debates concerning the efficacy of the magic realist descriptions in addressing postcolonial concerns like cultural deformity and dislocation are on. The works from the genre testify that it's one of the most effective tools to convey the postcolonial doctrines. The most discussed and cited postcolonial magical realism theory of 1988 was projected by Slemmon, the postmodern Canadian writer and critic. To him the oxymoron, suggested a binary opposition, "each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other" (10-11). His discussions were around narratives and characters which are usually termed as 'magical realism'.

Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian philosopher and literary critic, opined about discourse in novels as "the novelistic hybrid is an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by another" (361). His theories and discourse on postmodernism assert that postcolonialism can be divided into three as per its nature of use of magic realism. In the first usage, it serves twin functions of presenting the perspective of colonizer as well as the colonized, in addition to providing the background information. Secondly, it is capable of turning the perspective of a book that discloses the worries and blurs the illustration under similar circumstances. Thirdly it gives techniques for the folkloric illustration of postcolonial situations, recovering the fragments and opinions of unremembered or encompassed past for the purpose of reading the captured. In particular, magical realism assists specific ideas of postcolonialism through its formation of estrangement in certain narratives. Writers utilize it as a technique where spectators could experience the feel of the culture along with understanding and encompassing the effect of imperialism. Whereas Bowers emphasizes that, "the majority of magical realist writing cannot be said to occupy the mainstreams of these countries' literary production . . . they do not constitute a movement or group in Indian literature, each being unconnected to the other and located in different countries" (46).

Gabriel García Márquez, a proponent of magical realism, is one of the most effective stylists of his century. His stories weave a mesmerizing and complex web of situations and characters and his settings are spectacular. Márquez's works add up to an artistically balanced and sensible imagery which constitutes customs, morals and fallacy of the society. It primarily exhibits facets that have arisen from the factual and the traditional truth of the nation and geographic region and the major objective is to figuratively fabricate the situation of the society and the occurrences and groups of the continent with the weather of magical realism. As commented by Chanady, "the reader has the impression throughout the narrative that he is in the presence of the fantastic" (8).

*Love in the Time of Cholera* is a magical realist novel within which García Márquez's "construction of Love" (Booker 186) is in an unconventional way. The writer never applied paranormal components to expand the diegesis whereas he has presented moves of the personae and through it unpredicted outcomes are produced. Love is presented as an illogical power that persistently arises into and reverses an instructed, foreseeable and systematic world which forms the essence of the novel. The unbroken love between Florentino and Fermina despite their age paves way for magical elements within the novel. The novel is a persistent scuffle between the vicious forces of illogicality and the curtailment of command. The sarcasm is that always the illogical is disclosed as monotonous, and the normal and also the expected diurnal happening is revealed as an occurrence of insanity. Medical conception of Juvenal Urbino's body as a thing for learning is controversial throughout the narration.

The magician in Márquez transforms even the birds into the elements of magical realism. Birds are given unusual importance and are used to represent the awkward features in

human beings. The tamed parrot of Juvenal Urbino's speaks and learns singing lessons in French with "clarity and rationality that were uncommon among human beings" (Márquez 84). The Parrot vanishes after the primary segment of the novel. Its actions are correlated to the upcoming hazards. The author has developed the wide belief that sensory perception of the birds and animals in sensing the dangers around is better than the human beings. Even for the doctor's demise, the parrot is being blamed. The names given to the sex workers, with whom Florentino develops relationships, in the transitory inn are that of birds. This technique employed by the author adds to the unpleasant effect generated by the unethical behaviour of Florentino.

*Love in the Time of Cholera* is filled with magic which in fact has close affinity with normal life. In the episode that narrates the demise of Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, one can find that suddenly he has grown old and looked fifty years older than the previous night. Dr. Urbino was able to say about the erroneous appearance of the convalescent by mere gazing. The story, the people and the place within the novel acquire mythical, legendary and mysterious qualities as nobody within the city, in the novel knew anything and everything even before they needed to happen. Frequently, figure of speech is used to express the magic, "it was said that the hernia whistled like a lugubrious bird on stormy night and twisted in unbearable pain when a buzzard's feather was burnt nearby" (Márquez 148). In certain places, magic appears to return in the novel within the category of witticism. Unexpectedly the parrots emerge from the writer's levity and are concealed by sarcasm; while the president of the democratic comes along with cabinet politicians to verify the reality referring to his honour, for two hopeless hours the parrot rebuffs to mention one expression overlooking the disgrace of Dr. Urbino. Such puns refine the genre of the narrative.

The novel conjointly contradicts the popular belief that aged folks cannot marry. Florentino and Fermina waited for a long time and Florentino even had to be in jail; however, he bears it because that is a part of his love. The title itself is a contradiction where love is placed along with cholera, which epitomizes death. The diegesis of *Love in Cholera*, amidst further things, is by learning to participate, by being patient and impatient, and by relating something that has never been left of human love. "The novel simply bypasses the import of what is at stake here and aims to cover over the moral quagmire with deft phrases and witty invention" (Millington 120). It is regarding imperishable loyalty and never-ending adoration. Past and present, illusion and anguish, love and power all mingle in order to form a mosaic of reality.

The reality of live experiences, specifically the various vagaries of affection are treated as magical within the novel. The state of being under magical spell lies opposite to the perpetual internal war that happens within the individual's psyche and helps them to move out of the destructive trap they are in. The omnipotent narrator who wonders at the eternal allure of life is the customarily surfacing magic with the novel. As Palencia-Roth said, "the common-sense notion that what we see depends on what we are prepared to see and that what we understand depends on what we already understand" (146). The mystery of the alive forms the subject of the novel. People's constant reinvention of themselves also seems magical. The author remains reticent in these works. As the result of which, the incidents narrated are imprecise and also there will be numerous unbelievable planetary visions conveyed by the personae.

The timeline of the novel is in a cyclic pattern, which is an important feature of the genre of magic realism. The events of the past get repeated. Florentino considers himself inferior to Urbino and wishes to melange himself. Thinking about the death of Urbino appears

to be very normal for him as that is the only way to win back his love. The author has constructed the plot in such a way that makes the readers get confused about the time frame of the events.

When “Florentino and Fermina united on ship the world mattered the least” (Verma 4). Their journey starts in the boat named *New Fidelity*, the name of the boat symbolizes their revived bond of feeling and fervour. Fermina is exhilarated regarding the voyage. She chose to have only a few of her possessions that she would have few reminiscences of her deceased partner, his garments, books and different possessions. The presence of rain predicts a crucial flip of events within the novel consistent with Aghei and Hayati, “The immense downpour that floods the city brings about two drastic changes: the death of Dr. Urbino and the reappearance of Florentino in Fermina's life” (44).

Fermina frets that if her acquaintances see her and Florentino when the ship arrives at its final port, it will be a disgrace. The captain's flag indicates Florentino's devotion to the plague completely, when he is completely wiped out by Fermina's love. Metaphorically, cholera becomes synonymous amorously as a patient of cholera would surrender himself to death, Florentino has given himself to destiny. This “shatters the expectation of the horizon of readers” (Jauss 43). There remains no traveller aboard, except Fermina, Florentino, the captain and his lover. The ultimate chapter of the novel is symphonic, positive with its kinesis and rhythm, moving similar to a cruiser with its writer pilot.

The plot with its twists and turns creates a sort of a puzzle. “Garcia Marquez . . . insisting on the 'reality' of his stories, is often simply emphasizing their verisimilitude” (Gonzalez 63). The waiting of the characters is magic, whereas love is presented as real. Love is illustrated as the guiding spirit in the novel, and the aspiration to live. Márquez has pictured a replacement section of affection through the technique of magic realism, love in the time of Indian cholera. It is unconventional to think of tying a knot with a widow, particularly expecting to have a widow as a better half. Márquez has pictured equidistant representations of loveless sex and unfilled love in married life. He pictures that while not every love is inefficacious, neither the loveless life of Fermina nor the absence of love with the sex life of Florentino might realize quintessence, whereas Associate in nursing spirit might offer aspiring to their deeds, and at the top, each of them settles for one another.

There is a transparent dissimilitude between postcolonialism and magical realism. “Post-colonial critics often approach the presumed magic realist text with presuppositions about their political relationship to the post-colonial and first world contexts” (Bortolussi 288). The genre that presents the 'magical' customs of the aboriginal past, *magischer realismus* as told by Roh, has a bewildering influence and constantly undergoes a transfiguration of discernment to mutate or surpass the important macrocosm. Magic is free of religious and spiritual ties, but is so closely associated with socio, political and historical milieu that it serves to illuminate the underrated aspects of the same. It perhaps corroborates in vain to aim into a body of foregoing censorious conversation on expressive style within which magic communicates to the aboriginal customs and also the oldster's chronicles of occupant and further marginal or postcolonial literature.

Magical realism has aided Marquez to communicate the complex human emotions in the postcolonial context. He has successfully exploited the possibilities of both postcolonialism and magic realism. The work proves that both complement each other. The landscape and plot chosen by the author is that of a complicated one. The success of Marquez lies in transferring these multitudes of emotions that include anxiety, uncertainty, love and hatred into the minds of the readers. Postcolonialism to the Latin Americans, is the response to

their collective memory of the past. Their close communion with the bygone era is represented through the life of the present by Marquez. The author has wrestled with the questions on his ancestor's experience of colonialism by broaching a few episodes from the past and moulding it in such a way that it explains the components of the narratives. Marquez's experiments with the magical realism in the medium of novel has provided a good aesthetic experience for the readers and served as a good prototype for the aspiring writers.

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## A Postcolonial Study of Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*

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### *Abstract*

*India had been under colonial rule for a long time. The British had occupied India and had been plundering her wealth and resources. After an extensive time; Indian great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and many others emerged; they united Indians, and brought India under one umbrella and emancipated India from the British regime. Post-colonial writers have dealt with the relation between the colonizers and colonized throughout the colonization period. Shashi Tharoor is known as a great post-colonial writer; he based his works on Indians and Indian mythologies. He has written about the experience of colonialism from the point of view of colonized. His *The Great Indian Novel* is based on Indian myths. There are post-colonial elements that can be found in this novel. The present paper would aim to identify postcolonial elements in *The Great Indian Novel* where postcolonial theories of A K Ramanujan, Frantz Fanon and Robert young are applicable. This paper would also explore how the British exploited Indians and how Shashi Tharoor has depicted their colonial policies in India.*

*Keywords: Post-Colonialism, Indianness, freedom struggle, colonialism*

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Post-colonial literature has emerged as an important branch of writing and many works are being written while placing the post-colonial theories into the context. The post-colonial writers tried to recreate the culture and language sometimes by completely wiping out the colonial interventions and sometimes by amalgamating the colonial experiences “Accordingly, the Indian writers emerged with a view to unite Indians and to wipe out the colonial perspectives” (Abirami 168). Many writers like Sri Aurobindo, Aijaz Ahmed, Raja Rao, Ania Loomba, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Rabindranath Tagore, R. K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, etc. have talked about India and the colonial experiences Indians went through under the British rule. Through their writings, they manifested about how British colonialism had been detrimental for India and how the British treated Indians during their rule in India. Some writers have depicted through their works the plight of Indians; particularly the predicaments of Indian farmers

during the British reign in India. Shashi Tharoor is an Indian writer; he is an acclaimed politician and has remained an international diplomat. He also served as a Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs (2014 to 2019). Shashi Tharoor's birthplace is London and later he was raised in Thrivananthipuram. He has written 20 best-selling works of both fiction and nonfiction. His works deal with Indian history, Indian culture, Indian films, Indian politics, Indian society, Indian foreign policy, and more other related themes. Most of his books are based on post-colonial literature which depicts the relationship between the colonizers and colonized specifically about the harsh treatment of the British on Indians in India. A blend of historicism and mythology is evident in his works. The book which made him win the hearts of Indians is *An Era of Darkness*. This book was written by him after he came to know that his speech in the Oxford Union went viral. In that speech, he emphasized how the British looted Indians during their rule in India.

His first novel, *The Great Indian Novel* is based on Indian mythology which won him two prestigious literary awards, the first is, "The FIP – Hindustan Times Literary Award in 1989" and the second is, "The Commonwealth Writers Prize 1990". The title of the novel has been taken from the great Indian epic, Mahabharata where "Maha" means great "Bharat" means India. The Mahabharata is an epic story; it describes the struggle of the historical dynasty over the throne of the kingdom Hastinapur between the Pandavas and the Kaurvas. Tharoor compares the story of Mahabharata with the story of freedom struggle where the great leaders like, Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru fought for freedom and whom Indians give reverence for their sacrifice for the nation. "All the characters are recast and reset in the context of the Indian Independence Movement and first three decades of post independence. Figures from Indian history are transformed into characters from mythology and the mythical story of India is retold as a history of Indian Independence" (Kumar 184). The story of the novel depicts the pre and post-independence history of India.

The narrative of the novel begins with Gangaji's emergence as a national leader and his election as the President of the Kaurava party which led the country to freedom, and which split after independence, one side going to Priya Duryodhani, Dhritrashtra's only child with the famous arched brow who, as Prime Minister, imposed a "siege" on the country. It ends with the death of Duryodhani, her murder by her own security guards. (Venkatesan 100)

The struggle which the freedom fighters went through has been shown here in this novel. The writer depicts how difficult had it been to liberate India from the illegal occupation of Britain and brutal slavery which they had imposed on Indians.

Ramanujan says that in India, everything is context-sensitive; Indian thinking, culture, morals and ethics are influenced by the former and is context-dependent. Moreover, Indian literature is also context-sensitive which is evident in *The Great Indian Novel*. The context in this novel is great myths of ancient India which have been found in the great Indian epics like *Mahabharata*. Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is the retelling of Mahabharata, it has been written in an allegorical way. The historical characters which have been allegorized are Gangaji as Mahatma Gandhi; Dhritrashtra (Nehru); Priya Duryodhani (Mrs. Indira Gandhi); Pandu (Subhash Chandra Bose); Kama (Mohamed Ali Jinnah); Vidur (Sardar Vallabhai Patel); Drona (Jaya Prakash Narayan); Kanika Menon (Krishna Menon); Shishu Pal (Lai Bahadur Shastri); Azharuddin Shaik (Shaik Abdullah); Ashvathama (Chandra Shekar). He has written in an allegorical way to make the reconstruction of the reality. There are four great institutions that have been represented by the characters of Mahabharata. The Pandava brothers represent the different institutions like Arjun represents the Press, Bhim

represents Army, Nakul represents bureaucracy and Sahadev represents diplomatic services. Their aim is to save these institutions in India. Democracy is represented by Draupadi. Besides mythology and historicism, Post-colonial elements have been presented in this novel which shows Tharoor's anti-colonial approach and his resentment against the policies and strategies of the British in India. Tharoor has mentioned all the events of history in this novel without mentioning any date.

According to Frantz Fanon, there are educated among colonized whom he calls colonized intellectuals; they raise their voice against the colonizers. They observe, mimic, the culture of the colonizers and then react and fight to preserve their own culture, ethnicity, and traditional values. Tharoor has shown how Indian freedom fighters have fought bravely and strategically against the oppression of the British rule and how Indian freedom fighters remained successful to overthrow them from India and get Independence. Though it had been difficult in the beginning but later under the leadership of Gandhi, all the freedom fighters united and got independence from the British raj. This novel highlights the Jalianwalah Bagh massacre, Indian partition, Indian relation with Pakistan, creation of Bangladesh etc. "Shashi Tharoor has used his best to tell the partition trauma. Tharoor has employed satire to satirize colonial blunder, he gives a clear picture of partition of land" (S. Y 76-77).

Robert J C young said that Post-colonial literature is the literature which has been written by the writers who belong to the countries which had been colonized in 19th and 20th century. The writers write about the experience of colonialism from the point of view of colonized. This theory has also been found applicable in *The Great Indian Novel*. Tharoor is an Indian writer and India had been a British colony for almost two hundred years. This novel has been written about the times when Indian nationalist leaders had been fighting against the colonizers, when they were collecting heavy taxes from Indians, and oppress the common people of the country. Though *The Great Indian Novel* is based on *Mahabharata* and is a retelling of the story in the fictional form, it also depicts the condition of India during the freedom struggle. "It also figures out the first three decades of post Independence and shows the Indian history is transformed into characters from mythology, and the mythical story of India is retold as a history of Indian independence and subsequent history through the 1980s" (S.Y 74). It has been depicted in a satirical form. The history of India, Indian mythology, and the real culture of our tradition have been mentioned. When the writer deals with the problems, issues, and situations of that time, it is manifested that he talks about India under the British raj. "A social and political ideology is clearly articulated in this novel" (Lakshmi 2).

Frantz Fanon opines that fight for culture leads to fighting for freedom. This concept is applicable in this novel when Tharoor deals with the culture and brings mythological characters to depict the scenario of the freedom struggle. When Indians found that the British had been manipulating our culture and doing the conversion of religion of Indians by their missionaries in India, they woke up from slumber and thought of liberating India from the British regime. Tharoor has dealt with Indian myths and then he recreates history by this novel. "He recites the history of modern India through the epic story. The novel tries to build a history of the colonial and postcolonial India in terms of real events and characters from the twentieth century Indian socio-political philosophy" (Mastud 371). Many incidents are found in this novel that took place during the freedom struggle. India suffered a lot during British rule in India. British didn't leave any stone unturned to oppress and suppress Indians during their rule in India. Shashi Tharoor once said in an interview that he has been interested

in history since his school days and that interest of his has been manifested through this novel.

Some glimpses of Tharoor's resentment against colonization have also been found in his other books like *Riot*, and *An Era of Darkness*. He has travelled in Europe and other countries as a diplomat where he has experienced that England had established her colonies in many other parts of the world which have also been decolonized as India. It is indicated through *The Great Indian Novel* that, Shashi Tharoor has deep knowledge about history during British rule in India and he also has resentment against the British. "He tells India's story of bitter colonization experience and continues to the struggles of Indians to decolonize it" (Mastud 273). This novel also presents the example of pluralism and multiculturalism in India. "The argument that secularism is attainable by practicing political harmony is a common thread in Tharoor's works but this aspect is not investigated in detail by the researchers" (George 270). The reference to non-violence has been presented in this novel. Sabash Chandra Bose has been depicted in contrast with Gandhi ji. Gandhi believed in non-violence whereas Sabash Chandra Bose took up arms against the British and established his army. Tharoor is interested in depicting the real scenario of the times of the Indian freedom movement.

Tharoor has criticized the western historians and the French film makers who portray Indians as poor, slave and poverty stricken. He believes that it is the British who are responsible for poverty in India. Being a true nationalist, Tharoor has glorified Indian history and "is critical of foreigners' ignorance about the Kama Sutra by Vatsayayana. It is the only book from India that most foreigners know about" (Kumar 60). The narrative of this novel refutes colonizers' history and foregrounds Indians and Indian history.

Tharoor tries to object to the colonialists' view that India is an underdeveloped country. Tharoor being postmodernist and post-colonialist states in the novel that India is not an underdeveloped country but a highly developed one in an advanced state of decay. In the novel, Tharoor brings in Indian history and he critically scrutinizes it. (Boruah 148)

Tharoor has mentioned that the British created a divide and rule policies in India to rule continue India. "In his book *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), he follows a story-telling (though in a satirical) mode as in the *Mahabharata* he drew his ideas by assuming both back and forthcoming ways of lives based on the time" (Iliyas & Anitha 56). Tharoor has used different techniques to express his ideas; he has used satire, irony, humour, etc. to present different themes in this book. Tharoor has referred to some characters and titles from the works of Salman Rushdie, Rudyard Kipling, and Paul Scott. He has taken into consideration Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's children* too. Tharoor's characters have a connection with the social world. The characters which he presented in this novel may be different from the original characters; he has his own opinions about the characters which he has presented in this novel. The ancient texts are the source for his writing. *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Upanishads* work as a guide for his writing this novel because *The Great Indian Novel* is dependent on *Mahabharata*, which is the real source of his writing this novel. Language is an important weapon to encounter with historical narratives. Tharoor has used this tool and he has used it to write back. The novel "contests and debates some of the canonical notion of traditional historiography by implicating ancient Indian myths, oral tradition, digressive narrative technique, and other literary devices such as satire, magic realism, and other meta fictional devices" (Yadav 1).

The colonizers were greedy and they didn't look into the problems of Indians and neither were they moved over the merciful conditions of the farmers in India. They would give

farmers more work to do and a fewer wages. The Indian farmers could not meet the needs by the wages which they were being paid; they were subjected to several harassments. The treatments of the British towards Indians were harsh and they would not spare any kind of opposition and rebellion against them. Had there been any rebellion against them, they would crush them as they did in the Jalianwalah bagh. British would only care for their economy; they would adopt any condition for the sake of their motherland. Their main concern was to serve their motherland and make her rich for the cast of Indian lives. Indians would continue to suffer because of their draconian laws and their treatment of Indian farmers and soldiers. Indians would face discrimination in almost every field. British officers and employees had more salary as compared to Indian employees. Indians had no other way than to fight against them. While Indian freedom fighters were struggling and assembling the Indians to demand basic rights from the East India Company, the British would treat them harshly and even shot them dead. They had created a sense of terror in the minds of common Indians, who had no choice, but to surrender or die before them.

Shashi Tharoor's sheer alchemy of genius makes the characters and incidents incorporated in the novel reminiscent of the milestones of historical events such as jallianwalla Bagh Massacre, the Dandi March, the Motihari satyagarh, Chouri-Chora incident, Partition of the subcontinent, the assassination of Gandhiji, the wars with the neighboring countries, the Bangladesh war, the Emergency, the formation and fall of the anata Government and Mrs. Gandhi's return to power among others. (Pathak 239-240)

Tharoor has an explicit stand over the subjugation of the Indians during colonial rule. He knows the background very well as he had been a history student too. In the speech which he made in the Oxford union, he emphasized the point that the British crown should apologize to India for the oppression which they did in India during their colonial rule. In one of his interviews, he has pointed that Britain is rich as they had looted and amassed wealth from the third world during their rule over them. The other reason for her being rich is that she has planted the seeds of war in the third world, which the people of the third world are still harvesting and England is benefiting because she sells armament and ammunition to the third world. In this novel, Tharoor has criticized social, political, and economic repression on Indians by the British.

From the above discussion, it is apparent that Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is a post-colonial novel. The main protagonist of the novel is Ved Vyas who narrates the story of the novel. Though there is irony, satire, humour, pun, mythology, etc. but postcolonial elements are a predominant element that can be found there in this novel. This novel deals with the fall of the British Empire in India and the rise of Gandhi ji as a great leader. Tharoor has thrown light on this issue of freedom and has presented Indian great leaders as the characters in the above-mentioned novel. His pre inclination and pre mindset have been against the British raj and colonization. He had been well aware of British suppression in India and the degree of struggle which Indians went through to get freedom from English. The sense of resistance of the colonized is shown in this novel. Tharoor aptly specifies the characters which exhibit how Indian leaders resist.

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## The Immigrant's American Dream: A Reading of Patricia Engel's *Infinite Country*

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### *Abstract*

*The award-winning Columbian-American author Patricia Engel's works like The Veins of the Ocean (2016), It's Not Love, It's Just Paris (2013), Vida (2010) are mostly based on the plight of the Columbian migrants and diaspora, about the life that they live before and after migration. Her recent work Infinite Country (2021) is a slim novel about a family separated because the father was deported back to Colombia. This makes the family live in two different countries, the father along with the youngest daughter live in Colombia with the daughter's grandmother, and the mother lives with the two oldest children in America. They are divided not just by their physical location, but there is an emotional separation. The present paper aims to study how this family remained a family throughout their journey across time and borders even after being constantly challenged. The decision to leave one's home country and live in the new country makes the nuanced life of a migrant difficult as they deal with the haunting thoughts of the life that they've left behind with doubt, regret, longing, and profound homesickness. This paper is an attempt to analyze how the author addresses the popular stereotype of the immigrant coming to the U.S. just to fulfill their American Dream and never looking back.*

*Keywords: Family, America, migrant, Columbia*

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### **Introduction**

The idea of the American Dream was first introduced by the historian and author James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book titled *The Epic of America* as “the dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement . . . regardless of fortuitous circumstances of birth or position”. The document of Gale Student Resources Context, 2016 titled *How the American Dream has changed over time* has traced the meaning of American Dream from the times of colonization, when the people of colonial America realized the dream as a “new experience of equality” to the post-World War “Americans [who] fantasized about homes filled with happy families who vacationed every summer”. Although there are various other interpretations linked with the idea of the American dream, it has been identified as an important reason that has attracted a large number of immigrants to the United States. The distinguished professor and author of the book *Immigrants and the American Dream*, William A. V. Clark has stated that,

. . . the individual immigrant has always focused on material well-being and prospects for a better future, either in America or upon returning home with some

tangible wealth . . . media anecdotes of immigrant success [also] recount the sacrifices the first generation makes to ensure second-generation success” (Clark 3).

The hopes of the immigrants are fueled by the enduring notion of the American dream discussed by Jennifer Hochschild in her book *Facing up to the American dream*, that with hard work, even the poor and limited skilled people can succeed. Clark has mentioned about the low skilled Italian migrants of the past who have led themselves into the American middle class that marks the attainment of the American Dream. Likewise, the Latino migrants have also achieved success as in *The Americano Dream* that celebrates the success of the Latino entrepreneur Lionel Sosa.

The theme of the American Dream has been reflected in several fictional works of authors like Mark Twain, Edward Albee, Arthur Miller, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sandra Cisneros, Walt Whitman and more. They have dealt with it to show how it shapes the lives of their characters. For instance, in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Scott Fitzgerald has highlighted the failure of the American Dream through the life of his character Gatsby who dreams to win his beloved Daisy back. In the process of his unrelenting efforts to pursue what he lacks, namely, material wealth and riches, he loses himself and fails to attain his dream.

The recent novel of the Colombian-American author Patricia Engel, *Infinite Country* (2021) has also dealt with the popular theme of the American dream and how it plays an important role in shaping the lives of the Colombian family who migrates to the United States.

## Discussion

As a daughter of Columbian parents, the works of Patricia Engel are inspired to explore the process of immigration and diaspora. All of her works have explored migration and diaspora in different ways. *Infinite Country* is almost similar to her previous works as it deals with immigration in yet another profound manner. Barbara Gutierrez quotes Engel as saying that it tells the story of a Colombian family fractured by immigration and deportation for a period of almost twenty years in the late 1990s in Bogota and New Jersey. It follows five people, two parents and three children, who have a collective experience of emigrating. But each of the characters goes through their own personal and private experiences because they each occupy a different space in the spectrum of their migratory status. Being born in New Jersey herself, the author maintains dual citizenship and visits her parents' homeland, Columbia, frequently. Engel has infused *Infinite Country* with rich cultural references and language of the motherland while exploring the complex feelings that arise from leaving one's country and family to start anew along with trying to maintain ties to those left behind. In the novel, Engel highlights the nuanced reality of the process of immigration as opposed to its popular portrayal in media as an action where the migrants leave their homeland for an American dream to never look back to the land they left behind.

In the novel, Engel has created a family portrait by weaving together many stories that she had heard from the people in her community and the countries. She understands that with immigration comes the feelings of longing, homesickness, doubt and regret about wondering if migrating from the home country to a new place was the right choice. Engel states that “it is a very heavy burden to be the person that leaves. It makes life different. It creates a fracture between your generation and the ones that will follow”. This research paper is an attempt to understand this fractured reality of the immigrants.

It is Mauro who gets himself caught in the American dream for a better future in the United States. Bancroft points out that he was drawn to that land not just by economic

opportunity and the desire to escape Colombia's chaotic violence, but by a sense of adventure. Whatever be his motivation to migrate to the U.S., building a secure future for his family has been prominent. When he urges Elena to leave Bogota, Mauro tries to convince her that they would be able to help pay the debts of Elena's mother, Perla. Elena is reluctant to make a decision as being near her mother and her home seemed safer despite the violence all around. She could assume the difficulties that might arise in a new country. But when Mauro suggested that he would go alone to work for a few months, she could not let herself be left behind with their only child.

The critic Bancroft has highlighted that they entered the U.S. legally by moving to Texas with six-month tourist visas. Their intention was to “make some fat American dollars to pay off Perla's debts, and return home with their savings plumped” (Engel 29). With change in their circumstances, they had to stay back even after their visas expired. In order to keep themselves safe and secured, they work hard in their various arduous jobs: cleaning houses and restaurants, or moving furniture. Their employers would offer them work but cheat them with false accusations, or don't pay them at all, or call them into their office and sexually assault them. These happened because they became the undocumented migrants which made it certain that they could never complain to anyone for fear of detention or deportation. The constant fear that the undocumented immigrants from Latin America had to face during their stay in the U.S. has been for deportation or detention. In the article “Immigration as Foreign Policy in U.S. – Latin American relations”, Jorge I. Dominguez has stated that the relationship between the United States and the different Latin American nations has always been influenced with the use of immigration as a foreign policy tool and the involvement of U.S. government in the politics of the respective nations. The economic opportunities for the migrant laborers in the U.S. were dependent on the flow of migrants from these nations and the 'friendliness' of these nations with regards to the U.S. government. At certain times, the public's dislike for the mass flow of migrants concerns the government, and the immigration policies are made strict and the deportation of undocumented citizens from the neighboring nations takes place.

Even with all of that fear, Mauro and Elena made more money in a week than they would make in a month in Colombia. Their American dream was finally happening. With the birth of their second child Nando and then Talia in the U.S. eventually, they found better places to live and better jobs. It was then that Mauro got himself into a fight with a friend in a bar, and the police were called. After weeks in detention, Mauro was deported.

Elena considered going back to Colombia once her husband was deported, but other immigrant women urged her to reconsider, for the sake of her children's futures. Elena constantly has enquiring thoughts about everyone's desire for the 'American Dream':

What was it about this country that kept everyone hostage to its fantasy? ... an American man went to his job at a plant and gunned down fourteen coworkers, and last spring alone there were four different school shootings. A nation at war with itself, yet people still spoke of it as some kind of paradise. (Engel 90)

Elena is well aware of the violence she left behind in Bogota, yet that is home to her. In America, she's treated poorly, but those around her urge her to be thankful she's still able to live there, even if it is in hiding. This contradiction is something that Elena struggles with throughout the novel, because being in the U.S. seems wrong to her, but she doesn't leave for fear of what could happen to her and her children. She understands that “the price of being able to work to provide for the rest of the family was their estrangement” (92). The only true dream that Elena has is to be together as a family again, and to be able to live without fear, yet

this seems to be an impossibility, no matter what choice she makes.

The daughter that she sent away to Colombia was like a precious piece of her that went missing and now she wants Talia to be near her:

She wasn't foolish enough to believe that memories formed in infancy of being in her mother's arms would be enough to comfort her daughter through the years. She knew Talia must have felt the loss as Elena had or even more. (Engel 17)

When Talia was leaving for the U.S., Mauro had hoped that Elena and her siblings' love for her would help her enough to cope with her experience of immigration on the land where they are the 'minorities'. It was because he had already learnt what everyone who crossed over to the land of opportunities learns: "Leaving is a kind of death. You may find yourself with much less than you had before" (150). When Mauro was back in Bogotá, he completely fell apart, struggling with drinking and homelessness. In New Jersey, when Elena had the sole responsibility for three small children, she was able to find daycare for Karina and Nando, but not for newborn Talia.

Due to this, she sent Talia back to live with Perla with the idea that she would raise the baby for a little while until Elena could send for her return. By then, Elena was beginning to understand that,

When you leave one country for another, nobody tells you years will bleed together like rain on a news print. One year becomes five and five years become ten. Ten years become fifteen. (Engel 122)

Talia is the migrant who grew up in the country which is the birthplace of both of her parents. She wants to be in the dazzling nation of the United States which is her birthplace but she is reminded by her father that the place where she grew up "was the land of their ancestors and their connection to it ran deeper than Bogota being designated as Colombia's principal city" (149). Her father wanted her to be happy but did not want her to forget about the land of her origin. He shares with Talia the Andean myths of the condor, the jaguar and the serpent that are the guiding animals of the land. It has always been instinctual for animals and humans alike to migrate from one place to another in search of food or land:

It seemed to Mauro that . . . it was the fate of man to remain in motion and seek distance, determined by the will of Chiminigagua, because humankind's first migration was from the subterranean world beneath the sacred lake, driven out by the great water snake, to the land of the jaguars, and the kingdom of the condors above. (Engel 150)

Through the mention of the myths and traditional knowledge in the novel, Engel tries to show that migration has always been a part of the natural order of things.

As time went on, both Mauro and Elena began to realize that the reason for which they migrated to the U.S., the American Dream is futile as a dream that so many immigrants are drawn to for the promises they were led to believe for a better future. Along with this, despite their desire to safeguard their family from Columbia's turmoil, Elena began to realize the safety and security that she has sought for, is no longer guaranteed in the United States even if it offers the same kind of opportunities. Natasha Hakimi Zapata contends that:

. . . the original inquiry at the source of all the suffering as seen by both Elena and Mauro, is not the attacks by terrorists or guerilla groups; it is the European colonization of indigenous peoples that set the stage for endless cycles of violence that no American nation seems to be able to fully eradicate or overcome.

The violence in the United States is not any different than in Columbia. After years of living in a country that has harmed her and her loved ones in numerous, unexpected ways, Elena

concludes that every nation in America had a hidden history of internal violence. Each nation justified its violence with different stories by wearing different masks and carrying different weapons.

Talia's decision to go back to her mother was questioned when Aguja, the boy who helped her to reach her father on time, made her rethink about the land that she was going to leave behind. He reminded her that Colombia as a land has also nurtured her like a mother during her growing years along with her grandmother, Perla. It is the land of people who are of her own like brothers and sisters, but in the United States, she would be 'invisible' among all the American people.

In the novel, Engel seems to have highlighted the issues of the U.S. immigration policies through the first-person voice of the elder sister of Talia, Karina. Growing up in the United States, Karina is like a contemptuous American teenager: "There are things I wanted to tell my sister before her arrival," she says, "Like that you can love the United States of Diasporica and still be afraid of it" (129). But beneath this cynical attitude, she shares the deep loss and pain that all of her family struggles with: "Don't tell me I'm undocumented when my name is tattooed on my father's arm" (127). While living with an undocumented status in the U.S., both Karina and her younger brother Nando learnt not to differentiate between the police and the agents of the Department of Homeland security, the ICE, as they understood that they were not as free as the other people walking on the streets and could be questioned for their unfamiliar looks and eventually for their documents.

Karina despises that her family has had to live an invisible life because of being undocumented:

I've had borders drawn around me all my life, but I refuse to live as a bordered person. I hate the term 'undocumented'. It implies people like my mother and me don't exist without a paper trail. (Engel 127)

It is a kind of harsh immigrant experience for them to grow up as children in the U.S. because migrants are always considered as the "minority" (129). Karina is also reluctant to apply for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which is a United States immigration policy implemented during the Obama presidency that allows a few individuals with unlawful presence in the U.S. after being brought to the country as children to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and become eligible for a work permit in the U.S. She fears that by applying for this program, her undocumented status might get highlighted and she could face detention. Nando was the only one to have citizenship rights as he was born in the U.S., due to which Karina made him promise to register so that he could cast votes after he turned eighteen.

## Conclusion

The American dream that has attracted many migrants like Mauro for better economic opportunities eventually ceases to exist when the fulfillment of the dream occurs at the cost of their family and self-respect. Patricia Engel has written *Infinite Country* as a novel that tells the story of this family of five individuals whose experiences are similar to the realities of many migrant people that she has known since her childhood and immigrants around the world. It shows how intimately each and every individual is connected to their pasts, their points of origin, to the lands and the people that have made them. It is a story about how their love for each other transcends borders and the darkest of times. Elena, Mauro and their three children kept their bonds intact even when they struggled with rapidly changing

government laws which caused their separation. Engel has dealt with the issue of immigration in the United States by questioning the case of the often mislabelled 'economic migrants' who are in reality the indirect victims of the terrors of incoherent immigration policies by the government. The uncertain shifts in the U.S. immigration policy have made many immigrants like Elena and Mauro experience forced family separation due to deportation.

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## Secularism, Equality and Egalitarianism: A Critique of Kazi Nazrul Islam's Selected Poems

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### *Abstract*

*Kazi Nazrul Islam has made significant contributions in promoting equality in the Indian subcontinent where he is also regarded as the poet of equity and parity. Nazrul despised corruption, injustice, and humiliation in mankind, side by side spoke out about it, that's why, known as a "Rebel Poet." He was a poet of resistance, freedom, truth and equality. He was a non-communal poet with a communist mentality. Thoughts of secularism and humanity are widely reflected in his writings. He composed Hindu religious songs (Sama Sangeet) and Islamic songs during the same period. In this study, the elements of egalitarianism and humanism in Nazrul's selected poems are analyzed through the views of critics and philosophers like Karl Marx, Lenin, Edwin Arnold, G. S. Ghurye, Peter Berger, Dalai Lama, and others. Nazrul's views on equality are also be evaluated through a comparison of his poetry with two of his contemporary poets, Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Allama Iqbal.*

*Keywords: Equality, egalitarianism, communism, secularism, pluralism, humanism*

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### **Introduction**

Kazi Nazrul Islam, a rebel poet, is one of the incomparable figures of twentieth-century Bengali literature and culture. He was a poet of resistance, freedom, reality and a poet of a non-communal mentality. In the subjugated nation, Nazrul faced many difficulties and privations. Despite his academic abilities, he was unable to continue his studies owing to a shortage of funds. He observed and despised inhumanity, corruption, racism, hatred, and sectarianism on the surface of this conquered world which inflamed his mind and provided him the impetus to raise his voice against all sorts of inequalities throughout his whole life. His revolt for equality did not end in his personal life; the melody of his egalitarianism found its way into the court of his literature. There were several arguments by the fundamentalists of his time about his religion, since he wrote "Hamd", "Nat" and several poems concurrently about Hindu gods and goddesses. The present paper focusses on his egalitarianism and

humanism as represented in his poetry in the light of the views of various critics and philosophers. The poet has also been compared to two of his contemporaries Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Allama Iqbal to have a clear understanding of the depiction of the notion of equality.

### **Background of his Secular Thought**

As a child, his father, Fakir Ahmed, taught Nazrul and got education from Benepara school village a couple of days later. His uncle, Karim, gave him religious education where he learnt Arabic, Persian, and Urdu and wrote some *Leto* songs and *Pala* songs in that time of his life. Later, his way of observing things from a religious perspective changed. In Nazrul's life, influence of two people is seen in the case of changing thought from fundamental religious perspective. One of them was Sri Nibaron Chondro Ghotok who was involved in the West Bengal terrorist revolutionaries. The other was Barindra Kumar Ghosh, a prominent revolutionary of the terrorist movement before Indian independence. Nazrul's married life is also significant for understanding his core belief in secularism.

Nazrul's marriage to Nargis Asar Khanam, Daulatpur's Ali Akbar's niece, leads to disagreements with the pair. Nazrul then relocated to Comilla and grew up in the Sengupta family on the banks of the Kandi. Nazrul then formed a tight bond with Ashalta Sengupta, alias Duli or Dolan who was Giribala Devi's only sibling. Finally, the poet married Ashalata Devi, later 'Premila Devi' after her marriage, a Hindu woman, on April 25, 1924. Nazrul gave names to his four sons in Hindu-Muslims tradition as "Kazi Sabyasachi" ("Sunny"), "Kazi Aniruddha", "Arindam Khaled" ("Bulbul"), and "Azad Kalam" ("Krishna Mohammad"). In his personal life, Nazrul was a Muslim and claimed to be a follower of Hindu and Muslim faiths. As a result, a synthesis of the two religions is seen in his writing. He has spent his entire life attempting to reconcile the two religions.

### **A Critical Overview on Religious Equality**

Nazrul Islam took a firm and principled stand against religious intolerance. He passionately argued that he entirely trusted in the likelihood of Hindu-Muslim peace, and he used all his talents to persuade both Hindus and Muslims of the folly of religion-based animosity. In one of his poems titled 'Human Being,' (1925) the poet utters:

I sing the song of equality  
There is nothing greater than a human being,  
Nothing nobler! (Islam, *Poet of Tolerance*, 49)

The religious equality represented in Nazrul's poetry is observed in the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz also. Faiz holds a unique place among revolutionary poets around the world. His poetry is not just for entertainment; there are certain realities, most notably social realities. The more he is deconstructed, the more hidden messages in his poetry can be revealed. One of his most famous poems against Zia's regime is "We will see" ("Hum Dekhenge") –

When the heavy mountains of injustice  
Will blow away like cotton-wool  
Beneath the feet of us oppressed  
Like a heartbeat this land will beat  
And above the heads of the people-of-power  
When lightning cracks and crackles

We will see! (Faiz, *The Colours of My Heart*, 2017, p. 10)

Faiz uses Islamic etymological words in his poems, however, his poetry does not favor any particular religion. His consciousness like Nazrul's speaks of equality and humanity. The collection's most notable *Ghazal*, 'Slate and Pen' (*Lauho Qalam*), is about Faiz's enthusiasm and strong will to realize his ideal dream and achieve his goal. Faiz says,

I will go on the nurturing the Tablet and the pen

I will go on the recording what the hearts go through (Faiz, *The Colours of My Heart*, 2017, p. 25)

It is notable that the same expressions can also be found in Nazrul's poem "The Rebel" where Nazrul utters,

I am the Bedouin, I am the Chengis,

I salute none but me! (Islam, *Poet of Tolerance*, 64)

Faiz's poetry speaks to the commoner who lives a life of exploitation, deprivation and poverty and encourages him to fight for his rights and freedom just like Nazrul did through his poems.

G. S. Ghurye (1932) wrote about the factors of caste discrimination. According to him, there is a lack of a true general concept of caste. Because of the ambiguity of the phenomena, it seems that every effort at classification is doomed to fail. The caste structure, according to Ghurye, is hierarchical. People's rights and privileges are distributed unequally as a result of this hierarchy.

Moreover, to break away from the idea of caste discrimination, Nazrul writes:

In the name of caste, they play gamble,

Caste will be vilified if touched? It (classism) is not

A thing very easily obtainable. (Islam, *Poet and More*, 101)

Edwin Arnold, an English poet, also gave a clear statement on caste discrimination. He said, "There is no caste in blood."

According to Karl Marx (1843), religion is the stimulant of the people. It was translated from the German version, "Die Religion ist das Opium des Volkesis." (Marx's, 1843) Karl Marx's entire quotation is as follows: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (Marx's, 1843). Nazrul remarks the same meaning through his poem:

I woke up quitting to opium called religion

I have destroyed

the profession of priest of all religions

Who will listen to the call of the temple? (Islam, *Sāhitye Dharma*, 16)

In his popular book *The Many Altars of Modernity*, American sociologist Peter Berger (2014) discusses "pluralism" as a response to secularism. Nazrul's devotional writings were so detailed that he displayed his views on religious unity in an editorial *Joog Bani* (1920):

Come brother Hindu! Come Musalman! Come Buddhist! Come Christian! Let us transcend all barriers, let us forsake Forever all smallness, all lies, all selfishness and let us fall Brothers as brothers. We shall quarrel no more. (Islam, "The Life of a Rebel", 2)

Nazrul highlighted the importance of religious pluralism among the residents. He wrote:

O Captain! Today you shall be watched

For determination and love

'Hindu or Muslim?' Wait! Who asks?

Captain! Proclaim: My Mother's children are drowning—Human all!

(Islam, *Poet of Tolerance*, 49)

Religion, according to Durkheim (1912), is mostly a collective phenomenon. Religious practices are collective expressions of social reality. Durkheim argued that faith acted as a form of unification, recognizing societal roots and truths. Life is the most important thing in religion. Durkheim regarded it as an integral part of the societal system. He remarks that religion provides individuals with moral strength, unity, and emotion, as well as another means of communication and assembly by which they can interact and reaffirm societal norms.

Nazrul was very active in representing the social truth at any cost.

Not the white lotus sitter today  
 Mother is in blood- red-attire  
 O Mother! Let your full moon of creation laugh  
 On the breast of destruction. (Islam, *An Evaluation*, 136)

“Religion is, in a word, the system of symbols by which society becomes conscious with itself,” writes Émile Durkheim of *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. It is found in Nazrul's poems, where he tries to make the society conscious. His poem “The Peasant's Song” is the perfect example of that. Where Nazrul (1926) says,

They are robbing us of the food from our plates,  
 They are playing with the clothes snatched off  
 From the body of our chaste maidens.  
 Our babies are dying in our arms, today, Comrade,  
 And we are powerless to resist.  
 We are the true children of the soil,  
 green as the young grass,  
 Rama, the enemy of Ravana, is lying hidden in  
 Our beauty. (Islam, *Poet of Tolerance*, 76)

He wrote many poems where his religious egalitarianism can be found, such as “Pap” (“Sin”), “Issar” (“God”), “Sammabady” (“Equality”), “Manush” (“Human Beings”), “Baranghana” (“Prostitute”), “Coolie Majurs” (“Labourers”) and many others.

Nazrul stressed the futility of one's religiosity or morals if he lacks sympathy for the poor and destitute, as well as for all people, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or religion. In this regard, Nazrul wrote:

Who are these Hippocrates?  
 Reading and swallowing the Quoran, the Veda, the Bible  
 While hating people?  
 Snatch the holy books from them! (Islam, *Two Geniuses from the East and the West*, 25)

Nazrul was encouraged to live a non-communal lifestyle. He understood the deprivation of the general people deeply for religious division and caste system. As a result, Nazrul drew on the people's mixed Hindu and Muslim cultural backgrounds at the time. He was equally comfortable with Arabic and Sanskrit meters as he was with standard Bangla models. He was as comfortable referring to Persian archetypes as he was referring to ancient Hindu archetypes. He was well-versed in both ancient and modern literature, as well as the outside world.

Nazrul's poetry speaks of humanity. Vladimir Lenin (1905) says, “Down with Religion! Long live atheism. The dissemination of atheist views is our chief task.” Also, Nazrul has placed the religion of humanism above all other religions. In his famous poem “Human Beings,” he speaks,

Let us sing the song of equality  
 Nothing is greater than human, nor important.  
 No difference in country-time-person, same for all religion  
 In countries, times, and houses they are relatives.

(Islam, *Two Geniuses from the East and the West*, 25)

Dalai Lama expressed the same in his religious view when he says, “This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness” (Lama, *Simple Religion*, 1).

Nazrul believed that there is no discrimination between Hindus and Muslims. He claimed that Hindus and Muslims are brothers. They are the greater India's two eyes. He added that they are two trees in one garden. Both are rivers that originate in the Himalayas and flow to the same shore. They are like two siblings vying over one mother's seat. This unbiased and critical representation can be seen in his popular poem “Hindu Muslim Duti Vai” (“Hindus and Muslims two Brothers”):

Hindus and Muslims are two brothers  
 Two eyes of India, they are  
 Two trees in a garden-deodar and kodom.  
 As if the Ganga and Shindhu river,  
 Always blowing together.  
 Coming out of the Himalayas and going to the same sea.  
 Nightingale and cuckoo  
 Singing together in the one garden. (Islam, *Poet of Tolerance*, 52)

Dr. Muhammad Allama Iqbal tried to elevate Muslim pride in the subcontinent. Nazrul, however, did not talk about any particular religion as he was an outspoken supporter of inter-communal cooperation for the sake of the country and humankind. The Islamic ideal of fairness influenced Nazrul. Nazrul Islam penned a significant number of poems on Muslim grandeur to make the Muslim community to think beyond religious fanaticism. He wrote Mustofa Kamal Pasa, modern Turkey's savior and builder. Pasa, in his opinion, was ideal for recovering Muslim dignity and political standing.

The common feature in the poetry of both the poets is love for creation. Nazrul is in favour of eliminating the old and rotten for new creation. Iqbal also says, “Why dread destruction? Destruction is the travail of creation anew.” According to the prominent poet and researcher Sayed Ali Asraf, the connection between Iqbal's and Nazrul's concepts of “self” is increasingly apparent. He goes on to say,

Iqbal was a learned philosopher and thinker. He had also produced a comparison of the metaphysical characteristics of man's various religious consciousness in Islam. As a result, he could readily synthesize his concept of self with the Islamic view of man as 'Khalifatullah,' God's vicegerent on earth. (Ashraf, *Homage To Qazi Nazrul Islam*, 1973, p.85)

It appears that Nazrul, as a mass poet, may have taken the self-assertion concept inadvertently, while another Islamic poet, Dr. Muhammad Allama Iqbal, has borrowed the concept via his rigorous study of philosophy.

### **Cultural Interaction**

In a plural community, cultural interaction is unavoidable. Contracts may seem to be peripheral, but they are also broader, resulting in a flurry of experiences and attaining a higher

degree of consciousness by a person or community. In *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Smritikotha (Kazi Nazrul Islam: Memories)*, Muzaffar Ahmed writes that in 1921, he and Nazrul Islam agreed to join the Communist Party. In the poet's view, these communist concepts produced a notion of secular humanism against the background of contemporary Hindu-Muslim amity. As a result, the depiction of Hindu-Muslim ties in Nazrul Islam's works differs from other Bengali authors who came before him.

Nazrul considered the Hindu untouchability system a significant obstacle to Hindu-Muslim friendship. Nazrul wrote after explaining the untouchability mishap:

Let Hindus remain Hindus and let Muslims remain Muslims. But only for once o man! Come out in the boundless freedom under the great sky and cry in the voice of the day and creation and say, "Humanity is my religion". Then you will see response coming from all directions. In this great era of humanism, it comes out of the barrier and declares that you are not a Brahamin, not a Sudra, not a Mussalman, but you are man, you are the truth. (Islam, *Poet of Tolerance*, 93)

The poem "The Rebel" by Nazrul is incomparable in portraying the emergence of Humanism's influence.

The war-weary Rebel can be claimed,  
The cry of the tortured shall no more fill the air,  
The sword of the tyrant shall no more reign in the battle field.

(Islam, *Poet of Tolerance*, 65)

The vocabulary, smiles, and metaphors from Hindu and Muslim origins have been openly combined and used throughout the poem. In "The Rebel" (1923), the poet utters,

I am the Bedouin, I am the Chengis,  
I salute none but me!  
I am thunder, I am Brahma's sound in the sky and on the earth,  
I am the mighty roar of Israfil's bugle, (Islam, *Poet of Tolerance*, 64)

He composed these poems with both Islam and Hindu ideals in mind. In October 1922, Nazrul's first book of *Agniveena (The Vina of Fire)* was written. The book contains a set of twelve poems. The final seven—"Kamal Pasa", "Anowar", 'Ranoveri", "Sat-el-Arab", "Kheyaparar Tarini", "Korbani", and "Muharram"—are written on Islamic or Muslim themes. The first five poems, "Proloyullas," "Raktamber Dharini Ma," and "Agamoni," are focused on Hindu ideals; in the last two poems, "Rebel" and "The Comet", influence from both Hindu and Muslim sources are combined with communalism concepts. Although one thing is sure, all twelve poems are unmistakably imprinted with Nazrul's unique form and the poems of awakening humanism among the society. Whether the topic was Hindu or Muslim, the poet aimed to sing the victory of humanism.

According to Nazrul, "nothing is more holy than the heart," and in order to be close to God, one must immerse oneself in the reality river rather than rummage through the pages of Shastra. Nothing is bigger or better to him than man. He wanted to break down the boundary lines and diminish all barriers to social stratification. In his book, *Fonimonsha (1926)*, Nazrul aspires to see through the Hindu-Muslim riot, hoping that the warring Hindus and Muslims will eventually realize their error and unite against the British Raj.

In Nazrul's view, the interaction between cultures is thus twofold: (a) the interaction of Hindu and Muslim society, and (b) the interaction of various socioeconomic strata. In the first case, Nazrul is in favor of peace; in the second, he favors victory.

As a poet and thinker of the Indian nation-state that emerged from the great upheaval of anti-colonial nationalism, Nazrul sees the religious division as the common enemy from

both the political and social perspectives. It is identified as the dividing force of distinction, which must be combated by the ideal of universal humanity, in which variation is a marker of individuality. He is eloquently theorizing such a nation and imagining an imaginable reality, a planet of signification, and an idiom in which diversity is an undeniable truth and harmony is to be attained by the human endeavor of forming ties through the difference.

## Conclusion

Kazi Nazrul Islam was something like a poet-writer of what is called humanity. He wrote and sang about human beings, regardless of what so-called religious figures could think about him. Social conscience and the anti-reform trend have been expressed in the wake of communism. His communism recognized the vulnerability of the country's population and showed how a modern world could be created by resolving this vulnerability, which in today's violent money culture is quite relevant. He emerged as a people-oriented activist author who opposed orthodoxy, fanaticism, religious extremism, injustice, exploitation, tyranny, and all kinds of inequalities during his life. He tried to foster brotherhood between Muslims and Hindus as an advocate of religious harmony. He has enacted the fundamental virtues of humanism, compassion, friendship, tolerance, democracy, liberty, unity, and solidarity in his practice. Nazrul dreamed of a non-discriminatory society through his communist thinking. He dreamed of a society where there would be no division of religion, caste, and clan. The influence of his poetic expression revolutionizes all levels of society, especially common people who are animated by assimilating his verses. It is observed that Nazrul's path was very similar to the one that Faiz had shown to establish a secular society, however, his views are found different from his another contemporary poet Iqbal, though both of them have spoken of real nationalistic prosperity.

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## Hybrid Construction of the “Third Space”: Quest for Identity in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*

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### *Abstract*

*The author plays a significant role in defining the text and can also impact the way in which another text by an author is interpreted; Ann-Marie MacDonald in her play Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) posits a different meaning of Shakespeare's tragedies. Not only does she censure or questions Shakespeare's being the author of these plays, but also problematizes the plays as being comedies despite being popularly acknowledged as tragedies. The protagonist Constance Ledbely asks: “Is this tragedy?! Or is it comedy gone awry” (13). As a reader, one finds many theories of literature like Death of the Author, Subconscious mind and Existentialism, essential in order to understand the play. The writer has offered a completely new perspective to the reader wherein the reader is allowed to step into a world where the existing meaning of the text is changed completely. Placing two of the most famous Shakespearian heroines opposite each other and making the most iconic romance (Romeo and Juliet), a manifestation of infatuation and childish act is quite surprising and conspicuously pronounces that literary approaches are like coloured glasses worn while analyzing a text differently.*

*Keywords: Hybridity, Existentialism, Absurd, Death of the Author, Individuation, Jungian Analysis*

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The play pivots the journey into the sub consciousness of the protagonist Constance Ledbely; she is in search of her identity which is lost in the shadow of Professor Claude Night. “The real story happens in the zone of the unconscious mind. Constance stews in her office like base matter in an alchemical dish: she reaches the nigredo/nadir of her existence, and this allows her to reconsider her life, herself, as if in a dream.” (Rubess xii). Carl Jung maintains that, typically, people in their mid-thirties seek to cast aside much of their socially constructed selves—their “personas” or masks—and find their authentic selves. In this context, it is noteworthy that the journey into the unconscious leads Constance to individuation. “Individuation is the process, simple or complex as the case may be, by which every living organism becomes what it was destined to become from the beginning” (Jung). Constance with her alchemical manuscript enters the plays of Shakespeare which she believes are not tragedies. She contends that *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello (Good Morning Juliet)*, are comedies and more importantly, are not written by Shakespeare; he however “plundered and made over into ersatz tragedies!” (15). Her contentions however, are spurned by Professor Calude which she finds unjustifiable: “Oh I'm not, I'm, I'm not the least bit special, I'm, I'm just one flawed and isolated fragment of a perfect infinite mind like anybody else, I-I think

that I exist in that you and I are here chatting with the sense evidence of each other . . ." (16).

In relation to this battle of identity, Heidegger proposes that "I" am "an entity whose what [essence] is precisely to be and nothing but to be" (Heidegger 67). Constance's self-discovery happens in her subconscious mind. With coming together of all the characters, not only Constance but others also discover a personality which was earlier hidden or shadowed. She learns from Juliet and Desdemona and they in turn learn from her. When Constance enters the world of Desdemona she is given an identity of which Constance was unaware.

DESDEMONA As real as thou art, Constance, Queen of Academe.

CONSTANCE Is that my true identity? Gosh.

I was just a teacher 'til today. (Donald 28)

This realization comes as a blessing to Constance as she is jostled out of the precincts of her marked existence. Existence is "self-making-in-a-situation" (Fackenheim 37). Existentialists insisted that a human being is pushed into an incorrigible universe and therefore it is believed that "existence precedes essence". The idea manifests clearly in *The Basics of Philosophy* "Most Existentialists believe that personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential in arriving at the truth and that the understanding of a situation by someone involved in that situation is superior to that of a detached, objective observer". Since the outset, Constance is convinced of the anomalies apropos of Shakespeare's plays. Ann Marie Macdonald tries to use the reader response where she believes that the tragedies were intended to be comedies and tries to find the real author. Professor Claude Night on the other hand ensures that she should not be swayed by this unrealistic theory "Still harping on the Gustav Manuscript? I hate to see you turning into a laughing stock Connie. You know you'll never get your doctorate at this rate" (16). This leads to a struggle within Constance as she internalizes her being "Just a failed existentialist" (16). It is noteworthy that existentialists firmly advocate that an individual should not be restricted by the doctrines of society and should be allowed to exercise free will. Sartre has postulated "existence precedes essence", that is only by existing and acting in a certain way do we give meanings to our lives. He further asserts that there is no predefined structure wherein a human can be framed and therefore, the responsibility of defining our 'being' rests on us, however, this responsibility sometimes transports humans to an 'absurd' world.

Constance's entry into the worlds of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* may seem absurd to the logical reader however, to the playwright it is completely reasonable as she has added a new dimension to the plays by labeling them as comedies. The play begins with a communiqué by Jung: "The individual, on his lonely path, needs a secret. . . . a secret which he cannot betray- one which he fears to give away, or which he cannot formulate into words, and which therefore seems to belong to the category of crazy ideas . . . The concept of absurdity is related to existentialism, it was considered that humans are often stuck in the intricacies of being and nothingness." *Romeo and Juliet* as characters exemplify this inner battle as they are shown to be vacillating with their choices:

JULIET & ROMEO [Both aside] Th'affections of our love's first-sighted blood, have in the cauldron of one hot swift night, all cooled to creeping jelly in the pot. (Donald 54)

This emotional ambiguity of the lovers ascertains absurdity when they realize with regret that their having fallen in love with each other was immature and a foolish thing, furthermore to complicate the idea, they both fall for Constance. The whole idea of emotional turmoil of Constance and then Juliet, Romeo and Desdemona accentuate the idea of absurd theatre which insists the meaninglessness of human existence. All the characters in the play

run from "something" to "something" that they are not sure about. Esslin has asserted "the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions—and to laugh at it" (Esslin 429). Not only the readers but the characters also enjoy this predicament of their comical existence whereby they are shown to be free to move in any dimensions of time and space. Absurdity is again exemplified by a "dumb-show" in the play.

Shakespeare's tragedies are further presented as comedies by Ann-Marie Mac Donald, when she brings out the element of 'authorial intent'. The concept became important with the essay "Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes which states that the intentions of author are not important for the readers as the reader has to deconstruct the text interpret it. Barthes in his essay emphasizes that the author is a vehicle by which a story is communicated to the reader and after that author's ownership on the text is lost; according to him, "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (Barthes). He persists that the reader's interpretation remains parlous as he or she is deprived of an opportunity to enjoy the free play of imagination if he or she is not emancipated from the clutches of the author's influence and standpoint. In the light of the articulation of Barthes, MacDonald clearly can be credited with having defied the author's impact. Despite the fact that Shakespeare is acknowledged and celebrated for having written the deepest tragedies by most critics, MacDonald debunks a dramatist of his stature and tendentiously vocalizes her interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedies as comedies. The plays of Shakespeare while travelling through time and space have undergone many changes depending on the cultural contexts in which they are read and re-written. By changing two tragedies into comedies, Macdonald evidently and strikingly creates a "Third Space" where multiple meanings are created. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi. K. Bhabha broaches third space. According to him, third space is used "for elaborating strategies of selfhood . . . that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1–2). In the play, Constance after her encounter with Professor enters the world of Desdemona and introduces herself as "an academic".

The third space is further palpably created in the interrelationship of fantasy and reality. The audience always moves into the polarity of meaning, where they represent themselves in reality and sometimes represent the fantasy world of Constance's subconscious. Ann-Marie Mac Donald beautifully creates a world wherein the characters with their multiple personalities are weaved into the main plot and when they are put in their different versions simultaneously also, they do not leave the readers confused. The third space is engendered again when the author explores the issue of love and acceptance in her play. The play also explores Jung's theory of individuation. Jung's archetypes were drawn from various sources like mythology and literature, which is why some of the archetypes included the Wise Fool, the Trickster, or the Magician (Knight 1). In *Goodnight Desdemona*, Constance is shown to have dealt with three archetypes in the process of finding her 'self'. While, writing her thesis, she is profoundly immured to the worlds of Romeo and Juliet and Othello. Eventually, her unconscious arranges itself within the worlds of those two plays. That is why the play ends with the coming together of Constance's mind, "two plus one adds up to one, not three," (MacDonald 88). All the three women are shown to be standing together in the end but have retained their individuality. At the end of the play Constance, "gains some power through her alliances with other women while audiences feel empathy for her and rejoice in her final hopefulness" (Hengen 107). Jung states that people in their mid- thirties often tend to get rid of their "socially constructed-self" and move to their "actuality". The

realization of this “actuality” comes to Constance when her professor tells her that he is leaving. Constance then realizes that she was being manipulated all this while and she glides into the plays of Shakespeare where she makes the other characters get into their “actuality”. Constance searches for the Shakespearean “wise fool” who, she thinks can change the whole idea of the play as the fool will help her to find the real author of the play and can turn the plays into comedies. In Shakespeare's play, Desdemona was shown to be a kind-hearted and humble woman that causes her being perceived as an easy target. In *Goodnight Desdemona*, on the other hand, Desdemona becomes a strong and violent woman. This is validated when she tells Constance, “If thou wouldst know thyself an Amazon, acquire a taste for blood” and “Thou shall be eaten alive in Cyprus, Con. Learn to kill” (Pg 32). MacDonald doubles and triples the role of actors to highlight the multiple personalities and complexity of individuals. Masculine and feminine roles are also changed by MacDonald to change the narrative. The scene that is considered to be very important in Othello and Goodnight Desdemona is the sword play; both the writers have used sword play to reveal the personality of the characters which again refers to a space that is created in order to transform the characters as they want. “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes” (Proust, qtd. in Canfield, 153).

A key argument of Third Space theory is that everything is called into question and challenging the binary thinking, while writing the play *Goodnight Desdemona*, Mac Donald very aptly questions the plays and very subtly changes them from tragedies into comedies. The focus of whole narrative also changes from Othello and Romeo to Desdemona and Juliet thus bringing in the notion of gender stereotypes into the question. Many critics refer to Third Space as a place where “everything comes together”. Constance is shown to be trying to save Desdemona and Juliet from their sad fate and that brings worlds of Desdemona, Juliet and Constance together and their existence gets tied to each other. Both Juliet and Desdemona are introduced in Act II and Act III and Constance is introduced in Act I itself, this sequential unfolding of the characters further accentuates the plot. Both, Desdemona and Juliet develop a fondness for Constance at the very instance they see her and that shows how the writer wants to create a shift of plays into completely feminine realm. Constance's inept journey through the plays is likewise a journey of self-discovery; in the end she realizes that she is the author of the texts, someone she had been looking for, since the beginning of the play. Being the central character she very wisely changes the whole plot and also flips the ending of the play, making it a different story with the same plot. “Um . . . You're about to make a terrible mistake . . . m'Lord” (MacDonald 24). The point where she warns Othello that he is about to commit a blunder the plot takes a comic turn whereby Shakespeare. The term 'adaptation' and 'appropriation' both can be used to refer to any work that is based on some previous work and still retains the core work in fact Shakespeare's play acts as an important source for understanding Anne Marie Mac Donald's work. As Linda Hutcheon puts it, adaptations are 'haunted at all times by their adapted texts. If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we announce its overt relationship to another work or works'. Constance's mind in the play becomes the space which allows for the interaction of characters. The play shows the unexpected, strong transformation of Constance Ledbely's weak self in the process of individuation—a process that Jung delves into and considers important. According to Jung, it helps to create a full, tough, pleasant self. Desdemona and Juliet realize that they have something more to their personalities after they meet Constance and Constance also realizes the same. This individuation accentuates the personality of all the three characters and sets the

tone for the action to move towards the just. Juliet and Romeo realize that this is not the love that they wanted:

JULIET & ROMEO [Both aside] Th'affections of our love's first-sighted blood, have in the cauldron of one hot swift night, all cooled to creeping jelly in the pot. (Mac Donald 54)

However, it is noteworthy that Ann Marie Mac Donald does not aim at demeaning the plays of Shakespeare, rather she clearly declares her admiration for his talent. She states, "I would never lampoon something that I hated. It can only be something which fascinates me for some reason and if I'm fascinated by it then it means there is a deep attraction to it" (Much 136). The playwright with her adaptation of the play gives wholeness and positive transformation to the characters and play on the whole. Constance strongly believes the tragic death of Juliet and Desdemona in the plays by Shakespeare could have been avoided and that is why Alchemy or magic as a tool is employed by the playwright in the light of the concept of individuation given by Jung. She tries to transform the personalities through this technique and the play. The transition of characters into different personalities, thus, does not look bizarre to the readers. Moreover, this individuation allows the characters to complement each other; Constance prompts Desdemona and Juliet to change their personalities and behavior. Three women Constance, Juliet and Desdemona in the beginning are submissive who remain unctuously devoted and submissive to the male authority as classical heroines, but eventually with the passage of time realize their powers and try to help one another other in finding "themselves" and not just "exist" in the play which is constantly being told to the readers through "Chorus", which like all the Shakespearean plays also play an important role in this play.

At the end of the play, in the Epilogue the Chorus sums up the journey of Constance and her individuation where it reveals that she is the author of the play she had been searching for. She has had the courage to call her shade and has thus completed her hunt and the alchemical process. The "grey matter" at the end of the play is turned into "precious gold" and that is the lead of her "unindividuated" self. Ann Marie Macdonald has artistically tried to challenge and mould the existing parameters of literature and tried to give voice to the unvoiced in her narrative. Throughout the play she has tried to keep the original story in the background thus giving it its due. *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* parodies Othello and Romeo and Juliet, and appropriates many Shakespearean features. The play is a delight to read and keeps alive both the authors in the mind of readers as it seems that MacDonald has tried to give another dimension to the understanding of the Shakespearean plot.

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## **Reinterpreting the Mystical Essence in the Poetry of William Blake and Rabindranath Tagore**

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### *Abstract*

*Humans have longed for an understanding which defines their presence within universally interwoven energies. Man has aimed to understand the mystic expressions of poets who have tried to define an elevated spiritual juncture within mystical paradigms eloquently in their poetry. This mystical essence manifests itself within succinct expressions in the poetry of both Blake and Tagore who have been established as mystic poets and seekers of this universal truth themselves. Their poetic expressions, while being mystical, try to define the amalgam of consciousness with the all-pervasive divine consciousness and are projections of the lives within which these mystic poets exist and reverberate the realities that surround them. The mystic expressions in their poetry are fraught with worldly experience while embracing their existential quest and transcending it without cleaving or dissociating from it. This mysticism is truly spiritual in its essence, yet it attempts to define human existence within the worldly chaos. Both mysticism and existentialism concatenate at the juncture where in the mystic expressions in the poetry of Blake and Tagore provide answers to the existential ontological quest into self and an understanding of consciousness within an existential awareness. This paper aims to reinterpret the manifestation of what is mystic in the poetry of both Blake and Tagore within the existential paradigms.*

*Keywords: Mysticism, existentialism, cosmic consciousness, spirituality, mystic poetry*

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### **Introduction**

Man has forever tried to enquire upon ontologically into what human consciousness means while trying to define a mystical understanding of human presence within the universal interplay of energies. This is accomplished while incessantly searching for a meaning of life that is being led by humankind. The strife and chaos which has become intrinsic to human life reflects in the surroundings and becomes a part of the lives and the world that the humans live in. An existential view provides an answer to a philosophical

enquiry into the nature of life but also attempts to give meaning to it. Existential thought is congruent with the mystical manifestations in expressions of poets who are mystical seekers. Michalson states in his research work that the philosophy of existence may be described as a continuous and arduous journey when he says, “The way of existentialism is through the tragic sense of life, a dryness and thirst which keeps man continuously en route. Existentialism strikingly resembles mysticism in this respect” (355). The expressions in the poetry of established mystic poets like William Blake and Rabindranath Tagore continuously link the mystical experiences within their surroundings and the very existence of an individual in this world.

### **Existentialism and Concatenation of Mystic Realization within Existential Paradigms in the Poetic Expressions of Blake and Tagore**

Existentialism is an approach which aims to bring about an understanding of the consciousness or self within an individual while laying emphasis on the free will of the individual. Existentialism essentially deals with a philosophical exploration into the nature of consciousness or an understanding of self while laying emphasis on the varied individualistic experiences of the human subject which are not cleaved from worldly associations yet are entirely subjective and experiential. Existential mysticism would mean finding definitions of mysticism within the existential realities while it also offers an understanding and significance of life. Hunt tries to define this mysticism within the paradigms of existence as a cultivation of a here and now sense of being which is akin to Heidegger's authenticity, a “permanent I” and an “objective conscience” (25). Elaborating upon the similarities between the mystical and the existential states Hunt further says, “Heidegger both early and late, ultimately leaves open whether mystical states would merely be projections of our being alive, as they certainly are phenomenological or veridical ontological perceptions of a transcendental source and intentionality” (25). Both mysticism and existentialism hence emphasise upon the subjective experience while concatenating the experiencing process. Upon approaching both these approaches pragmatically, one observes that they necessitate the negation of the identity of self in the process of amalgamating with higher experiences and fall within the worldly stratagems of an individual. Jean Paul Sartre in his book *Being and Nothingness* (1992) describes consciousness as an openness towards the world which is constant and further explicates it as a transcendent interrelationship with others which inevitably results in a relation with the *in itself* consciousness (6). Consciousness is existence itself or as Jaspers refers to it as the 'Manifestation of Being' (Jaspers 11). This realization of self and consciousness is highly individualistic and the mystical realisation is not governed by any historical, religious or sociological dogmas. Both Blake and Tagore display this existential mysticism in their poetry extensively. The mystic expressions in their poetry are not other worldly or inexplicable because they find a connection within the existence of humans.

Literary methodologies like poetry, which are exhaustive, qualitative studies, are a valuable means to facilitate the study of existential elements within the thought process (Moustaka23). This holds true for the poetry of both Rabindranath Tagore and William Blake.

### **Blake's Poetic Expressions Encompassing Existential Mysticism**

Blake brings forth the mystical dimensions within the existential realm of our life in his poetry and it urges humans to seek mystical truths and eternal enlightenment within their

worldly existence despite the chaos, pluralities present in the world. His poetic expressions exhibit mysticism within the infinitude of the palpating life around while his mysticism finds its roots in life itself and manifests in the fulfillment of life within all its impulses. The mysticism in his poetry soothes the existential torment and provides an astute understanding of spiritual elevation in the life of humans; a mystical rapture with a complete submergence of selfhood with a higher consciousness. His mysticism is visceral rather than reasonable in his *Songs of Experience* (2007) and his mystic expressions emerge while laying out necessities of humans in their worldly pursuits. He professes mysticism with an understanding that the divine lies within the humans while they reflect the infinite and that human are the universe itself. Wilson in his work *Existential Criticism* (2021) opines that Blake was essentially an existential thinker much before the existentialist philosophers came into being while taking into context the importance given by Blake to human existence and individual subjective experiences (152). His poetic expressions are reflections of an exalted spirit which is aflame with mystic realization within existential realities. Singer in his book *Blake, Jung, and the Collective Unconscious* (2000) explicates that Blake's poetic works express key ideas which essentially depict transpersonal insights and merge with the humanistic, existential and psychoanalytic discipline (11). Existentialism is a philosophy which emphasizes upon the supremacy of the individual while laying utmost importance on man firstly as an individual (Cooper127). Blake's poetic mysticism resonates with this aspect of existentialism as he explores the true individual authentic 'self' within the existential and mystical realms in his poetry. Adams opines that Blake's poetic expression is a depiction of the grand path of human awakening and liberation which is an awesome existential calling which promulgates the evolution of consciousness and culture (9). In his poems in the *Songs of Innocence* (2007) like "The Divine Image" he reflects upon the idealistic mystic realities and the future that they hold for humans. Blake also believes in finding joy within the presence of all pervasive infinitude in the life while emphasizing on individual perspective in defining his essence within the existential context. In *Jerusalem* (1804) Blake says, "Distinguish therefore states from individuals in those states. States change, but individual identities never change or cease" (529). His poetry emphasizes for humans to return to sources that fulfill the imminent human nature in order to attain a mystical realization. Blake himself speaks about holding together the contradictory aspects of existence and integrating the wholeness of human existence when he says, "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to human existence" (Blake 34). For him love therefore was an essential source to realize mysticism within the existential pursuits of life as opposed to the societal norms where an open explication of the same was looked down upon.

For Blake life was fraught with meaning and it was meant to merge with divine while existing rather than merging with the oblivion in order to attain a mystical realisation of the universe. His mysticism was concatenated with a spiritual awakening while incessantly ruminating upon the meaning of life and existence. Blake hence finds mysticism within the surroundings and the realities of life, he describes it beautifully in the following lines in *Auguries of Innocence* (2008),

To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour. (138)

Blake's mysticism is a resonance of the effervescence of energy reflected in the

details of life itself. Instead of a meaninglessness or pondering upon the futility of existence he finds the very essence of existence within nature around him in the poem *The Echoing Green* (2008) when he says,

The sun does arise, And make happy the skies.  
 The merry bells ring, To welcome the spring.  
 The skylark and the thrush, The birds of the bush,  
 Sing louder around, To the bells of cheerful sound,  
 While our sports shall be seen, On the echoing green. (11)

Blake is also highly sensitive to the strifes and struggles found within the existence of life. He oscillates between the subjective experiences of reality and ideal reality with passion and emotes the essence of a unity as he believes in the binding of all the energies together. In *Ethics of Ambiguity*(1976) Beauvoir appropriates the essential interrelation between human facticity and transcendence as she believes that despite the restrictions of existence laced with the harsh facts, human always chooses freedom in order to create itself and drawing from Hegel's moment of recognition she states that a human is able to flourish only once he not only acknowledges the existence of other men but strives towards their common flourishing where she says, "To will one free is also to will others free" (73). Blake describes this unity in the portrayal of God's love despite the existence of disparities and pluralities in the world. There is a portrayal of Blake's mystic spiritualism when his poems show divine energy flowing through all. The essence of Blake's mysticism within the world's realities is depicted beautifully in the *Little Black Boy* (2008), "And we are put on earth a little space. That we may learn to bear the beams of love" (13).

### **Rabindranath Tagore's Succinct Evincing of the Mystic within the Existential Realm**

The mysticism in the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore is not bound within any fetters of ceremony, nor is it confined to a limited God or religion. The mysticism in his poetry doesn't transcend away from the life on earth nor is it away from the existence of beings. His poetry concatenates the epistemological thought of the existentialists' sojourn with the consciousness starting from nothingness and provides a conscious expression within mystical paradigms. His poetry is a device to explicate his principles and subjective experiences as necessitated by existentialists to understand self. He recognizes an enduring gap between the human and his God while offering a mystical reimagining of the human condition within the existence and employs poetic scripting to bring forth a human who is radical, unfettered and not bound by any dogmas or a transcendence of epochs within his search for the divine amalgamation. Radice believes that Tagore's mystical expressions relate to the life being led by humans rather than to a life of renunciation or escape in order to attain a veridical divine consummation (409). Tagore's mysticism is completely devoid of any dogmas yet is a part of the existential realm of life and the mystic expressions in his poetry are highly syncretic and worldly while resonating within the existential context. Tagore gives importance to the immortal human soul, the consciousness flowing through all, and absolves himself from worldly desires while leading a life of simplicity and that reflects in the mysticism which is evinced in his poetry (Hopkins 299). While Tagore's poetry is an amalgam of a mystical theism arising from values rooted in the Vedas, Upanishads, Pantheism, Sufi Mysticism and the realistic mysticism of the 'Baul' mystics, his thoughts were never fettered by a confinement of a singular religion or a divine sectarianism.

In his book *Existentialism a Very Short Introduction* (2006), Flynn talks about the

*being* and states that according to the existentialist Marcel, the *being* is eternal and inexhaustible and by involving oneself in the action of experience the *being* can overcome the worldly isolation and despair (71). Tagore's mysticism finds effervescence in every being, while not being confined to any particular theism, Tagore also depicts a God who is bound in unification with humans as his own creation. In his poem *Leave this Chanting in Gitanjali* (2019) he says, "Deliverance! Where is deliverance to be found! Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; He is bound with us forever" (18). Tagore's poems are a profession of love which is pure and results in unending joy. His mysticism is a reflection of his devotion for the boundless energy of the divine which not only pervades nature but also completely pervades his heart. One can witness this harmony which blends love of nature with reverence of divine energy in many of his poems.

Rabindranath Tagore doesn't struggle with his surroundings, rather he takes refuge in nature, finding the unifying belief in the divine consciousness flowing through the nature around him and formulating the nature within him. Tagore believes that existentially nature plays a pivotal role in human development. For him nature and man unite within the source of the Absolute. This communion of the spirit and nature are a depiction of a higher mode of relationship with an ever strengthening and deepening self-knowledge. Talking about this in *Sadhana* (2006) Tagore says:

When a man does not realise his kinship with the world, He lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then is he emancipated for then he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born. (283)

In Tagore's opinion while nature exists within the paradigms of collaboration within human, it doesn't go against man, albeit it is a synthesis of a coexistence and transcendence. This relation of man and nature holds absolute ontological importance for Tagore (Bannerjee31). In *Sadhana* (2006) Tagore describes his existential quest while acknowledging the quintessence of his relation with nature when he says, "At one pole of my being I am one with stock and bones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of the universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies . . ." (306).

Tagore's notion of the consciousness bears affinity to the description of transcendental consciousness of Immanuel Kant where Kant says that all representations have relations to empirical consciousness which has a necessary relation with transcendental consciousness (Kant 142). Tagore emphasizes incessantly on the subjective experiences and believes that while human releases himself from the bonds of physical necessities, he realises that man's personality and self-expression and go hand in hand. This reminds one of the existentialist Sartre when in his work *Existentialism and Humanism* (1955) he says, "Man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aim that he himself is able to exist" (55). Tagore's poetry brings about the understanding of a presence of an all pervasive energy that flows within and exists all around. It is evident from the following lines from *The Fugitive* (2004), "How often great Earth, have I felt my being yearn to flow over you.../I feel as if I had belonged to you ages before I was born" (125).

Tagore doesn't believe in any form of renunciation of this world in order to attain a mystical elevation or an amalgam with the divine. Tagore's thoughts resonate with the existentialist Jean Paul Sartre's words in *Existentialism and Humanism* (1955) when he says, "Without the world there is no selfhood, no person; without selfhood, without the person, there is no world" (123). Tagore time and again reiterates the presence of the divine and a

subsequent mystical realm within the existential pursuits of life. His mysticism exists within the toil and action of life itself. He believes that God exists within the humans and their lives as their embodiment. He depicts this in the following lines from *Leave This Chanting in Gitanjali (2019)*:

He is where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones.

He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered in dust.

Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil. (18)

## Conclusion

Both Rabindranath Tagore and Blake present universals in their poetry which enable one to understand and soothe existential dilemmas. Their mystic poetic expressions quench the existential thirst by providing an elixir of mystical understanding within the din of life. They bring mysticism within existential paradigms rather than expressing something excruciatingly inexplicable and beyond a person's comprehension. While existential thought is congruent with the mystical manifestations as evinced within the poetry of both the poets, they both succinctly express with varied means the manifestation of mysticism within the quintessentially existential realms of life. The poetry of Blake and Tagore strives to resolve the inherent dichotomies of human life which is in a flux with a multitude of demands on an individual. Their poetic expressions forge a mystic understanding of life within man's external and internal relations while deriving an understanding of consciousness which is concatenated to simply existing within this world. Both the poets consider the universality of an individual whose consciousness evolves within the encounters of this world. In both of their poetic expressions, the mystic understanding for an individual doesn't exist while being fettered in terms of the obstacles which society, religion, caste or community might create for the individual. For them the mystical evolution occurs within individual subjective experiences which are well within the paradigms of existence.

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## Centuries and Miles Apart: A Reading of S. L. Bhyrappa's *Sartha: The Caravan*

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### *Abstract*

*Literature in the Indian subcontinent has given a deserved place for Indian writing in translation which augmented the progress of regional literature, not only in theoretical and artistic writings but also in scholastic curriculum. The translators who translate an Indian language into English face many hitches in conveying the emotion and feeling of the original text. Several issues pop up when the person is translating and recreating a history of bygone ages. This research paper focuses on Bhyrappa's *The Caravan*, a work that has transcended the age and culture of the eighth century C.E. The language used in the novel *Sartha: The Caravan* is simple and simple metaphysical fiction with its own regional hues. This makes the reading of the text a complicated process even to the readers from other languages within the subcontinent. The present study focuses on the difficulties that a reader today may confront in the process of reading the text. The introductory part of the paper explains and scrutinizes how the massive vista of the past is unveiled before the readers. It also amply portrays the historical, economic, political, and religious condition of eighth-century India by unearthing the truth and fiction in the context of the histories. The paper inquires into the challenges of translating these experiences to a reader from a different era with less knowledge of the philosophical inquisitions discussed by the author.*

*Keywords: Translation, transcreation, regional literature, emotion, historiography, culture*

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The life of the Indian people continues the way it was, . . . in the same way as they did a hundred years back. Life, which is closely linked to the specific geographic environment, has continued as it was, since the lived life does not change dramatically or drastically owing to mere intellectual influences. (Devy 18).

Blessed with a vast cultural diversity India encloses a wide range of literature based on different languages and ethnicities from various regions and societal groups. Creative pursuits from the regional or *bhasha* literature represent the life, unique customs, culture, and history of the locality and are the “saga of the changing traditions of India” (Agarwal). At the beginning of the eighteenth century, when British rule took its hold over India, English

emerged as a medium of expression that ensured better communication and a wider audience. Many came forward translating the regional writings into English which became a conduit to the literature of the past and the present arena. The entitled study intends to reveal the phenomenal work attempted by the prodigious novelist S L Bhyrappa in his work *Sartha: The Caravan* to portray an epoch from the nation's cultural history. The study audits the nuances of language in translation, decoding the text a complicated process, even for the readers within the subcontinent.

Many International critics harangued that Indian history lacks credibility and whatsoever written in the name of history are mere stories. Added to this, the scholarship created by western Indologists on the historiography of India stood in the framework where “classical India became 'glorious', and British India became 'progressive, but the intervening centuries became, culturally, a period of continuous vulgarization” (Devy, *Amnesia* 5). The rise of Indology as a discipline challenged this consensus that India “had no historical consciousness there is no history of ancient India to be recovered” (Trautmann 189). Constructing historiography of the country has been an uphill task for the Indologists as there is a labyrinthine connection of history with the myths and folktales. “Historical tradition in early India was expressed in various genres of texts - genealogies, biographies claiming to be historical, chronicles, and annals in the form of inscriptions” (Thapar 2). Trautman has argued that the “intellectual accomplishments” of the Indians are “substantial, especially in formal bodies of knowledge such as the astronomy-astrology-mathematics group of sciences, in language analysis, and perhaps also in aesthetic theory and knowledge” (202). The chosen work of study, *Sartha*, records the nation's glorious past, which has often gone unremembered since the colonial conquest.

Bhyrappa has marvelously transcreated the eighth-century ecumene of India with its keen minutiae of authentic and credible historical characters through a single man's travel in *Sartha*. Though the significant concentration of this historical novel is on religion and philosophy, Bhyrappa tosses light on events, landscape, society, and economy of the period bringing forth the historical consciousness of the past. He has ventured to preserve and revive the ambiance of the bygone, splendid era by infusing a story to make it meaningful for modern-day readers unfamiliar with that era. Devadevan observes that *Sartha* is “a journey into the heart of tradition. Interestingly enough, tradition unfolds in these works as an ethos rather than as a way of life”.

Bhyrappa brings before the readers the historical personages like Adi Shankaracharya, the advocate of the Advaita school of philosophy; Mandana Mishra, who promoted Mimamsa school of philosophy and his wife Ubhaya Bharati, the legendary woman who acted as the judge in the debate between Mandana Misra and Adi Shankaracharya and Kumarila Bhatta, another scholar of Mimamsa school. As Nandakumar points out, “Our philosophers and acharyas have contributed immensely to the world of human knowledge”. Still, they gave less attention to these schools, including academia's Shaiva, Vaishnava, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. “While the lion's share of our university curricula is consumed by Western philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, Abhinavagupta and Shankara are relegated to the last pages of our philosophy textbooks” (139). Bhyrappa, with his background of teaching philosophy for over a decade to the post-graduate students, has blended history, philosophy, and literature in *Sartha*. Though he “had swerved towards literature,” he did not lose “sight of *this* Philosophy, and I have not lost it even now.” He also adds that the “genesis of Philosophy cannot be without a literary dimension” (Bhyrappa, “Development of Indian Thought”).

There are umpteen representations of mythologies and epics in the fictional world of the land—nevertheless, fewer deliberations on the 'Mimamsa' the philosophical schools of thought have embraced. To the advocates of this school, “all cognitions must be accepted as true unless and until they are falsified by other cognitions” (Pollock 607). The age in which the novel set saw the flourishing and decline of the indigenous knowledge systems. A significant number of intellectual activities were on the front, often warring against each other. “Pressed from all sides by opponents from rival schools of thought, Indian philosophers at this time were keen to maintain the consistency of their various commitments in the face of critique” (Arnold). Therefore, the landscape of the novel witnesses fierce arguments between the knowledge systems, most often between Buddhism and the proponents of the various schools of Mimamsa.

In *Sartha*, without traversing with acuity, the novelist has reinstated the Nalanda, one of the oldest universities, with its generosity and altruism. One can learn that the chief patron of Nalanda was the Gupta kings, who were *Vaidiks*, the followers of Vedas of Hinduism. Non-Buddhist scholars from all over the world came to study in Nalanda irrespective of their caste and creed. However, the ultimate goal of Buddhists in Nalanda, who followed the Mahayana variety, was to spread their pre-eminence. The Mahayana sect of Buddhism that dominated the period believed in idol worship and had elements in common with the existing practices. The eighth-century witnessed the mixing up of the Mahayana sect with tantric rituals part of Hinduism. In the Vishwakarma episode, the Buddhists entrusted a Vedic to chisel the Chaitya. This adaptation of Hindu gods, namely *Yaksha* and *Yakshini*, into the Buddhist fold forms the core of the deliberations in the novel. Nagabhatta finds it shocking that most of the Buddhist scholars and instructors in the University were once the Vaidiks who converted to Buddhism in the later phase of their life.

Nagabhatta's encounter with Kumarila Bhatta in Nalanda University forms the background of discussions on the Mimamsa schools. Kumarila was the advocate of the *Purva* Mimamsa school of philosophy and a staunch follower of *Vedic* injunction. The story of Kumarila, who disguised himself as a Buddhist scholar at Nalanda University to learn the intricacies of Buddhism, is developed by Bhyrappa in his work. The debate between Shankaracharya and Mandana Mishra, the student of Kumarila Bhatta, also finds a place in the novel. Bharati Devi, the wife of Mandana Mishra, chaired the session. This episode is frequently cited as an example of the higher social status women enjoy on par with men. Women of the period were great scholars who mastered complicated philosophies and schools of thought. Bharati Devi declared the young ascetic to be the winner, and her husband took up *sannyasa*. The work throws light on the system where an individual's intellectual freedom was honored and the “tradition in which intellect and arguments decided the acceptability or otherwise of one's belief prevented it from falling into protected faith and thus save the different elements and viewpoints of culture from being frozen into dogma” (Bhyrappa 184). Though fiction, there is much use of metaphysical and philosophical thoughts, revealing the scholarship of the novelist on the same.

The protagonist's voyage along ancient India's trade routes leads the readers to the journey over the numinous landscape of varied customs, tantric yogis, kings, courtesans, spiritual visionaries, and the philosophical debates of the great scholars. “These details of intra-religious and philosophical debates in the temples and *pathshala* of the eighth century India offer a solid picture of the historical conditions of that time and help us understand our history better than our understanding of them from the discursive textbooks” (Naikar). The sequence unravels the people's cultural milieu, rituals, tradition, and mindset during the

eighth century.

The readers also get to know of the Arab invasion of the period into the Southern part of the continent. Arab invaded India to expand their international trade, which also was the beginning of the “process of cultural intercourse between them” with impacts on “language and literature and subsequently on other aspects of their life and thought” (Nizami 53). The Muslim trading societies strengthened their root throughout India and started propagating their religious belief. The social condition of the first decade of the previous millennium, where trade, culture, and knowledge flourished, was presented to the readers through the novel. The history written during the colonial era failed to give prominence to this period. To the typical person, this period remains an era of darkness. Bhyrappa, who believed that “while portraying the character of a historical person, the author must adhere to historical truths” (Can We Build National Integration?), has done extensive research on the subject that consider in the choice of characters and description of the landscape and personages that covered a vast portion of the country.

The world has turned into a global village where customs, traditions, and culture are melting pots. In the course of these cultural interchanges, specific core values of ancient philosophies too are at stake. Kumarila and Mandana Mishra, therefore, become the guardian angels of their respective schools of thought. Bhyrappa has reconstructed a phase in the historiography of India where different streams of Indian knowledge systems got into conflict with each other resulting in the decline of the same.

This research paper has placed the loci of study on two levels – revivifying age and translation of the experiences. The translator S Ramaswamy has transcreated not only the bygone era but also its technical and philosophical vocabulary into English. Ramaswamy's keen knowledge of Vedanta and Sanskrit has contributed immensely to the process of translation. The readers cannot unearth Mandana Mishra and Shankaracharya's philosophical debate if the translator lacks historical exactitude. *Sartha* has its own intricacies as the author has imbibed a series of metaphysical thoughts into the novel's plot. The work represents an unfamiliar era, and it becomes the translator's responsibility to tackle the issues associated with it. Ramaswamy has shared his experience translating Bhyrappa's novel in an interview: “Bhyrappa deals with fundamental human emotions, and the themes are of universal significance. However, problems that face the translator are his involved, long, periodic sentences, classical music parallels, Joycean interior monologues, soliloquies and dialectal variations in the use of Kannada” (Santhanam).

Translation decodes and diffuses the meaning from other sources, and the translator plays the role of the intermediary. As Devy puts it, “Literary translation is not just a replication of a text in another verbal system of signs . . . . The translation is rather an attempted revitalization of the original in another verbal space and temporal span” (Of Many Heroes 156). Translation has helped India unify within the country by familiarizing numerous regional cultures, societies, and languages to make them fit within the framework of Indian culture. Every translator faces the challenge of transferring word-word, phrase-phrase as precisely conveyed in the original source. Nevertheless, if the text is culture-specific, translation becomes a challenging task.

In *Sartha*, the readers come across common words through the various 'bhasha' or regional languages. They have a cultural milieu attached to them, and therefore the translator has used the exact words without going in for a verbatim translation. Some of the words that come under this category are: *Arati, Theertha, Alap, Shruti, Archana, Patashala, Tantrik, Leelas, Yogi, Swargaare* Sanskrit verses and phrases that the author has used generously have

helped to bring in the strong exactitude, which has also catalyzed the reading experience of the novel. In an interview with Deshakulkarni, Bhyrappa shared his thoughts on translation “It is easy to translate literary work of one Indian language to another . . . but try to translate a literary work from any Indian language to any non- Indian language . . . . It is extremely difficult because the concept of a culture radically differs” (Bhyrappa “In Conversation”). The readers within the country may not find it very difficult to read the texts from the regional languages translated into English due to the shared cultural elements that unite the nation from north to south and across east and west. However, the readers from the alien cultural milieu find the novel more complicated and twisted.

Bhyrappa's *Sartha: The Caravan* has taken up the task of reviving the forgotten history, preserved through folk songs and fables. This work serves as a reference for the students of Indian history, literature, and philosophy. Bhyrappa believes that “History is seeking out the truths about our past events, learning about ancient human lives by studying the inscriptions, records, literary works, relics, artifacts, etc.” (Distorting Indian). The author has successfully recreated an age with all its complications, diversities, and gradations with its authenticity in *Sartha*. It is a work that has imbibed into it the diverse culture and timeless philosophical school of thought and the challenges faced by them through ages. The novelist has succeeded in “bringing the ahistorical into history” (Nandy), disproving the general belief that Indians are ahistoric in their outlook. The mission of Bhyrappa to re-live the past would be successful only when the readers assimilate and experience the age from the texts. Works like *Sartha* undertake the travel into the forgotten history of the land to encapsulate the quintessence of India's past should be brought to the forefront of the deliberations and promoted to reach the ordinary readers across the nation.

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**Digital Media and Man-Woman Relationship: A Study of Meena Kandasamy's  
*When I Hit You or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife***

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*Abstract*

*Digital media offers freedom to disseminate information and organize activities for greater good, yet can likewise be utilized to scatter insidious substance and deliberate exposure, as well as be used as a technique for torment in a relationship. This research paper will exhibit the negative consequences of digital media on husband-wife relationship eventually resulting in establishing the stereotypical gender roles with reference to Meena Kandasamy's novel, When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife. By taking a few occurrences from the novel, the research work will portray that however social media can be an incredible method of correspondence yet it additionally has its traps. This research paper will showcase how the societal structure and behaviour are maintained, regardless of one's assumptions, education, class, or status. This work will depict how digital media can also form the basis of a spoiled relationship in the man driven society and how the oppression brought about by the stereotypical society impacts women character and image in the general public.*

*Keywords: Digital media, society, relationship, social media, Meena Kandasamy, control*

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Digital media is connecting people with remarkable degrees of correspondence, social correspondence and neighbourhood across cutoff points of time, spot and social setting. It is comparably spellbinding people and stimulating the democratization of information. Of course, it could provoke selling out and distance in a relationship. This research paper will show the negative consequences of digital media in husband-wife relationship with reference to Meena Kandasamy's novel, *When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. By taking a few illustrations from the novel, the research work will portray that in any case online media can be an astonishing procedure for correspondence yet it moreover has its catches.

Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* is an extraordinary assessment of 'present day' marriage through the craft of fiction. An unnamed narrator brings the readers into her universe of a skeptic life partner; a father embarrassed by

the shame about what a potential partition would bring, and a mother who uncovers to her that this is the status quo, to be calm and to recognize the condition considering the way that the foremost year of marriage is for each situation hard; a mother who makes a “scene” of the narrator's disgrace and prompts her that time will pass and all of her troubles will be neglected to recall. A fundamental perspective this novel brings out is the way where viciousness proliferates in an obviously “modern”, “love” marriage. In fact, the novel echoes the accounts of thousands of women who face brutality (conjugal assault, misuse, and so on) in the room. The novel is an incredible women's activist composition on self-realization and departure. Apart from a few different abuses in the novel against the narrator, computerized/ digital media is likewise one of the main reasons for the provocation against her.

Digital media has positive as well as negative impact on the society. There are lot of people who are dependent on online media today like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp which has gigantically affected individuals' life. Digital media interface individuals in ways which were not possible earlier, empowering clients to keep up fellowships across time and distance. It empowers the individuals who are socially detached or in one way or another set apart from their nearby actual local area to associate with likeminded individuals. This improves individuals' connections and their capacity to keep in contact, and the capacity of loved ones to distinguish and help friends and family in need.

Digital media enormously affects everyone's life these days. People are too much dependent on the social media. In Meena Kandasamy's novel *When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, digital media assumes an incredible part in the narrator's life. At the point when she moves to another city after her marriage, she believes that it is the social media only that associates her with her family and companions. It is the social media that keeps her updated and she can keep up her associations with the rest of the world. It helps in maintaining and building up new relationships. The digital media is highly useful to the narrator when she shifts to a new place:

It is my lifebelt to communicate with the planet outside. Facebook has become my last capable association, since the time I have moved to Mangalore. Here, I don't have the float of artist companions I had in Kerala, I do not have the family networks here that I had in Chennai. During this segregation, Facebook has empowered me in movement of my work; it gives me news and updates, keeps me in the loop of the literary scene, and allows me to have an online appearance which is necessary if I don't want to be forgotten by others in a freelance world. (Kandasamy 52)

However, technology is a double-edged sword, and the edges of social media are even sharper. Though digital media is imperative in our lives but it may not by and large be used unequivocally. Understanding the entanglements can help one checking the typical perils of advanced media on the relationships or connections.

In Meena Kandasamy's novel, *When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, the narrator prompts the readers through this novel that love isn't outwardly hindered; it just looks in some unsatisfactory spots. The narrator moves from the wildness and the curfews constrained on her by creating letters to whimsical sweethearts. The novel is a reflection on worship, marriage, brutality and how someone who is a women's activist gets trapped in a harmful marriage. The tale depicts how extreme way of sexual thinking and conduct can be maintained, paying little heed to your education, class, and political leanings. It alerts how a clearly “viable” marriage could be wild, serious and severe without anyone around observing its furiousness. She is over and over told by her husband that it is her womanhood that is the issue and not his damaging behavior. In the essay “*Understanding Patriarchy*”, Bell Hooks

states that, patriarchy is a dangerous social contamination. Man driven society hoists violence to keep up male strength; the authority figure is to dominate and the delicate are to suffer.

As a result, the authority figure's dominance mindset should be altered. Regardless of whether the males needed to dispose of a particularly managing conduct against women they can't do so because male predominance is regulated in them through different social practices. It has been profoundly established in their belief system. According to Michel Foucault, only the powerful people survive and it is the society that decides one's roles and behavior.

In this novel, digital media platform is utilized to smother the voice of women. The society decides how women should behave and it is the society that decides that women should suffer at the hands of patriarchy. Women should learn how to endure the abuse of men. In this novel, it is portrayed that patriarchal society utilizes various resources to suppress women and one among these is digital media. The narrator's husband not only forces her to delete her Facebook account and he also takes control of her emails:

There is no purpose behind why you ought to be on Facebook. It's narcissism. It's exhibitionism. It's an exercise in futility. I've said this to you many times. It's merely you intentionally feeding information straight to the CIA, to the RAW, to the IB, to everyone who is nagging my life. Every fucking thing is being monitored. Your life might be a peep show, but I'm a revolutionary. I cannot let you to imperil me. (Kandasamy 50)

In this dangerous condition, the narrator understood that when her husband necessities her to cut herself off from Facebook, she understood that it is a show of calling implosion:

In my temperamental circumstance, when he wishes me to discontinue myself off or cut off from Facebook, I know that it is an act of career suicide. But at this particular moment, contending with him will not get any solution. I simply believe and find myself lucky enough that he asks me only to 'deactivate' and not really delete my Facebook account. (Kandasamy 52)

Her sudden vanishing from Facebook is the first thing that her husband compels her to do. After some time, her husband devises his email password and offers it to her:

'You can have this.' 'I do not require it.' 'I have faith in you.' 'Okay.' 'Do you trust me?' 'I do. So?' 'Do you believe me enough to share your passwords with me?' 'I have never shared my passwords with someone else.' 'So, you are hiding something?' 'No' (Kandasamy 54).

This dispute is ceaseless; it keeps moving around and around. The lone way-out for the narrator to demonstrate that she is right was to compose every one of her passwords. His mercilessness finally takes her action into the amazing compassion of calm, her quietness being the very thing her better half has needed all along. Nonetheless, when her better half additionally considered abuse with her, she comprehends that she can't win and ought to find another way to deal with shield herself. She loses her uniqueness. He deletes everything from her computer's hard disk. Everything about her life as an author is ended. There are no contacts. There is no email discussion that she can get back to sometime in the future. There is no past. There are no drafts of poems she sent to her companions. She becomes what her husband wanted her to be. She fulfills him with her body, cooks whatever he cherishes, wears the articles of clothing he chooses for her, disposes of herself from Facebook, grants him to answer and delete her messages, stops brushing her hair and, generally speaking, stops acting normally:

My husband decides to set me free. Free of my past. Free of the burden of memory. Free of the burden of the lost dreams. In setting me free, he says, he is setting himself

free. He deletes 25,600- odd emails from my Gmail inbox. All on one go. Then, to prevent me from writing to the Gmail support team and having all my emails restored, he changes the password to something I do not know and cannot guess. He erases everything on my hard disk. Everything about my life as a writer is gone. There are no contacts. There is no email conversation that I can return to at a later date. There is no past. (Kandasamy 139).

Violence against women is a regular certainty since centuries. In man driven social orders all through the planet, women have been considered as consistent, discretionary and marginalized, however male held winning positions. Male driven society looks like a social affiliation which considered women to be the property of the male.

In the essay, *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*, Elaine Showalter points out that history is deficient to comprehend women's experience. Women form 'muted group' in society and men form 'ruling group'. In any case, the husbands want to mute their wives. Gendered presence is a consequence of the patriarchy; it characterizes what is masculine and feminine, what people ought to and ought not to do and how people collaborate with one another and the world. The patriarchy establishes the framework for these identities and the whole thought of woman's rights is important to destroy the arrangement of male controlled society. (199).

In the novel, the narrator's husband assumes various roles: he was caring and warm when he was outside the home but was extremely brutal inside the four walls of the corner. The narrator endures all the extremities of her husband because she has no other way out. Indeed, even her parents don't show any eagerness in her wanting to get away from the circumstance by leaving her husband. Her parents feared that the society will taunt and question them if she got separated from her husband:

They will say his daughter ran away in less than six months. It will reflect on your upbringing. This is not what intended for my daughter. You have no idea what a father goes through. A father of a daughter—that is a special kind of punishment. We pay the price. (Kandasamy 158-59)

Society still assumes a fundamental part in women's life even when the whole social order has become highly digitalized. A woman without a legitimate sanctuary in her spouse's home is considered as a victim of the general public. These understandings are the tactics that are employed while shaping a child. The protagonist doesn't track down any passionate help from her parents, for which she alone needs to take choice whether to get rid of the marriage or not. Nonetheless, she keeps on remaining in oppressive marriage since she had an 'Expectation' that some time or other her husband may change:

Hope prevents me from taking my own life. Hope is the kind voice in my head that prevents me from fleeing. Hope is the traitor that chains me to this marriage. The hope that the things will change for a better tomorrow. The hope that will eventually give up violence. (Kandasamy 182)

But at the later stage when the situation gets extremely worst then she comes to understand that if she needs to obtain her objective i.e. to turn into a writer, at that point she should need to battle against such sort of brutal torment and she takes a strong choice to leave her husband just after four months of their marriage.

In "*Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire*", Judith Butler states that gender is a bunch of assumptions which is characterized by the society for each person. The society decides role, behaviour and actions for both men and women. Masculinity and femininity are not inherent. (Butler 6).

Digital media has further strengthened the gender specific roles. From the moment

it is declared that a new born is a girl; it is constrained to act like its gender. Due to this mindset the oppression against women is unending even when the world has become highly digitalized. The ideology which has been infused in the male dominating society needs to be changed in order to ensure gender neutral roles. One of the significant reasons behind barbarity and treating woman as a commodity is the performativity established since centuries as a result of which most of the women quietly endure such brutalities as they feel that they can't survive without men as is seen in the case of the narrator also. They support the role of men in order to retain privilege. But the women who raise their voice to resist such cruelties and escape from the situation find a way for a better and independent life.

Digital media offers freedom to spread data and encourage activity for phenomenal aims, yet can likewise be utilized to disperse abhorrent substance and conscious openness. It is also utilized as a tool for harassment against women by a patriarchal society. The novel shows how brutality sustains in an apparently “current”, “love” marriage and one of the reasons for this is the use of digital media. The novel is contemplation on affection, marriage, viciousness and how somebody who is a woman activist gets caught in an oppressive marriage. In any case, the narrator takes a solid decision by leaving the oppressive marriage, acquiring a self-identity as a free and independent woman. She shows to the world that such types of women do exist and need to exist thereby demonstrating that spouses are not for monetary help. The narrator gains a feeling of fulfillment as she walks out of the unforgiving treatment of life under the hands of her husband.

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**(Re)Visiting the Real Self: A Comparative Study of R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* and Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice***

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*Abstract*

*The present paper briefly compares and contrasts the intensity of crisis through which the protagonists of R. K. Narayan in *The Guide* and Arun Joshi in *The Apprentice* undergo while making existential choices that ultimately define, realize or determine their essence. It is considered that life is not just for enjoyment or power but for purpose and meaning. A person should try to provide a distinctive meaning to his life. In today's world, the modern man experiences a mounting sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness in his life. These existential dilemmas estrange him from himself, his fellows and even from his surroundings. He constantly seeks peace and contentment in life but fails to make out the exact purpose in life and the importance of his existence in the hostile world. Post-independence novelists have also depicted such a crisis, especially R. K. Narayan and Arun Joshi in their novels. Narayan's art of communicating ordinary human emotions in an extraordinary manner makes him a distinct novelist of his era. Chiefly, in his post-independence novels, his narrating style achieved excellence and maturity as he throws light on the existential dilemma faced by his characters in this hostile world. Arun Joshi has his own distinctive way to exhibit the pain and agony of modern man in his novels. He skillfully weaves the man's internal problems— rootlessness, restiveness, existential dilemma etc., in his protagonists' temperament. He presents through his characters how man confronts his 'self' and questions his existence in this absurd universe.*

*Keywords: Existentialism, existential crisis, existential dilemma, meaninglessness, human predicament*

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Existentialism is a school of philosophy which thoroughly talks about providing a definite meaning and purpose to existence from both perspectives — general and individual. Existentialism believes that the world is innately meaningless, and it is exclusively an individual's effort to create a meaningful and purposeful life for himself in this senseless world. No doubt, there are many philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich

Nietzsche who introduce existential thoughts in their works, but it is Jean-Paul Sartre who ultimately gives recognition to “existentialism” in the 1940s. In layman words, an existential crisis happens when a person fights for his existence. It denotes a moment of deep questioning about the practicalities and the relevance of the values one inherits in one's life. A person undergoing an existential crisis may seek answers to some inextricable questions, such as, if there is any purpose in his life or if life itself has any inherent meaning at all. Therefore, it is a standstill moment as a yank involves within the real self and the ethical self — a tussle among knowledge and realization — and the individual hangs into the predicament of divided loyalties, one towards his idealistic soul and another towards his aspirations. According to Wikipedia,

In existentialist philosophy, the term 'existential crisis' specifically relates to the crisis of the individuals when they realize that they must always define their own lives through the choices they make. The existential crisis occurs when one recognizes that even the decision to either refrain from action or withhold assent to a particular choice is, in itself, a choice. In other words, humankind is “condemned” to freedom.

R.K. Narayan and Arun Joshi, the most distinguished writers of the post-independence era, in their novels, depict their prominent characters suffering from existential quandaries. These characters find themselves stuck in the labyrinth of estrangement, isolation, frustrations, inauthenticity, etc. while making choices that ultimately define their essence. Their novels exhibit human predicament through their characters in their own distinctive ways. R. K. Narayan's works have been viewed from the existential context in recent years, but his way of presenting the human predicament is far more different from the other writers of his time. Unlike his contemporaries, his novels bring positivity and self-discovery to a man's journey of life. He employs a mature existential vision in his works to describe human dilemmas. He feels that man is horrendously surrounded by malaise and dissatisfaction in the present world so he needs to think positively and to confront the crisis boldly. He never highlights life's tragic moments; instead, he adds humorous elements while depicting life, as these experiences form the central part of one's life. The novel, *The Guide*, commences with a conversation between Raju, the protagonist and Velan, an innocuous villager of *Mangla* who tries to find a solution to his emerging crisis and assumes Raju, a 'Mahatma' with some miraculous powers. Raju plays diversified roles during his life — the railway shopkeeper, the tourist guide, the lover, the manager, and the spiritual saint. At each role, he faces an unusual level of existential crisis as he tries to 'exist' in this world. “Raju's basic need is to 'exist' and to exist he has to act and so in the novel, he acts as a guide, as a lover, as a manager and finally as a Swami” (Sunita 2).

Raju's crisis starts in childhood when his father sacrifices his son's education for material gain. Raju is not at ease and feels restless in the shopkeeper's occupation. However, Raju tries to overcome his predicament through self-education and accumulates knowledge through divergent means. After his father's demise, his role shifts to that of a 'tourist guide', but with the arrival of Rosie in *Malgudi*, this role, too, makes him experience another type of crisis. At first sight, Rosie's beauty enraptures him from top to bottom, that he could not grasp life's real purpose. Despite repetitive scruples by the soul, he finds it impossible to pull himself back. “No, no. It is not right. Marco is her husband, remember. It is not to be thought of” (TG 69). He is affected by *das Man* as he has forgotten the ontological roots of one being. Olson writes, “. . . for the existentialists, man is free by ontological necessity and that any attempt to escape from freedom is necessarily self-defeating” (109).

He wheedles Rosie when her husband, Marco, is busy with his passion of cave

exploration. Rosie, a passionate dancer, is constrained by her husband to develop her knack. Raju takes advantage of their marital strain and initiates a relationship with her. When Marco gets to know about her infidelity, he goes away, leaving Rosie at Malgudi station. Rosie, with no choice, takes shelter in Raju's house due to which Raju faces the wrath and neglect of society, his friend Gaffur and even his widow mother. Still, he condones each situation leading to an adverse crisis in his life. Raju burns the midnight oil to carry out Rosie's dream of becoming a renowned dancer, and soon, she becomes one. But at this time, he exercises his freedom of choice and values money and position more than his relationship with Rosie. Raju starts using her for his selfishness and to earn more money, and to enjoy a high status in society. He says, "If we don't work and earn when the time is good, we commit a sin" (TG 174), but this intervention evokes Rosie's aversion towards Raju as she doesn't get existential freedom. Even she goes through existential crisis and finds her life meaningless.

The present existential situation which is replete with despair and depressing moods will move from tension to harmony if we recognize the ontological order. No wonder if the craze of the present technological progress leads us to a shipwreck. But this can be averted if we regain the lost sense of the 'trust in Being'. (Gaur 89)

Now, their relationship is on tenterhooks as both are going through watershed moments. Their crisis aggravates more when Marco knocked into their life again. Raju purposely hides Marco's book, in which Rosie holds deep interest which makes the situation bad to worse. Again, when Raju forges Rosie's signature, on a legal document sent by Marco, without her consent and knowledge, it blows their relationship from smash to smithereens. Although Rosie makes every possible effort for his rescue, yet he is put under two-year police custody. While meeting Raju for the last time, she makes it clear to Raju, "Forget me. Leave me to live or die, as I choose; that's all" (TG 198). During Raju's jail-term, he looks into the inner recesses of his soul and elevates himself spiritually and morally.

Raju finds himself in the vacuum of prison life. The Guide who always guided others finds himself a slave. The fact of the guide being guided by others tortured him and Raju proceeds to transcend this situation of torture. (Sidhu 50)

Even after release from jail, he faces a crisis as he is not ready to go back to his village and later decides to move to an 'ancient shrine' on the bank of river *Saryu* near the village, *Mangla*, where Velan takes him as a *sanyasi*. Initially, he plays the role of a '*Sanyasi*' just for the sake of food and obeisance. But soon, he becomes a healer, judge and problem solver for the villagers. Surprisingly, the collective faith of villagers gradually makes a great transformation in him. Once the village is afflicted with drought and Raju 'the Swami' is forced to observe fast to relieve drought-stricken villagers, this event becomes final transcendence as for the first time, he overcomes his petty self and ponders about the lives of others.

For the first time in his life he was making an earnest – effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love, for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through with ordeal. (Bhatia 121)

Standing knee-deep in the water, he supplicates God to send down rain and save humanity. He removes the layers of disguise one by one and offers his life for the wellbeing of others and; thus, Raju's freedom from his 'individual self' releases him from all the crises and helps him in unifying with the entire cosmos. He tries to provide some essence to his existence with every role, yet every time he faces an existential dilemma. But when he submits himself to the cause of humanity, he imparts a purposeful meaning to his existence.

Although Narayan is aware of life's absurdity, he doesn't want to throw human beings into the abyss of pessimism and melancholy. He conveys serious thoughts without raising the characters to any unpleasant heights. Through his comic depiction, he relieves the readers for a moment and makes him acknowledge that suffering is the destiny of humankind. Arun Joshi has his own *modus operandi* of making the readers aware of the ferocious assaults of existence. He, through his characters, takes the readers into human's psychological depth to reveal the truth of man's life. Arun Joshi's magnum opus, *The Apprentice*, records man's emotional, psychological and social problems while confronting his self. It exhibits the traumas, trials and tribulations of today's man who tries to fit himself in this unethical world. Through the novel, Arun Joshi tries to assert that each individual has to face uncanny dread of nothingness in his life, but this nothingness helps an individual to create a meaningful life. In this context, Ratan Rathor, the protagonist, is presented as a man who is completely alone to struggle with an existential crisis. Ratan faces inner tribulations during his life as he swings between what he really is and what society expects him to be. The story is narrated as a dramatic monologue to a cadet. During their conversation, Ratan reveals the innermost secrets of his life and discloses how he turns into a 'kingpin in the corrupt official hierarchy' (Mehta 364). He shares his dilemma, which arises initially due to the double inheritance of his parents. On one hand, there is his father's idealistic views while on the other, is his mother materialistic ideals and the juxtaposition of these contradictory values in the consciousness of Ratan heightens his moral strain.

His morals and enthusiastic spirit started waning and he started living a life full of compromises. Throughout the novel, we see the constant conflict in the mind of Ratan between idealism and realism. In fact, Ratan is a child of double inheritance. (Mehta 365)

Another incident that makes Ratan undergo an existential crisis is when his father is shot dead while addressing the crowd which leaves an inefaceable impression on Ratan's mind that it is incomprehensible for him to narrate his feelings in words. His father's exhibition of courage and valour is embedded in his memory 'as a moment of great silence (TA 12). He often remembers this exemplary event that repeatedly realises how deviated he has been from his father's ideals throughout his life. His indecisiveness to join Netaji's army shows that the timidity that is deeply embedded in his soul unfolds the inner turbulence that restricts him from providing vital essence to his life. He chants, "What if I fail: What if I fail: What would happen to me if I fail? If someone would only tell me what to do" (TA 21). Apart from his father, Brigadier is the only friend in the whole wide world who holds a pivotal place in his life. Brigadier's selfless love makes Ratan realize, "I was not alone amidst the sugarcane, abandonment on the planet" (TA 16). However, Ratan hints at their contrasting relationship after his 'fall', and how reminiscences of their past relationship make his present painful. The prevailing moral anarchy and the constant decline of values among people makes him feel, "it was stupid to get killed like that. Stupid and meaningless. It served no one. Those you thought you served forgot you within the month" (TA 80). This bitterness gives rise to a new set of values crafted as per the corrupt society he becomes a part of now. Society succeeds in degenerating Ratan, who now suffers from chaos, dilemma, confusion and indecisiveness.

But what is remarkable here is Joshi's unique narrative skill, which has wonderfully blended the microcosm and the macrocosm. The degeneration of the individual and that of the nation are highlighted simultaneously without hampering the artistic integrity of the book. (Ghosh 96)

Finally, to seek his career, Ratan moves to Delhi, but soon realizes that it is difficult to

create a niche for himself in this phony world. The insensitiveness of the city life brings him to the verge of drained hope and collapsed faith. He undergoes inner dilemmas and conflicts to decide which path to follow, and within a short span, “I had become, at the age of twenty-one, a hypocrite and a liar; in short, a sham . . . From morning till night I told more lies than truths. I had become a master faker” (TA 27). Thus faking becomes the intrinsic trait of his personality and it was that time 'when all started to crumble'. After many efforts, he manages to procure a temporary clerk job in a war-purchase department. He immediately learns the mode of survival in the corrupt world — flattering high officials, cockiness, pretence, opportunism — and gets absorbed in 'bourgeois filth' (TA 32). Usha Yaul shares the same view in her article,

In his pursuit of establishing identity Ratan becomes more and more ambitious. In that process he loses his reasoning power to distinguish what is good and wrong. He keeps blind focus only on the interest and happiness of his boss (15).

The obedience and docility in him easily impress the Superintendent, who lures him with an 'officer' position if he consents to marry his cousin's daughter, and he accedes to that enticement. Now, it comes to him that the world is all about DEALS, “If men forgot how to make deals the world would come to a stop . . . It is not the atom or the Sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe: it is DEALS” (TA 48).

Despite all comforts and material gains, he remains exasperated with life. He is aware that the way he has chosen, will take him towards his doom. He is aware of his dilemma, yet he submits himself to the unjust world. He affirms, “The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more I was determined to “enjoy” life. And all the time I thought of death” (TA 85). Once, Ratan meets Himmat Singh, a Sheikh, who offers him a big bribe to supply defective war material in the Indo-China War. Ratan, again, acquiesces his proposal without considering that this 'DEAL' will cost the life of his friend, Brigadier. Ratan's dilemma reaches a nightmarish impasse when he realises that Brigadier has been framed in this conspiracy. At times his conscience pricks and impels him for confession, but then he justifies his delinquency and replies, “what good would the confession do? The men who have died have died” (TA 107). His incapability to confess and accept the moral responsibility of his misdemeanor results in the ultimate tragedy. The Brigadier could not take the guilt and committed suicide. This event serves as a catalyst for Ratan who initiates realising his moral inertia and his inner responsibility towards this horrid crime. Considering Sheikh the very reason behind this conspiracy, he decides to kill Sheikh. But the Sheikh enlightens, enriches and humanizes him. Ratan sees the hollowness of his existence and tries to retrieve his fragmented soul. Ratan acknowledges his guilt, grievously comprehends the futility of his wasted life and decides to attain redemption by dusting the shoes of devotees every morning at a temple.

Through the above study, it has become quite apparent that the paper bears a contemporary theme. In the present time, the modern man also unconsciously encounters a similar existential crisis as Raju and Ratan experience in their respective lives in the novels. There is a wide gap between what people preach and what they practice in reality. They adopt hypocrisy to secure a good place in society even at the cost of their peace of mind and become a “crisis of character”. It has also been evident that both the novelists, through their protagonists, have shown that one has to confront crises at every step of life. But these crises should not hinder to achieve subjective aim — to create the essence in this absurd world. But the skill these writers exhibit is quite dissimilar from each other. Unlike Narayan, Arun Joshi doesn't imply imaginative skill in his creative writings; rather, he adopts real experiences he gains while working in America. Arun Joshi, in contrast to Narayan, doesn't establish a casual

approach to depict the suffering of humankind; rather, he concentrates on acute suffering situations of human life to comprehend the human predicament. It is also worth noting that none but the man himself can root out the cause of his existential dilemmas, and he himself can come out of it. The significant similarity is that both the characters, Raju and Ratan, undergo diverse crises in their life yet they both adopt the Kierkegaardian way to seek their redemption—submitting themselves to the service of Humanity, which eventually relieves them from their crisis and assists them in providing relevant meaning to their life.

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**Text as a Speculum into Author's Culture: A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's  
*The Namesake***

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*Abstract*

*Culture defines identity, and the way in which we think, live and, write. Fiction through its realistic presentation gives the reader an insight into society. Literary works are bound to show variations on the basis of experiences and origins of authors. They indirectly lay bare the actual world that the writer has noticed prominently. A text written by a diasporic writer depicts his inner struggle for identity and recognition, which emerges as a result of variation in the native and inhabited place of a writer. Jhumpa Lahiri's, *The Namesake* depicts Bengali and American culture. *The Namesake* is a text that affirms Lahiri's Bengali identity and portrays the dilemmas faced by immigrants in adjusting to the new culture. The present paper attempts to study Lahiri's attempt to find solace for this identity search through the exhibition of myth, language, food, religion and ritual of culture and society she knows. Literature is an art form that depicts the human condition through its characters and their psychological progression towards maturity. The value of any literary work depends upon being located in particular but still representing millions for all times and places and it is this embellishment of all facts that makes any literary work valuable. Every successful writer has the skill of combining personal experiences falling in the sphere of particular with universal and this is what appeals to the sensibilities of all readers irrespective of the age, place and gender, as they can relate with the writing at a personal level.*

*Keywords: Culture, diaspora, language, food, religion, rituals*

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**Introduction**

Jhumpa Lahiri is an American author, a second-generation Indian descendant born to Bengali Indian parents. She is known for her writings about the Indian Diaspora. The works of Lahiri deal with India because of her Indian roots, and simultaneously reflect the problems and dilemmas of Indian immigrant's trying to adjust to an alien land something she has experienced and observed in her surroundings. Lahiri's works like *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), *The Namesake* (2003), *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) and *The Lowland* (2013) depict

experiences of Indian immigrants in America. This paper focuses on Lahiri's 2003 novel *The Namesake* which portrays the experiences of the Bengali diasporic community who left Bengal and are living in Boston. The novel portrays immigrants' attempts to rejuvenate their memories of their lost homeland by staying connected with the culture of their homeland. *The Namesake* is the story of a Bengali couple Ashoke Ganguli who moved to the United States for better opportunities that western land promises. The story resembles the life of Lahiri born to Bengali parents and had spent most of her life in America except for the initial three years in London where she was born.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the movement of a large number of Indians towards the west under forced or self-imposed exiles leaving behind their homeland. The number of immigrants from different parts of the world has made America a multicultural country. Diaspora is a term derived from the Greek word that means to scatter about. Historically, Diaspora referred to forced dispersion of Jews but nowadays the term is used to specify people who identify with their homelands but live outside it. According to the report titled 'International Migration 2020 Highlights' by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA): "the spatial distribution of transnational populations varies greatly and India's diaspora, the largest in the world, is distributed across a number of major countries of destination." (At 18 Million) This report states that almost 18 million Indians have immigrated to different parts of the world including the UAE, the United States and Saudi Arabia. A Diaspora society attempts to maintain the culture of homeland in a new place so that their next generation does not lose touch with their homeland and ancestors. Thus for immigrants culture is a thread that keeps intact their memories of lost homeland and becomes a medium to transmit their ideology to the next generation. Culture is a complex term but can simply be defined as a belief, an art, and a way of life. It includes the social organization of a particular country or group. Culture gives a sense of belonging; it is a way that leads to an understanding of the inhabited world. A Culture is a kind of entanglement, a sort of an asymmetric mixture between material and abstract attributes. Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College in London believes that the word culture encloses in itself the ways a particular community behaves and lives. According to him, Culture is an umbrella term that is the sum total of religion, language, delicacies, rituals, dressing, music, and last but not the least ethical and moral values. Therefore, the different attributes that get entangled in the construction of culture are language, religion, rituals, art, food, dress codes and entertainment. Every work of literature is a pointer indicating the cultural depth of an author. Authors do not live in a vacuum and certainly get consciously or unconsciously influenced by the world they inhabit thus making a piece of their writing as a speculum; a looking glass into his society. Lahiri's *The Namesake* deals with the tribulations of adjusting to an alien land. Jhumpa being an Asian American depicts immigrants' emotional struggle to adjust to a new culture without forgetting their roots. *The Namesake* acts as a speculum that reflects Jhumpa's observation of the cultural immediacy her family shares with Bengali culture along with their adaptation to American culture. Cultural proximity is a permanent tie among immigrants that helps them to strike a balance between their native place and inhabited land. In *The Namesake*, Lahiri has skillfully used cultural attributes to present a visible contrast between native and immigrant culture. According to Avtar Brah, the term diaspora and diasporans can be viewed as:

The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are

contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure. (Brah 193)

Jhumpa Lahiri portrays in *The Namesake* the constraints and confusions of first-generation immigrants who carry their country in their hearts and simultaneously express the dilemma of the second generation that grow with a sense of not belonging to any part neither the one they inhabit nor their motherland. In an attempt to stay connected with their motherland immigrants try to preserve their culture by practicing it in their home and passing it to their children so that at their homes they can create a micro-universe of their motherland culture. *The Namesake* is a novel not only reflects the attempts of Ashoke and Ashima to familiarize their children with Bengali culture but subtly is a symbolic presentation of attempts Lahiri's parents have made to acquaint her with Bengali culture. Lahiri was born in London to Indian immigrants of Bengali origin similar to Gogol's lineage of the Bengali family. Thus, the novel presents a blending of Indian and American culture to make second-generation immigrants suitable for the culture they are born in without forgetting their roots.

### Language as Culture

Language is a mode of communication within a particular society or with other cultures. Language imbibes the essence of culture, a medium used to pass on values, beliefs and customs. Language is not only a medium for sharing values, beliefs and customs but also serves an important social purpose of strengthening the feelings of harmony within a group. Language is a medium through which culture and values are conveyed and preserved, thus making it basal to the cultural identity of people throughout the world. Humans, consciously or subconsciously strive to make sense of their surrounding world by remaining intact to their culture and native language helps in strengthening the bond. Ihab Hassan thinks that post-modernists like Lyotard, Derrida and Lacan changed cultural tendencies. Ihab specifically mentions Lyotard's work *The Postmodern Condition*, which states that everything comes from culture, and both culture and literature are combined. Lyotard believes that the author's language can portray modernism or postmodernism in a text with the help of culture.

In *The Namesake*, Lahiri also makes it a point to use language as a medium to connect with one's culture. The first-generation immigrants train their children in Bengali language, literature and history through Bengali classes to preserve their home culture but simultaneously prepare their offspring to become suitable for the American way of life. Ashima makes an effort towards achieving this:

She teaches him to memorize a four-line children's poem by Tagore and the names of the deities adorning the ten-headed Durga during pujo: Saraswati with her swan and Kartik with his peacock to her left, Lakshmi with her owl and Ganesh with his mouse to his right. Every afternoon Ashima sleeps, but before nodding off she switches the television to Channel 2, and tells Gogol to watch Sesame Street and The Electric Company, in order to keep up with the English he uses at nursery school. (Lahiri 54)

Using the Bengali language was the first attempt of Ashima and Ashoke to connect their children with Bengali culture; "For when Ashima and Ashoke close their eyes it never fails to unsettle them, that their children sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them, in accents they are accustomed not to trust" (Lahiri 65). Lahiri has explicitly shown the differences in the use of titles by Gogol and Sonia on their visits to Calcutta: "They must remember to say, not aunt this and uncle that but terms far more

specific: mashi and pishi, mama and maima, kaku and jethu, to signify whether they are related on their mother's or their father's side, by marriage or by blood” (Lahiri 81).

### **Naming as a part of a culture**

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London and was named Nilanjana Sudeshna by her parents. Nilanjana's pet name becomes her proper name as the teacher found it more convenient to pronounce. The embarrassment that Jhumpa Lahiri suffered because of her name thus became an inspiration for the uncertainty Gogol suffers. *The Namesake* is a novel in which the protagonist's Russian pet name Gogol becomes a cause for the inner struggle and displacement he suffers. The novel is aptly christened as *The Namesake* as the author has picked up names of all characters very carefully with a deeper meaning attached to the way their characterization is done. Cultural anthropologists have identified the urge of humans to name their children as culturally universal: “Research has failed to reveal a single society which does not bestow personal names upon its members. Apparently, names and the process through which names are given are considered to be important to humankind” (Datta 88). However, the structure or the ways newborns are christened vary from culture to culture, a reference to it is when Mr. Wilcox suggests them; “You can always name him after yourself, or one of your ancestors”, Mr. Wilcox suggests, admitting that he is actually Howard Wilcox III. “It's a fine tradition. The kings of France and England did it” (Lahiri 28). However, this tradition seemed to be impracticable in Bengali culture as it may symbolize respect for ancestors in America or Europe but would simply be mocked at in India. As in Bengali culture: “Within Bengali families, individual names are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared” (Lahiri 28). Lahiri has herself asserted in one of the interviews that in Bengali culture there are two names of a person one pet name for family use paired with a good name to be used by a formal acquaintance.

As when Ashima's grandmother's letter does not reach he took the responsibility of naming the newborn. So in order to get Ashima and baby boy discharged from the hospital, Ashoke gives his son a name that is very close to his heart 'Gogol'. Gogol's parents consider this name as a pet name as for a good name they were waiting for Ashima's grandmother's letter from India as per the Bengali ritual. Here another important point is Jhumpa's attraction towards Russian literature and authors which is explicitly visible when Ashoke's grandfather states: “Read all the Russians, and then reread them. They will never fail you” (Lahiri 12). Lahiri was born in London to Bengali parents with a part of life spent in America apparently has no Russian connect but Bengali parentage establishes a link with Russia. Russia from the eighteenth century has been closely related to Bengal for the sake of trade, commerce, ideology, literature and culture. A Bengali boy with a Russian name would not have produced the cultural displacement faced by Gogol in *The Namesake* as cultural globalization of Bengal dawned on European traders and somewhere led to the blending of both. Fiction is the most unremarkable mode of cultural blending and such text further enhances the knowledge of global readers. A significant part of the novel throws light on the naming as an essential part of Bengali culture and the impact that a name has on the behaviour of an individual is quite evident from the transition in 'Gogol' once he changes it to 'Nikhil'. Lahiri is a keen observer and has drawn much of the character of her stories from the world she has observed and experienced. In fact, Lahiri has revealed herself that 'Gogol' is a name she has picked up from one of her cousins.

## Food and Ritual as a Cultural Connect

Victor J. Ramraj in his essay on “Diaspora and Multiculturalism” recognizes the confusion of immigrants as: “Yet though diasporans may not want actually to return home, wherever the dispersal has left them, they retain a conscious or subconscious attachment to traditions, customs, values, religions, and languages of the ancestral home” (King 215). This confusion is very well portrayed through the character of Ashoke. However, Junger Habermas, a cultural theorist puts forward the point that the head of the family is responsible for well being and status of his family. Habermas asserts that the duties of the household head were narrow and economizing just like Ashoke who takes care of his family as its head both financially and emotionally. His reluctance to return back to India is perceptible from the fact that he takes up a job in an American University, brings his wife and buys a house there for a better future but still in the farthest corner of his heart he gets nostalgic thinking about his homeland. Ashoke misses his home but simultaneously was aware of his responsibility as head of the family and therefore to fill this void and to stay connected with his native place Ashoke organizes gathering with Bengali and Indian friends. They also celebrate Indian festivals and cook Indian foods to have a feel of the native country in the inhabitant land. Lahiri in an interview says: “My parents were fearful and suspicious of America and American culture when I was growing up. Maintaining ties to India and preserving Indian traditions in America, meant a lot to them. They're more at home now, but it's always an issue and they'll always feel like and be treated as, foreigners here” (Das 178).

Ashima's in an attempt to stay connected to her motherland enjoys having Indian cuisine a source that nourishes her not only physically but emotionally also. One of the researchers Smita Mohanty suggests: “In food, habit, dress and manners they strictly adheres to Indian customs, putting on of vermilion in the part of their hair after marriage, erasing it after husband's death and not uttering the first name of the husband are marks of respect of a Hindu wife to her husband” (Mohanty 154). Another important component that connects with culture is food. Bengalis are fond of having rice in their meals. Rice is something they crave for, in a foreign land and Lahiri artistically portrays the enthusiasm Ashima has when it comes to cooking and sharing food with people who crave like her for that. Mary Douglas, a social anthropologist opines that the cooking and eating of food determines social relations and connections across boundaries and that each meal carries forward something more than mere nutrition. Another incidence where food connects with traditions is the Annaprasan ceremony:

The occasion: Gogol's annaprasan, his rice ceremony. There is no baptism for Bengali babies, no ritualistic naming in the eyes of God. Instead, the first formal ceremony of their lives centers around the consumption of solid food. They ask Dilip Nandi to play the part of Ashima's brother, to hold the child and feed him rice, the Bengali staff of life, for the very first time. (Lahiri 38)

This ceremony is celebrated by Ashok and Ashima wearing the traditional outfit with their Bengali acquaintances. Ashima though has been successful in creating an environment of home but still longs for the company of her relatives. This feeling of staying connected has been observed by Lahiri at her home also which she has portrayed skillfully in her novel as well. Lahiri has shared in an interview with Alden her love for cooking and eating different kinds of food. She gives credit for this affection for food to her food-oriented family as food not only has a nutritional purpose but eating traditional food makes them feel at home. Lahiri also admits the immigrants' attempt to stay connected to their roots through rituals, traditions

and food as they already have lost family, love, connection and relatives while staying in a foreign land.

Lahiri married Alberto Vourvoulias Bush, a journalist with Time magazine in 2001, in a traditional Bengali wedding ceremony in Kolkata similar to Gogol's and Moushumi's marriage designed by their parents in a traditional Bengali way:

In this respect, the wedding ceremony proves emblematic of a marriage that is predominantly designed to fulfill their parents' expectations: It's not the type of wedding either of them really wants. They would have preferred the sort of venues their American friends choose, the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens or the Metropolitan Club or the Boat House in Central Park. . . . But their parents insist on inviting close to three hundred people, and serving Indian food, and providing easy parking for all the guests.... It's what they deserve, they joke, for having listened to their mothers, and for getting together in the first place, and the fact that they are united in their resignation makes the consequences somewhat bearable. (Lahiri 219)

Lahiri has often talked about immigrant feelings. She believes that immigrants consciously remember the place left behind, something that cannot be removed from memories. She also highlights the point that they try to relive this emotion by creating a mock environment similar to their homeland by following the traditions of their native place. Lahiri and Gogol share the same confusion that generates from existing in the margins and yet not identifying with any place.

## Conclusion

The present paper opens up new insights that are outcomes of cultural blending. The immigration of people in search of better avenues led to the growth of new blended cultures inculcating a feeling of transnationalism. This movement of people from postcolonial nations introduced the western world to the intelligentsia of enslaved countries. The concept of culture differs from region to region but literary texts provide readers an opportunity to peep into the psychology of different cultures. This paper studies the role of language, rituals, naming, food and festivals but still there are more areas like art, education, architecture, migration, alienation, parental love, the quest for identity, and so on which can further enhance understanding of culture. A poem by Yamada suggests that a new multiethnic identity emerges from the brief impermanent lives of people who live in communities like the United States and keep on oscillating between cultures of the native and inhabited country. This feeling is summed up as:

People keep asking me where I come from  
Says my son  
Trouble is I'm American on the inside  
And oriental on the outside  
No Doug  
Turn that outside in  
This is what American looks like. (Yamada 99)

*The Namesake* thus stresses out the point that this world of technology and globalization is heading towards transnationalism where the movement of people is intentional rather than obligatory. In postcolonial times the movement is not controlled by any ruler but it is the fascination for the hegemonic culture that provokes people to immigrate to western countries in search of better opportunities. However, the penalty for this movement

cannot be predicted or controlled by people. Further, a natural outcome of this intentional movement is the exchange of cultures and adaptation to the new culture which results in experiences of living a life of in-transit, displacement and diaspora. In fact, Lahiri herself admits that her feeling of belongingness is not constant and keeps on changing; “More and more I feel comfortable in this country. I can belong here. I do belong here. I belong less in India.” (*Quotes*) The pace of transnationalism has increased doubly in today's world because of the movement of people for sports, overseas studies, tourism, because of different international festivals and last but not the least for better living status. Internet no doubt has played a great role in identifying places that one can immigrate to or visit as a tourist. Amartya Sen believes that cultural freedom and multiculturalism does not come from sticking to one culture but by participating in a two-way flow of local and global: “In contrast, having two styles or traditions coexisting side by side, without the twain meeting, must really be seen as plural monoculturalism” (Sen 157). Diasporic writing thus helped in the development of a double vision that is not biased towards one culture but accepts the goodness of every culture with open hands. Jhumpa Lahiri like her text has been shifting culture and enjoying the new things learned from every culture just like Gogol's salvation when he was able to strike balance between Indian and American culture.

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**Kalidasa's *Abhigyanashakuntalam* and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:  
Exploring the Coordination of Rasas**

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*Abstract*

*Kalidasa and William Shakespeare, two hallmarks of creativity though blossomed at discrete places, time, and situations, are the celebrated authors of world-famous plays. Born in opposite corners of the world, they offer some of the world's best compositions in the form of Abhijanashakuntalam, Meghduta, Macbeth, Hamlet and so on. Shakespeare is commonly known as the Kalidasa of England, while Kalidasa is hailed as the Shakespeare of India. While Kalidasa was the ancient wizard of Sanskrit literature, Shakespeare was known as the world's best dramatist. It is commonly said that great men think alike. Hence, the study is an attempt to understand the affinities emphasizing the implication of rasas in the selected works of these writers. The utilization of emotions, the nature of language, and the representation of people are some of the criteria used here to evaluate their work. While most of Kalidasa's works are based on the two Indian epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, Shakespeare's works are inspired by Roman models. Abhigyanashakuntalam and Hamlet are beautiful expressions of these two playwrights. The present paper deals with the bond of love and friendship as depicted in both the plays by highlighting the doctrine of Rasa used by Kalidasa. This research aims to investigate emotions, also known as 'bhava' or 'rasa.'*

*Keywords: Kalidasa, Shakespeare, AbhigyanShakuntalam, Rasa, similarities and dissimilarities*

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**Introduction**

Kalidasa was a great Indian classical poet and dramatist. His compositions were written in classical Sanskrit and were inspired by *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. He was a court poet in the royal court of Chandragupta II. His works are extraordinary and ahead of his time. His most famous work is *Abhijanashakuntalam* followed by a literary poem *Meghduta*. His other works include *Vikramorvasiyam*, *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Kumārasambhava*, and

*Raghuvamśa*, etc. He has been critically acclaimed and applauded worldwide as almost all of his works have been translated into multiple languages. One of the most notable characteristics of his writing is his portrayal of nature and its relationship with human beings. He is renowned for the use of simile in his work.

The *Mahabharata* and *Padmapuran* provide the basis for *Abhigyanshakuntalam*, but these versions look plain and simple compared to Kalidasa's refined and nuanced representation of the subject. The play's storyline revolves around King Dushyanta, who encounters the hermit-girl Shakuntala on a hunting expedition and marries her in a mutually agreed-upon ceremony in the hermitage. He gives Shakuntala his signet ring and pledges to send for her later since he must return to his place due to state concerns. However, due to a curse, Dushyanta refuses to recognize Shakuntala as his wife when she appears pregnant with his kid at the court. Shakuntala could not show him the ring he had offered her as a token of his love as she misplaced it on her way to the court. Later, in the end, both of them were reunited, and everything worked out perfectly.

His play *Abhijanashakuntalam* was a literary gem. It narrates the story of Shakuntala, a beautiful apsara born to the sage Vishvamisra and a beautiful apsara named Menaka. After being abandoned by her parents, Shakuntala is reared in the hermitage of sage Kanva. Shakuntala falls in love with Dushyant, a king, and the two get married. However, Dushyant is forced to leave Shakuntala due to prior commitments, Shakuntala is cursed by the sage Durvasa, forcing Dushyant to forget about her. Consequently, their journey takes a turn for the worst. The rest of the play chronicles Shakuntala's attempts to reconcile with her husband, as well as the difficulties she encounters along the road.

The first three chapters of the book *Abhijanashakuntalam* are full of Shringara Rasa and then it moves towards Karunya (Compassion and Tragedy) rasa from the fourth chapter. In this chapter, Shakuntala and Dushyant get married, and the guardian of Shakuntala, Kanava, comes to know about their love marriage. Durvasa causes Shakuntala as she was lost in her husband's thoughts. This is the first instance of grief, and it continues till Shakuntala goes to Dushyant and makes various efforts to make him recall about their union. Unfortunately, she is accused of infidelity not only by her husband but her guardians also. She is abandoned, and the readers feel karunaya rasa, preparing the ground for forthcoming events.

Shakespeare is an English playwright and dramatist. He is given the title of 'Bard of Avon.' He wrote many plays, sonnets, and short tales. He has a thorough understanding of human emotions. The tragedy of *Macbeth*, the narrative of *Romeo and Juliet*, and plays like *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* all deal with human struggles. Even though Shakespeare is no longer living, his writings continue to inspire others. Today, his works are acclaimed and taught in academic institutions. He's been termed the "Kalidasa of England" since he and Kalidasa were both able to capture the complexities of the social life of their respective times.

### **Comparative Study of Shakuntala and Hamlet**

The most significant motive of literature is to stimulate emotions in the readers' hearts, and it is performed through various elements. A play is the depiction of people's actions and interactions, and characters play a key role in this respect; thus, they demand special consideration in this study. Plot, character, thought, diction and spectacle are all essential elements in plays. Characters are the intermediaries who carry out the plot's activities; hence a

play would be incomplete without them. Depending on how significant they are to the story and for the stimulation of rasas, the characters in the drama may be categorized into major and minor characters. Major characters have a lot to say and often appear during the play, while minor ones have a brief appearance.

Kalidasa portrays Shakuntala as a personification of beauty, feminine appeal, and womanhood in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. Kalidasa has fashioned her after the ideal heroine of Sanskrit literature as outlined in Sanskrit dramaturgy scriptures. Shakuntala, like Savitri and Sita, has been portrayed as an ideal lady. The dramatist's major goal in such a romantic design is to awake the Srngara Rasa. Shakuntala is the epitome of beauty and elegance. Shakuntala, unlike previous heroines like Urvashi and Malvika, is a natural child. She was raised amid nature and is more grounded in reality. Shakuntala is Kalidasa's masterpiece that transcends the erotic. In her life, nature also plays a significant part.

Hamlet is the primary character or protagonist of the play *Hamlet*. Hamlet's philosophical tone and cerebral depth are undoubtedly his most remarkable qualities. All of his soliloquies have this character. His soliloquies reveal a man who is extremely thoughtful and introspective. "To be or not to be, that is the question," he begins one of his most famous soliloquies. He is at his most philosophical in this soliloquy. Each soliloquy in Hamlet's play is a work of art, not just in terms of philosophic substance but also in terms of style and linguistic brilliance. These soliloquies portray Hamlet as a scholar, philosopher, and poet in a nutshell. Hamlet is a sensitive and idealistic young man when we first encounter him in the play. He had taken the universe at its value, assuming that humans were merely a notch below the angels. Hamlet has a unique sense of humour, yet it is bitter, sardonic, and mordant. Irony and sarcasm are also lethal tools in his arsenal.

### **Friendship in *Hamlet* and *Abhigyanashakuntalam***

Horatio may have a tiny role in Shakespeare's famous drama *Hamlet*, but his value to not just the play's readers but also to the virtuous Prince Hamlet cannot be overstated. Hamlet holds a particular place in his heart for Horatio as a buddy. Hamlet informs him that he has been picked as a favourite by his soul:

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice  
And could of men distinguish her election.  
She hath sealed thee for herself.  
(Act III, Scene II, 59-61)

Hamlet describes Horatio as a man of endurance and not a slave to desire in Act III, Scene II, and tells him that he wears him in his "heart's core," in his heart of heart. Horatio was the one who informed Hamlet about his father's vision that the men had witnessed the night before. Horatio also advises Hamlet against pursuing the ghost because he is more concerned with Hamlet's safety and does not want anything bad to happen as a result of Hamlet's fascination with a ghost. Horatio is dedicated to Hamlet, his master. As a result, before his death, Hamlet entrusts Horatio with the job of accurately narrating the events of his life and death.

Anasuya and Priyamvada are Shakuntala's dearest friends and are shown to have sisterly care for her. The rasa Hasya (Laughter, Mirth, and Comedy) has been excellently depicted here by characters like Vidushak and pals (Sakhi) of Shakuntala. They inspire laughter in the audience with their style of speaking and humour. Priyamvada has a young and exuberant demeanour, whilst Anasuya is solemn. Shakuntala has fallen madly in love, and both females are quick to notice. Priyamvada and Anasuya are also well aware of the mental

condition of love-lorn Shakuntala. It indicates that in Act II, they think and view her situation as similar to those of those tormented by love, as described in legends. They also offer Shakuntala the brilliant idea of writing a love letter to the King and concealing it in flowers that she could put into his hands under the guise of flowers to cultivate and enhance her bond with him. When the sage Durvasa cursed Shakuntala for neglecting his holy presence, it was Priyamvada who pleaded with Shakuntala's forgetfulness and implored the sage for forgiveness and mercy in the sense that the curse would no longer impact the creation of any symbol of acknowledgement. When Shakuntala was about to leave her hermitage for King Dushyanta's court in Act IV, both of her friends grieved severely and felt abandoned. Furthermore, both Priyamvada and Anasuya are so dutiful, docile, and loyal that they don't tell anyone about sage Durvasa's curse: they don't even tell Shakuntala about it because they didn't want to bother her with it, especially since a token of recognition could be easily produced when the time is ripe.

### **Relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia and Shakuntala and Dushyant**

Their love was so strong that even when they were in a lovely setting, Dushyanta's inner delight and Shakuntala's beauty triggered feelings of love in him. Even though he's hidden behind the bushes, he can't stop himself from admiring and worshipping Shakuntala's enchanting youth. When the king proposed marriage, Shakuntala requested that they wait for the sage Kanava to return, but their strong love for each other would not allow them to wait, and they were both eager to marry, so in the sage's absence, they secretly married in the ceremony of "Gandharva Vivaha" with Mother Nature as a witness. After a few days, word of turmoil in his city reaches the King, who is asked to return. He departs with regret but pledges to return soon, bringing his lover with him. He offers her a signet ring as a gesture of his affection and pledges to send an emissary to accompany her to the palace. The monarch, however, did not maintain his word, and Shakuntala's real love is put to the test in the form of a waiting period. Shakuntala sits and waits for Dushyant's entourage to arrive and transport her to his castle. However, they do not appear.

At the beginning of the epic poetry, Kalidasa gave Sringara Rasa, which is about the entrance of Dushyant, who is exceedingly gorgeous as the God of Love Kamadev. Dushyant has portrayed Shakuntala's attractiveness in these couplets; he is constantly praising Shakuntala and noting her beauty; the depiction of beauty in terms like these produces the sensation of love in the reader's imagination. He goes on to say that she isn't from this world since her beauty is divine.

Hamlet was undeniably in love with Ophelia at one point in his life. His love gets tainted with distrust and animosity as a result, and his shabby treatment of her is partially the result of this. Furthermore, Hamlet is troubled by the terrifying thought that, like his mother, he had been duped by Ophelia, that Ophelia was shallow and superficial. One of the play's mysteries is Hamlet's attitude toward Ophelia. According to Dover Wilson, this conundrum is even more difficult to solve than Hamlet's delay in exacting his retribution. The problem isn't that Hamlet, who once loved Ophelia, has lost interest in her. His mother's behaviour explains this, which has made him completely disillusioned with love and poisoned his entire imagination.

The research by Chaudhari (2017) gives us a glimpse of the nature of characters and the kind of language used by Kalidasa in his poem *Meghduta*. It is the story of a passionate lover named Yaksha and his wife, Alaka. It is a kind of messenger poem where Yaksha, after

living in exile for a year, conveys his return via clouds to his wife Alaka, who lives on Mount Kailash in the Himalayas. The word Meghaduta means cloud messenger. This poem describes the insights of human life and, at the same time, provides a beautiful description of the beautiful landscape. Kalidasa is popularly known as Shakespeare of India. This might be incorrect as Kalidasa lived much before Shakespeare, and his works were discovered by the British much later. Certain scholars refer to Shakespeare as the Kalidasa of England because of this view. Kalidasa, in the story *Meghduta* has beautifully portrayed oceans, rivers, and forests. He has great respect and admiration for nature, and it is evident from his poems. His profound knowledge of the human heart makes him one of the most celebrated Indian writers.

Talking about the formulation of the poem, it is about a hundred and twenty stanza long poem. It is divided into two parts. The first part is about the path of cloud from Ramgiri to Alaka where Kalidas has talked about the beauty of nature. In the second part, he talks about the human heart. The heart of Yaksais longing to reunite with his wife. It is about pain and solitude. As the cloud moves, the poet describes the change of emotions of the heart. He has beautifully portrayed the changing of emotions with various facets of nature. He has sketched each character and nature so skilfully that one can wonder at his unique sense of imagination. He has portrayed the inseparable nature of human and nature's relationship. He is known for the use of the poetic device 'simile' a lot in his compositions. His portrayal of the longing heart of Yaksa generates sympathy in the heart of readers as well. It takes the readers on an emotional journey and simultaneously moves through the bounties of nature.

The research by Solanki (2019) compares the two plays *AbhijanaShakuntalam* by Kalidasa and *Shakuntala*, the Memory play by Namota Gokhale. Very few women characters have made their mark in Indian literature. Shakuntala is one of the most important characters. She was the daughter of sage Vishwamitra and apsara Menaka. However, certain circumstances lead her to get adopted by Sage Kanava. *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* by Namita Gokhale was published in 2005. In Gokhale's play, Shakuntala is a free-spirited, confident woman. She was aware of the discrimination faced by women. She is suffocated by societal norms and is a bold woman. Whereas Kalidasa's Shakuntala is a beautiful woman who is the epitome of society's expectations. She is an ideal woman who takes care of her family's honor. She is the true picture of women in a patriarchal society. To conclude, Shakuntala by Kalidasa is a meek woman who conforms to the patriarchal norms of society, while, Namita Gokhale's Shakuntala is the opposite.

Rasa is nothing more than a person's emotional state of mind. Sringar Rasa (pleasure or love), Hasya Rasa (laughing or humor), Karuna Rasa (sorrow or compassion), Rudra Rasa (anger), Vira Rasa (heroism or courage), Bhayangkara Rasa (fear), Bibhatsa Rasa (disgust), and Adbhuta Rasa (disgust) are the eight Rasa described in the Rasa theory (wonder or awesome).

These plays depict complex human emotions. The tragedies of Shakespeare might be understood via the lens of Rasa theory. Fundamental human emotions might be investigated in Shakespearean works based on this notion. The audience is drawn to these many feelings. We perceive sorrow, grief, and hatred for the world in Hamlet. On the other side, *Macbeth* is a power-hungry guy who murders his master. His wife fuels his zeal, and the two of them collaborate to assassinate the monarch. However, his internal problems reappear, and he descends into sadness, regretting the king's death.

In the research by Rathore and Gour (2019), through the reading of both the marvellous writings of Kalidasa and Shakespeare, observed that both the heroines are high-born, but both are scrambled in a lap of nature because of their parent's carelessness and lived

a normal life instead of luxurious life. But Miranda seems not to be associated with nature as far as trees, creeps, flowers, and birds are concerned. Whereas Shakuntala is very much associated with all the natural surroundings in which she was born and brought up. She finds a kinship with nature. Both Miranda and Shakuntala are not prepared for the sudden unfair changes in their lives and different circumstances under which the two were brought up and struggled. Shakuntala's simplicity is natural that of Miranda is unnatural.

Deb (2017) conducted a comparative study on classical Sanskrit dramas *Abhijanasakuntalam* and *Malavikagnimitram* both dramas by the legendary poet Kalidasa. Shakuntala is portrayed as the lady of nature. While the protagonist in *Malavikagnimitram* depicts the life of Agnimitra. The study calls *Abhijanasakuntalam* a beautiful tale of love and romance, while the other play is a love plot between a rich king and a poor maid. The human emotions portrayed in both plays present how beautiful human emotions are. It talks about the complex human life with the help of the Sanskrit language and takes the readers on an emotional journey.

## Conclusion

The research proves that language is not a barrier while portraying human emotions. Kalidasa, a classical author, wrote in Sanskrit, while Shakespeare's works are in English. The emotions of love, hatred, anger, content, wonder, jealousy are all the common emotions exhibited by people of all age groups, religious backgrounds, regions and do not depend upon words. Both Shakespeare and Kalidasa portrayed various stages of human life. Though Kalidasa is quite older than Shakespeare and belongs to a different era altogether, these writers have presented the exact picture of their times. The portrayal of women characters is even more enjoyable. Each of the two writers has made their essence felt. Both Shakespeare and Kalidasa are famous literary figures who rose to prominence as a result of their remarkable works. Both of them handled universal truths, ethical norms, internal and external conflicts, power struggles, and the supernatural with ease. There are various parallels and variations between the narratives of both authors. They both created works of art while keeping the events and people in their plays as realistic as possible. The result is a balanced struggle if we pitted Kalidasa's peacefulness against Shakespeare's multiplicity. Both enter their stuff with equal force and play their games according to the mandates of the rules in place at the moment. Shakuntala was personified as an epitome of beauty and elegance. She has been portrayed as an ideal lady. On the other hand, Hamlet was portrayed as a man with unique sense of humour, he is sensitive and ideal also. Despite the variations in their modes of expression, both the writers exhibit mysterious design in their works.

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## **De-stressing Cognitive Load: Effects of Computer-Based Learning Materials on Mental Effort in Second Language Learning**

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### *Abstract*

*The conceptual framework of Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller 215-266) has been recognizable in recent decades. In addition, the fields of behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and interface design have made a phenomenal contribution to second language pedagogy. However, a great majority of the classroom practices have neglected the CLT theoretical groundings for content organization and instructional delivery (Lujan 17-22). Neglecting such an instructional delivery has inhibited the learning process and exerted extraneous cognitive stress on learners (Renk 411). This paper aims to discuss that the instructional design which is implemented without reference to the Cognitive Load Theory is likely to give random results in its efficacy. After critically examining the theory, this paper empirically tests the hypothesis that computer-based materials that are designed in light of how the human mind works lead to meaningful learning (Mayer 31). The experimental study comprising of a pre-test, treatment, and a post-test was chosen to arrive at suggestions for constructive development of the second language learners. Finally, this paper reviews the limitations of the research and directions for further study.*

*Keywords: Cognitive load theory, second language learning, stress, instructional design, classroom pedagogy*

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### **Introduction**

The Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller 159-168) is one of the oldest theories of human cognitive architecture. It establishes an intricate relationship between long-term memory and working memory. According to the CLT, the process and structure of human cognition are closely analogous to the processes and structures associated with evolution by natural selection. In human cognitive architecture, long-term memory plays a significant role. In fact, all human cognitive activity is determined by information held in the long-term memory. However, the capacity of working memory is constrained. Peterson and Peterson found that without rehearsal, almost all the contents of working memory are lost within 20 seconds (193-198). Therefore, all instruction requiring learners to deal with information must be processed by a structure that is minute in capacity and that retains the new information for no more than a few seconds. Unfortunately, many instructional designs ignore the limitations of working memory. For example, any inquiry-based design can place a heavy load on working memory. For this reason, it is important to place human working memory limitations into a theoretical framework to facilitate a full understanding of both memories. Learning with understanding can result in alterations and helps in storing the information in long-term memory. Sweller

explained that if a child learns to recite the letters of the alphabet and how they can be used to produce written language or learns to recite a multiplication table and understand that multiplication table is a shorthand procedure for repeated addition, he is likely to retain information for a longer period (215-266). This is due to the alterations that occur in long-term memory. The further changes take place with the increased level of understanding. Understanding can be largely described by the additional changes in long-term memory. Therefore, knowledge is held in a schematic form in long-term memory whether it is pictorial or verbal written, or spoken. According to Mayer, a human brain consists of separate dual channels for visual and verbal processing (43-71). When a data is displayed to the eyes, learner prepares through their visual channels. On the other hand, when a data is exhibited to the ears, learner prepares data in the sound-related channel. In addition, a few scholars state that humans have limited capacity in the amount of information that can be processed in each channel at one time (Chandler and Sweller 151-173). This implies the fact that when an animation or illustration is presented, the learner is able to hold only a few images in working memory at any one time, reflecting segments of the exhibited material rather than an exact copy of the presented material. Besides, the active processing organizes the selected information into a coherent mental representation and integrates it with other knowledge (Mayer 70-71). The outcome of active learning that leads to a coherent mental representation helps in exploring the typical ways in which the knowledge can be structured. These structures include Process, Comparison, Generalisation, Enumeration and Classification (Chambliss and Calfee 367-459).

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Computer-based materials should be designed to help learners process and store information in the long-term memory. In the context of Cognitive Load Theory, it is important to highlight the Atkinson-Shiffrin Model of Memory (Luman Educational Psychology). According to this model, there are three major stores of memory: Sensory Memory, Working Memory, and Long -Term Memory. Inputs such as Images and sounds are entered in Sensory Memory through the two active sense organs i.e. ears and eyes. Apparently, images and sounds are stored in Visual Sensory Memory and Auditory Sensory Memory respectively. For example, when the word 'parrot' is spoken, the mental image of 'parrot' is formed simultaneously. In other words, we hear a 'parrot' and form a picture. The entire processing of information is done hierarchically. First by selecting relevant images, organizing images and words into order and integrating it to constitute prior knowledge. According to the model, computer-based presentations contain two types of pictures. 1) Static and 2) Dynamic. Static

picture refers to the onscreen text or image presented to a learner. For example, a static picture may include an informative paragraph on 'lightning' highlighting the causes, effects, accidents, and injuries. When learners learn the process and causes of lightning by an active animated presentation along with narration, the presentation is said to be dynamic. The second event under 'sensory memory' is that pictures impinge on the eyes resulting in a brief sensory image. This ensures the fact that the learner beholds an image or narration for a short amount of time in his respective modalities. This event requires less effort as compared to active cognitive processing, the processing in which the learner has conscious control. This attentional processing helps the learner to select images loaded in sensory memory and consequently, mental representation is formed under working memory. Once the working memory is filled with images, cognitive processing organizes the data into a coherent structure. As a result, a pictorial model is identified where learners build an organized visual representation of the information. In the last, active cognitive processing connects the new representation with prior knowledge. For example a student while performing a role-play recalls his prior knowledge to incorporate real-life dialogues.

Furthermore, integrated learning is achieved when a student can relate, analyze, and corresponds to a part of the image. A learner can utilize his prior knowledge to connect words with pictures to form mental representation. The student can create sounds in his mind corresponding to the visual picture. For example, thinking of wind when seeing wavy arrows in a picture. When verbal material is entered through a visual channel, the words take a complex route. Selected images are brought into the working memory and are then, processed like spoken words.

## **Methodology**

Here, the hypothesis is that computer-based material that is designed in light of how the human mind works leads to meaningful learning. To check this hypothesis, this paper analyses the data gathered from the respondents of government and private schools of Delhi and Aligarh through an experimental study. The TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) was adapted and used as a research instrument. Besides, the research design included Pre-test, treatment and Post-test. Moreover, the groups were categorized as two treatment groups. The former treatment group was exposed to Computer-based materials, while, the latter group was exposed to Chalk and Talk (C&T) method of learning. In addition, the responses of each student were deeply analyzed. Before the main analysis and evaluation of the hypothesis, a preliminary analysis of the data was performed to study the key variables. The process of preliminary analysis included the distribution of study variables and differences in overall pre and post-scores.

## Preliminary Analysis

(1) Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables				
Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Gender	Male	290	48.3	600
	Female	310	51.7	
Region	Aligarh	400	66.7	600
	Delhi	200	33.3	
Schools	Govt.	300	50	600
	Private	300	50	

The sample size consists of 600 participants. The samples were collected from 290 males and 310 females. As far as the region was concerned, 400 participants belonged to Aligarh and 200 participants participated from Delhi. While considering the type of school, 300 participants from Government and 300 participants from Private Schools were taken into consideration. The sample size consists of 600 participants. The samples were collected from 290 males and 310 females. As far as the region was concerned, 400 participants belonged to Aligarh and 200 participants participated from Delhi. While considering the type of school, 300 participants from Government and 300 participants from Private Schools were taken into consideration.

## (2) Descriptive statistics of study variables

(2) Descriptive statistics of study variables					
Variable	Category	Skills	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Method of Treatment	Computer based material	Listening	300	50	300
		Speaking	300	50	
		Reading	300	50	
		Writing	300	50	
	Chalk and Talk	Listening	300	50	300
		Speaking	300	50	
		Reading	300	50	
		Writing	300	50	

The study variable is the form or method of instructional delivery i.e, Computer-based material and Chalk and Talk. For each instructional category, there are four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing comprising the frequency of 300 each.

**(3) Mean differences between Pre and Post-Test of both the treatment groups**

(3) Mean differences between Pre and Post-Test of both the treatment groups							
		Mean	N	S.D	Std. Error	t	P
Pair	Pre test	58.2567	600	16.67185	.68063	-20.60	.000
	Post- test	63.0267	600	15.75573	.64322		

The overall scores indicate that pre-test has a mean of 58.2567 while the mean of post-test goes up by 63.0267. The table also represents the number of participants (N) which is 600 for each test.

Hypothesis Testing

**(4) Computer-based materials are likely to lead to meaningful learning**

(4) Computer-based materials are likely to lead to meaningful learning									
Post scores	Computer-based material						Chalk and Talk		
	N	Mean	S. D	S.E	T	p	Mean	S. D	
L	100	16.22	4.16	.41	-3.51	.001	15.11	4.98	
	100	18.35	4.39	.43			15.17	4.19	
S	100	10.68	3.20	.32	-5.18	.000	9.48	3.12	
	100	13.57	4.56	.45			10.90	4.19	
R	100	17.36	3.51	.35	-1.93	.055	17.07	4.18	
	100	18.46	4.47	.44			16.43	4.18	
W	100	11.83	3.16	.31	-5.99	.000	12.24	3.24	
	100	15.17	4.58	.45			13.09	3.99	
To	100	56.09	11.13	1.11	-4.84	.000	53.90	12.7	
	100	65.55	16.05	1.60			55.59	13.9	

As mentioned in the table, there are significant differences in the mean scores of CBI and C & T between Government and Private schools of Aligarh. In the select Government Schools of Aligarh, Computer-based Material produced more impact than the materials which were delivered through chalk and talk method. In the select Private Schools, Computer-based material left a better impact upon students' retention. The ultimate question which arose was whether CBI was a real step for effective learning in Government Schools. The answer was 'may be' if appropriate guidelines were followed and factors related to designing material were considered. The matter was not just confined to materials but it also involved individual differences, prior knowledge of the students, congruency of format, multiple intelligence, spatial skills, level of the learners, learning styles, and exposure to technology. For instance, content which is designed for learners with good prior knowledge would be different from the instructions tailored for novice learners. In this experiment, Private School learners were able to give self made comments and produced a series of knowledge which helped them to engage and link future school tasks. An effective cognitive

construction was also noted among students as their cognitive flexibility collaborated with motivation and a positive attitude. As a result, the success of Computer-based treatment was overwhelming.

### Qualitative Analysis

While choosing the Computer-based material, three major steps were taken. First, the inclusion of interface features and forms of structure that is, including multiple media in a unified accessible classroom learning space. Second, considering psychological and individual differences allow all the learners to proceed in a way that compliments their unique learning process. Third, appropriateness of content is because every content available on the internet is not optimal for the learning process. The Computer-based material for listening treatment consisted of *audio* and *audio-video*. The Computer-based material for speaking consisted of a *text- image-based tutorial*. The CBI for reading included *text*, and *narration*, *music cum animation*, *visual and narration*. The Computer Based material for writing included *images*, *visual-music*, *tutorial* (picture, text, narration), and *text-music*. Given the richness of the interactive environment to learners, the content and methods were carefully crafted covering creative tasks to answer the questions. The visuals in all four skills promoted the context and also supported the range of sub-skills to develop matching images, sensibility to English sounds, listening and reading for specific information, understanding the crux of a story, norms of written communication, vocabulary, grammar, and supra-segmental features in oral communication. The different styles of CBI content were presented to note the observable changes resulting from the use of varying treatments.

In listening, the majority of the students in Government school A and B at Aligarh, reported better performance when *the image (static) and audio* were presented. The students did not show an increment in scores when the *audio cum video* was shown to them. In speaking, eighteen students out of fifty in Government A, and twelve out of fifty in Government B performed better in interpreting the *image*. Eight students in Government School A were observed with significant improvement when music cum video was shown to them. Meanwhile, thirteen students out of fifty in Government School B were reported to have shown improvement after receiving *music and video (real life)* treatment. However, the performance deteriorated in both the schools and reported no change in the other two treatments. In the reading test, a tutorial of text and narration created a heavy impact on learners' retention. Both the Government Schools marked a huge progression in retaining the *tutorial* of text and narration. However, the fall in scores was noted in both the Government Schools when *music and animation* were presented. In writing, a rise in scores was noticed when the tutorial treatment consisting of *pictures, text and narration* were shown to them. A few students in both the schools in Aligarh had shown improvement when *animation complemented the narration and text* was shown to them.

A school located in Delhi showed different results. In the case of *audio-video*, the majority of the students gained optimum scores. As far as the only audio treatment was concerned, no increments in scores were observed. It was also discovered that the treatments of *image and video cum music* were proved successful in elevating the speaking scores and performances of students. The emphasis on stress and intonation was also noted among students after the treatment of computer-based suprasegmental features. In both reading and writing, tutorials (picture, text, narration) worked well. Music, song, and text treatment also left a positive mark on students' retention scores. To some extent, the students' grammar and

structure in writing sentences were also improved after the exposure of *animation, text and narration*. A sharp differentiation in performances occurred between those using ICT schools and non- ICT schools. At first, most of the students in Private School A in Aligarh were positively affected by the treatment of images accompanied by audio. However, in Private School B, students after getting the treatment of *audio cum video* performed better. As far as speaking is concerned, in Private School A *tutorial* of audio and text worked well. The majority of the students were found keen to speak after getting the treatment of *video accompanied by music*. In private school B, all three treatments: *tutorial* (text, narration, picture), *video-music* and *image* interpretation were effective. When the treatment of reading was given to school A, the *tutorial* comprising of text, narration and picture, was proved successful. However, no change was observed after the treatment of *music cum video*.

In the treatment of writing, school A performed less as compared to school B especially after perceiving *tutorials* comprising of pictures, narration, and text. In the treatment of *animation, text and narration*, School B reported a positive change in improving the sentence structure and style of writing. Private School C which is located in Delhi presents a different case. Here, the majority of the treatments including *animation, narration, text, music* were proved successful. Students showed interest and a consistent improvement in their performances.

### Similarities and Differences

1- To explore what constituted the great impact upon learners' performances, it was found that *image-audio* format or dual code in Private Schools and *audio-only* in Government Schools were beneficial to learning. The participants in Private Schools not only consumed less time but also showed better retention skills in solving a set of questions than their counterparts. This finding clearly supports the Cognitive Load Theory.

However, in Government Schools, unanticipated results occurred. Here, a maximum number of individuals found *audio* treatment useful. Participants in Government Schools were not exposed to Computer Based Instruction (CBI) in any form, hence, this treatment was probably the first time they were exposed to it. Therefore, at the time of answering the questions, they were forced to mentally integrate the *audio and video* format which might have exhausted their cognitive capacity and proved detrimental to learning.

2- While adding an image on the projector screen such as a cartoon-like character helped students to articulate words more efficiently than the group where no image was presented. This was not just the case of Government Schools but also of Private Schools. On screen, the image served as a cognitive role by stimulating and directing the attention of the learner. When a student understands an image, he forms multiple mental representations, thereby, constructing a mental model of the image's content. The mental model is then applied to interpret the perceptual representation. Therefore, it can be said that a straightforward way to activate learners' background knowledge is to add an image or picture on a screen.

3- In the other case, music-video (moving pictures) left a great impact upon Private Schools' learners' retrieval. On the contrary, in Government Schools did not show significant improvement. The students of Private Schools were already exposed to computers and were accustomed to machine voice and English. For them, music cum video was realistic and ecologically valid. However, for a newcomer, emphasis on music was a distraction from

retaining new information. The students could either focus on music or moving pictures or if in case both, it could have led to extraneous cognitive load on working memory.

4- The reason why *tutorials* were successful in both Government and Private Schools is an approval of the Integrative Model of text and picture comprehension which was advocated by Schnotz (2003). The idea of two representational channels (visual and auditory) and multiple memory systems was combined into an integrative format that enhanced perception and comprehension. In other words, the integrative format of learning includes the involvement of working memory, long-term memory, and dual processing of the channels. It also involves multiple representations in the text as well as picture comprehension. It means the Theory of Cognitive Multimedia Learning can be applied in this context.

## Conclusion

By taking into consideration the performances of students, their cognitive architecture including the limited capacity of working memory, processing of dual channels, it can be concluded that Computer Based materials that communicate with the students' cognitive learning style are likely to lead to meaningful learning. Secondly, active processing of the instruction is most likely to occur when Computer instruction is endowed with internal properties that promote motivation, engagement, and interaction with the students. Besides, Computer-based materials are highly effective in schools where the use of technology is frequent. Computer-based materials produce better results than the materials which are delivered through conventional method. This paper widely tests the efficacy of the modes of Computer-based materials such as *audio*, *audio-video*, *tutorial*, *music-animation*, *image-narration*, and *text music*. The results open many dimensions. These dimensions include students' retrieval, their background, their multiple and spatial abilities, prior knowledge and motivation. Hence, it can be concluded that the key factors to the success of computer-based materials also depend on the mode of delivery.

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## **Problems Faced by English Teachers in Teaching English as a Second Language: Teachers' View**

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### *Abstract*

*Language is essentially a perfect medium of expression and communication through which people get a chance to know each other. It is truly said by Michael Swan that language teaching should be about teaching language. But in the present times, this notion sometimes gets lost. Modern time is full of competition, where people are competing with others in every field. In such a situation, good communication skill is the need of an hour. For some people languages are difficult to learn, and for some languages are difficult to teach. A great deal of experimentation and theories have taken place in the hope of improving Spoken English. For a teacher of a second language, it is hard to pick her way through the mass of accumulated information as how to make use of all these theories in teaching English. The researcher endeavors to unveil the problems being faced by English teachers in teaching English as a second language to the students of high school. The study poses two research questions: 1. What are the problems faced by the English teachers? 2. What are the ways to overcome these challenges? However, one should not forget that teaching language does not mean teaching structure of language, rather teaching language completes its meaning when the students make full use of language outside the classroom. Language learning refers to changes in behavior, acquisition of interests, social values, and even changes in personality. The study aims to investigate the problems faced by nonnative English teachers in teaching English as a second language to the students of high school.*

*Keywords: English, second language, acquisition, learning, teaching, structure, cognitive, students*

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### **Introduction**

Language is a cultural phenomenon as it changes from one society to the next. It is a supreme human achievement, which makes us what we are; it is the foundation of all other learning. Children easily acquire the structure of language at a particular age and after this ephemeral period; they need to struggle to reach native like proficiency in using second language. Every language comprises four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Amongst these, speaking is the most important since language is primarily meant for speaking. People mostly deviate from standards in speaking, as they are unable to pay appropriate focus on pronunciation and syntax of the language.

Language is essentially the perfect medium of expression and communication

through which people get a chance to know each other. The use of language inculcates communicative competence and brings appropriateness including linguistic competence, which is extremely desirable in learning a language. David Nunan writes, 'Most recently, the term 'communicative competence' has gained currency. This refers to knowledge of rules of use and appropriacy and includes linguistic competence' (Nunan 33).

Every nation is potently and politically shaped by its language only. Thus A.C. Gimson observes, 'a language is a system of conventional signals used for communication by a community' (Gimson 4). English as a global language has gained the status of lingua franca. After independence, English has embarked into every domain – finance, education, social, and personal. The rapid growth of English-medium schools has explored every nook and cranny of the country and proves that there is a rapidly growing urge among Indian students to acquire the ability to speak English fluently. In other words, people are making strenuous efforts to acquire this second language. Furthermore, with the latest evolution in the IT sector, call center, and hospitality industry, a concern and keen desire towards the improvement in spoken English can be seen in their efforts. People have become particular about their pronunciation and thus focus more on their spoken English. It has been accepted as the language of administration, Indian press, and of the elite class. After independence, the administrators even thought about the demise of the English language. However, the result was that it permeated Indian society like a necessity. Even Kachru also supported this statement.

India after becoming independent in 1947 was left with a colonial language, in this case, English, as the language of government: it was thought that the end of the British Raj would mean the slow but sure demise of the English language in South Asia. This, of course, has not happened. The penetration of English in these societies is greater than it has ever been. (Kachru 542)

### **Aim and Purpose of the Study**

There are many studies done on the difficulties faced by students in the acquisition and learning of English as a second language. But in comparison, one finds only a handful of research done on the challenges and issues being faced by English teachers teaching English as a second language. Thus to know from a teacher's point of view, led the researcher to investigate the matter regarding the problems faced by the teachers while teaching English. In teaching, it is extremely desirable to know what one wants to accomplish. The study aims to find out and analyze the problems faced by English teachers in teaching English to the students of higher secondary classes.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The study has been delimited at several levels. The investigator has delimited the study to ten English teachers who teach English to higher secondary students. Graphically it is restricted to the reputed higher secondary schools of Chandigarh and Ambala city affiliated to the State Board of Education. It is further delimited to the English teachers who are teaching English to 11th and 12th standard students. Considering the present scenario, the interview has been conducted through video conferencing using the Google Meet app. The interview questionnaire consists of twenty-three questions and responses of the teachers are received and analyzed using qualitative methods. Following are the limitations in the selection of the

English Teachers:

- i) All the teachers must be non native English teachers
- ii) All the teachers must be teaching English to 11th and 12th standard students.
- iii) Minimum two teachers have been taken from every school.

## **Research Methodology**

The present study limns the problems of English teachers while teaching English as a Second Language. Since the purpose of this study was to identify the issues and challenges being faced by the English Teachers so she visited different schools in the above-mentioned cities. The researcher requested their willingness in this project and after their confirmation, only ten teachers from three different schools expressed their willingness the participation. This is a data-based qualitative study for which semi-structured interviews of the teachers were taken for the analysis and data interpretation. The questions were framed considering their experiences while teaching English. Keeping in mind the sincere and honest answers, the interview had been conducted for the individual teachers to get the in-depth information and used as raw material for analysis. Due to pandemic times, the researcher aspires to interview them through video conferencing with the help of Google Meet.

## **Data Analysis**

In this chapter, the investigator endeavors to analyze the challenges and issues being faced by English teachers in teaching English as a second language. The study focuses on one research question: what are the problems being faced by English teachers teaching at the higher secondary level? In anticipation of answering this question, the researcher framed twenty questions related to 1) environmental issues 2) limited teaching resources 3) problems due to family background 4) limited time for lecture 5) language issues 6) dependent on the teachers 7) wrong syllabus 8) overcrowded classrooms 9) better teaching through acquisition or learning 10) teacher-student dynamic approach 11) learning better in the classroom or outside the classroom 12) students learn better through cognitive or structural method 13) which part of the language skill is difficult to teach? 14) problems due to heedlessness 15) problems in teaching pedagogy 16) problems due to lack of motivation and fear of making mistakes 17) lack of knowledge regarding research in the development of English Language 18) extra workload. To begin with, an individual speaker's recorded corpus was analyzed through observational and semi-structured interviews. With the help of video conferencing through Google meet, the recording was played many times and later it was analysed. To make the interpretation more comprehensible, every teacher has been given the identification as teacher one, two three and so on. The researcher went through the process of listening, re-listening, checking and verifying the interview given by every teacher. The present research deals not only with the problems being faced by English teachers but also variations specific to speakers' knowledge and command over the language. In addition, solutions to overcome these problems are followed by the implications of the study.

## **Problems Due to Environmental Issues**

It has been observed that two out of ten teachers face difficulty in teaching English as a second language due to the environment of the class. For instance, teacher number one has

nurtured the students at a higher secondary level for eighteen years. She encounters problems in the teaching because the environment of the class becomes negative due to the usage of her mother tongue. As the students are non-native speakers and thus expect the teacher to teach in their mother tongue. It becomes difficult for a language teacher to teach through another medium of instruction. In addition to this, students belong to poor families which is also one of the main reasons for problems in teaching English as a second language as they don't have an environment where someone could interact in the same language and motivate them to speak. This is the problem being faced by teachers teaching in the schools of Ambala City. However, the same issue is not faced by the teachers teaching in the schools of Chandigarh. Parents' awareness towards education is the reason that they motivate their children and give such an environment where they strive to enhance communication skills in the English language.

### **Limited Teaching Resources**

It has been observed that teachers teaching in the schools of Ambala City found it difficult to teach English as a second language due to limited teaching resources. They have smart classrooms, projectors, and boards but encounter problems due to the non-availability of WI-FI. Furthermore, they have language labs but don't have sufficient software to teach the English language. Moreover, they have not been given proper training to use English language labs. In comparison to this teachers teaching in the schools of Chandigarh don't face problems due to limited resources but neither have they had knowledge about the use of English software nor the access to the systems installed in the language labs.

### **Problems Due To Family Background**

Most of the students belong to lower middle-class families due to which they don't have English speaking environment at home. Moreover, the love for their mother tongue is also a hindrance for a language teacher as they don't cooperate with the language teachers. The same problem is being faced by the English teachers teaching in the schools of Ambala City as the students are from the lower middle class where they are not being encouraged to speak in the English language. In such a situation, an English teacher plays an indispensable role as now it becomes her responsibility to encourage the students for the acquisition and learning of English as a second language.

### **Limited Time for Lecture**

This problem is being faced by most of the teachers as they have limited time for teaching. Broadly speaking, teaching in the context of literature, the time is quite sufficient but faces a constraint of time when they give activities to the students. There can be certain reasons for that like sometimes students show their heedlessness and sometimes due to large numbers of students the activity could not be completed timely. Thus the teachers teaching in the schools of Ambala and Chandigarh face difficulty due to the limited time given for the activities. There are some students who show their reluctance in performing the tasks and get an easy escape due to limited time.

## **Language Issues**

This is the most common problematic issue for all the teachers. As it has been mentioned above that the being nonnative speakers they belong to different backgrounds and environments. It certainly becomes difficult for an English teacher to teach English in their mother tongue when she asks some questions related to their subject and gets feedback in their respective mother tongue. This problem is being faced by the teachers teaching in the schools of Ambala and Chandigarh.

## **Dependent on the Teachers**

It has been discerned that after the completion of the chapter, the students are asked to answer certain questions. In such situations, few students try to give answers but shy students or weak students depend upon the teacher in the anticipation of getting answers from her educator. Thus it becomes difficult for her to inculcate language skills in all the students of her class. This problem is being more faced by the teachers teaching in the schools of Ambala city in comparison to the Chandigarh teachers.

## **Wrong Syllabus**

In our education system, reading and writing skills have been mainly focused on. This is the major problem that is being faced by all the teachers. Policies are being framed but are not properly implemented according to a few teachers. It has been noticed that most of the teachers didn't find the literary text relevant and interesting due to which students as well as teachers both lose their interest in learning and teaching. They could not retain the interest of the students due to irrelevant syllabus. As soon as the English language became globalized, educationists have started making efforts, taking cognizance of its importance, to improve speaking skills as it is a means of communication.

## **Over Crowded Classrooms**

This is the most common problem for some teachers as due to a large number of students, the purpose of effective English language teaching gets defeated. There can be certain reasons like limited time for activity and every student does not get time to perform, disturbance due to a large number of students. Some of them are interested in learning the language while some students are reluctant to acquire this language. This obstacle is encountered by most of the teachers in Ambala as well as Chandigarh.

## **Teaching through Acquisition or Learning**

Most of the teachers believe that the English language can be better learned through acquisition instead of learning through structures. But the irony is that they teach through structural methods as the syllabus has been designed in such a way that they focus on the completion of the syllabus. It has been noticed that teachers teaching in the schools of Ambala city have good knowledge about grammar but don't have good command over the language. During the interview, they seem to be quite nervous while giving answers in the English language.

## **Teacher Student Dynamic Approach**

During the investigation, the researcher analysed that the teacher-student dynamic and psychological approach prove to be a magic mantra while teaching English as a second language. Sometimes they face difficulty in the application of these approaches due to a hectic schedule. This issue is faced by every other teacher.

## **Role of a classroom**

Considering the pandemic times, every teacher is teaching through virtual classrooms. But they are of the opinion that students learn better in the classroom rather than outside the classroom. The classroom plays a vital role in teaching English as a second language. Thus all the teachers are facing this problem due to the present scenario.

## **Facing Difficulty in Teaching through Cognitive Method**

It has been observed that Most of the teachers find it hard to teach through cognitive methods due to the wrong syllabus. The syllabus has been designed in such a way that neither the teachers get time to teach through this method nor the students get the opportunity to learn with this methodology.

## **Which Part of the Language Skill is Difficult to Teach?**

In our education system, reading and writing skills have been mainly focused on. There is hardly any effort being made for listening and speaking skills. Most of the teachers find it an uphill struggle to teach writing and speaking skills to the students. At the end of the semester, the students find it difficult to comprehend the chapter in the examination and are unable to speak during the activity.

## **Problems Due To Heedlessness**

This is also one of the major concerns of the teachers that sometimes students do not show their interest in learning the English language. The reason behind this is love for their mother tongue and thus shows heedlessness. Another reason is that they find the text boring and expect the teacher to explain it in their mother tongue. Thus it becomes very hard for an English teacher to teach the language with effectiveness.

## **Problems in Teaching Pedagogy**

The teachers find it an uphill task to teach pedagogy to students through exploratory study because of the large number of students in the class and the limited time for the activity and teaching. Thus each student does not get a chance for exploration.

## **Problems Due to Lack of Motivation and Fear of Making Mistakes**

As it has already been mentioned that most of the teachers face difficulties in teaching

English as a second language due to textual issues and overcrowded classrooms. Thus at times, it becomes difficult for a teacher to motivate every student and thus also not perform due to the fear of making mistakes.

### **Lack of Knowledge Regarding Research in the Development of English Language**

It has been observed that most of the teachers teach intending to complete the syllabus. They neither have any interest nor have any idea about the new research being done in this language for the development of second language learners.

### **Problems Due to Extra Workload**

It has been found that the English teachers are unable to teach with effectiveness and proficiency due to three to four consecutive lectures at times. Thus due to the paucity of energy level, it becomes difficult for them to teach with perfection. Though the teachers tried to cover up this issue in the interview but were unable to hide the fact.

### **Findings**

- a. It has been observed that the teachers of Ambala city though swayed by the cognitive method of teaching, yet teachers pursue teaching English through the structural method.
- b. In addition, teachers teaching in Ambala city and Chandigarh don't have access to varied researches going on in this second language. Neither they have an interest nor have any idea to explore more about it in the world.
- c. They have been seen lacking the necessary interview skills and have hesitancy as well.
- d. The researcher analysed the mother tongue influence seemed fully pervading in teachers' communication discourse which discourages the teaching of English in the way it ought to be.
- e. The teachers of Ambala city need to discard their incumbent teaching methodology and try to make amendments by adopting the innovative and established ways of teaching in English.
- f. It has been found that the zeal of just finishing the syllabus will simply make the learning in English obsolete.

### **Suggestions**

After analyzing the above-mentioned problems being faced by English teachers in teaching English as a Second Language, the following are some recommendations and suggestions which can further help them to overcome such difficulties:

- a. The students should be asked to speak in the English language at the Kindergarten level.
- b. The rule of limited students in one classroom should be followed strictly.
- c. The teacher should not be allowed to teach in mother tongue in her class.
- d. However, a student should be asked to speak in a second language without any fear of making mistakes.
- e. Teaching texts in English language should be done using cognitive methods.
- f. The structural teaching should be made more interesting using acquisition and cognitive methods
- g. Teachers should be given exposure to workshops regarding second language

- teaching.
- h. More provisions should be given to teachers to upgrade their speaking and writing skill.
  - i. More opportunities to be given to teachers regarding the awareness of the new research work done in the area of second language teaching and learning.
  - j. Teachers should be given the training in terms of operating the communication skills language labs.
  - k. Quality of teaching should be mainly focused instead of quantity of teaching.

### **Implications of the Study—Conclusion**

In our education system, reading and writing skills have been mainly focused but as soon as English language became globalised, educationists have started making efforts, taking the cognizance of its importance, to improve speaking skills as it is a means of communication. Many policies have been framed to teach English as a second language but they are not properly implemented. It has been analysed that English teachers are facing problems in teaching English as a second language due to environmental and family background issues. Furthermore, most of the teachers are unable to teach using cognitive and structural approaches due to a large number of students in a class and thus find it difficult to teach with effectiveness and unable to pay attention to the individual student. Another problem arises due to limited teaching resources and limited time for teaching. Moreover, teachers have not been given proper training regarding teaching English as a second language. They also find it difficult to teach English when students do not perform due to the fear of making mistakes. It becomes challenging for them when the students show heedlessness due to boring texts or irrelevant syllabus. They also encounter problems as they are unaware of the new research being done in English Language Teaching. It has been observed that in a city like Ambala, teachers are living in the furtherance of training and workshops regarding teaching English as a second language. If they would have been given proper resources and training, they could overcome such difficulties in teaching English language to non native speakers.

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## Understanding the Efficiency of Deep Learning in Language Learning using Personalized Language Learning Apps

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### *Abstract*

*Deep learning is the subclass of machine learning in the broad domain of Artificial Intelligence and it is the new learning enterprise to employ students in committing the process of deep learning through ascertaining and mastering the existing knowledge for creating and using new knowledge in the world. This is the process of having leadership over one's learning process via personalized learning tools, where the learners know what they learn and when to learn. Personalized learning is adaptive learning, which refers to instruction that is paced to learning needs and travel through specific interests. This research paper is framed to analyze how effective deep learning is achieved by tertiary-level students using personalized learning tools or aids. Precisely, the researcher is going to apply the connectionism theory for the analysis of the language learning process and its applications and associations among tertiary-level learners. In addition, the researcher is going to use the quantitative study for the analysis of the efficiency of deep learning in the language learning process among tertiary-level learners using personalized language learning aids. It is hypothesized that deep language learning using personalized learning tools or aids helps in the process of natural language learning. To sum up, this research deals with how deep learning is induced through personalized language learning apps among tertiary-level learners.*

*Key Words: Artificial Intelligence, deep learning, connectionism, language learning, personalized learning*

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### **Introduction**

Learning is the act of engulfing the world's existing knowledge and training them to execute the knowledge in real-world experience. Teaching and learning is the process that goes hand in hand which includes five aspects namely teacher, student, learning process, learning situation, and learning technology. The teacher acts as a facilitator with the

intervention of technology in the learning process and learning execution. Furthermore, the mode of learning through technology has been increasingly used which facilitates the learning process easier and comfortable. Despite many learning techniques machine learning and Artificial Intelligence has been incorporated into English Language learning. This paper intends to discuss the effectiveness of Artificial Intelligence in the field of education and how the trend of using personalized learning apps has been taken into consideration for language learning. In addition, this research paper is framed to analyze how effective deep learning is achieved by the tertiary level learners using personalized learning tools or aids. Precisely, the researcher is going to apply the connectionism theory for the analysis of the language learning process and its applications and associations among tertiary-level learners. In addition, the researcher is going to use the quantitative study for the analysis of the efficiency of deep learning in the language learning process among tertiary-level learners using personalized language learning apps. Followed by the study, the analysis part of this paper will give acumens on how effective deep learning is achieved using personalized learning applications. Indeed, the Horizon Report 2020 on Higher Education states that the higher education institutions are hastening towards new models for online programs such as assessment (assessing the competency) and Crediting (micro-credentials and digital badging). It is evident by the Horizon reports 2020 that the online student enrolments have been increasing by ten percent annually over the past five years in Canada (11). This shows that the students' convenience towards online learning has followed the effectiveness in the field of education. It is estimated by the horizon report 2020 that the Next-Generation Digital Learning Environment forms a transformation or a shift in the architect of learning situation and ambiance for the learners and the instructors which accommodate flexible learning experience through educational technology and application (9).

Finally, this paper throws insights on the understanding of Artificial Intelligence in the field of education; adoption and efficiency of deep learning techniques in language learning using personalized learning applications, and the analytical data on usage of personalized apps and their awareness among tertiary level students.

## **Research Methodology**

This research paper is framed to analyse how effective deep learning is achieved by the tertiary-level students using personalized learning tools or aids. Precisely for this analysis, the research is processed by applying 'connectionism theory' to the concept of deep learning to synthesis the language learning process and its applications and associations among tertiary-level learners. In addition, the researcher has also used the quantitative study for the analysis of the efficiency of deep learning in the language learning process among tertiary-level learners using personalized language learning aids. The questionnaire has been prepared and circulated online (Google form) to the tertiary level learners, to analyse the effective use of personalized learning apps by them and how efficiently it induces deep learning among the learners. So, the researcher has undertaken both qualitative and quantitative analysis for the study. It is hypothesized that deep language learning using personalized learning tools or aids helps in the process of natural language learning. To sum up, this research deals with how deep learning is induced through personalized language learning apps among tertiary-level learners.

## **Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education**

Artificial Intelligence has its domain in the field of education to facilitate the techno societal bases. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the mimicking of intelligence and behavioral patterns of the living human entity and duplicates or kindles the human intelligence in machines. AI has many competing factors like capacity for logic understanding, planning, emotional knowledge, self-awareness, creativity, problem-solving and learning. In the EDUCAUSE review article, 2019 Elana Zeide defines Artificial Intelligence as “the attempt to create machines that can do things previously possible only through human cognition” (17). The role of human cognition is replicated and machinated to form the human intelligence in machine version. It has a great sway on the economy, society, education, learning, and training. The impact of fast mounting technology will create high compression to transform educational practices and policies. Educational systems have adapted the requirement of industrial need which is achieved by the intervention of AI in the educational field. This process conveys specificity to the learning process and provides a wide range of inputs to meet the specific industrial goals. JRC Science for Policy Reports, 2018 states:

In European Framework programs for research and technological development, AI technologies have been studied and applied in an educational context in many projects focusing on technology-enabled learning. These projects have used technologies that have deep ties with AI research, including natural language processing, pattern recognition, intelligent tutoring, probabilistic AI planning, intelligent agents, AI game engines, Personalized learning environment (PLE). (3)

So, the importance of AI in terms of the educational field and language learning has been increasing widely, where AI technologies have been used based on task and skill-based models. It is the learning which is unendorsed unstructured data, learned without human supervision. Artificial Intelligence has been widely incorporated in Machine Learning.

## **Deep Learning**

Learners are provided with loads of information online and connected worldwide to access the information. They are broadly connected with people and the information, in which they dwell. The real task lies in collecting the right information at the right time for obvious usage and implementation. It is by learning through connections and associations the learners get aware and master their learning process. For example, Peer tutoring is one such strategy that helps the learners to get mastery over their ideas. This event of associations can be better done through the deep learning technique. Deep learning is the subsection of machine learning in Artificial Intelligence, which deals with the higher-order thinking process to bring in perceptions and develop differences and relationships between previous and existing knowledge, the learners acquire to implement in their real-life situations. Ning Yueying in their paper “Deep Learning in effective English Teaching Strategy of Senior High” in-sighted that deep learning is above the base of primary knowledge and it is the meta-cognitive process of re-structuring the existing knowledge and cognitive strategy, which acts as a driving force of learning process to transfer the knowledge into solving practical problems. This statement can strongly adhere to language learning because the cognitive process for language learning should be experimental to get practical implications and usage in a real-life situation as done through the flipped classroom. It is a technique that engages the student in practicing, discovering, and mastering existing knowledge, creating and using new knowledge in the real

world. The main objectives of deep learning are that the students will gain the proficiencies and temperaments that will prepare them to be creative, connected, and collaborative of real-life problem solvers and to be healthy, all-inclusive human beings who not only subsidize to but also produce the common goals in today's knowledge-based, creative, interdependent world. The tertiary level students must incorporate independent learning, self-enhancement, social and technical - adaptive learning in the field of education. This type of learning is widely used by new pedagogies because deep learning is the evolution of the digital era, where the new pedagogies belong to. The new pedagogies are defined by Michael Fullan as “a new model of learning partnerships between and among students and teachers, aiming towards deep learning goals and enabled by pervasive digital access. Most instructional elements of the new pedagogies are not 'new' teaching strategies; although we would say that the active learning partnerships with students are new” (Fullan 2).

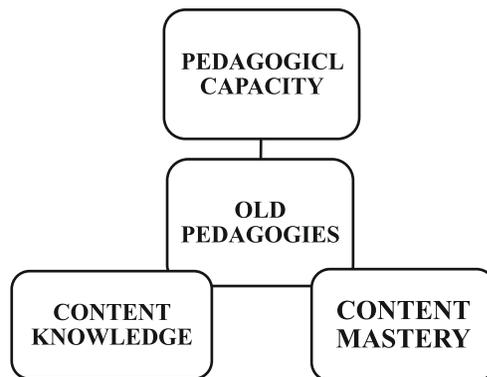


Figure 1: Content retrieved from “A Rich Seam How New Pedagogies Find Deep Learning”

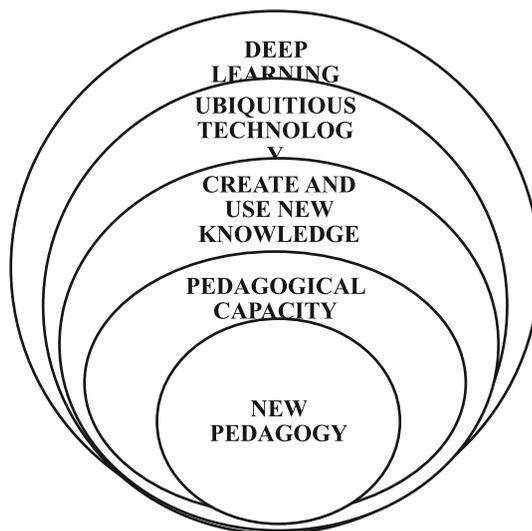


Figure 2: Content retrieved from “A Rich Seam How New Pedagogies Find Deep Learning”

## Personalized Learning

Personalized learning as defined by the Horizon report 2020 on Higher education is the teaching and learning practice that seeks to tune the course experience to the individual needs of the learners (14). It is the star in the sky of artificial intelligence and machine learning. Some of the personalized learning applications are MOOC's (2013), Makerspaces (2015- 2016), Game-based learning (2011-2014), Grammarly, Duolingo, SWAYAM, NPTEL, etc., are framed to be used in the comfortable time and space by the learners. Google reviews that its Google Apps for Education is estimated to reach 110 million users by 2020 as stated in the Horizon report 2020. Personalized learning apps have been increasingly used by the new pedagogies because of their rapid progression and amiable time consideration for the learning process. Though this type of online learning makes the learning process easier but the primary cognitive process takes the dominant role over emotions and intentions of learning. Contrarily, Isaac Asimov in his interview with Bill Moyers, 1988 states that computing would allow the personalized one teacher and one student exposure to be accommodated in great mass. This contrary complementation on personalized learning is experienced everywhere. With this intervention of new technologies, English Language Learning and Teaching happens everywhere and also by any means. For example, when we compose a mail the grammar and spelling corrections are made automatically using the Grammarly application. In this way, the English language is learned on a normal basis using various language learning apps like Duolingo, Busuu, Babel, Hello Talk, Memrise, etc., In addition to learning, these apps include practical tasks to create association and make language learning easier. Personalized learning is the evolution from teacher-developed individualized learning plans to student-centered instruction, which is equipped by Artificial Intelligence- Powered Education (ATEd). Personalized learning includes technical facilities like machine translation, computer linguistics, speech recognition, speech synthesis, intelligent tutoring technologies, etc., to improve language learning.

## Implications of Connectionism Theory

Connectionism theory is followed in the Instructional design models which act as an active learning process in terms of higher-order thinking. This theory is used by the American Psychologist Edward Thorndike in 1898 and formulated Thorndike Laws. According to these formulated laws Thorndike integrated the ideas of cognitive and computational neuroscience, where learning is achieved by associations between a particular stimulus and responses. "Connectionism tries to explain human mental abilities in terms of artificial neural networks" (Banan).

In addition, an individual can mark the associations between the specific stimulus and responses. This has three main significant laws framed by Edward Thorndike they are as follows:

**Laws of Readiness** – It is the learner readiness or the acceptance physically, mentally, and emotionally to learn, analyze, find solutions or responses, frame learning objective, etc., The readiness to learn is the first aspect to be noted by the instructor to introduce their learning objective and it is important to be enhanced because this law will help the learner to prepare their state of cognitive connectivity.

**Laws of Exercise**— This law explains the drilling aspect of learning where the learning which is most often repeated is the best remembered and helps learn complex tasks. This part is very much important in language learning after readiness to learn a language. This law has two sub-divisions namely law of use, stronger the association stronger the learning occurs, and the law of disuse which implies if the connections or association is weaker the learning process will be slower. Some of the suitable terms that imply this law: recall, revise, restatement, re-evaluation, and reconsider.

**Laws of Effect** — This law enumerates the individual's responses to a particular situation enclosed by the reward or reinforcement to make those responses stable and stronger. This law considers the emotional aspects of learning which is very much necessary for language learning in terms of understanding the context. In addition, Thorndike states that the learning which strengthened when it is ushered with the satisfying feeling and at the same time the learning gets weaker when the learning association happens with unpleasant emotions. Precisely, a positive attitude towards learning the English language determines and leads to action in a real-life situation.

These laws of Thorndike highlight the points like associative learning, active learning, and effective learning. The predominant element of this theory is that associative learning helps in filtering the irrelevant details or information and segregates particular parameters of learning to be actively found in the cognitive process. To be simple, it is the ability to deal with the indispensable learning which is pertinent to the important situation. That is the learning which is used for essential needs. In addition to these laws, this theory highlights two important aspects namely Response by Analogy and Associative Shifting, which is the reaction from past learning experiences or identical elements and shifting of responses to related situations respectively. Some of the additional laws included in the modern Instruction Design are Law of Primacy, Law of Recency, and Law of Intensity.

Connectionism is the interconnection of neural networks where knowledge is shared and distributed. This theory is practically applicable to English language learning because English language learning through personalized applications helps in association and implies practical implications for further understanding. Thus, the cognitive process of learning the English language is devised to be easier when learned with the association. Eventually, this process leads to the process of deep learning. The understanding of deep learning implicates the association with that of connectionism theory, where both deal with associative learning, which seemed to be effective in terms of English Language teaching and learning. However, personalized language learning applications act as an intruder for practical understanding and associative learning.

### **Analysis of the Data**

The researcher has conducted a quantitative study by circulating an online questionnaire for the tertiary level learners to analyze the effective use of personalized learning apps by them and how efficiently it induces deep learning among them. There were about 33 responses collected, among which 35.5% of learners use the online mode of learning and 64.5% use offline mode of learners. Those online learners use personalized apps like Grammarly, Duolingo, Hello English. The percentage of learners using the online mode of learning is comparatively less which shows the learners' acceptance toward offline learning. The amount of time the online learners spend on language learning is for about one hour. The

importance and awareness of language learning are shown to be minimal. Those personalized apps are used by the tertiary learner for its comfortable accessibility of time and place and which makes the planning and preparation easier. The learners' affinity towards personalized apps is observed to be increasing high but there is no proper guidance for them to utilize the sources productively. 74.1% of the learners feel that the apps act productive for their language learning process but the usage and its effectiveness seem to be productively less. They are aware of the importance and productivity of learning apps in terms of language learning because 81.5% agreed that the personalized learning act as an effective tool for language learning. Their awareness is not taken into practice and implemented, thus the effective use of personalized apps is considered to be minimal. Eventually, their understanding and perception of effective use of personalized apps are seemed to be agreeable, that is 76.9% of the learners agreed that the usage of personalized learning apps helps in the implication of their language learning in a real-life situation. Some of the responses from learners are suggestive and they feel that they are unaware of effective and good language learning apps. However, 96.5% of the learners accept that the learning or the outcome from personalized apps would help them practice their language learning to experiment in their real-life situations. This shows their interest in accessing personalized learning for English language learning.

### **Interpretation**

The analysis of the data collected is observed to be contrary to the hypothesis, where the research is hypothesized that deep language learning using personalized learning tools or aids helps in the process of natural language learning. The data shows that the effective use of personalized language learning apps is minimal by the tertiary level learners, whereas the efficiency of deep language learning via personalized apps is assumed to be high. If the learners are guided to use appropriate language learning apps they would have enhanced deep learning. However, it is also observed that the learners are expecting their learning to be associated in the real-life situation, but flappable with the lack of awareness among them. Though dwelling in the world of technology the learners are scheduled under a dependent learning atmosphere (traditional classroom), which is projected through the analysis of the data. Despite many modes of online learning like e-learning, distant learning, digital learning, blended learning, and virtual learning; personalized learning creates a comfortable time and place for the learners with their proper planning and space for preparation. It is estimated that digital learning, offline digital learning, virtual learning allow the learners to interact, connect and share their learning outcomes and learning material with other learners and teachers as stated in an article titled "Feasibility of Learning a Language using a Full Online Course" by Masumi Kai. The report of fact laid by Edupert is that the count of enrolment for online learning courses is estimated to be 9.6 million by the year 2021 due to the COVID pandemic and thus the necessity of adapting to personalized learning might get increased. At this stage, the proper awareness of language learning applications has to be appropriately guided by the instructors as found lacked from analysis of the data. The increase in the demand for language learning has been increased because of learners' interest in the productive application of English language skills in their esteemed organization. Thus there would be a rise in the process of personalized language learning to get the estimated result in the skill improvement.

## Conclusion

Deep learning in the process influences the use of high cognitive level in terms of language learning and also high-level use of technology for knowledge creation and includes creative thinking. Deep learning and connectionism theory go hand in hand with associative learning. This significant factor of associative learning implies and triggers creative thinking because it filters the needs or necessary knowledge from the strategic unessential knowledge. This method of learning particularizes the learning process and intensifies the language learning outcome. In addition, this method helps in framing the individual learning objective to be implemented, for which personalized learning better helps. Despite many arguments on online learning and traditional face-to-face learning, the tough situation of the COVID pandemic increased the use of the online platform and nearing technology on the lap of every learner. Intensively, the formula of personalized language learning brings the combination of associative learning and self-evaluation. As per the data collected the overall observation states that the awareness of personalized language learning application is seemed to be minimal but the learners are aware of its significance and its merits to ensure the learning outcome. In the fast-growing techno society and privatization, the educational proportions have been changed accordingly to meet the industrial needs and thus specific skill for the specific purpose of employability has been concentrated by the tertiary level learner. Observing from this aspect the predominance of the English language acts as a vital role because the English language plays a significant role in every employability and industrial sector. To meet this need the learners have to equip with their personalized learning objectives. However for this language learning needs artificial intelligence alerted the combination of machinated language processors like Alexa, Google Assistant, Grammarly, etc., to get acquainted with the English language every day. The new pedagogies that arise in this techno society have their central components of learning; they have new learning partnership, deep learning tasks, and ubiquitous access to digital technology as mentioned by Michael Fullan. The encouragement of language learning and teaching is endorsed by digital access in terms of meeting industrial needs. The effectiveness of English language learning can be achieved by the deep learning technique which is proven with the association with connectionism theory, where both the concepts abide by the associative learning principle. At the same time, the observations from the data show that the tertiary level learners have their indulgence in associative learning principles but they couldn't find or be guided with appropriated sources of learning through personalized language learning applications. Finally, it is perceived that the new pedagogies have to be trained in the access of ubiquitous technology for language learning to endorse deep learning and find its effectiveness.

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## Need for Imparting Soft Skills in High School Students

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### *Abstract*

*The need for superior soft skills is the need that the students should inculcate as an attribute to remain competitive for employment in the present job market. Among all other skills on demand by the recruiters at present, soft skills play a decisive role in the selection process, especially at the campus interviews. The professional institutes in pursuance of elevating their placement records, recognise the importance of soft skills and train the students through various personality development programmes for facing these job interviews. Many times, the duration and content of such programmes may not be sufficient to transform the personality of the students to the desired level. The present research has tried to explore whether such development efforts can be initiated even at the middle and high school to groom the budding professionals to face the challenges of the future. Expert interviews of eminent academicians and teachers in the reputed schools and service management educational institute in Chandigarh Tri-city were conducted to elicit new insights in this domain. As New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has emphasised reforming the education system in the country to meet the demand of the employers and has stressed the need for soft skills among students, the findings from this study contribute to the said objectives of the policy.*

*Keywords: Soft skills, hard skills, education, high school, employment*

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### **Introduction**

Soft skills have become extremely relevant in today's continuously changing environment. The need for superior soft skills is the need that the students should inculcate as an attribute to remain competitive for employment in the present job market. In this regard, Beheshti and Leighton depict collaboration, adaptability, creativity, persuasion and emotional intelligence as the top five soft skills demanded by employers. According to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (2020), there is a target to train youth and adults by 2030 in technical and vocational skills so that their eligibility for employment and entrepreneurship can be enhanced. It is further added that emphasis must be put on life skills such as analytical skills, critical approach, creativity, teamwork, communication skills and conflict resolution. Even the India Skills Reports (2020) states that employers while hiring a candidate, look for a positive attitude, adaptability, learning agility, domain expertise and interpersonal skills.

In line with the target set by SDG, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also believes that 'the purpose of the education system is to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values.' The

guiding principles of NEP 2020 that will enlighten both the academic system, as well as the individual within, are soft skills such as communication, collaboration, ability to work in a team, and flexibility. At present, the onus to develop all type of skills i.e. hard/soft skills is on professional colleges or Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). In a limited time of 3-5 years, where the students have to sharpen their professional and technical skills, it is a challenge for the institutes to focus attention on the student's soft skills. The quality of graduates and their lack of soft skills have been a topic of concern among employers. The HEIs are often blamed for not imparting these skills among the students. It has been argued that hard skills can be enhanced with training by employers but it is the soft skills that determine the employability and long-term growth of the human resource. Further, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is scarce research that addressed the significance of imparting soft skills to the students, especially at the high school level.

Keeping the context in mind and after understanding the importance of soft skills in today's competitive world, the present study investigates the need to impart these skills at the high school level. The main objective of the study is to understand the high school managements' perception of the requirement of soft skills and the involvement of educational establishments in imparting these skills to students. The paper presents the findings of this study. The paper also recommends some measures and initiatives which can be taken to initiate the need for soft skills training for high school students.

## Literature Review

With the individuals and organisations relationship getting dynamic and complex, an extraordinary Intelligence Quotient (IQ) may not be sufficient. Even in personal life, scoring full marks in various examinations and displaying outstanding technical skills are not the only criteria for success. According to Arora, the ability to manage emotions of self and others feelings with compassion in different situations with soft skills amplifies academic intelligence and cognitive capacities (44). The Collins English Dictionary 2020 defines the term soft skills as “desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude”. Hence, Soft skills are character attributes that magnify a person's interconnection, job accomplishment, and professional opportunities. Shipilov considers soft skills as “socio-psychological skills: communicative, leadership, team, public and others”. The author explains that these skills can be beneficial in the most critical life situations and are related deeply to social interaction. According to Labzina et al., “Soft skills relate to a person's ability to work in different working environments alone or with other people” (341). Evenson states that the word, soft skills has been used frequently in both trading and academic fields, in business meetings, and module development (29).

Dewa explains that soft skills education, which is utilized to develop the morality of the students, is supposed to appear in each part of the school curriculum, from the written curriculum, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities of the school organization (45). Diakiw states that investing in soft skills education during a child's early education period has a greater positive impact on a nation's economy. Therefore, certain soft skills like 'self-regulation', 'self-awareness' and 'task completion' which can be conveniently developed in early childhood education are critically predictive of life success. Pandey et al. further elaborate that it has been found that the maximum human brain development occurs at the age range of 12 to 18 (404). Now when it has been quite evident that recruiters are relatively

putting more insistence on life skills, individuals must also adequately grasp the importance of these skills and make constant efforts to learn them. The environment of the classroom is quite ideal and challenging, where the students can understand different ways of handling people, and facilitating learning, doing experiments and transferring knowledge in an interactive rather than prescriptive form. It is a place of learning where one can make mistakes without losing his face and the job (Hangman 21).

In the words of Wats & Wats “The earlier emphasis of competent human resource with high-quality hard skills has transformed to both hard skills and proficiency in soft skills. The education sector which is the backbone for the development of a competent human resource for any country's growth and development cannot remain unaffected by this major shift in the employment sector. HEIs have started understanding the importance of developing soft skills in students for making them relevant to the changed requirements of the world of work” (8). Contrarily, many reports and results indicated that despite increasing demand for soft skills in the current job scenario, substantial job applicants don't possess these desired attributes adequately (Klaus; Mitchell et al 45; Robles 456; Yarbrough; Anthony and Garner 364). Hence, it becomes imperative to impart training on soft skills which can prove very beneficial for school students. These internalized skills will further help them in securing suitable employment in future matching the desired requirement of recruiters in different industries.

## **Methodology**

A series of expert interviews were conducted with the management of educational institutes including Principals and Heads of Departments (HOD) of selected high schools and service management institutions in the tri-city i.e. Chandigarh, Mohali & Panchkula based on their overall rankings. Due to the present scenario of Covid-19 the interviews were held online. Questions were also sent electronically to some of them who responded telephonically. For the study, Tri-city was chosen as it has almost all types of educational institutes and campuses of many reputed organizations, therefore, representing the changing scenario of the Indian job market. Moreover, the ongoing pandemic situation limited the author to restrict the sample to the tri-city. The views regarding the need for imparting soft skills in schools; the initiatives and the role played by the school in imparting soft skills in relation to the employer demand; measures one should take up at individual level to enhance soft skills; the top five soft skills which are required to be inculcated in the high schools were solicited from these experts.

## **Discussion**

The Principal of a leading school A when asked about the need for imparting soft skills in a school environment opined that soft skills are one of the most important components for the personal growth of an individual. Soft skills empower students with a strong conceptual and practical framework to build, develop and manage teams thereby enhancing their career prospects. Schools should not only focus on lessons and grades, but also education for life. Hence it is better to start training students in these skills during the formative years of their education, as early exposure to the life skills will enable them to imbibe these skills in their lives in a phased manner. It was further added that the students regularly participate in role plays, debates and discussions etc. as these activities further developed their inclusive

skills, such as conversation skills, analytical and benefits realization management skills. The students are encouraged to support their classmates or juniors who need help to comply with the target completion date through the peer mentoring programme organized by the school. The 'Buddies' support each other and offer counsel, constructive feedback and reinforcement. It was agreed upon that group activities should be emphasised to make the students understand the importance of teamwork and leadership skills. However, concern was shown over the lack of time, as the school has to abide by the norms and rules regarding syllabus completion and other activities prescribed by their respective boards. It was also suggested that students should tie-up with some common interest clubs and co-curricular venture that can help refine their soft skills. According to the expert, persuasion skills, conflict resolution skills, time management, communication skills and teamwork spirit are the most important five soft skills the students need to inculcate.

The Director of School B feels that soft skills are imperative to calibrate the student's outlook, morals, credence, inspiration, aspiration, feelings, inquisitiveness, readiness to embrace and accept new propositions, resilience, visionary thinking, and various skills sets of communication, demeanours and protocols so that they will be able to deal with different situations laboriously and energetically. Among the various etiquettes and manners, giving due respect to others, having designated time for playing and working, using the correct tone and pitch of voice and words while interacting with teachers and fellow mates etc. are some areas which are very important to be grasped by students. Learning through project work and real-life application-based assignments needs to be encouraged. Regular interactions with counsellor or experts and special gatherings help students build necessary life skills, set achievable goals and reduce stress. This further leads to enhanced resilience, drive for personal success, greater self-confidence and self-esteem among students. Modules like SWOT analysis, morals and values classes, train the brain i.e. incorporating memory techniques and Mind Mapping have been designed for addressing various dimensions of child development. The school management also expects some reforms by the education department so that a blending of hard and soft skills can be achieved for the holistic development of the students. At the individual level, students should try to take part in specialised training workshops for upgrading their soft skills. Communication skills, teamwork, leadership skills, conscientiousness and adaptability are the top five soft skills that need to be developed among the students.

According to the Principal of School C, school education should provide inputs to develop the emotional quotient of the students to handle the difficult situations of life. The ability to apply emotional intelligence can make students flexible in the technical areas as well. Additionally, the development of one's emotional quotient is directly responsible for inculcating habits of success. Involving children in a variety of service-oriented activities, to develop skills, positive attitudes, values and competencies are an integral part of the school curriculum. Do it Yourself learning activities, using the available videos, interactive computer software programmes and other learning material, or observation, sharing each other's personal experience or other project work, is used by the school for ameliorating and boosting the soft skills of the students. Students are motivated for taking on new challenges, working hard to achieve goals, thinking of novel ways to do things. Regular workshops and seminars are conducted by the school to abreast the students about basic life skills. 'Distress to De-Stress' is a serene workshop that is specially arranged for students so that they can handle various situations of daily life including examinations stress. It was further stated that there is an urgent need to recalibrate the syllabus by the board where soft skills are embedded in the

learning environment. Communication skills, timekeeping, positive attitude, adaptability, and learning agility are the top five skills where the students should focus.

As the Principal was not available, the Senior Coordinator of the School D was requested to share her views. According to her, there is an urgent need to revamp the syllabi of the school education. As conditions have changed considerably from the past, education needs to be contemporary to match the job market demands. Providing children with the right environment as early as possible is very essential for their physical and mental health. Additionally, a school should help children become confident individuals by polishing their soft skills and general awareness along with networking skills. It was further added that the school regularly conducts workshops and organizes expert talks to ameliorate the soft skills of the students. Project-based learning, where the focus is on teamwork and leadership skills are given priority. 'My Buddy' programme is a popular programme offered by the school where the less experienced students are guided and supported by the students who have a better knowledge of certain topics. Needless to say that a designated staff member is the mentor of a particular 'My Buddy' group. 'Goodness Bank' and 'Light Channeling Techniques' are some ways adopted by the school to give the daily dose of life skills to the learners. Students should engage themselves in the habit of regularly reading books and articles on soft skills-related topic for internalising these skills. As stated by the Coordinator, leadership skills, communication skills, negotiation skills, strategic thinking and willingness to learn are some soft skills that are in higher demand.

After gaining insights about the need for imparting soft skills and the initiatives taken by different leading schools, the next step was to interview the Principal of a reputed service management educational institute. The students tend to pursue their career in the service industry after completing three years bachelor degree with a curriculum based heavily on soft skills and their application, which is an essential requirement in the service industry. This interaction is required to validate whether the training in soft skills application during three years are enough for a student to transforming their personality or whether high schools should also contribute to this endeavour. It was opined by the Principal that the development of soft skills is a gradual process in a students' life and even three years of rigorous training may not bring the desired change in their personality. The schools should stress especially on communication skills and adaptability skills which are generally lacking when students join the institute. There is a need for higher interpersonal skills among students in the service industry so that they can anticipate the needs of the customers and render services before they ask for them. Such a sense of anticipation if inculcated at early stages in the school can be developed easily at the institute level. Not only anticipation but expressing the feelings correctly to others in a balanced manner is also necessary to enhance interpersonal behaviour. According to him, many students fail to clear group discussion round in the campus recruitment process in their final year due to inappropriate communication. Also, many students who even join the industry soon leave as they cannot cope up with the stress and peer pressure in the highly customer-oriented service industries such as hotel, restaurants, airlines, banks, etc. In the end, the Principal agreed that the role of schools in nurturing these soft skills at early stages in a student can significantly enhance their employability in the service industry.

## **Conclusion**

The intend of this research paper was to show the enhanced relevance of soft skills in

current global challenges, as well as to explain the importance of developing these skills at the early stage of education i.e. at the school level. As it has been observed that the need of the hour is not only to escalate students' awareness of the relevance of soft skills but also to guide them in taking individual responsibility to attain and cultivate these essential life skills to continuously adapt to the changing job market and upgrade their employability skills. The discussion with the major stakeholders of the school level confirmed the need to increase the emphasis on soft skills in the students of high school. It is important that academia develops a strong partnership with the present job market so that students can be nurtured and prepared for the industry at the school level only. The author believes that the schools should vigilantly analyze and amalgamate the coveted soft skills into their curriculum. They need a shift in the way they envision sustainable development. Considering the pressures of today's fast-paced world, the responsibility tilts more towards educational institutions, especially schools to play a greater role in helping children understand and handle human emotions. There is also a need to blend soft skills with the school curriculum, which is only possible when various school boards will incorporate soft skills in the syllabus to prepare the students ready for the industry. However, they should also organize customized training workshops or seminars to support the learners further polish their soft skills. It is fairly pivotal that students should also endeavour for enhancing their soft skills through self-directed and motivated readings and participation in appropriate skills development workshops, training programmes and activities. NEP 2020 which aims at the holistic and multidisciplinary education of an individual also advocates the requirement of soft skills to make the learners ready to get an upper hand in the business world.

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## Identifying Learner Strategies for Skill Development in a Language Classroom

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### *Abstract*

*In the domain of language learning and teaching, the learner and learner strategies have undertaken an increasingly significant role. The individual learner, learner choices, learner autonomy, and learner control have had a pervasive effect for decades now on the learning and teaching of a language. Language learning strategies have been explored and contested for years as well as considerable emphasis has been placed on the role of these strategies for effective language learning. The teacher has been moved to the periphery and the key participant in the classroom, that is, the learner has gained a more prominent role by exhibiting responsibility and control for their knowledge and learning experiences. A substantial body of research has been directed at finding out how language learners handle their learning process and what strategies they employ to enhance performance. Taking into light the above concepts, this paper will provide a broad overview of learning strategies for skill development in a language classroom. The paper will also take into account several landmark studies, identifying their stance on language learning strategies which will further extend our understanding of strategy development and strategy use in a language classroom simultaneously providing insights into how students employ language strategies for effective learning.*

*Keywords: Language learning and teaching, language learning strategies, learner autonomy, learner control*

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### **Introduction**

Strategy employment for language learning has been the subject of research for decades now. As the area of language acquisition is continuously evolving and diversifying, sustained research is needed to explore the ways in which learners engage with language learning strategies. Language learning and teaching through strategy instruction have encouraged a step towards learner-centred settings, giving learners the autonomy, independence, and control to customize their learning preferences in order to achieve language competence. Continuous research into the sphere of language learning and teaching has encouraged learners to work on their ability to manage and control their learning process, thereby avoiding direct mediation on the part of the teacher. The mid-1970s observed a shift in the methodology of language teaching bringing the focus on the learner, inquiring and investigating how an individual learner acquires a language and taking into consideration several factors such as motivation, learning styles and strategies. Various researchers have

stressed the importance of strategy employment for language learning which has resulted in development of several lists, frameworks, and taxonomies regarding strategy use (O'Malley and Chamot 8; Oxford 17; Vandergrift 83). This paper attempts to expound the field of language learner strategy research and draws parallels between different definitions and taxonomies. The correlation between language learning strategies and different language skills, that is., reading, listening, writing, and speaking is also elucidated. Lastly, recommendations are made for potential future research in exploring ways how learning strategies can contribute to effective language learning and consequently improve a learner's language competence. It is worth noting that the focus of language learning strategy research has not merely been confined to strategy used by a learner, but has also taken into account several factors such as how strategy use contributes and optimizes a learners' knowledge of the target knowledge, how strategy use varies across individuals and how it changes over time and so on.

### **Language Learning Strategies: Definition and Classification**

Different researchers over the years have proposed different frameworks for strategy identification and strategy classification (Rubin 42; Naiman et al. 4; O'Malley and Chamot 8; Oxford 17). The concept of language learning strategy has been viewed with skepticism and labelled as “elusive”, “fuzzy”, and one that has “no consensus” (Ellis 529; O'Malley and Chamot 8). Literature on strategy research reveals a vast array of definitions linked to diverse themes, namely “notions of consciousness, problem orientedness, consistency of behaviour, effectiveness” (McDonough 51) in a way advocating a salad-bowl approach, which at times has abounded distrust among researchers and practitioners. For example, Cohen emphasizing the notion of consciousness defines learning strategies as “thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance” (7). In a similar note, White defines learning strategies as “operations or processes which are consciously selected and employed by a learner to learn the TL or facilitate a language task.” However, the behavioural factor has been underscored in the definitions formulated by O'Malley and Chamot, who claim that learning strategies are “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (1). Thus, the task of defining learning strategies has remained a tremendously challenging one.

Research on language learning strategies emerged in the mid-1970s with an identification of the features of a “good language learner” (Naiman et al. 60; Rubin 45) and what strategies were employed by successful learners and how those strategies can prove helpful to less competent learners. The identification of strategies was based on classroom observations, interviews, and diaries. Rubin's work, although lacking solid theoretical base gained momentum and witnessed renewed interest in strategy research in the subsequent years as it mirrored the developments in the branch of cognitive psychology concerning the mental processes of a learner. Rubin proposed a broad definition of learning strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (45) and her strategy grouping scheme subsumes strategies under two categories: one that has a direct contribution to learning “clarification/verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice”, and second, that contributes indirectly to learning “creating practice opportunities and using production tricks such as communication

strategies” (124-26). Naiman et al., also suggested a classification scheme grouping strategies under five broad categories, namely, “active task approach, realization of language as a system, realization of language as a means of communication and interaction, management of affective demands, and monitoring of second language performance” (58-75).

The 1980-90s witnessed an upsurge in strategy research with researchers compiling extensive, multi-levelled taxonomies (O'Malley and Chamot 46; Oxford 17) and evaluating strategy use. For example, O'Malley and Chamot proposed a taxonomy encompassing several strategies which are differentiated as “metacognitive (selective attention, planning, monitoring, and evaluation), cognitive (rehearsal, organization, inferencing, summarizing deducing, imagery, transfer, elaboration), and social strategies (cooperation, questioning for clarification, self-talk)” (46), bearing a correspondence to Rubin's direct and indirect strategies (5). Similarly, another framework, Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) for understanding learning strategies was developed by Oxford (283). She defined learning strategies as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations” (8). She put forward a classification scheme in which strategies are divided into two key groups: direct (memory, cognitive, and compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, and social) (17). Oxford's work on strategy classification differs in numerous ways from earlier attempts; it is more detailed, comprehensive, systematic, and links strategies to each language skill, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Although Oxford's taxonomy (17) is considered to be “perhaps the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date” (Ellis 539), an undeniable overlapping of strategies can be observed. Metacognitive strategy aids the learners in controlling their learning by planning their task; however, the act of planning and self-assessment often requires reasoning, which in itself is a cognitive strategy.

Despite the disagreements and conflicts vis-à-vis the definitions and classification of learning strategies, research has continuously maintained and empirically proven that learners employ strategies during language learning and strategy assists learners in taking control of their learning, and attaining independence and autonomy. Successful learners have been observed to exercise greater strategy use and control as compared to less successful learners, consequently advancing their language performance. Also, more successful learners employ strategies in an effective and productive manner, choosing context relevant strategies or using a combination of strategies for better results. Less proficient learners, on other hand, are often overwhelmed with wide repertoire of strategies; as a result, their strategy selection and strategy use appear to be tangled and desperate (Oxford 56).

### **Language Learning Strategies and Reading Skills**

The relationship between reading skills and strategy deployment has been explored extensively by several researchers over the years with both novices and skilled writers engaging in a myriad of strategies. Numerous studies, through observation and interviews have gained insights into the reading process and how different strategies are employed by the learners for language learning, for example, “skimming, scanning, identifying cognates or word families, guessing, reading for meaning, predicting, questioning, rereading words, sentences or entire passages, activating general or background knowledge, making inferences, following references, separating main ideas from detail, and summarizing”

(Barnett 3; Gascoigne 72) which successfully optimised their reading skills. Studies focused on the explicit teaching of reading strategies have concluded that proficient learners exhibited better metacognitive control which consequently improved learners' reading proficiency. Similarly, studies have also investigated the effects of cognitive and metacognitive instruction on reading comprehension and concluded that both strategies improved the performance and comprehension ability of the learners. In addition, studies have demonstrated that the less proficient learners have a tendency to engage in local, "bottom-up approaches" (Gascoigne 72) in which the act of reading is linear, isolated and text-driven; the focus is merely on the identification of vocabulary items, pronunciation, and sentence structures. In contrast, more successful learners are likely to adopt "top-down" (reader-oriented) or "interactive models" (a combination of both "bottom-up and top-down approaches") (Gascoigne 72) which leads to maximum interaction between the reader and the target language, leaving the text entirely to reader's interpretation. Thus, strategy instruction plays a key role in progressing a learner's reading performance as reading strategies allow the readers to "make intelligent guesses about what might come next in the text [and then] samples only enough of the text to confirm or reject those guesses" (Barnett 3).

### **Learning Strategies for Listening Comprehension**

The sustained regard for language learning strategy research has motivated the researchers to explore the relationship between the use of strategies, particularly metacognitive strategies and listening comprehension. An extensive body of research has been devoted to listening skills in language acquisition, although the effect of learning strategies on listening comprehension is still in its infancy. Listening strategies assist learners to acquire the skills that are required to regulate and direct their ability to listen and comprehend. Several studies concerning the dissimilarities between skilled and non-skilled listeners have shown that skilled learners exhibit better listening comprehension since they deploy strategies in great numbers and engage in an effective orchestration of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies (O'Malley and Chamot 17; Vandergrift 90) which enables them to direct and control their listening efforts in comparison to their less-skilled counterparts. Vandergrift, a prominent researcher in the field has conducted several studies which emphasize the multi-dimensional nature of listening comprehension, highlight and identify different cognitive and metacognitive listening strategies stresses the importance of acquiring skills such as "word recognition and word segmentation" ("Learning" 91), and underscores the role of metacognitive awareness in advancing a learner's listening proficiency. Listening strategies can also be developed through listening diaries, teacher led classroom discussions, and questionnaires, such as Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (Vandergrift 101-02).

### **Learner Strategies and Writing Skills**

Writing has been envisaged as an arduous and a challenging task. Within the discipline of language strategies, a number of studies have been carried out in several academic contexts with a focus on different age groups to affirm that strategy training, particularly metacognitive training can yield positive outcomes with regard to writing skills. Several researchers note that research into the writing strategies is predominantly concerned

with examining a writer's strategic behavior as h/she plans, translates, and reviews a task. Writers have been found to support their writing processes with specific cognitive and metacognitive strategies which subsequently maximizes their writing competence. Research studies demonstrate that strategy instruction and training can assist learners in becoming independent, autonomous writers and can augment their writing performance (Oxford 15). Writing strategies are commonly based on two different theoretical backgrounds: O'Malley and Chamot's classification scheme comprising of "cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies" (46), and Hayes and Flower's writing model which guides the writer through the stages of "planning, translating, and reviewing" (13) and identifies and explores the differences between skilled and non-skilled writers. More skilled writers have shown better metacognitive control and reported greater use of metacognitive strategies of "planning, monitoring, and evaluating" in combination with several cognitive strategies such as "grouping, elaboration, summarization" (Oxford 17). Research also advocates that skilled writers devote much time on planning their writing tasks and spend even more time on revising the content or the global features of their writing and thus outperform those who are not strategic writers. Based on the studies conducted so far, it can be rightly assumed that equipped with the knowledge and instruction of writing strategies, a learner can significantly improve his/her writing performance and achieve more success and autonomy in his/her writing.

### **Language Learning Strategies and Speaking Skills**

Within the field of pragmatic ability, numerous empirical studies have been conducted by researchers that validate the effectiveness of strategy instruction for speaking skills with teachers providing explicit instruction concerning key speech acts. Concerning the question of whether strategy instruction improves speaking ability, the outcomes have been positive (Iwai 311-18; Nakatani 86). O'Malley and Chamot emphasize the importance of speaking strategies noting that they help the learners in "negotiating meaning where either linguistic structures or sociolinguistic rules are not shared between a second language learner and a speaker of the target language" (43). The concept of integrating strategy instruction into the regular classrooms and daily speaking tasks has been highly encouraged by different studies. For instance, Iwai (349) notes that explicit teaching of speaking strategies enhanced the learners' performance in oral production by improving their procedural knowledge, i.e., knowing how to use a language, thus making it more proficient and refined. Similarly, Nakatani's study (88) including an experimental and a control group revealed that learners' performance improved significantly due to an increase in awareness regarding general and specific speaking strategies. Studies have, therefore consistently shown that the experimental groups who were given explicit strategy instruction regarding speaking skills have performed better than those who were not. Language learning strategies have shown to successfully help language learners enhance their pragmatic performance, both at the time of learning as well as performance. Learners with strategy training have tended to outperform learners with regular classroom instruction as they were able to utilize complex linguistic systems in an appropriate manner.

## Conclusion

This paper provides insights into the field of language learner strategy research and throws light at the working definitions of learning strategies and the proposed classification schemes. Although the absence of consensus concerning the terminology and classification of strategies suggests that much work remains to be done, research studies suggest that learners frequently engage in strategy use for language learning skills, i.e., reading, writing, speaking, and listening with successful learners employing more strategies than the less successful ones. Researchers have over the years attempted to discover the relationship between strategy use and language proficiency. The outcomes of these studies have been favorable and positive, thus highlighting the contribution of language learning strategies for successful learning. With the growing interest in the field, an examination of language learning strategies with respect to different variables such as, the four language skills, age, motivation, gender, proficiency, and ethnicity has been conducted. This has diversified the field of strategy research and an increasing demand for employing strategy taxonomies into classrooms can be observed. Since utmost importance has been given to training and learning of academic discourse, it is imperative to equip the learners with learning strategies that will assist them in making the transition from novice to expert writers. The identification, categorization, and classification of learning strategies were originally done for research purposes, but the development of these schemes for instructional purposes appears to be the need of the hour. Teachers need to develop effective methodologies or procedures for less successful learners by taking into consideration the strategy use of more successful learners which would eventually minimize the difference between the two. Advocating the use of learning strategies and providing strategy-based instruction in regular classes may enable the learners to learn and write skillfully, thus making them autonomous and better learners. The knowledge and use of learning strategies may facilitate a self-regulated, self-directed approach to learning and subsequently improve levels of self-efficacy among learners. In addition, strategy research, with a focus on the needs and styles of a learner is assisting the educators and researchers in developing an optimal approach for learning and thus redefining the pedagogical approach in the classrooms. Although much has been explored and revealed by language learner strategy research, there still remain areas which need to be investigated, for example, the effect of strategy instruction on language learning when integrated into regular classrooms or the effect of strategy instruction when taught as a separate course. To reiterate, the appropriate selection and practice of learning strategies may prove to be extremely beneficial for language learners and augment their language proficiency.

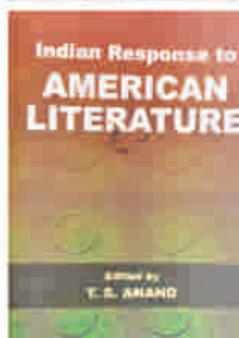
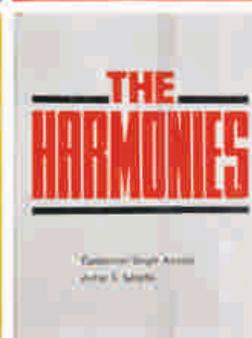
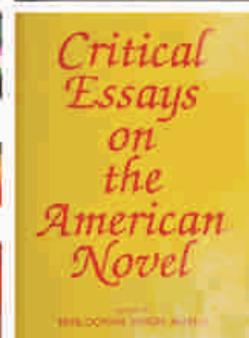
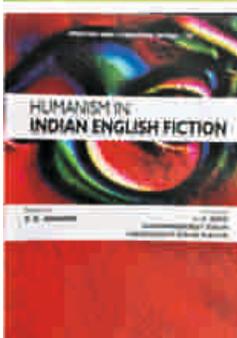
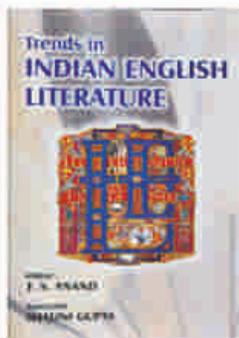
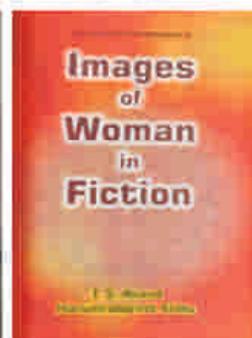
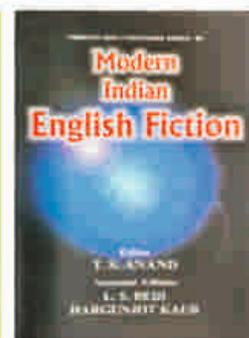
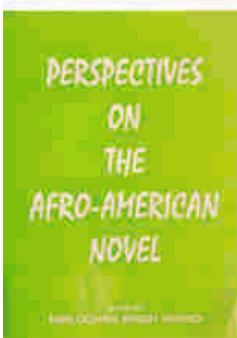
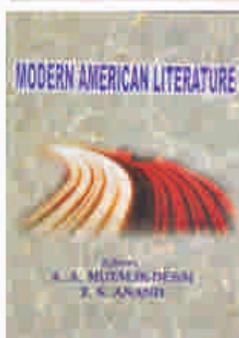
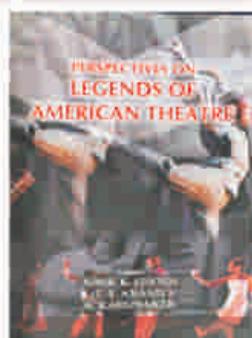
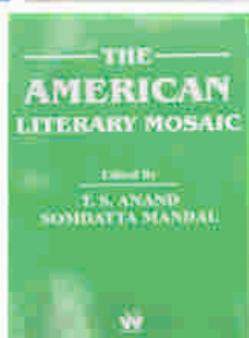
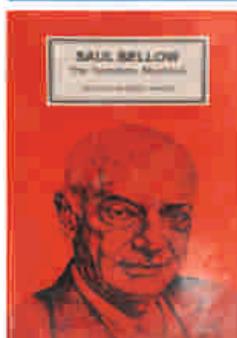
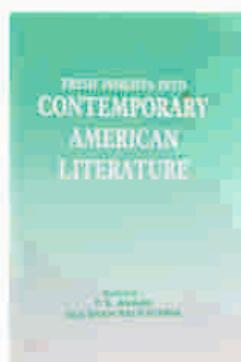
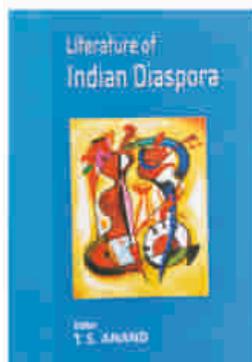
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