

Literary Voice

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From the Editor's Desk

Literary Voice: A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies, Number 23, Volume 1, September 2024 comprises insightful appraisals of literary texts drawn from British, American, Canadian, African and Asian literatures. The research articles probe multiple nuances of disability, and politics of nationalism. Narratives of Illness as manifest in Autopathographies interweave themes of injury, illness, patient-practitioner relationships and critique medical practices. Besides, the essays explore the shifting gender dynamics, the Phenomenon of Internet Celebrity, and how the paternal/masculine authority declines with the rise of maternal/feminine power. The Politics of Post-Apartheid and Racial Power Dynamics gets under sharp analytical focus like the Disability and its sociological and political implications. The write ups analyze the symbolic use of water imagery to represent the interconnected oppression of women and exploitation of nature, challenge the existing stigmatisations surrounding substance use disorders, offer critique of capitalist-driven development, and analyse how marginalized individuals are made 'disposable' in modern India. The essays study the impact on the lives of the members of communities living in bioregions, and examine the concept of waterscape, and the themes of freedom, displacement, memory, trauma, identity, culture, complexities of human relationships, and unravel the dynamics of the Partition.

Literary Discourses, Book Reviews, and investigations centred on Films and T.V. Series, and ELT, are value additions to the current edition. The edition has adequate delight to offer to the devotees of the Muse! We look forward as ever to your responses.

T.S. Anand

Fame, Fortune and Labor in the Digital Age: Exploring the Phenomenon of Internet Celebrity in *People Like Her* by Ellery Lloyd

Aiswarya Vijayan*
Dr. K. Reshmi**

Abstract

The proliferation of the internet, particularly the evolution of diverse social media platforms and its integration into the everyday lives of people, has resulted in a novel cultural phenomenon called Internet Celebrity. In the contemporary digital era, internet celebrities, who gain popularity primarily through their web presence, have amassed global recognition and wield significant power and influence upon society. Their pervasive reach extends across multiple social domains, shaping political discourse, ethical standards, legal frameworks, social institutions, cultural trends, and economic practices. Moreover, being an internet celebrity has become part of the career choices and life plans of a notable fraction of the human populace. The present study intends to explore the complex dynamics of this emerging phenomenon of internet celebrity through a critical analysis of the novel *People Like Her* (2021) by Ellery Lloyd. Employing the concept of demotic turn by Graeme Turner, the study traces the transformation of Emmy Jackson, the protagonist of the novel, from an ordinary individual to an internet celebrity. It examines the production, dissemination, and consumption of fame in the digital age, as well as the nature, characteristics, and mechanisms of online fame. The study also analyses the emergence of internet celebrity as a lucrative business model and the work done by internet celebrities as a form of labor within the capitalist framework.

Keywords: Internet celebrity, demotic turn, online fame, labor, capitalism.

The twenty-first century has witnessed the explosive growth of new idols who owe their fame to social media. The new kind of celebrity, better known as internet celebrity, has altered the ways in which fame is created, consumed and sustained. Fuelled by technological advancements, internet celebrity has become a cultural phenomenon that shapes the ideologies, discourses, and fantasies of individuals, particularly the younger generations. Their pervasive reach extends across multiple social domains, shaping political discourse, ethical standards, legal frameworks, social institutions, cultural trends, and economic practices. Moreover, being an internet celebrity has become part of the career choices and life plans of a notable fraction of the human populace. With the exponential growth in the number of ordinary people turning into internet celebrities day by day, a detailed examination of the phenomenon, its societal influence, and subsequent consequences becomes imperative. The present study intends to explore the complex dynamics of this emerging phenomenon of internet celebrity through a critical analysis of the novel *People Like Her* (2021) by Ellery Lloyd.

The phenomenon of internet celebrity has generated fascination across cultures and has received attention from scholars across disciplines. Crystal Abidin, digital anthropologist and prominent scholar in the field of internet culture, offers a

comprehensive analysis of the emergence, operation and influence of these celebrity figures, in her work *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Celebrity Online* (2018). In her view,

Internet celebrity refers to all media formats (people, products, icons, figures, etc.) that attain prominence and popularity native to the internet, although the spillover effects and afterlives may include cross-border flows outside of the internet. Internet celebrities are mainly known for their high visibility, whether this be attributed to fame or infamy, positive or negative attention, talent and skill or otherwise, and whether it be sustained or transient, intentional or by happenstance, monetized or not. (15-16)

The text chosen for the study, *People Like Her* by the London-based husband and wife duo Ellery Lloyd, narrates the life and experiences of an internet celebrity. The critically acclaimed writing team comprises journalist and editor Collette Lyons and renowned author Paul Vlitos. With works characterized by insightful exploration of contemporary issues, they have established themselves as prominent voices in modern British fiction. While Collette has contributed to *The Guardian*, *The Daily Graph*, and *The Sunday Times* and authored two travel books, Paul has written two novels, *Welcome to the Working Week* (2007) and *Every Day is Like Sunday* (2008). Together, they have produced other notable works, including *The Club* (2022) and *The Final Acts of Juliette Willoughby* (2024). *People Like Her*, a contemporary psychological thriller, follows a fashion editor turned influencer, Emmy Jackson, who gained fame by showcasing the unfiltered realities of raising her two children. The narrative that alters between three different viewpoints, that of Emmy, her husband Dan and a hater who is out for revenge against Emmy and her family, offers a realistic portrayal of the behind-the-scene lives of the influencers. The present study traces the transformation of Emmy from an ordinary individual to an internet celebrity, employing the concept of demotic turn by Graeme Turner. Analyzing the trajectory and experiences of Emmy, it examines the production, dissemination, and consumption of fame in the digital age, as well as the nature, characteristics, and mechanisms of online fame. It also analyses the emergence of internet celebrity as a lucrative business model and the work done by Emmy to attract and sustain the attention of her audience as a form of labor within the capitalist framework.

The evolution of Emmy from an ordinary individual to a celebrity of international renown provides valuable insights into the creation of digital fame. The widespread proliferation and accessibility of networked media have radically altered the process of production, circulation, and consumption of fame. As James Bennett notes, not just the pursuit of fame become “increasingly ordinary”, but also “the tools with which to become famous” (179). The visibility and popularity of ordinary people in media, what Turner referred to as the 'demotic turn', reached its peak with the democratizing tools of digital media. The expansion of online fame witnessed “the opportunity of celebrity spreading beyond elites of one kind or another and into the expectations of the population in general” (Turner 92). Emmy is a commoner who transformed into an influencer, using the democratic tools of digital media, converting herself into a self-brand, and earning a living out of it. She relied

exclusively on the photography platform Instagram to attract a million-plus followers, becoming “the first of the British Instamums to hit seven figures” (Lloyd 26). Emmy's popularity and success can be attributed to a cultural shift that celebrates the ordinary and places increased interest in “the lived experience of the ordinary” (Turner 92). As Emmy observes, “nobody likes a show-off. We want naturally pretty women, goofy grins, rainbow colors, honest captions, and photogenic disarray” (Lloyd 25). Recognizing the growing demand for authentic and relatable content, she began sharing her everyday experiences of raising her two children. She effectively resonated with a broad audience seeking genuine connections and relatable stories by portraying herself as an ordinary mother navigating parenting challenges, thereby cultivating a loyal following. Emmy's ascent to online fame and stardom resulted from deliberate and meticulous planning, which extended over the years. Although Emmy claims that “the career change from fashion maven to flustered mama was just a happy accident” (Lloyd 5), the version of events recounted by her husband Dan proves it otherwise. According to Dan, Emmy never does a thing by accident and further affirms that “if you really think my wife fell into doing this by accident, it just goes to show that you have never met my wife” (Lloyd 8). Emmy kick-started her preparation for the 'influencer game' way back, even before planning her pregnancy, meeting an agent and pitching her idea for a shoe blog. Irene, the agent, agreed to represent her but recommended that she focus on mental health and motherhood, which she identifies as “the next big untapped markets” in the influencer industry (Lloyd 24). However, she suggested Emmy to start with a shoe blog to learn the mechanisms of the digital ecosystem and to create “a good backstory to make the whole thing feel more organic, and authentic” (Lloyd 24). The moment Emmy realized she was pregnant, she set plans and worked on launching a parenting blog in motion. To Dan's surprise, Emmy had already bagged Instagram handles and domain names for both Barefoot and Mamabare accounts by the time she was three months pregnant. Thus, everything was put together, as Dan describes it, “before she had even written her first sentence about stilettos. Let alone that within three years she would have a million followers” (Lloyd 9). Thus, in the contemporary networked era, the acquisition of fame can be accidental, as in the case of many viral stars or carefully orchestrated, as in the case of Emmy.

Whether the fame be accidental or pre-planned, internet celebrities, including Emmy, are predominantly self-made individuals achieving fame “structurally independent of the mainstream media” (Turner 71). As content production and circulation are done exclusively on open, reciprocal and accessible social media platforms, the highly gatekept, institutionalized and authoritative traditional media is entirely excluded from the process of creation of digital fame. Emmy planned and created all her content independently and built her following on Instagram without the backing of any traditional media networks or intermediaries. However, despite the paradigm shift in the creation of fame, internet celebrities were not regarded highly in the early days as their integration to the mainstream media was minimal.

Nevertheless, today, digital fame is no longer limited to the virtual realm and “it is not uncommon for the internet celebrities to rival or surpass traditional celebrities in terms of global popularity or reach” (Abidin 14). Dan, Emmy's husband, aptly points out that “Harry G. Frankfurt has considerably fewer followers on Instagram than my wife does” (Lloyd 9). Moreover, as demonstrated by Emmy's example, internet celebrities seamlessly blend into the mainstream media, with television channels frequently inviting them for interviews and chat shows, prominent brands seeking them to endorse their products, and publishers and movie makers approaching them to get their stories. Emmy's observation about *justanothermother*, another Instamum, that “she was getting TV adverts, had a big contract lined up with Pampers, had her own (very early) morning show on talk radio”, demonstrates this. Emmy has also been invited to media appearances, encompassing television shows, interviews, panel talks, and guest slots on radio programs. In other words, the fame of the internet celebrities has reached a level where the traditional industries use them to sustain their business.

Another characteristic of digital fame is its rapid attainability, with the extensive reach and instant accessibility of social media channels that facilitate faster dissemination of content. Individuals can share their content with millions of people across the world instantly. Moreover, with the viral nature of these platforms, engaging content is shared rapidly across platforms, often attracting millions of views, shares and likes in a very short period of time. Along with the content, the popularity of the content creators also reaches global audience, transcending all geographical boundaries, in no time. With few posts on her Instagram page going viral, Emmy is transformed into an internet sensation in a couple of weeks. Emmy reflects on her swift rise to fame, stating, “It feels like it all happened in an instant” (Lloyd 4). Dan also shares his surprise and disbelief when he states, “neither one of us really anticipated how quickly it would take off or how famous it would make us, as a family, or how exposing that would feel” (Lloyd 48), underscoring the instant acquisition of fame in the digital age.

Despite its accessibility and quick achievability, digital fame is highly transient and fleeting in nature. With the rapidly changing internet trends and constantly updating platform algorithms, unpredictable audience engagement and short attention spans, growing competition and oversaturation of content, the prominence of any celebrated figure in the digital landscape can fade away in no time. As Emmy puts it, “one false move, one fuckup, one badly judged comment, some cack-handed virtue signaling, could bring the whole thing tumbling down. The paid appearances, the shoots, the campaigns, all of it. It happens to people. It happens overnight” (Lloyd 110). Therefore, internet celebrities are often “easily replaced and quickly forgotten”, and they can “move from maximum visibility...to complete obscurity within a matter of weeks” (Turner 40). Sustaining popularity often requires solid groundwork, ongoing efforts and a thorough understanding of the audience and online landscape by the celebrities. Emmy's constant efforts to remain in the limelight and continued fears about losing it prove a testimony to the impermanence

of digital fame. Dan remarks, “The thing people always get wrong about influencing for a living is that they think this stuff is easy... That they could do it if they wanted to—which, of course, they don't” (Lloyd 68). According to him, “the main thing that people fail to understand is that this is work. Hard work. Planning ahead. Knowing when and where and how to mention your brand partners, finding ways of just slipping in references... as if they're simply part of the texture of your life” (Lloyd 69). He further adds, “all elements have been considered and reconsidered, every angle fussed over...to ensure that everything is perfectly calibrated for maximum shareability” (Lloyd 70). Thus, internet fame of any type or magnitude is short-lived unless channelled meticulously.

The contemporary celebrity, according to Turner, represents a “worrying cultural shift: towards a culture that privileges the momentary, the visual and the sensational over the enduring, the written, and the rational” (4). Abidin contends that Turner's observation holds maximum relevance in the context of internet celebrities. In the contemporary attention economy, almost anything, a single image or a video, a chance encounter or a relatable moment, even controversies or acts of infamy, can transform a person into an internet sensation. Adverse actions, controversy or criticism often tend to draw more public interest than positive or neutral content; as Emmy observes, “There is no such thing as bad publicity” (Lloyd 174). Emmy's insight on the influencer industry that it is an “industry that constantly demands I reveal more, peel off yet another layer of skin, bare everything, share everything, just to entertain some half-interested stranger for a quarter of a minute” (Lloyd 165-166), reveals its demanding and invasive nature. Dan's perspective on social media is particularly noteworthy. He suggests that social media leaves little space for real feelings or emotions as it often favours idealized portrayals. He questions, “Who posts a picture of themselves crying, with puffy eyes and snot on their chin? Who posts a picture of themselves feeling blue?” (Lloyd 145). Moreover, it is the ability of a person to grab attention rather than any demonstrable talent, skill or achievement that makes a person popular on the internet. Emmy's fame was largely contingent on her ability to grab and sustain the attention of her audience rather than any skill, achievement or talent. Therefore, Daniel Boorstin's famous aphorism on celebrity that “the celebrity is a person who is well-known for their well-knownness” (58), best applies to internet celebrities, including Emmy.

According to Tahere Sarfi et al., internet celebrities “not only amass popularity and recognition through content but also capitalize on lucrative opportunities for financial gain” (211). Corporations and advertisers are increasingly keen to collaborate with these digital luminaries as they realize the efficacy of social media platforms for product and service promotion. Among the modern marketing strategies that utilize “more subtle and indirect methodologies” (Sarfi et al. 211) to engage customers, the employment of internet celebrities for product and service endorsements has become a prominent strategy. Research suggests that influencer marketing has emerged as “one of the most lucrative strategies for marketing today” (Arnesson and Carlsson 71). While incorporating influencers helps marketers reach an extensive and diverse audience, collaborating with these enterprises allows

influencers to earn revenue from their digital activities. For Emmy, the online revenue she garners is the sole income source of the four-membered family with two children and a full-time writer husband who has not published anything in the past eight years. Dan makes this clear when he says, “if we pull the plug now there's no way we can pay the bills” (Lloyd 47). However, their extravagant and luxurious life is a testament to the substantial wealth she amasses through her brand endorsements and collaborative partnerships.

With the growth and popularity of influencer marketing, internet celebrity has become a lucrative business model. Emmy's assertion that “being Instagram famous is like being a Monopoly millionaire” reveals the promising prospects of revenue generation from the digital venture (Lloyd 128). Her agent Irene, who makes a career shift from representing the actresses to the influencers, also observes that “influencers are where the money's at” (Lloyd 51). Emmy, with her Mamabare account of million-plus followers, has attracted paid ads, product collaborations and partnerships from numerous brands across the continent. She is also the face of countless campaigns launched by various brands, including the Mother's Day campaign of a famous toilet paper brand. A rough strand of hair featured in her Instastories and a casual mention of hair woes alone earned her “a spare room full of lotions and potions to help plaster it down—as well as ten thousand pounds from Pantene” (Lloyd 21). The birthday party of her daughter Coco was exclusively sponsored by different brands in exchange for mentions and a designated number of hashtags of each sponsoring brand, starting from the caterer to the makeup artist.

Although the prospect of being an internet celebrity seems very promising and rewarding with the possibility of revenue generation from enjoyable digital activities, creating and sustaining online fame as well as monetizing it is a complex endeavour that requires constant efforts and hard work. According to Khamis et al., drawing the attention of the audience itself proves to be challenging in the present-day attention economy “wherein an unprecedented number of communicators compete across more screens for increasingly distracted, dispersed and privatised audiences” (Khamis et al. 5). Moreover, businesses and brands often choose to collaborate with content creators who have considerable reach and meaningful engagement. Therefore, monetization is possible only for those creators who cultivate the right kind of social capital that appeals to the brands. Thus, those aspiring for fame and fortune from their digital activities need to make continuous efforts “to generate a form of 'celebrity' capital by cultivating as much attention as possible and crafting an authentic 'personal brand' via social networks, which can subsequently be used by companies and advertisers for consumer outreach” (Hearn and Schoenhoff 194).

According to Ruiz-Gomez, the influencers establish “their own authentic 'personal brand' by investing the same amount of dedication, time and effort that successful brands devote to building theirs” (20). This work influencers put into branding themselves can be understood as a form of labour encompassing a range of activities, including crafting a unique identity, exhibiting authenticity and intimacy, engaging their audience consistently with regular posts and updates, and

maintaining frequent interactions with them. Analysing the audience demographics, Emmy decided to cater to a particular niche audience, social media mamas (the community of women on the internet). For her targeted audience, she invented her unique identity as Mamabare, a mama who bares everything with a grin. Along with authentic discussions on parenting, Mamabare shared her unfiltered family life online. She also assumed the role of a trusted guide, actively listening to the parenting dilemmas of her followers and offering them thoughtful advice. She explains the importance of replying to every single message, “even if an unusually high proportion were from the creepier end of my follower contingent, knowing that if I don't they'll complain in my comments or bitch on the gossip sites that I'm getting too big for my boots” (Lloyd 50). Therefore, she ensures that every comment is acknowledged and every DM is replied to before the day ends.

Information and media studies scholar Alison Hearn, in her article titled “Meat, Mask, Burden: Probing the Contours of the Branded Self”, defines self-branding as a “distinct kind of labour; involving an outer-directed process of highly stylized self-construction, directly tied to the promotional mechanisms of the post-Fordist market” (167). Influencers, including Emmy, deliberately engage in affective and immaterial labour in order to sustain attention, establish themselves as self-brands and achieve monetary benefits. While creating content that resonates with their audience could be seen as creative labour, learning and adapting to the changing trends, audience preferences, and social media algorithms could be understood as intellectual labour. Strategic planning done by influencers is akin to strategic thinking in the traditional labour process, and monetization and finance management by influencers demand financial acumen, which is yet another form of labour. In addition to this, building and sustaining relationships with the audience and their peers require interpersonal skills as well as enormous emotional and psychological investment from the influencers. Thus, influencers' self-branding involves a combination of different forms of labour, including creative, emotional, strategic, intellectual and financial labour.

As with any other capitalist enterprise, self-branding also ultimately benefits the brands that extract value from the branded selves of the influencers and exploit their labour. The monetary gain the influencers derive from this market enterprise, in most cases, did not adequately compensate their labour. They are often offered free products in exchange for brand promotion, which many not align with the value and effort they contribute to the brands. While Emmy complains about a room full of unused products, her assistant Winter notes, “You can't eat free clothes, or pay your rent with them” (Lloyd 106). Given the power dynamics at play, the brands often have more bargaining power within the influencer-brand relationship, which, once again, can prove to be exploitative to the influencers. Moreover, the brands abruptly terminate their contracts with influencers, abandoning all the promises, when they feel that the influencer's behaviour, content or brand image no longer aligns with or undermines the values and image of their brand. Emmy encountered a similar

situation when her friend Polly levied allegations against her, accusing her of fabricating stories. Immediately, all the brands she had collaborated with began contacting her agent, with some attempting to break ties with her while others abruptly dropped all their contracts. Only after issuing an apology, following Irene's advice, Emmy could mitigate the situation at least partly. These incidents underscore the precarious nature of influencer's work, where the brand relationships can turn upside down swiftly, often resulting in losing all their efforts and hard-earned opportunities without recourse for compensation. Therefore, the work performed by influencers can be viewed as a form of labour within a capitalist framework, which tends to be exploitative for the influencers and advantageous for capitalists.

Undertaking a critical analysis of the novel *People Like Her* by Ellery Lloyd, the study has illuminated the intricate dynamics of the phenomenon of internet celebrity, focusing on the interplay between fame, fortune and labour. The novel offered a critical lens to explore the multifaceted nature of internet celebrity and the mechanisms of production, dissemination and consumption of fame in the contemporary digital age. The study demonstrated that the prospect of being an internet celebrity, although potentially lucrative, subjects these celebrities to the exploitative pressures inherent within a capitalist framework. It illustrated that the capitalist exploitation of digital labour by influencers disproportionately benefits the platforms and corporations, leaving the influencers vulnerable to pressure, privacy threats, and public scrutiny. The study contributes to a broader discourse on internet celebrity, influencer economy and its impact on contemporary society.

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The Metapsychology of Mother-Wife-Whore Paradigm A Close Reading of Harold Pinter's *Flora and Emma*

Alankar Das Dalal*

Abstract

One of the key concerns in the whole of Pinter's dramatic oeuvre is an inevitable yet subtle power struggle in the construction of identity. Keeping this basic premise unaltered, he traces the trajectory of the women characters through the paradigm of the mother, the wife and the whore starting from *The Birthday Party* (1958) to *Mountain Language* (1988), to finally establish a domineering role. The aim of this paper is to explore how the paternal/masculine authority declines with the rise of maternal/feminine power within the social structure of the family, particularly through the characters of Flora in *A Slight Ache* (1961) and Emma in *Betrayal* (1978). While the former exercises her power through garbed maternal feelings, the latter capitalizes upon male desire to establish her authority. These strands will be explored in the study through the lens of Freudian and Lacanian metapsychology.

Keywords: Motherliness, Power, Femininity, Desire, Identity

Introduction

In the plays of Harold Pinter, the limelight is not on the contemporary society but on the microcosm of the individual beings, either in the private world of their 'room' or in their interaction with others. Though Pinter has refused having ever read Freud, Katharine Worth asserts in *Revolutions in Modern English Drama*,

His interest gathers around the revelation of characters: he focuses attention on the subtext, the Freudian slips, compulsive repetitions and so on that give the characters away: we are drawn into 'reading' them. (qtd. in Sakellaridou 5)

The portrayal of women in Pinter's plays from *The Birthday Party* (1958) to *Mountain Language* (1988) has undergone a sea-change though the basic premises of power struggle and identity have remained the same. In the early works, the characters of Meg in *The Birthday Party* or Rose in *The Room* (1960) appear to play subservient roles while those of Ruth in *The Homecoming* (1965), Kate and Anna in *Old Times* (1971) or Emma in *Betrayal* (1978) appear to be more powerful and domineering. However, when viewed from Freud's psychoanalytic theory, even the early portraits acquire sufficient dominance in their smothering motherliness. The aim of this paper is to explore the aplomb with which the mother-wives play their roles with respect to their son-lovers.

The question that the stereotypically revered institution of marriage is not a haven of marital bliss has often been raised and analysed by Pinter. The discord in the conjugal life and the frequent absence of the husband from the house has resulted in not only the consequent decline of paternal authority but also the gradual rise of maternal power within the social structure of the family. This urges the wives to seek alternative sources for their emotional and sexual fulfillment. Consequently, they

tread a precarious line between being the mother and the seducer. Regarding this, Nancy Chodorow writes in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*,

...the decline of the husband's presence in the home has resulted in a wife 'as much in need of a husband as the son is of a father'. This wife is likely to turn her affection and interest to the next obvious male – her son – and to become particularly seductive toward him. (104)

While Freud's Oedipus complex entails the son's desire for the mother, I contend that Pinter's female characters desire the son not only to channelize their libidinous drives but also to exert their power to control and dominate the male through garbed maternal feelings since it is only in the paradigm of a mother-wife-whore can they find a possibility of establishing their authority. In this regard, this study shall investigate the complex relationships of Flora and Edward in *A Slight Ache* and Emma, Robert and Jerry in *Betrayal*.

Flora's Trajectory from Enslavement to Emancipation

While Meg in *The Birthday Party* is rejected by her father and Mrs. Stokes in *A Night Out* abandoned by her dead husband, in *A Slight Ache* Flora is deprived of a child. However, in the course of the play, she, like Rose in *The Room*, not only mothers her husband, the only male available to her in the country house, but, unlike Rose, also establishes her dominance in the family structure. In the early plays of Pinter there is a conspicuous division in the depiction of the two aspects of the feminine principle, the mother and the whore, in the portrayals of Meg and Lulu in *The Birthday Party* or Mrs. Stokes and the Girl in *A Night Out*. In *A Slight Ache* this distinction is sufficiently blurred in the character of Flora as she emerges as an autonomous entity supporting the Freudian theory that “women should find fulfillment in their own femininity” (qtd. in Sakellaridou 51) which anticipates Pinter's further developments in the characters of Sarah in *The Lover* and Ruth in *The Homecoming*. However, in the play the central focus is on Edward, Flora's husband though by the conclusion the limelight shifts to the mother-mistress. Flora, unlike Meg or Mrs. Stokes, does not appear to be a tyrannical wife-mother overshadowing the husband-son with her smothering attitude since the scales of power vacillate between the husband and the wife. However, once the outsider intrudes and the son is born, the mother empowers herself to dispossess the father. Edward, by inviting the Matchseller, unconsciously authors his own death.

Though the setting in *A Slight Ache* is different from the earlier plays of Pinter, the opening scene underlines the similar theme of discord and disharmony in the barren relationship of Edward and Flora. The disagreement in the initial exchange between the husband and the wife indicates the inner vacuity that lurks in their marital life.

FLORA. You know perfectly well what grows in your garden

EDWARD. Quite the contrary. It is clear that I don't. (*Plays I* 143)

This inevitably reflects the sterility in their conjugal life and how Flora yearns for someone who would know her garden, her flowers, give her love and make her feel

complete. In *The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays*, Gabbard observes, “Flora shows her emptiness in her constant sexual demands” (77). However, due to the impotence of her husband she is denied all that she desires. Moreover, he appears to dominate his wife to subservience, clearly evident in the wasp episode when he instructs and she obeys. Ironically, the killing of the wasp implies that Edward sustains his security by imposing his control and will on the environment but Flora, whose very name invokes the goddess of flowers, is a part of nature and represents the earth-mother. Consequently, when nature retaliates, the man dwindles to a pathetic wreck.

According to Freud, the female Oedipus complex involves the transference of cathexis from the original love object, the mother to a new love object, the father. When a girl discovers that her father possesses what she lacks, she not only feels attracted towards her father but also identifies herself with the mother. The chapter, 'Sigmund Freud's Classical Psychoanalytic Theory' in *Theories of Personality* mentions, “However, her love for the father and for other men as well is mixed with a feeling of envy because they possess something she lacks ... She imagines that she has lost something valuable, while the boy is afraid he is going to lose it. To some extent, the lack of a penis is compensated for when a woman has a baby, especially if it is a boy baby” (55). Thus, this son becomes the 'penis substitute' for the mother whom she wishes to possess and control. Consequently, the desire for the male is a disguised expression of the desire for power. In this regard, the feminist Shulamith Firestone's opinion in *The Dialectic of Sex* becomes noteworthy.

I submit that the only way that the Oedipus Complex can make full sense is in terms of power. We must keep in mind that Freud observed this complex as common to every normal individual who grows up in the nuclear family of a patriarchal society... (47)

The ploy that Flora capitalizes upon is her mothering of Edward, thereby reducing him to the stature of a child. She treats him as a baby and calls him “Beddie-Weddie”. When he complains of aching eyes, she offers to bathe them. She is presented here as a protective mother showering her genuine concern for the child. Thus, Gabbard has rightly pointed, “Flora shows her will to dominate in the same way that Rose does. She reduces Edward to a child. Thus, she fills her own desire for a child and simultaneously emasculates Edward” (73). Her motherliness is also noticeable in her interaction with the Matchseller. Seeing him perspire, she mops his forehead and face with her chiffon. She even gives him a name, Barnabas which, according to Hinchliffe, means “son of exhortation” who becomes for her “the desirable and submissive combination of child, husband and lover” (69). Finally, she attains absolute power over her surrogate son when she dehumanizes the Matchseller into an object and says, “I'm going to keep you” (161). He becomes a thing to be possessed by the mother.

What dominates the character of Flora is her deep sexual cravings which unfortunately Edward fails to fulfill. On the other hand, the moment Flora confronts the Matchseller, she is sexually aroused. Her recounting of how she was raped in the past on a hillside cattle track by a poacher is a prelude to the passionate yearnings that

she is about to unleash a little later. Her words, “Hmnn, you're a solid old boy, I must say. Not at all like jelly” (*Plays 1* 161) are replete with sexual undertones. The repressed desires of Flora are expressed blatantly when she speaks of sex and seductively allures the Matchseller, “Tell me all about love. Speak to me of love” (161). Thus, in the words of Gabbard,

Finally, when she is alone with the Matchseller, she sees him through her own desires. He becomes first the embodiment of her sexual fantasies – the poacher. Then the Matchseller becomes the embodiment of her anal and phallic pleasures. (80)

Consequently, she feels he has been waiting for so long only for her and, therefore, decides “I'm going to put you to bed. I'm going to put you to bed and watch over you” (*Plays 1* 161). Thus, the Matchseller becomes the screen for a projection of her desires that finally enables, as Martin Esslin puts it in *Pinter the Playwright*, her “liberation from a hated, impotent husband” (94-95).

However, this liberation of Flora comes at the cost of Edward. While the Matchseller is restored to youth at the end of the play, Edward weakens into a mere shadow of his former self. His slight ache enlarges into a suffocating pain that smothers him into absolute destruction. He is blinded like Stanley and silenced like Albert. He is defeated, castrated and ousted not only from the house but from the life of Flora as well. Nor is the Matchseller's stance victorious for it is uncertain whether Flora shall allow his personality to bloom or dominate his life, and bring about his ruin, like that of Edward's. However, it is only Flora who emerges triumphant in the 'desperate battle'. She not just fulfils her desire for a child and her sexual needs but also establishes herself as powerful enough to subjugate the male characters. Therefore, Penelope Prentice in *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic* correctly says, “Flora, however, who gains dominance in the end, like Ruth in *The Homecoming*, is the first of Pinter's major characters to finally achieve power who is also sympathetic and, like Ruth, sees what is going on beneath what is said” (64).

Transcending Traditional Boundaries: The Liberation of Emma into a 'New Woman'

Betrayal, first staged in 1978, opens in a pub where Emma, the wife of Robert, and Jerry, Robert's best friend meet two years after their affair had ended. The action in the subsequent scenes, however, follows chronologically backward, thereby, making the exposition the final episode. It is when the past is encountered and the lost Eden is revisited that the present achieves meaning and the characters can be dissected. However, in the first scene Emma appears to be considerably a bold and empowered figure who runs a prosperous gallery in contrast to Jerry's “hangover”. While Jerry confesses that he is “not all that well”, Emma asserts that she is “fine. Just like old times” (*Plays 4* 14). This is indicative of how least she has been affected by the end of her affair with him. Though the play emphasizes more on the issue of time and memory, the tacit struggle for power in the male-female discourses cannot be entirely overlooked. Emma tries to reduce Jerry to helplessness by repeatedly

asking whether he thinks of her, trying to suggest that he still depends on her emotionally.

EMMA. Ever think of me?

JERRY. I don't need to think of you.

EMMA. Oh?

JERRY. I don't need to *think* of you. (*Plays 4 18*)

The repetition in Jerry's words and the extra emphasis on the word “think” inevitably reflects how Emma has become an inalienable aspect of his being that he can never extricate himself from. He does not need to be with her or to think of her in order to remember her. She has become an integral part of his existence. However, Emma reveals no such passionate or emotional attachment or fervour. In the words of Michael Billington, “Emma's self-control, emotional poise and professional success contrast with Jerry's tentativeness, uncertainty and enslavement to past memories” (260).

The reason why Jerry suffers is perhaps because he finds no emotional or sexual fulfillment with his wife, Judith. She is a doctor and as such remains busy with her patients. Her life revolves mostly around her profession and her kids. She hardly spends time with her husband. Even Robert points out how once she had to leave in the middle of the dinner for her night shift at the hospital. Moreover, Jerry learns that she has an admirer who takes her out for drinks. This amounts to a void being built in him which leads him to transcend the boundaries of marriage and find fulfillment of his desires elsewhere. Dylan Evans describes Lacanian desire as being “entirely sexual” (*Dictionary 37*). In *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* Lacan states, “what's important is to teach the subject to name, to articulate, to bring this desire into existence” and “In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world” (228-29). We find Jerry's articulation of his desire at the very beginning of the affair in the last scene of the play. With an irresistible passion and unabashed directness, he expresses his love, moulding Emma into the *objet petit a*. In his 1962-63 seminar on 'Anxiety', Lacan departs from Freud in arguing that the cause of anxiety is not without an object (*n'est pas sans objet*) though this object “cannot be symbolised” as other objects. “This object is *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire ... Anxiety arises when the subject is confronted by the desire of the Other and does not know what object he is for that desire” (Evans 12). Emma becomes, at the level of the Lacanian signifier, this unattainable object-cause of desire for Jerry, acquiring “the status of an algebraic sign”, as Lacan puts it in *Écrits* (12). This becomes evident in the following outburst, JERRY. I should have had you, in your white, before the wedding. I should have blackened you in your white wedding dress, blacked you in your bridal dress, before ushering you into your wedding, as your best man. (*Plays 4 86*)

Jerry completely surrenders himself at Emma's disposal and feels that if she denies him his love, he will perish to death – “I'll be a cripple, I'll descend, I'll diminish, into total paralysis, my life is in your hands” (87). Never before has Pinter shown a male character to articulate his subordination, helplessness and insecurity more

pathetically than this. The anguish in Jerry suggests the desperation with which he tries to draw the *objet petit a* within the Symbolic Order which, however, remains beyond symbolization. Penelope Prentice, therefore, observes, “Jerry seeks to encapsulate her and their love in a solipsistic world, like a dream shut off by sleep from the waking world of reality” (246-47). Interspersed with the theory of *objet petit a* is Lacan's development of the notion of the gaze which is distinct from Sartre. While the latter, conflates the gaze with the act of looking, Lacan distinguishes between the two. In Lacan's opinion the gaze is “the object of the scopic drive,” it is the gaze of the Other (Evans 73). Elaborating on this in *The Four Fundamental Concepts in Psychoanalysis*, Lacan states when the subject looks at an object, the object is always already gazing back at the subject, but from a point at which the subject cannot see it. This subject position is discernible in Jerry in his failure to make Emma love him with equal reciprocity.

You're lovely. I'm crazy about you. All these words I'm using, *don't you see*, they've never been said before. *Can't you see?* (italics mine) I'm crazy about you. [...] You overwhelm me. You're so lovely. (*Plays 4 87*)

Instead of the vague abstractionism of the male characters, Emma's actions are driven by reasonable justifications. Martin Esslin points out, “She decides to betray Robert because she feels betrayed by him in his indifference to what he has seen taking place, his acceptance of Jerry's claim to intimacy with her as her husband's best friend” (207). She establishes her power over both Robert and Jerry by manipulating knowledge to her own advantage. She has been in a secret liaison with Jerry for five years but informs Robert about it only when she finds it befitting. Similarly, after returning from Venice when she meets Jerry, she hides from him the truth that Robert has been informed everything about their secret affair. Jerry learns about Robert's knowledge of it four years after it has actually been said to him. Esslin says, “What Pinter is drawing attention to is precisely this element in betrayal, adultery, that makes it so attractive: the feeling of power, of superiority, it gives to the one who knows what is happening over the victim who is totally oblivious of it” (209). It is only Emma who appears to be the omniscient figure in the play that enables her to establish her authority over others. Sakellaridou, therefore, observes, “The idle woman of the past, whose role was to look after the happiness of the family or the gratification of the lover, has now turned into a busy, purposeful, professional woman with independent needs” (191). Despite being excluded from the male world, she liberates herself and manages to surpass the confines of the mother-wife-whore enclosure.

Conclusion

Therefore, we find that in acknowledging the pre-existence of the Lacanian gaze, the male author posits his female characters in a matrix to be “looked at from all sides” – the mother, the wife and the whore (Lacan 72). Thus, the determining male gaze, in terms of Laura Mulvey, “projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly”. However, as opposed to the coded appearance for “strong visual and

erotic impact”, I argue that Pinter's female portraits in these plays acquire their 'to-be-looked-at-ness' through their aplomb and sangfroid in the mother-wife-whore paradigm. Consequently, in the early plays of Pinter, women characters utilize motherhood as an instrument to acquire control and authority over the male characters, thereby establishing their power in the family structure as an oppressive matriarch. This desire for power which actually originates from their 'penis envy' is finally resolved when they find a son-substitute in the docile and submissive male characters. While Stanley, Albert and Edward or the Matchseller are subdued into complete infantilism by the end of the plays, the motherliness of the women, however, is not entirely bereft of sexual longings. Thus, they either reduce the husband to a babe or an outsider to a son-lover. In the later plays, however, the women establish their assertive roles on the grounds of unfulfilled male desires. In the process of empowering themselves, therefore, they not only transcend the softness of maternal feelings quelling the son or surrogate-sons into total submission, but also acquire the profanity associated with the role of a whore, thereby becoming hideous in their representations.

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Revisiting the Question of Absolute in Select Works of P.B. Shelley: A Speculative Realist Reading

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Abstract

Speculative Realism as critical theory intends to focus on the question of existence of a non-theological material core of existence which exists independently of human mind and which is characterized by unreason. This question of absolute or ultimate had been earlier shelved off from critical discussion because of post-structuralism's suspicion towards any idea of absolute or universal and is once again brought into focus by the 'material turn' in critical theory. This paper analyzes select works of Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, with special attention on his critical essay "On Life" and poem "To a Skylark" and shows how Shelley, anticipating ideas of Speculative Realism, speculates about probability of a mind-independent material core of existence without drawing a definite conclusion. The paper attempts to explore how materiality interacts with textuality in Shelley's works and presents how the notion of an unknown absolute exposes limitations of human language and knowledge.

Keywords: Absolute, materiality, anthropocentrism, non-human, the Great Outdoors

Speculative Realism - Notion of Material Absolute

The longing to have a knowledge of the absolute is one question that has intrigued the western intellect since ages. Poetic works from the period since the end of the eighteenth century to the first half of nineteenth century which is roughly known in Britain as the Romantic Era, is noted for its desire to fathom the absolute truth of existence and the cosmos. Some of the canonical critics on Romanticism like M.H. Abrams, Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom focused on this absolutizing quest of Romantic poetry. Later, however, with new historicist approach of critics like Jerome J. McGann who attempted to decipher the embedded historical ideology beneath Romantic poetry, and with post-structuralism's suspicion towards all metanarratives, the question of the absolute has been completely closed off from critical domain since the middle of twentieth century. Specially, the linguistic turn that emerged with Derrida's theory of deconstruction and the associated anti-logocentric approach which challenges relevance of materiality of the external world because of human mind's dependence on language, totally destroys any claim for the absolute. The idea that human longing to know the absolute is futile can be traced back to Immanuel Kant's distinction between noumenon or things-in-themselves which is unknowable to human beings and "phenomenon" or appearances. Evan Gottlieb in *Romantic Realities* regards this long chain of critical apprehension towards the absolute as "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Gottlieb 6). In this context, it may be said that the linguistic turn in critical theory cannot be absolved from the charge of anthropocentrism as the sole emphasis on language implies the prioritization of human mind over the material world.

The emerging critical school of Speculative Realism attempts to liberate the materiality of the world from the shackles of language and once again brings into focus question of the absolute. In this critical turn from linguistic to the material, Graham Harman, while presenting his philosophical foundation of Speculative Realism (henceforth abbreviated as SR), insisted that “philosophy must break loose from the textual and linguistic ghetto that it has been construing for itself and return to the drama of things themselves” (Harman 17). Quentin Meillassoux, one of the principal proponents of Speculative Realism, in his book *After Finitude*, challenges critical theory's insistence that perception of the material reality is always dependent on human mind--- an idea which Meillassoux terms as *correlationism*. Meillassoux defines *correlationism* as the idea according to which “we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from each other” (Meillassoux 5). According to Meillassoux, decentering of human beings in context of the larger universe started with 'radical enlightenment' of early seventeenth century and with Copernican revolution in science, Galileo's mechanistic ideas and later with Spinoza's materialist ontology. Correlationism, according to Meillassoux, is a philosophical reaction against the human insecurity exposed by scientific knowledge and to reinstate human control over the material world. In contrary to the idea of correlationism, Meillassoux posits an absolute which exists independently of human mind and which he regards as “the great outdoors” or “the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers” (Meillassoux 7). This absolute is, however, material and is not a reinstatement of transcendent theology. It is something which, as Greg Ellerman explains, “would remain irreducible to human history, economics, or social structures, defined instead by an inhuman, deep time of its own” (Ellerman 158). Meillassoux's concept of *the Great Outdoors* is not going back to the pre-Kantian theological idea of an original entity, but posits an unknown material absolute which is characterized by “a principle of unreason” (Meillassoux 60) or “Hyper-Chaos” (Meillassoux 64), that is, a total absence of reason. The great outdoors can, thus, be defined as the material core of cosmos and existence--- a space which exists independent of human mind and which resists anthropocentric explanation by human reason. Meillassoux characterizes the Great Outdoors as absolute contingency because the absolute being not grounded on reason, contingency is the only condition of its existence. In this way, Meillassoux's Speculative Realism uses critical thinking to turn against itself in order to expose the limitation of human intellectual perception but, nevertheless, insists on the existence of a mind-independent absolute core of existence.

P.B. Shelley's Notion of Absolute

It is in the context of Speculative Realism's re-emphasis on the absolute, Romanticism's interrogation into the core of nature becomes very significant. The Romantic poet whose ideas are very relevant to Speculative Realism's interest in the Absolute is Percy Bysshe Shelley. The uniqueness of P.B. Shelley's philosophical mind is the simultaneous presence of materialism and a quest for the absolute. There

is a restless speculation in Shelley's philosophical thinking into the nature of absolute center of the entire world and whether the absolute exists independently of human mind or not. Shelley's idea of the absolute, like that of SR, is a material one as he sharply rejects idea of a transcendental Christian God. Shelley can be regarded as one of the few pre-modern critical intellects who, anticipating Speculative Realism, enquires into the material origin of his own thought-process and thus uses reason to expose the limitation of reason itself. In this sense, Shelley's idea of the absolute anticipates Speculative Realism's projection of an absolute which is characterized by unreason. At the same time, on some points Shelley differs from a strict Speculative Realist reading and that will be discussed in later sections of this paper.

One particular critical essay by P.B. Shelley that is very much relevant in this context is "On Life" because this particular writing contains in details Shelley's ideas on life and on the source of life. In this essay, Shelley states how his intellectual attitude towards life and the world has undergone changes over the years. The radical nature of Shelley's thinking in his youth made him committed to a steady scientific and materialist way of thinking and made him take a hard stand against orthodox Christian idea of God. This attitude brought young Shelley under the influence of materialist and atheistic philosophy as explicated in the works of French Enlightenment thinkers like Baron d'Holbach's *The System of Nature*. Shelley, however, soon becomes disillusioned with cold materialism because acceptance of human subjective consciousness as merely product of matter threatens to annihilate creative agency of human mind. Shelley writes in his essay "On Life" that there is a spirit within man which is "at enmity with nothingness and dissolution" ("On Life" para 5). This was the beginning of two oppositional strains in Shelley's critical thought--- a conflict between the desire to uphold the creative prowess of the subjective mind and a simultaneous commitment to understand the material guiding principle of the universe. Shelley feels that the world is governed by unknown material principles which he calls 'Necessity' and which eludes the boundaries of human logical thinking, thereby anticipating the Great Outdoors of Meillasoux. Shelley clearly states that thoughts and feelings arise in human beings "without our will" ("On Life" para 3) and human beings employ words to express them. Shelley thus apprehends that the operations of the human mind is governed by material forces which are beyond the subjective will of human beings. Thus, though Shelley never could abandon believing in the infinite creative possibility of the artistic mind whose thoughts wish to "wander through eternity" ("On Life" para 5), he was beginning to formulate an idea of a material absolute which is indifferent to human mind.

In the essay "On Life," Shelley repeatedly points to the inability of human mind to comprehend the material guiding principle of the cosmos, that is, the very absolute core of the world because human mind is always "shielded by the familiarity" ("On Life" para 1) of language. On another occasion he says that it is "vain to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being" ("On Life" para 3). On one hand Shelley, in line of Derrida's deconstruction, affirms that human mind is conditioned

by language and hence cannot comprehend the absolute core of existence outside the mediation of language. But unlike the idea of deconstruction, Shelley does not restrict his yearning for what Kant regarded as things-in-themselves, that is, the absolute. Use of words like “mystery” and “dark abyss” (“On Life” para 10) point to the existence of a mind-independent core of universe which is irreducible to the anthropocentric domain of human knowledge.

Imagination as a Material Phenomenon: Erasing Mind-Matter Duality

It is in the context of the gap between subjective mind and the imperceptible material absolute at the core of the world that Shelley's idea of imagination as a tool becomes significant. The Romantic idea of imagination has always been a means of connecting the subjective mind with the absolute as famously exemplified in S.T. Coleridge's definition of imagination as “repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am” (Coleridge Ch. XIII para 11). Speculative Realism, however, has challenged the anthropocentric underpinnings of some of the Romantic ideas on imagination and has looked at imagination within a material context. For instance, contrary to the idea of imagination as a subjective experience, David Abram from the perspective of phenomenological ecology, looks at imagination as an “impersonal awareness” (Abram 272). In “On Life”, Shelley doubts the exclusive agency of human mind and imagination, for Shelley, becomes a process to overcome the restrictions of language that bounds the subjective mind and becomes a means to connect to the material absolute which governs everything. Imagination can be regarded as a process of transcending the subjectivity of the mind in favour of a mind-independent material core of existence. As Evan Gottlieb in *Romantic Realities* point out that the romantic interest, especially that of P.B. Shelley, is “in attempting to transcend the mind altogether--- thus effectively overcoming the subject-object dualism” (Gottlieb 8) and it is this particular desire that becomes relevant to SR's conviction of a material absolute which does not necessitate the idea of correlation between mind and being. It is noteworthy that Shelley, unlike Coleridge, does not have religious overtones in his idea of imagination and instead projects imagination or reverie in material terms whereby those who are in reverie “feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe” (“On Life” para 8). This is an example of Shelley's idea of erasure of subject-object as well that of mind-matter duality through subjective mind's attempt to undo its own subjectivity.

Shelley's Inconclusiveness about Nature of the Absolute

The ongoing tension in his thinking between his apprehension of a material absolute which is indifferent to human subjective mind and his simultaneous desire to uphold the powers of the poet's subjective mind gives a unique form of undecidability in Shelley's worldview. He, however, does not forcefully try to solve it through reinstating theological ideas. Years ago, Humphry House pointed to the value of this undecidability when he wrote that we do not go to Shelley “for a system, or for a final

answer about anything, but for an experience” (House 48). This undecidability is not his weakness but is mark of his intellectual honesty as he probes into the very edge of thinking after which “words abandon us” (“On Life” para 10). Shelley points out that there is one question that has always remained unanswered except by those who have falsely tried to solve it through religion and that question is: “What is the cause of life?” (“On Life” para 12). The fact that Shelley admits his ignorance in finding answer to this question shows that he, just like Meillasoux in our contemporary times, conceives of an absolute which is characterized by absolute contingency and unreason. Instead of being able to find out the truth of the absolute, Shelley points out that the best that philosophy and reason can do is to break down all the anthropocentric false conclusions about the absolute and to leave “a vacancy” or blank spot (“On Life” para 7). Devoid of any kind of anthropocentric simplifications, the “dark abyss” that Shelley wants to look into is no different from Meillasoux's *the great outdoors*.

Now, it would be interesting to explore how Shelley's idea of a material absolute is reflected in one or two of his poetic works. Shelley's poetic works reflect a practical demonstration of the ideas that have been shaping in his critical essays. It will be seen how Shelley's ideas of the absolute undergoes change over the time as reflected in some of his poetic works. It will be also seen in the following sections how Shelley's idea of the absolute is aligned with SR's concept of the material absolute and where it differs.

Absolute's Resistance to Human Symbolization in “To a Skylark”

First, a very well-known poem of P.B. Shelley, “To a Skylark”, published in 1820, can be considered. One noticeable aspect of the poem is the invisibility of the skylark within the poem and its refusal to be appropriated within the symbolic framework of the poem. Shelley conceives of the skylark as an absolute which is manifested only through physical sensations like colour, smell, sound but which itself can hardly be perceived by the poet. In this poem, Shelley distinguishes between physical manifestations of nature and the hidden cause behind these physical manifestations but that core is always elusive. The fact that Shelley conceives of the absolute, represented through the elusive presence of the skylark, as a material one is reflected through the abundance of visual, olfactory, tactile and auditory sensations in the poem, thereby pointing to the vital energy and vibrance which animates the natural world. When Shelley compares the skylark with “a cloud of fire” (line 8) or focusses upon the “shrill delight” (line 20) of its song, he primarily focusses upon the material intensity of its energy. The skylark itself however is both absent and present, both transcendent and immanent at the same time just as SR's material absolute is absolutely contingent though it governs the material laws of the universe. In fact, this trope of invisibility is continued throughout the imageries of the poem whether it is poet singing hymns “unbidden” (line 38) or the “unbeholden” (line 48) glow-worm, or “rose embowered” (line 51).

It is true Shelley uses human emotions to present his sense of wonder at the absolute

energy of the skylark but his use of emotions also hints at a material nonhuman aspect of emotions. For example, when Shelley presents the skylark as “unbodied joy” (line 15), the joy implies an absolute intensity of energy which cannot be fully represented through language and implies an anticipation of the unknown which teases human mind out of itself. Adam Potkay in *The Story of Joy* asserts that Shelley's insight, as reflected in *Prometheus Unbound*, was that joy lies “out of reach of representation” (Potkay 165). It is true that Shelley uses traditional non-material spiritual language like in the very first line of the poem where he presents the skylark as “blithe spirit” (line 1). However, as Evan Gottlieb points out, Shelley's poetry often collapses the boundary between physical and metaphysical and his “Spirit” or “Power” becomes “a metaphor for describing how the material world interfaces with the human mind to produce effects that sometimes seem to exceed their causes” (Gottlieb 147).

A very intriguing aspect of “To a Skylark” is how the material absolute subverts human language and eludes the entire domain of human knowledge. The poem has been one of the most famous works within the canon of Romantic literature because of the exquisite beauty of its language. The virtuosity of Shelley lies in the beauty of its imageries, a synesthetic blend of different sensations of colour, smell and sound, the rhyme patterns and a profusion of rhetorical figures of speech. All these techniques Shelley employs to bring a breathless sense of vibrance and energy into the poem which would approximate the absolute energy of the skylark itself. Paul De Man writes that “poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object” (Man 3). In order to express the beauty of the skylark's song, he repletes the imageries with beautiful objects from various domains of human culture as well as from nature whether it is sounds of “vernal showers” (line 56) or “chorus hymneal” (line 66) sung in human marriage ceremony. In spite of this, Shelley reveals that there is a “hidden want” (line 70) in all his descriptions of beauty and admits that “what thou art we know not” (line 31). Language, because of the “shield of familiarity” which he mentions in “On Life”, will never allow the poet's mind to represent the absolute. The series of negations negating one imagery after another is the only way Shelley can approach the absolute core because, like Meillasoux' idea of the great outdoors, Shelley's absolute is characterized also by a certain unreason which cannot be reduced to anything which human beings know. Nevertheless, the absolute is a very real presence for Shelley and it has intrigued him throughout his poetic life. “To a Skylark” presents Shelley's self-conscious reflection of his failure to represent the absolute through poetic language.

Shelley's apprehension that there is an irresolvable gap between the subjective mind and the absolute material core of existence is reflected even more strongly when he brings in the question of mortality towards the last part of the poem. Shelley conjectures that skylark “of death may deem/Things more true and deep/Than we mortals dream” (lines 82-84). The phenomenon of death is ultimate triumph of non-human matter over human subjectivity and brutally cuts short agency of human

reason. The skylark, with an assumedly secret knowledge of the absolute is free from the contingency of mortality which bounds all lives. Suddenly, optimistic tone of the poem becomes gloomy because, the absolute being inconceivable, Shelley's mind reverts back to the limited nature of human life. The poem, nevertheless, ends with an optimistic note when he appeals to the skylark to teach him "half the gladness/That thy brain must know" (lines 101-102).

Fully Non-Human Nature of the Absolute in Shelley's Later Works

In "To a Skylark", Shelley conceives an absolute in the form of the skylark which, in spite of poet's power of imagination, cannot be reduced to the domain of human mind. Nevertheless, his desire to uphold the creative power of the subjective poetic mind is reflected in this poem in his emphasis on aesthetics, beauty and human emotions. This is where Shelley differs a little from Speculative Realism as Meillasoux in *After Finitude* hardly focuses on aesthetics and emotions, restricting instead to scientific speculation. Nicholas Halmi, in discussing Meillasoux' idea of Speculative Realism, accused the Romantic sense of sublime as anthropocentric as it is an attempt at "mastering the infinite psychologically" (Halmi 43). In this context it needs to be mentioned that the residue of humanistic optimism which Shelley displays in "To a Skylark", gives way, in his later works, to a brooding realization of the necessity of completely surrendering his subjectivity at the altar of an unknown material secret of existence. In his 1821 poem *Adonais*, written on the occasion of death of John Keats, Shelley wishes to let go of his subjective mind altogether by surrendering to death and wishes not to "let Life divide what Death can join together" (line 477). This is like Shelley finally deciding to plunge into the "dark abyss" at the source of existence, but he can only plunge without his subjective rational mind and probably without his very life. In another poem named *Mont Blanc*, Shelley does not hold back from presenting the ominous aspect of the nonhuman material world and its absolute indifference to human subjective mind. Critic Angela Leighton pointed out that the final lines of *Mont Blanc*- "And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,/ If to human mind's imaginings/ Silence and solitude were vacancy?" (lines 142-144) - may indicate that the world which human beings perceive is entirely an act of imagination and this imagination has nothing to do with the absolute indifference and silence of the non-human material core of the world (Leighton 103). Shelley's final work *The Triumph of Life* presents life-force itself as a mysterious autocrat who by means of false seductions, chains human beings and carries them towards the inevitability of death. Here, unlike the skylark in his earlier poem, the hidden absolute at the source of life and death is no longer presented in optimistic language but as a mysterious ruthless tyrant. The glory of human mind, especially that of poetic mind, has been completely triumphed over by cold materiality of life-force. In spite of the predominating tone of bewilderment and gloom, Shelley here is surprisingly closest to Speculative Realist perspective of absolute which is characterized by absolute contingency and unreason. One particular line from this last unfinished work of Shelley seems to sum up his quest for

absolute that has persisted throughout his poetic and critical works and this line happens to be “Then, what is Life?” (line 548).

Notes

¹ The necessity of renouncing one's subjective self for the sake of understanding the larger material truth finds expression in another Romantic poet John Keats' letter when he wrote that “a poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity” (Keats 387).

² In John Keats' “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, the materiality of the urn similarly “dost tease us out of thought” (line 44), that is, challenges poet's subjective mind.

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Savouring the Past: Food Symbolism and Imagery in Romesh Gunsekera's Novel *Reef*

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Abstract

Food memories hold great importance in our lives as they evoke moments of our past. Memories associated with food become special when it comes to the lives of immigrants. Romesh Gunsekera's debut novel *Reef* (1994) revolves around the story of a Sri Lankan immigrant named Triton, who recounts his life in Sri Lanka through a series of events based on his food memories. This paper aims to investigate the significance of culinary moments in the narrator's life and how they help him discover his identity. By analysing lengthy descriptions of food, cooking, and consumption in the novel, the paper intends to explore how food creates an imprint in the mind of the narrator. Authors make use of food imagery and symbolism in their works to explore the identity of the characters, their actions, and their hidden motives. Hence, the paper also brings light various connotations derived from analysing food imagery and symbolism employed in the novel.

Keywords: culinary, identity, memory, food imagery, symbolism.

Introduction

The interdisciplinary field of Food Studies has been an expanding discipline in the field of research for the past few decades, as it incorporates gastronomy, literary studies, and cultural studies. Before the emergence of Food Studies, cooking, eating, and drinking were perceived as mundane acts in everyday life. But the theorists of Food Studies argue that the role of food is not confined to its nutritional properties; food has multi-dimensional aspects that affect people physically, psychologically, emotionally, and socially. According to Claude Fischler, "Food not only nourishes but also signifies" (276). By analysing the multi-dimensional nature of food and foodways in literature, readers can decode a plethora of meanings.

In addition to being a source of energy, cooking, serving, and consuming food also serves as a medium through which individuals construct and sustain their identities. In his work *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature*, Wenying Xu states that, "Food operates as one of the key cultural signs that structures people's identities and their concept of others. Although commonplace practices of everyday life, cooking and eating have far-reaching significance in our subject formation" (2). By critically examining what, where, how, and why food choices and habits are, we can develop a better understanding of ourselves and others.

In literary works, food often assumes symbolic meaning beyond its tangible form, acting as a metaphor for a broad spectrum of human emotions and experiences. Authors employ food and food related motifs to evoke senses, memories, and experiences. Food becomes a repository of memory, identity, and longing for migrants, as it provides a way into their past. Romesh Gunsekera is a British author

who was born and raised in Sri Lanka, and later migrated to England where he has been living and working since. Most of his works are set against the backdrop of the Sri Lankan Civil War and primarily portray social and political tensions; and the lives of immigrants. He infuses his novels with memories and nostalgia from his life in Sri Lanka. Though his debut novel *Reef* (1994) is set in 1960s against the backdrop of Sri Lankan political unrest and social transformations, it is a personal narrative that revolves around the life of Triton from his childhood to adulthood. The novel begins with Triton who is a Sri Lankan immigrant and a restaurateur in London in 1980s. Triton's encounter with a petrol station attendant, a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee, evoked memories about his life in the house of Mister Salgado, a marine biologist in Sri Lanka during the 1960s. He remembers his entire life journey, from being a silly servant boy in Sri Lanka to being a successful restaurateur in London. Triton's longing for the bygone days and his recollections about his life in Sri Lanka become the major thread of this novel.

Cooking up Narratives of Self

Identity formation is a complex process in which human beings develop a sense of understanding about themselves and their identity. There are various factors, both individual and social, that contribute to the formation of one's identity. Food plays a significant role here. In his essay "Food, Self and Identity", Claude Fischer explains the complex relationship between food and individual identity. He examines two dimensions of how food contributes to identity. The first extends from various aspects spanning from biological to cultural, or from nutritional value to symbolic significance. The second connects the personal to the collective consciousness, or from psychological to social aspects.

The novel *Reef* explores how food and cooking give a sense of identity to the narrator. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator is unnamed; he was called *kola*, which means 'a young boy'. He has been addressed as "Triton" for the first time by Mister Salgado in association with the dishes he prepares, "Triton made it" (74). This is the instance in which Triton feels a sense of identity for the first time. Later, he spends the majority of his life inside the four walls of the house, cooking and serving Mister Salgado and his guests. Triton's ardent search for identity makes him an expert in the art of cooking.

Triton's culinary skills and the knowledge he acquired from Mister Salgado's house give him the confidence to live alone as an immigrant in England and to fulfil his ambition. He dreams, "The snack shop would one day turn into a restaurant and I into a restaurateur. It was the only way I would succeed: without a part, without a name, without Rangan Salgado standing by my side" (190). Even without Mister Salgado's presence, he is determined to fight alone to fulfil his ambition in a foreign land. His culinary expertise gives him an identity as an established restaurateur in London.

For Triton, food not only gives him an identity, but also gives him confidence to express himself. He says, "I gave by cooking and it gave me pleasure in return" (92). Triton finds cooking as a mode of self-expression, and each culinary adventure he

masters gives him immense confidence and pride. He boasts about his dishes and craves praise and appreciation for his skill, “They were more than good. I knew, because I can feel it inside me when I get it right. It's a kind of energy that revitalises every cell in my body. I needed his praise and I needed her praise I felt stupid to need it, but I did” (76). By embracing food as a form of expression, Triton finds meaning in his life.

A Taste of Memory and Nostalgia

Memories have an enormous impact on our lives. Our memories are not merely fragments of our past, they also serve as the foundation of our identity and perceptions of the world around us. In the novel, there is an instance where Mister Salgado says to Triton, “We are only what we remember, nothing more...all we have is the memory of what we have done or not done” (190). There is a profound connection between food and the memories of one's homeland and childhood. The plot of the novel *Reef* itself is a flashback of the narrator's life in Sri Lanka and his archived culinary memories. Triton's recollections are peppered with nostalgia, illustrating the extent to which his past life continues to influence in shaping his future. Revisiting memories make Triton to reflect his personal growth from an uneducated boy to a skilled chef.

Triton's relationships in the past influence his present. His bond with Mister Salgado is tied to their shared history. By revisiting the memories at Mister Salgado's house, Triton could understand the persistent influence of past on the present. He reminisces Mister Salgado's dream to construct a marine park in London with a sort of floating restaurant for Triton, “a temple of gastronomic god”, which serves “... a row of silver tureens with red- crab-claws in black bean sauce, yellow rice and squid in red wine, a roasted red snapper as big as your arm, shark fin and fried seaweed” (187). In fact, these words have resonated in his memory and serve as a driving force to become a successful restaurateur in London. His capacity to contemplate his memories and extract insights from them enables him to surmount the obstacles of the present and envisage the future.

The sensory and affective qualities of food can take us back to the memories of the past, which are archived in our brain. A French author, Marcel Proust, says in his novel *In Search of Lost Time*, that food significantly influences the formation of memories. In the volume titled *Swan's Way* (1913), Proust writes that the aroma of the madeleine biscuit dipped in linden tea elicits profound delight and recollections of his childhood. This phenomenon is later described as the Proustian effect by the researchers. In the novel, whenever Mister Salgado tastes a sliver of cake, he remembers his tea date with his girlfriend, Nili. Salgado reminisces about “... the scent from her fingers, which might have brushed the crumb on the plate mingling with the aroma of rose-water, almond essence, cardamom, letting her rise and settle in his imagination as the honey seeped into his body” (78). This food memory is also infused with his desire for her, therefore leaving a lasting imprint in his mind.

Food tantalises our senses and entices us to experience the pleasures derived from

flavours, aromas, and textures. Triton not only wants the food that he serves on the plate look presentable and appealing, but he also wishes that the food should stimulate other senses. He says,

“I prepare each dish to reach the mind through every possible channel. The mouth I only need to tickle, get to salivate, and that I can do even by the picture I present, the smell- perfume rubbed on to the skin, or even the plate, uncooked- the sizzle of a hot dish or some aromatic tenderizing herb. For the mouth itself salt, sugar, lime and chilli alone provide a stunningly varied palate.” (97)

He ensures that the flavours and aromas of his food bring out a gradual sensory experience that leaves a lasting impression. Therefore, he carefully plans the order in which each item is to be served before Mister Salgado and his girlfriend Nili. He imagines, “I would give her enough time to savour the aftertaste of the *pattis* and feel the glow of coriander inside her. Let the tea slip down to cleanse her palate and subdue the nerves that had been excited by the spice and fattened by the meat, and only then bring out the cake on a small Dutch Salver for Mister Salgado to cut (77). Triton always loves to observe people enjoying the meals he serves them with great relish. He believes that he can influence others through the food he cooks, thereby offering them pleasant memories to cherish in the future. He is an exceptional cook who plans his culinary adventure so meticulously that the particular flavour and texture of his exotic dishes create a memorable impact in the minds of the people who consume them.

Feasting on Imagery and Symbolism

Food holds significant symbolic value as it is deeply embedded in our everyday life and has the ability to fulfil physical, emotional and psychological requirements. It engages all senses, triggers sensory, emotional and cognitive connections, enhancing its potential for symbolic power. Literary scholars and cultural theorists analyse food imagery and symbolism in literary texts to understand the identity of the characters, their actions, hidden motives, and so on. In the famous essay “Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption”, Roland Barthes comments on the semiotics of food, “For what is food? It is also and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviours” (29). Food serves as a mirror, reflecting the complexities of human emotions and experiences. The literary landscape endlessly interprets food as symbols of anger, suppression, despair, desire, love, hope, and much more.

Gunsekera uses food as a symbol to express various emotions of the characters throughout the novel. Triton's desire for Nili is communicated through the food he makes exclusively for her. Whenever she visits Mister Salgado's house, he offers her an array of dishes extending from the unique Sri Lankan cuisines to the Western ones, “I made everything: little coconut cakes- *kavum*-patties, egg sandwiches, even love-cake” (74). The *love-cake* that Triton prepares exclusively for Nili, symbolises his love and suppressed desire for her. In Sri Lanka, love cake has a legacy. It is an invention of the Sri Lankan women to allure the hearts of the Portuguese contenders

during their invasion of Sri Lanka. Triton tries to win the heart of Nili by making love-cake for her. He even tries to add additional ingredients to enhance the taste of the *love-cake*. We can also see Triton satiating his desire by sneaking a piece of *love-cake* left by her. All these gestures and culinary expressions are symbolic of his ardent desire for her.

There are instances in the novel where Triton uses food as a platform for emotional manipulation. Food condenses and communicates specific messages to evoke emotional reactions. Triton always longs for Nili's love and praise. When Nili tastes his turkey dish during the Christmas feast and she appreciates Triton by saying that even her mother never got it right, Triton's heart bursts with joy. He eagerly prepares a variety of dishes to impress her because he considers food “the ultimate seducer” (108).

Food not only emerges as a signifier of memory, desire, and affection but also as a vehicle for self-defence in the novel. Triton also uses food as armour to escape from Joseph, the chief housekeeper at Mister Salgado's house. Triton hates Joseph, who is a drunkard and a sexual predator; he uses onion as a defensive mechanism to protect himself from Joseph. When he realises that Joseph hates the smell of onions, he creates an aroma of onion juice around him so that Joseph won't come near him and annoy him.

Apart from the symbolic significance of food, the novel is also brimming with images of cooking, serving, and eating. Luci amma served as the main cook in Mister Salgado's house upon Triton's arrival as a young boy. She was the one who taught Triton the artistry of food preparation. He remembers Luci amma's craft in cutting onions, “she worked the knife like a stern goddess—a *devatara*- slicing translucent, perfect semicircles” (24). Triton was captivated by the flawless expertise of Lucy amma, which he witnessed during his early days at Mr. Salgado's house. In another instance, Triton describes the art of making tea in a grand poetic manner: “Milk and half a spoonful of sugar. It has always been that: just enough milk to turn the clear brown into creamy mud, and half a teaspoon of white sugar to fortify it” (22). Through years of experience, Triton has become a culinary expert.

The diverse array of traditional Sri Lankan food ingredients and dishes described in the novel reflect the means through which Triton preserves his cultural identity. Being the cook of a foreign master, Triton tries to assimilate the culinary tradition of his master; but he also ensures to use local ingredients to preserve his culinary identity. He is able to sustain a sense of his reverence for the culinary heritage he possesses. Triton remembers the grand Christmas feast he made at Mister Salgado's house. He cooks turkey and other dishes- “lots of basting and plenty of salt and butter worked wonders on the turkey meat. Other dishes include stuffing of rasin and liver Taufik's *ganja* and *jamanaran* mandarins to moisten the dessert” (88). During their beach picnic, Triton makes *pol-kiri-badun* curry, a steamed *pittu* and his special dish of brinjals garnished with tomatoes and Embilipitia grass (122). Through these tantalising food images, Gunsekera not only allures us to the exotic flavours of both Sri Lanka and the West but also illuminates the ways through which ones' culinary

heritage is celebrated.

In the novel, apart from the descriptions of cooking, there are vivid descriptions of eating. When Nili visited Mr. Salgado's house for the first time, Triton was terrified by Nili's voracious appetite; she ate like a hungry horse that gulps its food. In another instance, Triton also observes Prof. Dunstable's manner of eating, "Professor Dunstable's mouth is working furiously: it seemed to tighten into a tiny flower when he chewed his food. Each mouthful was pulverized and squeezed around and around until it pushed out his lips as if it were about to be spat out, but then he could shoot down his gullet..." (101). Gunsekera has successfully portrayed the gustatory experiences of various characters in detail.

Conclusion

The paper is an attempt to illustrate the various aspects of food portrayed in the novel. Food and foodways reveal a myriad of connotations, apart from their nutritional aspects. Food memories hold a special place in our hearts, as the flavours, aromas, and experiences of certain foods can conjure up our minds and settle there forever. Food memories encompass not only the tangible and sensory components of food, but also the complex recollections of social environments and shared experiences. The novel *Reef* delves into Triton's life through a series of memories he cherishes. The entanglement of food, memory, and senses is beautifully described in the novel.

The food imagery and symbolism used in the novel clearly reveal the hidden motives and desires of the characters. Food provides Triton with a sense of freedom to express his desire, fear, anger and talent, and it also makes him a more powerful person. It is evident that Triton has established his identity as a culinary expert; therefore, food can be viewed as a rhetorical symbol that establishes Triton's identity, self-expression, and acceptance.

Food not only evokes our senses and satiates our appetite, but it also enacts various other invisible roles. The act of preparing and sharing meals fosters moments of intimacy and understanding, and establish human connections. The paper affirms the magical ability that food possesses to win the hearts of the people associated with it. Triton uses food as a tool to express his suppressed desire for Nili, his concern for Mister Salgado, and his escape from Joseph. Throughout the novel, we can see such lengthy, appetising descriptions of food and food imagery that tantalise every reader. The lengthy descriptions of food, cooking, and consumption in the novel not only evoke strong sensory, emotional, and gustatory associations, but also unveil the motifs and intricacies of various characters.

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Unravelling the Victorian City in Dickens's *Bleak House*: Discourses of Sexuality, Domesticity, and Power

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Abstract

This paper delves into the Dickensian urban aesthetic and contends that, unlike domestic novels, it derives its expressive energy from contact between people of disparate social classes. I deploy Michel Foucault and D.A. Miller's work on power, surveillance, and the rise of the police force in England coupled with Michel Certeau's theorization of the flâneur and walker as frames to analyze Dickens's representation of interactions and interplay of power and resistance among Lady Dedlock, Tulkinghorn, and Detective Bucket.

Keywords: Dickens, *Bleak House*, Virus, Sexuality, Urban Aesthetic, Domesticity, Power, Flâneur, Detective, Walker

Charles Dickens's (1812-1871) fascination with the city has been noted by many scholars including Alexander Welsh, Peter Ackroyd, Jeremy Tambling, and Rosemarie Bodenheimer (Gomel 297). Building on their scholarship, I examine Dickens's unravelling of the urban aesthetic in *Bleak House* (1852-53). I enquire what the new social space is that we come across in *Bleak House* and how the unravelling of this new social space, i.e., the city or the metropolis, affects the thematic and formal concerns of the Victorian novel. How does Dickens bring together disparate classes of people? Lastly, how does this contact between the 'respectable' and the 'non-respectable' affect the Victorian domestic ideology wherein female sexuality becomes a site of contention? I begin by examining Dickens's representation of the city via artistic techniques like panorama and montage. I further analyze how circulating print commodities, viruses, and sexual liaisons breach the secure walls of aristocracy, thereby becoming points of contact between diverse social strata. I conclude by foregrounding the operations of power in the city, thereby exploring the double impulse that characterizes the novel – the conflict between the impulse to map and homogenize the city versus the aesthetics that are based on differences in the city. I contend that negotiations between the flâneur-like figure of the detective and the figure of the 'walker,' as theorized by French cultural theorist Michel de Certeau, are crucial but underappreciated aspects of Dickensian representation of the urban aesthetic.

Hogarth's Influence and Dickensian Urban Aesthetic

Set largely in the fortified interiors of the country house, Austen's *Mansfield Park* traces interactions of more or less homogenous groups of people connected by kinship or family ties. As opposed to Austen's domestic novel, *Bleak House* is set in London. Its embeddedness in the city influences the plot construction and organization of time and space in the novel. The city contains, within a geographically continuous terrain, dramatically divergent social spaces and classes.

British artist William Hogarth's (1697- 1764) *Industry and Idleness* (1747) depicts both the extremes of London and is often considered one of the sources of inspiration for Dickens's representation of the city. In addition to portraying the sites of responsible domesticity, production, and church, Hogarth uncovers London's underworld in his representation of the whore's house and Blue Boar. Plate III depicts Tom Idle gambling in the churchyard. It exemplifies the classic Hogarthian juxtaposition that brings together two modes of representation - one is the church, sustained by geometrical symmetry, as opposed to the street-like configuration that is marked by curves and broken hinges representing disorder and chaos.

Similar to panoramic paintings, which present a wide view of the physical space, Dickens captures both the teeming variety and the fractured landscape of London in a single sequence. Certeau deploys figures of speech like synecdoche and asyndeton to illustrate the qualities of panoramic representation. He argues that while asyndeton “cuts out” and “retains only selected parts,” synecdoche “amplifies the detail and miniaturizes the whole” (Certeau 101). Echoing Hogarth's representation, Dickens in *Bleak House* describes not only the upper-class world of Chesney Wold but also that of Chancery Lane which is occupied by the bourgeoisie and the urban slums, namely, Tom-all-Alone's. Dickens draws on the expressive strategy deployed in Hogarth's Plate III in his juxtaposition of the church, symbolizing civilization and moral development against street urchin, Jo: “And there he sits, . . .looking up at the great cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral. . . From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of that great, confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach...” (Dickens 243). Sambudha Sen observes that this scene holds together the “contradictions of a stratified landscape in a tense, disconcerting juxtaposition” (*Urban Aesthetic* 484). It also seems to undermine the official view about the widespread progress of London. Dickens, like Hogarth, highlights the ineffectualness of the church in touching the lives of people. Thus, Dickens brings to the fore, poor, homeless, language-less Jo, thereby registering the presence of the 'Other' which the novels of domesticity tend to evade.

Street as a Site of Unregulated Encounters

In the domestic novel, time plays an important role in plot construction. It sustains complex psychological realism as one witnesses the growth and development of a character, and their relationship with other characters as the plot progresses. As opposed to this, in urban novels, the exploration of space, rather than time, becomes more important. Read in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, *Bleak House* can be seen as being driven by the chronotope of the 'encounter.' Bakhtin argues that “encounters in a novel usually take place “on the road” . . .(where) the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people—representatives of all social classes, estates, ages—intersect at one spatial and temporal point...” (Bakhtin 243). The action of *Bleak House* also moves out of the 'safe' interiors onto the streets that are seen as dangerous because they are the sites of unregulated encounters. One of the most unexpected encounters

between the upper-class woman, Lady Dedlock, and the crossing sweeper, Jo, takes place in the street where Lady Dedlock, disguised in her maid's dress, asks Jo to show her all those places “that were spoken of in the account,” namely “the place he [Hawdon] wrote for, the place he died at... and the place where he was buried” (Dickens 201). In addition to being a site for these chance meetings, the street also becomes a site where Lady Dedlock's sexual impropriety is delineated not merely with respect to her inner emotions but also has serious spatial consequences. She is ejected out into the streets when the secret about her illegitimate daughter is exposed. The narrative underscores the intersection of morality and the public space.

Deployment of Montage to Showcase Connections Across Class Barriers

Discussing issues of contagion, Elena Gomel contends that Dickens represents the city vertically, highlighting the separation of the rich and the poor, coupled with a horizontal maze uniting the city. Gomel foregrounds Esther as the central character who connects the city. Building on the extant scholarship, I, however, delve into how the dissemination of print commodities, viruses, and sexual contact are other modalities via which Dickens extends his exploration of the unpremeditated contact between people of varying social classes through the use of montage. In a montage, actions starting from two different points later intersect unexpectedly. Hogarth shows that both the church and the prostitute's house are part of London, yet they are structurally separate, leaving no possibility of interaction between them. In contrast, in *Bleak House*, the line of action that begins in the upper-class world of Lady Dedlock converges quite unexpectedly with the one in Kook's rag and bottle warehouse where her former lover, Hawdon, used to live. Lady Dedlock is at the center of “the brilliant and distinguished circle” (Dickens 209) while Hawdon is surrounded by squalor. His room is described as “bare”, “foul”, “filthy”, and “gripped” by “poverty” and “sickness” (Dickens 124). This narrative converges in the pauper's graveyard – initially when Lady Dedlock goes to the burial grounds to see Hawdon's grave, and later when she dies there at the “iron gate... seeming to embrace it” (Dickens 713). Lady Dedlock's journey to the graveyard can be seen as an “act of self-recognition. She seems to be silently acknowledging the reality of her relationship with the world of Hawdon.” She seems to come to terms with “that part of her identity, which she has always suppressed” (Sen *BH* 87). Dickens breaks down the “ideological, social, and topographical barriers with which civilized society seeks to preserve its sanctity” (Sen *BH* 86). Their clandestine sexual relationship connects the aristocratic Lady Dedlock to the poor clerk, Hawdon. She is also linked to her neighbour, Boythorn, who is her sister's husband but was deserted by his wife because of Lady Dedlock's illegitimate daughter. Thus, Dickens's urban aesthetic is characterized by unexpected encounters and hidden connections between people belonging to diverse social classes.

Urban Aesthetic and Breaching Conventional Barriers

Urban aesthetic is predicated on the contact between the 'respectable' and the 'non-

respectable.' In addition to the sexual relationships, as examined above, this contact is achieved primarily through the circulation of print commodities and viruses. Hogarth, before Dickens, demonstrated the ability of the print commodity, like the ballads of "Moll Flanders" and "Last Dying Speech of Idle", to breach the shielded interiors of homes or workplaces. Plate I of *Industry and Idleness* shows the ballad of "Moll Flanders," a semi-pornographic piece of street literature, entering the site of production – the workshop. Tom Idle is shown gazing at the ballad book rather than working. Furthermore, Plate XI is dominated by the woman selling the Last Dying Speech of Idle. Dickens also highlights the propensity of the circulating print commodities illustrating how, despite Sir Leicester's refusal to let Lady Dedlock's portrait be "engraved" (Dickens 82), it is reproduced, akin to a fashion model, and sold everywhere. Guppy notices the similarity between Lady Dedlock's portrait at Chesney Wold and the poster girl in Tony Jobling's room. When he looks at her portrait in Chesney Wold, he exclaims, "Blest ... If I can ever have seen her...yet I know her!" (Dickens 82). Dickens explores how the circulation of print commodities traverses social classes, thereby generating new plot connections. For instance, the story of pauper Nemo's death reaches the upper-class house of Lady Dedlock through the means of legal documents that were written by him and carried by Tulkinghorn, Mr. Dedlock's attorney, into Chesney Wold. This contact between the upper and the lower classes generates a lot of anxiety, especially in the upper classes, about maintaining domestic sanctity. This is evident from Sir Leicester's discomfort when Tulkinghorn narrates the story of Nemo's death due to a drug overdose to Lady Dedlock. Sir Leicester emphasizes that this "sort of squalour" must be kept away from the upper classes (Dickens 149).

Intersections of Discourse on Sanitation, Disease, and Female Sexuality

In the nineteenth century, discourses about sanitary problems and prostitution were gaining prominence. Edwin Chadwick's (1800-90) report on sanitation blames domesticity and the life of the working classes as "the main cause of the ravages of epidemic, endemic and contagious diseases among the community" (3). The report throws into relief the anxiety regarding the mobility of the diseases that breed in the slums but find their way into the upper-class chambers. The metaphor of the virus is reactivated in the novel through Jo's character. Jo, devoid of family and a sense of self, is constantly forced "to move on" (Dickens 382) by state authorities like Bucket and other characters like Mrs. Snagsby. Lack of language, interiority, and constant movement frees Jo from a location and transforms him into a freely floating signifier. He becomes the circulating 'virus' that infiltrates the sanctity of the home and inadvertently infects Esther with smallpox when she interacts with people in the slum, including Jo himself.

Furthermore, In *Bleak House*, the nexus between sexuality and disease is articulated not through a sexually transmitted disease, like syphilis, but through smallpox. William Acton's (1813-75) report on prostitution provides a window to understand this. Acton describes the body of the prostitute as a diseased "mass of syphilis" and a

scatterer of pestilence (93). Comparing the prostitute's genitals to sewage, Acton contends that her privates cannot be cleaned. He also outlines the ability of the infection to disseminate both physical and moral disorders. Thus, the prostitute, without physically entering, invades the sacred domain of the house via a chain of infections. Underlining this connection, Epstein Nord points out that prostitutes came to be associated with “cholera, typhus, smallpox” as “venereal disease[s] [are] euphemistically lost and merged with a generic notion of contagion” (Nord 83). In *Bleak House*, the “threat of the disease from un-sanitary urban sanitary conditions and spreading epidemics merges with the threat of disease and degeneration from exposure to infected female sexuality” (Nord 83). Lady Dedlock, owing to her sexual transgression, lies at the intersection of the Victorian period's anxiety about female sexuality on the one hand, and bleak sanitary conditions on the other. Lady Dedlock exemplifies how “fallen female sexuality is introduced upward into the middle class... The distinction between the woman of the hearth and the woman of the streets no longer holds; the prostitute has now become a wife, and along with her urban pollution of all kinds has invaded the preserves of middle-class life” (Nord 81). *Bleak House* demonstrates the fragility of the conventions of respectability and Victorian values where print commodities, sexual liaisons, and viruses can breach the private domains of the upper classes that were hitherto considered to be inviolable and sacrosanct.

Anxiety regarding maintaining social distances is concomitant with the endorsement of domestic ideology¹ in *Bleak House* although it is an urban novel. Esther, who maintains the sanctity of the home as an efficient homemaker, is extolled. In contrast, Mrs. Jellyby, who neglects her household duties and does not care for her family as all her attention is diverted “to the subject of Africa” (Dickens 48), is censured by Dickens. Esther criticizes her by saying that “it is right to begin with obligations of home and while those are overlooked and neglected no other duties can possibly be substituted for them” (Dickens 61). Furthermore, like *Mansfield Park*, any character who threatens the domestic ideal is punished in the end. Thus, Lady Dedlock, who has an illegitimate offspring out of wedlock, dies on the streets. Despite this overt celebration of the domestic ideal, a case can be made for the contradiction in the ideology and aesthetics of the novel. While the conventional Victorian novel is predicated on the contradiction between “angel” and “whore,” Dickens expends creative energy on characters such as Lady Dedlock, who obfuscate the clear division between the wife and the prostitute and threaten the domestic ideal.

Detective/ Flâneur and Dynamics of Power in City

Bleak House is marked by a conflict between the impulse to map, control, and homogenize the city, on the one hand, and the aesthetics that are based on difference, on the other hand. Drawing on Michel Foucault's work, D.A. Miller, in *The Novel and the Police*, unravels less visible modes of “social control” instead of exploring the overt operations of power (viii). He observes that “with Dickens, the English novel for the first time features a massive thematization of social discipline” (Miller

ix). Lady Dedlock is not only central to the discourse on female sexuality and the contact between the upper and lower classes, but Dickens unravels how surveillance and power operate in urban spaces via her trajectory in the novel. Foucault identifies the body as the principal target of power. Rather than focusing on the centralized sources of societal power, Foucault accords primacy to micro-level power relations. He argues that “since modern power operates in a capillary fashion throughout the social body, it is best grasped in its concrete and local effects and in the everyday practices which sustain and reproduce power relations” (qtd. in Armstrong). I use the Foucauldian notion of “unseen but all-seeing surveillance” (Miller viii) to read the power dynamics in *Bleak House*. Lady Dedlock is subjected to constant observation and surveillance. Guppy studies Lady Dedlock closely to register the similarity between her and Esther. Tulkinghorn also keeps a watch on her movements and eventually ferrets out the secret about her illegitimate daughter. Foucault contends that knowledge and power are inextricably linked. Thus, after discovering the secret about Lady Dedlock's past, Tulkinghorn exerts more power over her. He is “absorbed in love of power” and has his “eyes” upon Lady Dedlock (Dickens 357). She feels stifled by his presence as he is “always at hand.... haunting every place. No relief or security from him for a moment” (Dickens 575). He moves on from observing her to obstructing her freedom of action. He “does not approve of” her decision to dismiss Rosa (Dickens 580). Lady Dedlock notices an “undefinable freedom in his manner which is new” (Dickens 580). Halfway through the novel, to use Miller's term, this “amateurish” (73) attempt to discipline ends as Tulkinghorn is killed by Hortense, Lady Dedlock's maid.

After Tulkinghorn's murder, the task of disciplining is taken up by a professional detective, Bucket. In the nineteenth century, the movement from the system of chancery to that of the police marked a shift from “inefficient procedures” towards a far more efficient, “swift and productive” system of surveillance (Miller 74). In this milieu, argues Miller, the figure of the detective attempts to provide a “simplified representation of order and power” (73).

Dickens identifies Bucket's talent for observation and analysis. Mr. Snagsby describes him as possessing “an unlimited number of eyes” (315). Not only is he a master of disguise, who makes himself appear in a “ghostly” manner as with a touch of stick, but he also makes others “instantly evaporate” (Dickens 310), and his interpretations are “little short of miraculous” (Dickens 710). Bucket is described as a highly efficient officer who is omnipresent and omniscient. Jo believes him “to be everywhere and cognizant of everything” (Dickens 563). His expansive knowledge enables Bucket to exercise almost limitless surveillance. Fanny, in *Mansfield Park*, is also an all-seeing eye who represents the authorial eye and uses her observation to unravel the subjectivities of the characters. Bucket, however, uses his observational faculties to detect the criminals and discipline the city.

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) in *Arcades Project* draws a parallel between the figure of the detective and flâneur. Flâneur is a person who walks through the city to experience it. While the flâneur appears to be a casual stroller, Benjamin contends that

he deploys his indolence as a “plausible front, behind which, in reality, hides the riveted attention of an observer who will not let the unsuspecting malefactor out of his sight” (442). The detective and flâneur then share the propensity to keenly observe things that might not be noticeable to ordinary people. Benjamin's work on the flâneur was inspired by the work of George Simmel (1858-1915) who contends that the relationships between members of a large city are more deeply influenced by the activity of the eye than of the ear. Combining the “casual eye of the stroller with the purposeful gaze of the detective,” Benjamin constructs a literary creature capable of seeing the city as “landscape, lying either desolately or seductively open before the fictional characters... and ... as a room enclosing them either protectively or oppressively” (Rignall 113). An “anonymous face” in the multitude, the “flâneur is free to probe his surroundings for clues and hints that may go unnoticed by the others” (Rignall 113). Dickens's Bucket fits the bill. He is described as “...studious in his observation of human nature.... [he] pervades a vast number of houses, and strolls about an infinity of streets: to outward appearance rather languishing for want of an object..... He is ...innocent in his conversation – but, through the placid stream of his life, there glides an undercurrent of forefinger” (Dickens 626). Armed with the skill for minute observation coupled with a tendency to don the mask of a carefree and aimless stroller of the city, Dickens's detective lies at the intersection of the figures of the detective and flâneur.

The Resisting Female Walker

Gomel examines the “doubleness of the urban aesthetic” implying how the twin (opposing) impulses of engagement with the city, including that of the flâneur who enjoys the city and that of the reformer who talks about the ills plaguing the city, co-exist in Dickens's *Bleak House*. I, however, emphasize the opposition between the flâneur and the walker as being central to understanding Dickens's urban aesthetic wherein there is not just heterogeneity but also surveillance and power tussle. Unlike Gomel and others, I compare Bucket with a flâneur and Lady Dedlock with a walker. I contend that the negotiation between the flâneur-like figure of the detective and the figure of the 'walker' (as Certeau theorizes) lies at the center of *Bleak House*. Foucault argues that where there is power, there is always an attempt to resist it. While the flâneur embodies the disciplining impulse of the city, the walker tries to evade that discipline. Certeau in “Walking in the City” examines how mundane practices such as walking can be emancipatory and a mode of resistance as it “elude[s] discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised” (96). The walker links the diverse parts of the city and evades its operation of power by not choosing the set path. If Inspector Bucket approximates the flâneur, as examined above, I argue that Lady Dedlock can be studied as a walker in Certeauan terms. Lady Dedlock walks from her patrician house in Lincolnshire to Cook's Court (Hawdon's place of work) to Krook's house (where he used to live) to where he is buried, in the heart of outcast London. Certeau argues how the walker is able to accord novel meaning to the different milestones of the city. The route that Lady

Dedlock traverses can also be understood in light of Certeau's arguments about the alternate mode of mapping the city. In addition to being liberating, walking also symbolizes homelessness as Certeau notes "to walk is to lack a place" (103). Lady Dedlock's trajectory in the novel mirrors this when she laments, "I have no home left" (Dickens 667) as she leaves her home when she is afraid that her secret will be exposed. One can not ignore the issue of gender in the analysis of Lady Dedlock as a walker. The character of the 'walker' is further complicated here by gender. In addition to being a walker, Lady Dedlock is also a woman walking the streets at night, thereby being perceived as a streetwalker despite not being a prostitute by profession. She challenges the distinctions between the 'angel of the house' and the 'whore.'

Moreover, like Bucket, Lady Dedlock uses disguise to avoid being detected. She dresses up in her maid's clothes when seeking Jo's help. Later on, she employs both, disguise and the act of walking, to evade the operations of power that is to resist being tracked down. She moves from her house in London to Esther's home in the countryside to Genny's hut in St. Albans to Snagsby's abode in Chancery Lane where she exchanges clothes with Genny and dies at the gates of the burial ground. Bucket's seemingly omnipresent powers of surveillance seem to be limited when it comes to finding Lady Dedlock. He is unable to outwit her in her final escape. While the detective seeks to exert control and police the city, the walker strives to elude this discipline and control. The tension between the two is a relevant, but oft-ignored, thread in the analysis of *Bleak House*.

Conclusion

One can conclude by stressing that the city serves as an organizational framework in *Bleak House*. Dickens penetrates the secrets of the city and reveals the hidden connections existing among people who would otherwise appear to be unrelated. Unravelling the Victorian anxiety concerning female sexuality, he demonstrates the way this contact is achieved by the circulating print commodities and viruses wherein female sexuality has come to be associated with infection and moral decay. Dickens, however, registers not only the teeming variety of London but also charts the attempt to control this variety. Dickens's detective has powers of uncanny observation and analysis which he deploys to discipline the city. Lying at the heart of the narrative, Lady Dedlock problematizes the distinction between the angel of the hearth and the streetwalker. She also emerges as a 'walker' who resists the surveillance and showcases the alternative ways of experiencing the city.

Notes

1. Victorian literature registers the celebration of domesticity and female chastity across literary genres including domestic novels, working class fiction (like that of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*), and in non-literary reports such as those of Acton and Chadwick.
2. Philip Collins argues that some of the prominent features of detective Bucket were derived from Inspector Charles Frederick Field, one of the early important members of London's

- detective police force (*Dickens and Crime* 207).
3. The attempt to evade power and surveillance can also be seen in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). He describes London slums as a “huge peep show.” The people Mayhew observed and interviewed often expressed their fear of being observed - “there are so many eyes about;” they also expressed “their attempts to avoid observation by keeping their own eyes open -“we are always on the look-out for the policemen” (qtd. in Burke 662).
 4. Certeau writes, “the dispersion of stories points to the dispersion of the memorable as well... objects and words have hollow places in which a past sleeps, as in the everyday acts of walking, eating, in which ancient revolution slumber... memory... awakens... our wordless stories... the places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences. What can be seen designates what is no longer there” (108).

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Interpreting Louise Glück's Imagery and Realism about Death, Sorrow, and Beyond-ness

Dr. Sukanya Saha*

Abstract

Louise Glück's poetry is candid, approachable, and relatable. Her intellect and gift are apparent in the way she gives depth to her words. The enigmatic quality of her poetry commands attention and involvement. She mandates the gaps to be filled, the elements of fictitiousness be eliminated, the illusion of reality be realized, and the inherent allegories be decoded. The quiet in intimacy, privacy and interiority characterizes Glück's voice and she consciously eschews bragging and propaganda. The distinctive coexistence of psyche and feelings renders her poems individual, lyrical, and human. Glück was being essentially herself. Hers was a voice that dared to articulate fearlessly about death and in imagery not commonly found in lyrics. The paper takes a course through some of her poems to trace and interpret her imagery about death and understand how she perceived and articulated them.

Keywords: Louise Glück, Death, Despair, Loneliness, Spirit, Soul

The pursuit of philosophical insights with emotional immediacy that dons deceptively plain language, is not unusual in contemporary lyric by women. Women poets are demystifying the illusion of poetry that was long mistaken as mere spontaneous personal dialogue. The fashioning of pseudo idealism in doling out quotable quotes that ensues profound philosophical truths, is virtually nonexistent now. It is replaced by addressing literature qua literature, wherein existentialism and absurdity are jostling for prominence.

Glück was a 'safe' choice for the Nobel amidst the mayhem that the world is in now. With precision in poetic technique, she showed sensitivity in handling loneliness, relationships, death, and sorrow. The academy plucked “a brilliant talent from obscurity” and turned it into “a household name” (Saunders 1). The quotient of timelessness instead of topicality in her poetry endows it with the “austere beauty” that “makes individual existence universal” (Service para. 1) Her deft for clarity is shaped by the motifs from daily life, people she had loved, her memories of childhood, and family relations. This caught the attention of Anders Olsson, Chairman of the Nobel Committee (Reynolds 1). She shunned the garb of ostentation, making herself a writer who can be relied upon for authenticity. Glück's themes are a varied mix, that have family, childhood, love, sex, death, nature, and animals in it (Garner 1). Her style is intellectually demanding, intense, direct, and orderly. Glück stayed away from manipulations and misleading linguistic artwork. Her articulateness is evident in her thematic choices and structures. Perceptions about death's reality were challenged by her through imagery, previously unthought-of, dreaded, and evaded in lyric poetry. There is no diplomatic conformity, moralistic dialogism or claims for recognition and fame:

“I cannot go on

restricting myself to images
because you think it is your right
to dispute my meaning:
I am prepared now to force
clarity upon you.” (Clear Morning)

For Glück, “inwards listening” (Bhattacharjee 1) was crucial. She insisted that her voice be heard because her intellectually demanding verses necessitate an inward journey wherein one would confront and exhume the deepest and the most intimate feelings that appear like tangled undergrowth spread over consciousness. Vividness in Glück's imaginings makes her words turn into live images that float like dreams reassuring that poetry never did shun its visionary quality. However, one must be mindful that her visions are not commonplace and friendly.

Dana Levin, a fellow poet, recounts how the entry fee of Glück is “a dollar but once you get in, the territory is complex” (Sastri 188). Glück peels off the pretenses, laying the emotions bare and raw. This added to her style that rendered individual existences as universal making her the most accomplished lyric poet. She imposes curbs over the flux of thoughts and maintains detachment from subjectivity which strikes as unique in lyric poetry. This has earned Glück unusual distinctions putting an end to the debate over confessional versus intellectual in lyric poetry.

Glück favours solitude and an individual devout reader absorbed in deciphering the words which are addressed solely to him. Her poetry seemingly accessible, is deeply penetrating, tying one within it for longer. Glück deflected acclaim and did not write easily understandable or likeable poetry which could dilute the experience to harvest admiration. She expected her audience to be intelligent and had become more profound and witty while growing old.

Glück's preoccupation with death, sorrow, pain, rejection, isolation, and loss has a lingering quality that surfaces with wandering thoughts. She embraced passivity. The complexity involved in death did interest her immensely and raised her curiosity about its philosophy:

“we sit by the side of the road, watching the sun set;

...

It's this moment we're trying to explain, the fact
That we're at ease with death, with solitude.” (Celestial Music)

In *Being and Time* Heidegger proposes that accepting mortality is key to authentic and genuine living. Our existence is finite and the fact that death is certain, shapes our lives. It is imperative that we understand our impermanence.

“Heidegger advances the idea that authentic being toward death enables the person to experience genuine freedom and resolve. In other words, if human beings want to understand what an authentic human life is, each individual must grapple with their finitude. Making meaning out of death is how one understands life.” (Menaldo, 405)

Glück's incline towards death syncs with Heidegger's proposition that death's knowledge would lead to the understanding of the truth of existence and eventually to the knowledge of the universe: “The end of the world – is death. The 'end' that

belongs to existence limits and defines the whole of Existence... death is just a fellow Existence” (quoted in Shariatinia, 93). For Heidegger, only humans are privileged to the knowledge of death and if they cannot think about death, it is their disability (Shariatinia 93). Mark A. Menaldo in “Death in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* writes that according to Heidegger western metaphysics is no more delving into the philosophical aspect of Being. The notions about substance or essence is taking precedence over the fundamental questions about Being, “Being is contingent on time, and human beings mark their existence in time, which is shot through with the absolute certainty that they will die.” (Menaldo, 405-406) Glück's vivid imagery about death shows her conscious awareness of the metaphysical aspect of Being which Heidegger was insistent about. For instance, she depicts the soul that sits pensively by the lifeless body before leaving it forever and finding a new garb. She visualizes the door of infinity that would liberate her from the drudgery of mortal existence. 'Death' did not frighten her and she mandated its space parallel to 'life.'

Glück's resolve to make amends with death is apparent in the honesty with which she represented it. An artist's mind must observe, as the mind and the world which surrounds it, conspire to change each other. The artist must disengage from the drama of life, observe death approaching, renounce the hope of survival and abstain from protesting. Glück knew that authentic awareness of the phenomenology of death can only make one understand life in totality. A rational mind's conscious awareness may not bring this understanding. For her, death forces to envision not only the end, but also the life as a whole. Glück pronounced death, sadness and isolation as universal, contrary to what Harold Bloom contented while arguing that American poetry is more inclined towards evading death's verity (Bloom 449-462). In “Approach of the Horizon” Glück wrote how she visualized the approach of death. Her descriptions of life's sensations gradually departing from limbs is unnerving. She prepares to embrace death by sending doctors with their tests and procedures away and hires a secretary instead, to record the experience with precise details. She registers that “Feeling has departed” and envisages the headstone inscription that reads like an exploration boarded on with curiosity. Such picturing of death is unique in lyric poetry. Glück proposes a hypothetical existence that promises freedom. The thought about existence beyond this plane occupied her consciousness that defied any rationale of assessment. She yearns for the sky which is imperceptible from her sick bed:

“It exists now as a remote hypothesis,
a place of freedom utterly unconstrained by reality.” (Approach of the Horizon)

Glück showed a deep desire in her for the imagined, which for her was essential and real. Grief-stricken and at loss, she questioned the existence of belief in new beginnings because death is a mystery and its discerning inaccessible to those living. The death's finality and irrevocability fueled her ponderings. The unflinching quality in her portrayal of funeral homes is startling. Her projection is immersed in grief because obviously, from loss are born widows and orphans:

“I'll tell you something: every day

people are dying. And that's just the beginning.
Every day, in funeral homes, new widows are born,
new orphans. They sit with their hands folded,
trying to decide about this new life.” (A Fantasy)

Humans are bewildered after seeing the graves. The event of death brings their failures in love and relationships to the fore. They are frightened and uncertain about crying because their grief has rendered them befuddled.

“Then they're in the cemetery, some of them
for the first time. They're frightened of crying,
sometimes of not crying. Someone leans over,
tells them what to do next, which might mean
saying a few words, sometimes
throwing dirt in the open grave.” (A Fantasy)

Glück's understanding of loss is real, insightful, and profound. She does not offer meagre consolations with empty words. Her perception of the bereaved is guided by a deep knowledge of how human psyche works. Loss of her own father and sister made her understand the pain family undergoes after the near one's funeral is over. “In A Fantasy”, she wrote for the widow, for whom visitors' empathies were futile. The widow wants the wheel of time to rewind and play the cemetery - the hospital's sickroom - the marriage - the kiss. Only those who have suffered loss can relate how the past, which is a 'fantasy' now, can only soothe the seething wounds of the agonizing present.

“And after that, everyone goes back to the house,
which is suddenly full of visitors.
The widow sits on the couch, very stately,
so people line up to approach her,
sometimes take her hand, sometimes embrace her.
She finds something to say to everybody,
thanks them, thanks them for coming.
In her heart, she wants them to go away.
She wants to be back in the cemetery,
back in the sickroom, the hospital. She knows
it isn't possible. But it's her only hope,
the wish to move backward. And just a little,
not so far as the marriage, the first kiss.” (A Fantasy)

Glück did not intend to thrill. The intensity in her address stems from the sincerity in thought and precision in her words that appeal for their ordinariness and familiarity. Her emotions, dreadful or splendid, are heard from somewhere beyond. She had experienced that door towards infinity and was not uncertain or speculative about it. Her knowledge of death was real and she was never apprehensive about talking of it or picturing its reality.

“At the end of my suffering
there was a door.

...

Hear me out: that which you call death

I remember.” (The Wild Iris)

Her “The Red Poppy” probes deeper and speaks about before-ness from somewhere timeless and beyond. Glück does not offer glossary for her imagery and conceptions (Hunter). She wants her readers to decode for themselves what she offers. The speaker in her poems resists objectivity, yet mandated the knowledge and authority in the listener about the metaphysical experience. The emigration of consciousness from existential to elemental is deftly handled by her. The strangeness in her expression is oddly appealing:

“Oh my brothers and sisters,
were you like me once, long ago,
before you were human? Did you
permit yourselves
to open once, who would never
open again? Because in truth
I am speaking now
the way you do. I speak
because I am shattered.” (The Red Poppy)

Glück does not rely on platitudes. Her matter-of-factness is rather startling and novel for poetry. She is not sentimental and does nowhere imply escape from pains of existence. Her truths about human experiences penetrate, and haunt, owing to her melancholic and skeptical sensibility.

“You see, they have no judgment.

So it is natural that they should drown.” (The Drowned Children)

The detached onlooker's tone is as cold as the frozen lake. Such tone has a “horrificing logic” and “cruel objectivity” (Gerkenmeyer 1) about it that immediately grabs attention and does not let it slip away easily.

“they sink
until at last they are quiet.” (The Drowned Children)

The abject blindness and weightlessness plummet them until, “they are quiet,” signifying the suspension of sentimentalism in Glück's representation. No one wails for the drowning children in that cold and aloof vicinity. There is nothing from over which Glück is pulling the veil away. The truth lies bare and stark, ever existent, needing to be registered, recognised, and resignation will not offer any lasting consolation. Her tone is not of hapless surrender, it is of confrontation looking directly into the eye of the grief.

Anorexia had made Glück struggle to sacrifice that interfering flesh which hindered her perfect form. She learned that the need for perfection herds humans towards their graves.

“because a woman's body
is a grave; it will accept
anything. I remember
lying in bed at night
touching the soft, digressive breasts,
touching, at fifteen,
the interfering flesh

that I would sacrifice
 until the limbs were free
 of blossom and subterfuge: I felt
 what I feel now, aligning these words—
 it is the same need to perfect,
 of which death is the mere byproduct.” (Dedication to Hunger)

If life is battling the meaninglessness and is ultimately a survival against suppression, then the rebirth is risking the eternal joy that her imagined heaven promises. She wanted a heaven for those who are conflicted about reality and its interpretation. Life is hurtling abuses with every morsel consumed and divesting from it in any way possible is embracing heaven.

“I said, "Listen, angel, wean me from this bit."
 I said, "Divorce me from this crap, this steady diet
 Of abuse with cereal, abuse
 With vodka and tomato juice,

...

I tended his anemia and did the dishes
 Four months—the whole vicious,
 Standard cohabitation.” (Dead End)

For Glück, nature did not offer solace and hope. This notion may make the ardent romantic frown. For her, romance does not elevate the self from pain. Assessment of feelings are grounded in humans' efforts to express them truthfully. She meditates over snowdrops into which winter may breathe life but her soul seeks freedom from the mundane earthly cycle of waking – survival - suppression and - misery. She proposes that if one adapts to the agony, then life starts making sense. She is skeptical about opening eyes again in the coldness of light and the raw wind of futility.

“Do you know what I was, how I lived? You know
 what despair is; then
 winter should have meaning for you.
 I did not expect to survive,
 earth suppressing me. I didn't expect
 to waken again, to feel
 in damp earth my body
 able to respond again, remembering
 after so long how to open again
 in the cold light
 of earliest spring--
 afraid, yes, but among you again
 crying yes risk joy
 in the raw wind of the new world.” (Snowdrops)

The process of surviving would painfully involve waking, and responding to the despair again. Responding would most certainly involve surrendering and being lost in the vicious cycle again. Glück rummages through the symbols of consistency and change in nature rather impatiently. The evidences of change do not surface easily despite her checking each clump for some hope of revival. That familiar misery

creeps in when the summer wraps its course with dying leaves turning brilliant yellow and the music from the birds ceasing, yet, her hands are ruefully empty.

“I'm looking for courage, for some evidence
my life will change, though
it takes forever, checking
each clump for the symbolic
leaf, and soon the summer is ending, already
the leaves turning, always the sick trees
going first, the dying turning
brilliant yellow, while a few dark birds perform
their curfew of music. You want to see my hands?
As empty now as at the first note.” (Matins)

War and death held same meanings for Glück. The men of action escape from answering the questions of life for which perhaps their women and children have amassed better insights because it is they who are left to survive their plights. They are the ones who are abandoned because war turns men deaf to the voices that remind them of home and its callings. Men are blinded too. They cannot see their widows and orphans. They simply disappear after abandoning life.

“But how to explain this
to the ones at home to whom
fighting a war is a plausible
excuse for absence, ...
these

are men of action, ready to leave
insight to the women and children.” (Parable of the Hostages)

For Glück her sister's absence was more conspicuous than the actual experience of her death. (Chiasson 1). Such circumstances made her to perceive the most dreadful and had opened those vistas of imagination for her that are identified as eccentric or whimsical in common understanding.

Glück's uncanny description of beyond-ness is unusual and thus fascinating. Teicher says that Glück reported from a place from where no other poet could, no matter how patient and precise he was (Teicher 1). In “Crossroads” Glück depicted a soul that is communicating to the dead body before leaving it forever to search for its new form. The soul laments for the loss of the body in which it once inhabited. The emotion in the soul's voice is profound that stimulates an ache essentially personal and the imagery is unfamiliar in poetry about death.

“My body, now that we will not be traveling together much longer
I begin to feel a new tenderness toward you, very raw and unfamiliar,
like what I remember of love when I was young—

...

It is not the earth I will miss,
it is you I will miss.”

In “The Fear of Burial,” a similar kind of misery lingers and resounds. The body lies in an empty field all night long. It is lonely and the spirit awaits a new body to fill

itself into it. The shadow refuses to leave the body alone and ties itself tightly to it. The dead body lies lonely in the empty field. The spirit waits patiently before it has to start its eternal journey. The body's shadow resolutely clings to it. The words 'empty', 'nothing' and 'loneliness' weave the familiar pattern of gloom, the fear, of being left out and forgotten in death. Teicher writes, “The living are offered no preview of death” (Teicher 1) and with such a stark portrayal, Glück had assumed the responsibility of offering the knowledge of it.

“In the empty field, in the morning,
the body waits to be claimed.
The spirit sits beside it, on a small rock--
nothing comes to give it form again.
Think of the body's loneliness.
At night pacing the sheared field,
its shadow buckled tightly around.
Such a long journey.” (The Fear of Burial)

Amidst several other things to admire about Glück's poetry is the fact that, despite emotional registers in her poems, she does not evade cruelty. Garner writes, “she confronts the monsters in herself, and in others, not with resignation and therapeutic digression but with artery-nicking knives” (Garner 1). Her realization about what does absorption of pain mean and how it renders the psyche wounded, is clear and precise.

“Long ago, I was wounded. I lived
to revenge myself
against my father, not
for what he was--
for what I was: from the beginning of time,
in childhood, I thought
that pain meant
I was not loved.
It meant I loved.” (First Memory)

Conclusion

Reading Glück's poetry is akin to plunging willingly into the bewildering grief, groping for respite, battling callowness without the hope of placidity or revival. Her disillusioned, isolated narratives have frequently come to be regarded to as bleak or dark. Grief and despair in her poetry cannot be construed in a single reading. These abstractions assume concrete shapes in her imagined world while hovering over thoughts about death and afterlife. There is a lingering impression that she preferred imagined over real. She did never go after making noise and spun a silence which could only be broken by herself from within. Reading her imagined reality that drew-in the afterlife, is believing in the ultimate. She appeals for an unflinching seeing and inspires inward-looking which is most evaded and dreaded.

In Glück's words, “Whatever the truth is, to speak it is a great adventure” (Teicher 1) She chose to write something not palatable to many, since she “wanted to be heard”,

which she thinks is “a more convincing proof of existence” (Teicher 1). She proved what being heard leads to - all most prestigious awards for a litterateur. She projects dreams with her wild imaginings of the inaccessible beyond-ness. Her rendering of what happens before and what awaits after, reconstructs the perceptions about death derived from prevalent poetic discourses. The complexity of her imagery recreates the misery, suffering, even death, since she is “primed for this” (The Racer's Widow). The overwhelming surge of feelings had turned her a recluse.

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Gynocentric Re-Writing of Historical Fiction: Readings in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Select Works

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Abstract

Most of the historical texts are written from male point of view, having male protagonists at its center. Women are presented just as supportive characters, playing the roles of wives, sisters, mistresses, daughters or daughter-in-laws. Such an andocentric presentation of history has led to a tilted or narrow representation of women in Vedas/scriptures and historical texts. As gynocriticism came into prominence, literature began to be re-read and re-written from female perspectives, keeping women at the center of writings. This is what Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni intended to do as well, through her re-writing of seminal historical texts from the central woman character's eyes. She reimagines history as women in those historical sagas must have experienced or perceived them. The present paper is a critical reading of Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2009), *The Forest of Enchantment* (2019) and *The Last Queen* (2021) to re-imagine history from Draupadi's, Sita's and Maharani Jindan's point of view.

Keywords: Gynocriticism, History, Women's Writings, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Feminism

Introduction

Re-writing history comes with a lot of challenges, as the sequence of events and factual accuracy cannot be altered. It is challenging to use an altered lens to view the events and to re-imagine the history without altering the facts. Despite these constraints, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has skillfully re-interpreted history by breathing new lives into monumental women characters like, Mata Sita, Draupadi and Maharani Jindan in her texts *The Palace of Illusions* (2009), *The Forest of Enchantment* (2019) and *The Last Queen* (2021), respectively. She skilfully foregrounds the seminal roles these women played in shaping history. She makes us see history through the eyes of these women protagonists whose stories have been silenced by history. They are just presented as minor characters in the mainstream history, negating their instrumental roles in shaping the history of their times, ethnicities and nations. As Divakaruni states in her interview with Priyanka A. Roy, "Sometimes I do think strong women are forgotten by design. (laughs) I feel like I might be the messiah of these women whose stories need to be told. I think, 'Whoa, she's an amazing person, why do we not know about her?'" (n.p.). It bothers her that why such gaps exist in history and she foregrounds that it is essential to address these gaps through gynocentric re-reading and re-writing of historical texts.

Divakaruni's approach towards rewriting historical fictions by keeping women at its center aligns with Elaine Showalter's concept of 'gynocriticism,' in her work "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981), a form of feminist criticism that highlights women's roles as writers of history, by adapting a language specific to women, and addresses themes pertinent to women's experiences. It intended to establish a new tradition in women's literature, history, anthropology, linguistics, and

other fields that centers on women's internal experiences, their sense of sisterhood, and their unique subculture. Divakaruni also intends to do the same through her writings. She sets out to revisit history by imagining how the women in history would have seen and experienced the historical happenings. To quote her words in 2023 interview with Mansi Shah:

I started writing the stories of women just because they were more natural to me. I felt like I understood other women more and of course, I thought it was an authentic view point I realised that all of our great mythological heroines were always shown to us from a male writer's perspective. And the stories were always interested in the men. The women characters were there, but they were kind of pushed to the side. Their complexities were not explored, their voices are not heard. So that became really important to me. For me to imagine them in the centre of the narrative, telling their stories, in their own voice. (n.p.)

By revising women's history, Divakaruni uncovers women's stories that have been overlooked or forgotten, granting them the recognition they deserve. For instance, in *The Last Queen*, by focusing on Jindan's role as a regent and her resistance against British annexation, Divakaruni reconstructs her legacy in a way that honours her contributions and agency. This approach helps to restore Jindan's rightful place in history and provides a more nuanced understanding of her impact on Sikh history and the history of Punjab. This revisiting of the history serves several purposes. First, it involves challenging patriarchal biases that have shaped historical narratives, demanding a critical re-evaluation of existing accounts and the creation of more inclusive and diverse histories. Second, it contributes to a more accurate and complete historical record that reflects the experiences of all individuals, regardless of gender. Lastly, it contests the traditional notion that men are the primary architects of history while women are passive or subordinate, thus addressing gender biases prevalent in academic fields such as history and literature, where women's contributions have often been minimized or ignored.

Margaret Atwood's metaphor in *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002) — “the premise is that dead bodies can talk if you know how to listen to them” (162) — reflects her belief in the importance of reinterpreting history through a more inclusive lens, particularly when it comes to women's voices. This metaphor emphasizes the idea that women's stories, often missing or marginalized in traditional historical accounts, can be uncovered and understood if we approach historical research with sensitivity and an open mind. Atwood's observation highlights a significant gap in historical records — the stories of women are frequently absent from textbooks and mainstream historical accounts. This absence is not merely a result of oversight but a reflection of historical biases where women's contributions and experiences were often deemed less important or were deliberately excluded. Listening to the dead, in Atwood's sense, involves empathy and imagination. Researchers and writers need to empathize with historical figures and use their imagination to reconstruct and give voice to experiences that are not fully documented.

By revisiting and rewriting collective histories, women writers not only honour their female ancestors but also amplify their previously silenced stories. A revisionist

approach to history involves challenging and updating established narratives to include overlooked or marginalized voices. This process not only recovers lost stories but also provides a more nuanced understanding of history. For Instance, in the paper “From Visibility to Analysis: Gender and History,” the critic Peto (2021) asserts, “If we define history as a site of remembrance, it is crucial to see it also as a reflection on power relations: who is remembering what, who is mastering the past and the remembrance of it, what is becoming visible in such a historical canon?” (1). Through imaginative yet historically informed storytelling, authors can fill gaps left by traditional historical accounts and offer new perspectives on historical figures and events.

This underscores the persistent issue of women's erasure from historical narratives. Scholars often investigate how historical narratives have excluded or marginalized women's experiences due to prevailing social norms, historian biases, and institutional structures. June Hannam (2008) notes that the writing of women's history has been deeply connected to feminist discourse and “evolving historical methodologies” (21). As women scrutinize inequalities in their lives, they turn to history to trace the origins of their oppression and consider how to transform these dynamics, learning from past challenges. Efforts to recover and amplify women's voices and contributions involve re-examining primary sources, reinterpreting existing narratives, and uncovering neglected stories.

As Aparna Basu (1991) observes, traditional history textbooks often include only those women who either took on male roles or were beloved by prominent men. Although there are a large number of texts that document the rise and fall of Sikh Empire and the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Maharaja Duleep Singh, none of them do justice to the women in their households as they do not pay attention to the significant contribution of women of the times. Rani Jindan is primarily recognized as Maharaja Ranjit Singh's youngest wife and the mother of the last Sikh ruler, Maharaja Duleep Singh. She is not recognised as a powerful historical figure in her own right. It is not acknowledged that her impactful role deserves a legible record in Sikh history. This is where Divakaruni jumps in to fill in the void, through her re-representation of the historical women characters. She highlights that rewriting women's history is crucial for achieving gender equality and acknowledging the substantial contributions of women throughout history. For too long, women's experiences and voices have been marginalized or erased from historical records, leading to a skewed understanding of the past.

Discussion

Divakaruni also addresses this issue, noting how women's stories are often sidelined in favour of prominent male figures. She makes Draupadi and Mata Sita the central characters in her narratives, who are overshadowed by figures like the Pandavas and Lord Ram. This perspective motivates Divakaruni to present narratives centered on women. In *The Last Queen* (2021), Divakaruni gives the readers an insight into Queen Jindan's character through a blend of factual detail and creative imagination. Her novel is notable for its historical accuracy and offers a perspective on the final

years of the Sikh Empire, focusing on Rani Jindan's experiences before and after Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death in 1839. The text takes into account the events that led to turmoil in the Sikh kingdom, goes into the details of various claimants to the throne who were unable to manage the political intrigue and power struggles that come with kingship, leading to the annexation of Punjab. The British, having exploited internal discord and the weakened state of the Sikh Empire, engage in military conflict. This is when Rani Jindan's efforts to rally support and resist the British come to the front.

Jind Kaur, who rose from a common background to become the final reigning queen of the Sikh Empire in India, exemplifies this historical erasure. She was Maharaja Ranjit Singh's youngest queen and the mother of Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last ruler of the Sikh Empire. Despite her significant role, Rani Jindan is often remembered merely for her beauty and strength. Following Ranjit Singh's death and the assassination of his three successors, Duleep Singh ascended to the throne as a child, and Jind Kaur served as his regent. Fiercely protective of her son's legacy, she opposed British annexation of Punjab and defied conventions by engaging openly in governance, discarding the traditional veil. After the Sikhs' defeat in the first Anglo-Sikh war, she was replaced by a Regency council, and the British later imprisoned and exiled her. Her impactful leadership in resisting British forces earned her significant influence, yet she was ultimately stripped of her possessions, including her son, who was taken to England. Despite her pivotal role, historical records on Rani Jind Kaur remain scant.

Rani Jindan is a complex and multifaceted character who is not afraid to challenge the status quo. She openly admits: "I value your love and your loyalty more than my pride, so I will speak my mind. I've been a widow since I was twenty-one. The years stretched ahead of me, empty as a desert. Then, miraculously, I found love again. But I cannot marry Lal. If I do, I must give up being regent. I cannot abandon Duleep like that. But should I be sentenced to loneliness just because I wish to protect my son? Many of the nobles have several wives-and mistresses, too. Their liaisons are accepted. Am I a sinner just because I'm a woman. I love only one man, but society will denounce me if it finds out" (241-42). She questions the double standards of society that are meant to restraint women.

She acts as the pillar of strength for Duleep when he is made to sit on the throne at the age of five, after his father's death. Instead of breaking down, she gathers all her courage to save Punjab, whom her husband loved more than himself. She does her best to save Punjab from the British. Nowhere does she become weak or fearful. She even denies being in Purdah, to appear courageous and invincible. Maharaja Duleep Singh acknowledges her mother's strength and contribution time and again. "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?" (*The Last Queen* 156). Jindan's son ponders as he sends the last of her ashes off into the sea on his sea voyage back to Britain.

When Rani Guddan and others decide to be Satis, instead of facing the aftermath of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's demise, Jindan realises she does not have the liberty to do so.

Her husband trusted her with the responsibility of Duleep and Punjab and she must live upto his expectations. Divakaruni says in this concern in her 2023 interview:

I presented them in the context of the times, and not how I see them right now—because that is how Rani Jindan would have seen them and judged them, especially the first time she is faced with them, with the death of her best friend, Rani Guddan.... I wanted people to feel the amount of pressure there was on Rani Jindan, too, to become a sati. The fact that she is even able to stand strong against all this pressure says something about the firmness of her character. Later, she is horrified when another dear friend, Rani Pathani, decides to become a sati - but she understands why, although she does not agree with her. The reality, as Rani Guddan points out to Jindan, is that life was very difficult for a widow, and often royal widows met a violent end after their powerful husbands (their protectors) passed away - as we see in the tragedy of Maharani Chand Kaur and her daughter-in-law Bibi. (n.p.)

The subject of female solidarity is also of great interest to Divakaruni. She portrays what women as a united group can achieve. Guddan and Pathani, and her maid, Mangla, were a huge support for Rani Jindan. Another woman who was important in the narrative, though not Jindan's friend, was Ranjit Singh's chief queen, Mai Nakkain, who controlled the politics of the *zenana*.

Divakaruni's retellings of the Mahabharata and Ramayana also shift the focus from nobles, statesmen, and state politics to the stories shared among women within palace walls. In her essay "Women's History in India: A Historiographical Survey," Aparna Basu emphasizes the need for visibility of women in various roles—producers, peasants, workers, artisans, domestic servants, and within the family as wives, daughters, and mothers. Basu argues that the comprehensive scope of women's lives should be a primary concern for women historians (181-182). She recognizes the importance of expressing the inner experiences of characters like Draupadi and Sita while simultaneously questioning their traditional identities.

In *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantment*, Divakaruni crafts narratives that center on the often-overlooked stories of women, elevating them to the forefront of historical discourse. *The Palace of Illusions* highlights the life and struggles of Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, who sacrifices her firstborn son to protect her reputation within the royal family and yearns for him throughout her life. The novel also portrays the self-sacrifice of Gandhari, the wife of the blind king Dhritarashtra, who chooses to blindfold herself, believing she has no right to enjoy the pleasures of life that her husband cannot experience.

The Forest of Enchantments begins with Sita reading Valmiki's Ramayana, only to find herself "conspicuously absent" (2). She questions Valmiki's narrative, which extols Ram's valor while ignoring her experiences. In response, she decides to write 'the Sitayan.' Sita chooses to write in red, saying, "How else could I write my story except in the color of menstruation and childbirth, the colour of the marriage mark that changes women's lives, the color of the flowers of the Ashoka tree under which I had spent my years of captivity in the palace of the demon king?" (4).

In addition to Sita, the novel highlights other significant yet often overlooked

women: Queen Sunaina, who secretly advises Janak on state matters and raises the earthborn Sita; Urmila, the forgotten sister and wife who spends fourteen years without her husband for no apparent reason; Ahalya, whose beauty is turned to stone by a jealous husband; Kaikeyi, who is vilified for loving her son unconditionally; Soorpanakha, the wild enchantress punished for desiring the wrong man; and Mandodari, Ravana's wife, who witnesses her kingdom's destruction and her son's death due to her husband's obsession with another woman. These women are frequently absent or misrepresented in male-authored texts. Women are either presented as beautiful damsels in distress or strong but wicked and ugly. This indirectly passes the message that strong women are undesirable and wicked.

Also, Divakaruni, at times, plays with imagination to add touches of fiction to history. As White notes, "The writer of realistic fiction sets her story within a time-and-place-specific context and examines, through the actions of her imaginary characters, the line that divides the reality of that time and place from what historians would recognize as the truths we know about it" (148). In *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni introduces a new character, Dhai Ma, to challenge the mainstream historical narrative. Dhai Ma serves as a storyteller, revealing various aspects of the characters in Draupadi's life and voicing her deepest desires. However, she constantly reminds herself and the queen of their gender roles and societal expectations. Similarly, in *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakaruni creates the character Haradhanu, a mystical bow that becomes Sita's storyteller and confidant. Haradhanu guides Sita to unknown places and reveals secrets about her mystical birth and future.

Draupadi and Sita's curious and unconventional behavior provides an alternative perspective on mainstream history, which often omits these personal stories. Draupadi feels like "a girl who wasn't invited" and questions her existence, while Sita is eager to learn about her real parents. Sita, a healer and warrior, resonates with nature because she is "earth-born" (*The Palace of Illusions* 7) and often wonders about her origins. Draupadi's contemplation of her name reflects the male-dominated authority in her life. Despite her extraordinary birth, she is identified by her father's name and lacks a distinct identity and purpose. She questions, "My attention veered to the meaning of names our father chose. Dhristadyumna, Destroyer of Enemies, Draupadi, Daughter of Draupad" (5). Divakaruni's Draupadi, however, becomes a pivotal figure in the destruction of enemies, criticizing her father for choosing a name that undermines her role in history and obscures her individuality.

On the contrary, Draupadi often envisions her own palace, raising the question of the spaces women truly belong to. She wonders if her place is in her father's palace or in the Palace of Hastinapur, which she sees as entirely her own. The palace built by the Pandavas feels like an illusion to Draupadi, as she does not feel a sense of belonging there. Similarly, Sita yearns for forests and oceans, feeling out of place in her father's home.

Draupadi frequently asks Dhai Ma to recount the story of her birth, which makes her feel connected to history and her future. Sita, on the other hand, seeks the same

connection from Haradhanu. Both women strive to assert their identities and embed them into their present lives. Mainstream history and traditional historical fiction often overlook the subtle yet significant stories that women have to offer as cultural texts. Divakaruni's feminist approach weaves her novels with the imaginative and rich tales of women, bringing these overlooked narratives to the forefront.

In the words of Lerner, "It is important to understand that 'woman's culture' is not and should not be seen as a subculture. It is hardly possible for the majority to live in a subculture.... Women live their social existence within the general culture and, whenever they are confined by patriarchal restraint or segregation into separateness (which always has subordination as its purpose), they transform this restraint into complementarity (asserting the importance of woman's function, even its 'superiority') and redefine it. Thus, women live in duality—as members of the general culture and as partakers of women's culture" (Lerner, 52).

In all the texts under study, there are instances of gossip, eavesdropping, getting dressed for events, and other activities that are part of 'women's culture.' These elements are often ignored in male-authored texts and dismissed as 'subculture.' However, when women write history, these so-called 'subcultures' play a crucial role in the narrative and are integral to the female voice.

Conclusion

To conclude, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has effectively represented the inner sphere of women's lives, bringing them out from the hegemonic portrayal in the epics. Rewriting women's history can empower contemporary women by providing role models and examples of women who defied societal norms and made significant contributions. It helps women recognize themselves as active agents of change and understand their struggles and achievements as part of a broader historical continuum. This effort also extends beyond merely correcting historical records; it involves confronting and challenging the dominant narratives that have shaped our understanding of the past and revealing how gender-based discrimination and oppression have been sustained.

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Queering the Domestic Space through Re-imagining 'Home': Deconstruction of Heteronormativity in Abha Dawesar's *Babyji*

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Abstract

This article attempts to re-imagine the concept of domestic space in Abha Dawesar's novel *Babyji* as a site of queer identity formation and expression. Set against the backdrop of 1990s New Delhi, the narrative assiduously follows Anamika Sharma, a teenager who navigates her lesbian desires within the confines of her home thereby challenging the traditional notion of home as a heteronormative space. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Gaston Bachelard, Alan Sinfield, and queer theory, this paper examines how Anamika's interactions within her domestic environment subvert conventional familial and societal expectations. The analysis discloses that the home, rather than being a static, heteronormative space, becomes a dynamic site of secrecy, exploration, and growth for Anamika. The article also argues that Dawesar's novel presents a critical intervention in the discourse on gender, sexuality, and space by illustrating how the concept of home can be redefined to accommodate and celebrate lesbian identities, thereby problematising the dominant heteropatriarchal narratives and offering a more inclusive understanding of domesticity.

Keywords: Home, lesbianism, adolescent character, heteronormativity, deconstruction

Introduction

In the rich labyrinth of contemporary Indian literature, *Babyji* emerges as a remarkable and provocative narrative that delves deep into the complexities of adolescence, identity, and societal norms. Authored by Abha Dawesar, a writer who is celebrated for her nuanced exploration of human relationships and sexuality, *Babyji* is set against the backdrop of 1990s New Delhi, a time of significant socio-political change in India. Dawesar, with her insightful and vivacious storytelling, invites readers into the life of Anamika Sharma, a brilliant and precocious teenager navigating the tumultuous waters of her desires and social expectations. Published in 2005, *Babyji* stands out in Dawesar's oeuvre as a novel that contends conventional narratives around gender, sexuality, and power dynamics, earning her critical acclaim and a devoted readership. *Babyji* unfurls through the eyes of its protagonist, Anamika Sharma, a 16-year-old student who excels academically but nevertheless finds herself embroiled in a web of “affairs” that challenge her understanding of the world and herself (Dawesar 75). The novel is a bildungsroman that captures the essence of growing up in a society that is at once rigid in its expectations and filled with undercurrents of change. Therefore, through Anamika's interactions with her family, teachers, and a cast of complex characters, Dawesar crafts a narrative that is as much about the personal as it is about the political, offering a window into the life of a young girl who dares to defy norms and carve out her own path.

Re-imagining the Concept of Home

The idea of home holds a vital place in literature, serving as a complex symbol and motif that writers often scrutinise from various vantage points and give away multiple interpretations. In its literary sense home represents a physical dwelling or place of residence, however, it takes on a much deeper and metaphorical meaning in scholarly literary works and carries profound symbolic implications. In his seminal work, *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard initiates his discourse by enumerating the concept of home, asserting that “all truly inhabited space embodies the fundamental essence of the notion of home” (5). Home spaces are further imbued with a multitude of memories, emotions, and desires, thereby rendering it unsurprising that the concept of home, akin to childhood, is infused with a sense of nostalgia. By emphasising the poetic realm, specifically the imaginative reaction to “spaces we love,” rather than the tangible aspects of the wardrobes, cellars, and attics included in his research, Bachelard draws attention to the parallels between experiences with physical places and spaces encountered within the realm of literature (xxx). Bachelard's observations on how emotions affect our experiences of spaces suggest that we love our homes because they provide a safe space for daydreaming and allow us to imagine our desires in peace (6). However, not everyone feels this way. For some, home is not a place they love, nor is it a sanctuary for daydreaming. For individuals belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community, their residence can often become a cause of unease and seclusion. According to Browne, Lim, and Brown, a significant number of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and trans persons experience an unwelcoming environment in their homes, leading to increased sentiments of social isolation and marginalisation (3). Nevertheless, in an attempt to deviate from such a negative proposition, Dawesar deliberately positions a lesbian adolescent experimenting with her sexuality within the space of her home, thus subverting the traditional notion of home as a pristine heterosexual patriarchal place. Hence, this paper attempts to study how Anamika, the protagonist redefines her home space so that she can exhibit her lesbian desires freely within the intimate space of her abode. According to Carol Werner *et al*, “People and their environments are an integral and inseparable unit; they cannot be defined separately, and indeed are mutually defining” (2). This perspective challenges the traditional view of the home as inherently heteronormative, suggesting instead that any relationship can shape a home. The concept of home, therefore, is not fixed but is continually reconstructed, allowing for the possibility of queer spaces that defy hetero-patriarchal norms. Dawesar's novels exemplify this subversion, presenting the home as a flexible space that can accommodate diverse relationships and identities.

A Shift from Conventional to Non-Conventional Paradigm

Renowned queer theorist Alan Sinfield astutely acknowledges the intricate interplay between the concept of home and its construction within the framework of heteronormativity. Sinfield suggests that many individuals who identify as homosexual are typically raised in heterosexual families. As a result, they often find

it necessary to distance themselves to some extent from their families and immerse themselves in the culture of a minority community if they are fortunate enough to have access to one (103). Sinfield's proposition regarding the necessity for homosexuals to transition from a conventional, familial household to an alternative 'minority community' that can accommodate their sexual orientation lacks a viable solution for transcending the limitations imposed by heteronormative standards and addressing the inherent conflicts between queer identity and a sense of belonging. In lieu of this, the present paper intends to re-imagine the concept of 'home' through the application of social science-based conceptualisations, which offer a suitable structure for examining the novel *Babyji* by the acclaimed Indo-American author Abha Dawesar, in which she navigates the complexities of lesbian adolescence. While recognising the validity of Sinfield's statements in drawing attention to the consequences of sexuality within the context of the household, the critical approach pointed out in the present study contends that they also prompt inquiries into our sociocultural perception of the hetero/homo binary and suggests a re-evaluation of the correlation between home and sexuality by questioning the very definition of home. Sinfield's perspective elucidates the simultaneous manifestation of naturalised and socially acknowledged heteronormativity within the conventional domestic environment. However, it also perpetuates the binary nature of sexual 'normativity' by proposing that individuals who identify as homosexual must relocate from this 'normative' space to a subordinate minority community. This implies a form of othering while employing the terminology of queer theory in this context. This paper's examination of the home space further expands upon the theoretical frameworks proposed by David Bell et al., whose research on gender, sexuality, and place highlights the importance of recognising the straightness of our streets as a cultural construct. It also emphasises the need to critically examine the commonly held belief that everyday spaces are inherently heterosexual (32). The home can be considered a notable relic here.

Nuanced Juxtaposition of the Site and Sentiments in *Babyji*

The concept of home in *Babyji* is multifaceted, reflecting both a physical space and a complex emotional landscape. In the novel, home is depicted as a location where the protagonist, Anamika, resides with her family and as a site of personal conflict, exploration, and growth. It embodies traditional familial expectations and norms, while simultaneously serving as a backdrop against which Anamika navigates her identity, desires, and relationships. Anamika's interactions within her home reveal it as a space of secrecy and introspection. For instance, her engagement with the *Kamasutra* in the scooter garage, a part of her home, highlights how she uses the physical spaces within her home for personal exploration away from the prying eyes of her family and societal scrutiny. She remarks, "I decided to read the *Kamasutra*. I had to do this while standing in the scooter garage, which had been converted into a storeroom. I would sneak out with a flashlight after my parents had gone to sleep" (Dawesar 1). This act of reading in secrecy underscores the home as a complex space

where Anamika's non-normative desires and intellectual curiosities are pursued in the shadows, reflecting a tension between her inner life and external expectations. Nonetheless, Anamika later disrupts this heteronormative framework of home by engaging in homo-erotic intimacy with her maid Rani suggesting a subversion of this place to a queer space where non-normative desires are practised.

Anamika's residence generally, particularly her bedroom, serves as a physical environment wherein she explores her attraction towards women. The protagonist's encounters with the domestic servant, whom she successfully entices, transpire within the domestic sphere (49). This not only serves to emphasise Anamika's ability to convert her domestic environment into a realm conducive to sexual exploration but also serves to underscore the intricate nature of navigating such relationships within a setting that is conventionally intended to be secure and devoid of sexual content. Despite home being a site where heterosexual intimacies are well played out, Anamika displays her nonchalance towards the heteronormative conventions by indulging in homoerotic love affairs with Rani, the servant, India, her older friend, and Sheela all in the secure environment of the home itself. Instead of seeking refuge in lesbian/gay bars or other heterotopias where non-normative desires are carried out without the fear of shame, Anamika chooses home as a site to contend with the patriarchal heterosexual power structures. The domestic abode and the bedroom specifically in this context, assume a multifaceted role as a locus of longing, investigation, and concealment for Anamika, mirroring her odyssey towards comprehending her sexual orientation and selfhood.

Roderick Lawrence, an environmental scientist and a specialist in urban ecology and housing, argues that “the concept of the home is ambiguous” as a site of relative and not absolute definition; the home subsequently becomes a fluid location of multiple possibilities (53). The fluidity observed in this context aligns with the perspective of queer theory on identity, as exemplified by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's assertion that “queer” is an “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements [...] aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically” (8). Similar to identity, the concept of home is not characterised by a singular location or a delineated entity, but rather as a dynamic construct subject to transformation and evolution. The gradual metamorphosis of Anamika Sharma's domicile into a realm conducive to the exploration of her lesbian inclinations constitutes a noteworthy facet of her developmental trajectory within the narrative of *Babyji*. Her encounter with Rani ushers her into the burgeoning realm of sexuality. After her routine work, Rani emphatically offers to massage Anamika's legs, thereby initiating an intimacy that transcends the heterosexual barriers. Anamika remarks:

I was thinking all these things in my head when she lifted my skirt all the way up past my underwear, gripped my left leg firmly, and started to massage it...The sensation of her hands taking over my flesh, kneading it, stretching it, and squeezing it was comforting. When she was done, I walked her to the door and shut it behind her without saying anything. (15)

Likewise, Anamika's first attraction towards India (a middle-aged divorced woman with whom Anamika starts an affair) and the consequent visit to India's home result in another profound and intimate episode (22). These instances collectively highlight how the home becomes a crucial setting for the exploration of lesbian desires, providing a private space where Anamika and India can navigate their feelings and relationships away from the public eye.

We went into her bedroom. She put oil in a small steel bowl and lay down on the bed with a towel under her head. As I massaged the oil into her black tresses, she let out little ooh-aahs of pleasure. I got absorbed in her glistening skin and in the way my fingers slid easily because of the oil. After her hair had soaked up the fluid I massaged the base of her neck. (9)

The scene described, where Anamika massages oil into India's hair and then the base of her neck, can be analysed from a queer lens as a moment of intimate, sensual connection that transcends conventional boundaries of friendship or casual physical interaction. This act of care and physical touch, set within the privacy of a bedroom, serves as a space for exploring non-normative desires and affections. The perceptible sensations—the glistening skin, the ease with which fingers slide because of the oil, and Sheela's vocal expressions of pleasure (ooh-aahs)—all contribute to a heightened sensory experience that underscores the intimacy of the moment. From a queer perspective, this scene disrupts traditional narratives of female interaction by imbuing the act of massaging with a layer of erotic potential. The privacy of the bedroom and the physicality of the massage allow for a closeness that challenges heteronormative assumptions about the nature of women's relationships with each other. It suggests a fluidity of desire and intimacy that is not confined by societal expectations of female friendship or sexuality. Moreover, the act of massaging, especially in the context of oiling hair—a deeply personal and traditionally feminine activity in many cultures—can be seen as a form of queer kinship. It creates a momentary world where the norms governing female bodies and their interactions are momentarily suspended, allowing for the expression of care, desire, and connection that defy easy categorisation.

The Closet and Spatial Negotiation

The bedroom further serves as a metaphorical 'closet' for Anamika, encapsulating her struggles with her lesbian identity within the conservative context of her society. The bedroom, traditionally a private space for rest and personal moments, becomes a complex location where Anamika's exploration of her sexuality and her intimate encounters are hidden away from the public eye, reflecting the broader theme of concealment associated with LGBTQIA+ identities. The incorporation of the bedroom in the narrative typifies the self-conscious nature of Dawesar's construction of homosexuality by integrating into the narrative a space used in everyday expression to denote homosexuality; that of 'being in the closet.' This reconfiguration of her bedroom challenges the heteronormative associations of domestic spaces with familial and reproductive functions, positioning it instead as a

site of queer possibility and resistance. Anamika's interactions with her lovers in bedrooms are instances of her exercising autonomy over her sexual desires, yet these moments are shrouded in secrecy. Consider this, when she invites her servant into her room with the intention of a sexual encounter, the act of asking her to remove her clothes is a confrontation with the norms prescribed, yet it occurs within the confines of her private space, away from the judgmental eyes of society (48). This duality highlights the bedroom's role as a closet, where Anamika's lesbian identity is both expressed and concealed. Furthermore, the bedroom becomes a space of queer intimacy and self-discovery. Anamika's encounters with her lovers in bedrooms are moments of vulnerability and connection, such as when she “leads a lover by the hand into her bed, turning off the light for privacy” (71). These interactions, while deeply personal and affirming of her identity, are kept hidden, mirroring the closeted nature of many queer relationships in conservative settings. The use of the bedroom by Anamika to explore her sexuality also reflects the broader societal pressures to conform to heteronormative standards. Moreover, the secrecy necessitated by her bedroom encounters underscores the risks associated with deviating from the cultural standards, making the bedroom a space where her true self is both discovered and hidden, embodying the concept of the closet in LGBTQIA+ discourse.

Gill Valentine asserts that “the use of this metaphor to describe lesbian and gay invisibility appears to have come into common parlance in the mid to late 1960s at the time when its material signifier became popular within the home” (153). Valentine's theoretical framework explores the connection between metaphor and object, clearly linking the cultural sexual reference and object. This approach is similar to the way Dawesar's novels handle these themes. In addition, Valentine cautions that the paradox of the closet is that by publicly revealing one's true identity, one inadvertently reinforces the existence of the closet itself, so emphasising the problematic contradiction inherent in this theme (157). Coming out of the closet does not destroy it, but instead ironically increases the incidence of closets, so strengthening the marginalisation and invisibility of homosexuality in society. Nevertheless, Dawesar's deliberate and clever use of the closet in her works prevents the problematic situation where homosexuality is once again linked to and confined within a hidden location. Instead of linking the closet and homosexuality to societal marginalisation and secrecy, as commonly believed, it becomes a place where individuals undergo personal growth in Dawesar's novel. Furthermore, its historically repressive features are welcomed to confront and question the dominance of heteronormativity.

Anamika transcends the metaphorical closet through her bold exploration of her sexuality and her refusal to conform to societal expectations. Her journey is marked by a series of “liaisons” that defy the traditional roles assigned to her by a conservative society, indicating her step beyond the boundaries of the metaphorical closet (198). This act of balancing multiple “liaisons” is a form of resistance against the societal expectations placed upon her, signifying her move beyond the constraints of the closet (198). Moreover, Anamika's intellectual pursuits and her

ability to excel in areas like quantum physics, juxtaposed with her exploration of the *Kamasutra*, illustrate her transcendence of traditional gender and societal roles (18). Her academic and sexual explorations are both areas where she refuses to be confined by societal expectations, indicating a broader rejection of the metaphorical closet that seeks to hide or suppress her true self.

Taking this discussion further, the frequent reference to the doors in the narrative symbolizes the boundaries between public and private spaces, serving as metaphors for the closeting of queer identities and the navigation of societal norms. From a queer perspective, doors represent the threshold across which Anamika's lesbian identity moves between visibility and invisibility, safety and vulnerability. Additionally, Anamika's conscious decision to lock the door during intimate moments is not just an act of creating a private space but also a symbolic gesture of claiming her identity and desires away from the societal gaze (88). This act of bolting the door, while seemingly reinforcing the closet, paradoxically serves as a step towards self-acceptance and acknowledgement of her identity, marking a significant move beyond the metaphorical closet. However, the presence of doors also highlights the precariousness of such safe spaces. The rattling of the door when Sheela and Anamika are together not only interrupts their moment of intimacy but also serves as a stark reminder of the external pressures and the ever-present threat of exposure (128). The door, in this instance, symbolizes the fragile boundary between the private expression of queer identity and the public veneer that Anamika is forced to maintain. Moreover, "the locked back door" that Anamika encounters upon returning home from India's place serves as a metaphor for the barriers she faces in reconciling her queer identity with her family life and societal expectations (288). The locked door represents the obstacles to fully integrating her private self with her public persona, highlighting the challenges queer individuals often face in finding acceptance and understanding within their own homes and communities.

Likewise, Sheela's home becomes a site of lesbian exploration primarily through the intimate and private moments shared between Anamika and Sheela within its confines (234-235). These moments are characterised by a mix of emotional intimacy, physical closeness, and the exploration of desires that are facilitated by the privacy and safety of the home environment. One instance illustrating this exploration occurs when Anamika visits Sheela's house, where the privacy of Sheela's bedroom allows for a moment of potential intimacy. However, the need to keep the door open, as requested by Sheela to avoid suspicion from the household servant, introduces a layer of restraint to their interaction, hinting at the complexities of exploring their relationship within a domestic setting (234). Another significant moment is when Anamika and Sheela share a quiet, intimate time in Sheela's room, lying on the bed close to each other but not touching, immersed in the ambience created by soft instrumental music. This scene underscores the home as a space where the characters can experience moments of closeness and potential exploration of their feelings in a discreet and personal setting (302). Furthermore, Anamika's fantasies about their future together, imagining a shared domestic life with Sheela,

further illustrate how Sheela's home, and the concept of a shared home, becomes a canvas for Anamika's exploration of her lesbian desires. Their conversation about living together, with details about their dream home's decor, reflects a deeper longing for a life where their relationship can flourish openly and freely (268). Lastly, a more explicit exploration of their lesbian desires occurs when Anamika, under the guise of discussing another matter, leads Sheela to her bedroom intending to be intimate. The act of turning off the light and the subsequent physical intimacy between them, described in a rush of emotions and sensations, showcases Sheela's home as a critical site for the exploration of their sexual relationship (268). This analysis aligns with the broader themes in *Babyji* of exploring “sexuality as a spectrum rather than a binary,” where Anamika's interactions with various characters, including Sheela, serve as a narrative device to question and expand the understanding of desire, identity, and intimacy beyond conventional heteronormative frameworks (134).

Declaiming Domesticity, Reclaiming Home

Dawesar's work presents a compelling critique of the prevailing notion that the home can be exclusively the domain of heterosexual families. By subverting this conventional understanding, Dawesar challenges the notion of the home as a sphere that adheres to heteronormative norms, instead transforming it into a reclaimed space that embraces and accommodates lesbians. By adopting the perspective that the concept of home is inherently ambiguous, fluid, and subject to change, Dawesar aligns with the theoretical frameworks proposed by Lawrence and Werner et al. This approach allows for the reinterpretation of the space, offering alternative interpretations that challenge the prevailing heteronormative norms. Through the recognition of the home, gender, and sexuality as discursive constructs, Dawesar thus engages in the deconstruction of the binary dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality, thereby fostering a more inclusive comprehension of both spatiality and individuality.

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Eco-poetic Vision of Agha Shahid Ali: A Select Study of *Snow on the Desert* and *I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight*

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Abstract

At present industrialization and human activities are degrading the environment day by day, glaciers are melting due to the rapid rise in pollution, which is bad for the environment. Natural disasters, seasonal shifts, and climatic change have been on the rise and are exceedingly dangerous to human life. In this regard, Agha Shahid Ali, a renowned Kashmiri-American poet, is known for his evocative and poignant poetry that often explores themes of love, loss of natural beauties and his cultural heritage. While his poetry may not be explicitly focused on environmental issues, it can still be analyzed from an Eco-critical perspective, which examines the relationship between literature and the environment. In this context, Ecocriticism seeks to understand how literature represents and interacts with the natural world, and how it can contribute to environmental awareness and conservation. Analyzing Agha Shahid Ali's poetry through this lens, we can explore the ways in which he portrays nature, landscapes, and the environment and how these depictions can foster a connection between readers to the natural world. By immersing his readers in vivid descriptions of the natural world, he creates a sense of connection and appreciation for the environment. This study delves into how Ali uses natural imagery and landscapes in his select two poems, "*Snow on the Desert*" and "*I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight*" to reflect the political and personal turmoil in his homeland, Kashmir. This paper will provoke readers to reflect on their own role in environmental degradation and inspire them to take action to protect the natural world.

Keywords: literature, environment, protection, poetry, natural disasters

Introduction

Globally, the ecocritical approaches have gained increasing attention in the study of literature, culture, and the arts in recent years and the environmental challenges, such as pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss, have global ramifications, with certain regions more affected than others. Literature, with its ability to engage emotions, provoke thoughts, and inspire actions, provides a unique platform for exploring and addressing these environmental crises. In the modern world, the preservation of the environment has indeed become a top priority for many individuals and communities. In this context, Literature has the power to refocus public attention on the importance of protecting the environment by offering different perspectives, narratives, and imaginative possibilities. Through literary works, readers can gain insights into the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds, the consequences of environmental degradation, and the urgency of sustainable practices. One such field in this regard is ecocriticism, which deals with the study of nature. Ecocriticism theories and especially the one propagated by Lawrence Buell in his book *The Environmental Imagination* explore in American context the relationship between literature, nature and culture and which plays a

significant role in analyzing and understanding the environmental dimensions of literature. By applying ecocritical approaches, scholars and readers can uncover the ways in which literature portrays environmental concerns, raises awareness, and encourages environmental stewardship. Literature captures and conveys the emotional and societal impact of natural disasters, vulnerability of human life prompting readers to reflect on their own responsibility and the collective actions necessary to mitigate and prevent further environmental crises and refocuses public attention on environmental protection, provide insights into human-nature relationships, and inspire action.

The term “Ecocriticism” was first used by William Reckett in an essay titled “*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*” published in 1970. William Rueckert writes that “eco-criticism entailed the —application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature; because ecology has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live” (Rueckert 107). In literature, Eco criticism analyses the relationship between humans and the natural environment. It is concerned with how environmental issues and attitudes towards nature are presented and examined. According to Peter Barry “eco-criticism began in the United States of America in the late 1980's, and Green Studies in the United Kingdom in the early 1990's” (Barry 143). One of the primary purposes of ecocriticism is to investigate how individuals in society behave and react to nature and ecological elements. In his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, Lawrence Buell describes ecocriticism as “the environmentally oriented study of literature and (less often) the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice” (138). Scholars and critics began to pay more attention to the representation of nature and the environment in literature, recognizing the importance of ecological issues and their impact on society, often drawing concepts and methodologies from various disciplines, including literature, ecology, philosophy, sociology, and environmental studies.

Many notable literary figures throughout history have expressed concerns about the environment and the potential destruction of the natural world. Writers such as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Frost, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Blake, and Ruskin have incorporated nature and environmental themes into their works. Their writings celebrated the beauty of the natural world, raised awareness about the impacts of human activities on the environment, and expressed the need for its preservation. However, it is true that the concept of an explicitly defined “Ecopoetic voice” or the organized philosophy of Eco criticism as we understand it today emerged in the late 20th century. This development can be attributed to the growing environmental awareness and concerns during that time, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of environmental studies. In this regard, Agha Shahid Ali's poetry deserves the appropriate attention. Agha Shahid Ali has produced a significant amount of poetry that addresses a variety of subjects, including socio-religious, natural, and environmental challenges, and nostalgia of homeland. The present study delves to analyze the eco critical vision in “Snow on the Desert” and “I see Kashmir from New

Delhi at Midnight”

Life of Agha Shahid Ali

Agha Shahid Ali was born in New Delhi in 1949; however his family is from Kashmir. His family has a very high level of education. Nishat Zaidi comments, “Ali grew up in a culturally and linguistically rich environment where the entire family read and appreciated poetry and literature in Persian, Urdu and English” (56). Agha Shahid Ali attended a number of universities, including the University of Kashmir, the University of Delhi, the Pennsylvania State University, and the University of Arizona. He got well-known in America by identifying as an English-language American poet. In this context Adil Muzafar states, “Ali is best known in the U.S. and identified himself as one among the modern American poets” (47). His use of startling metaphors, miraculous juxtapositions of contradictory materials, and the blending of the real with the strange makes his poetry appealing and aid his poem's structure as a technical poet as well. He has been described as the Master-Poet of Kashmir, a devotee who uses the precious jewels of his mind to immortalize his beloved country.

Agha Shahid Ali, a prominent Kashmiri-American poet, has indeed produced a significant body of work that touches on various subjects, including socio-religious themes, nature and the environment, and a sense of longing for his homeland. In an introduction to “*The Rebel's Silhouette*” (1995), Agha Shahid Ali says that his grandmother during his childhood days used to quote, “Milton...Shakespeare, Keats, and Hardy in English; Hafiz and Rumi in Persian; Ghalib and Faiz in Urdu; Habba Khatun, Mehjoor, and Zinda Kaul in Kashmiri” (xi). This demonstrates his deep engagement with literature across various traditions and suggests that Agha Shahid Ali had a multicultural upbringing, with a blend of Western and Eastern literary influences. When analyzing his poetry from an Eco-critical perspective, one can consider the theoretical framework that underlies Eco-criticism and explore how it applies to Agha Shahid Ali's poetry. Ali's poetry often showcases a deep appreciation for the natural world and the landscapes of his homeland, Kashmir. He frequently employs vivid descriptions of nature, evoking a sense of beauty and tranquility. In terms of his poetic style, Agha Shahid Ali is known for his use of startling metaphors and juxtapositions of contradictory materials. Nishat Zaidi further says that “Shahid Ali's poetry can be best termed an elaboration of the Subcontinent's own mixed history. He draws from the rich cultural resources of the country of his birth, where plurality, compositeness and eclecticism mark cultural patterns” (57) These techniques create a sense of surprise and evoke vivid imagery, enhancing the impact of his poetry. His poetry collections include: *A Walk Through the Yellow Pages* (1987), *The Half-Inch Himalayas* (1987), *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991), *The Country without a Post Office* (1997) and *Rooms Are Never Finished* (2001).

Discussion

In most of his poems, Agha Shahid Ali beautifully evokes the picture of natural landscapes, emphasizing the importance of rivers and streams. He believes that any

disruption to these natural elements, which he regards as the primary sources of life and energy, will result in the world becoming barren like a desert. His poems frequently draw on memories of his childhood in Kashmir, indicating his strong affinity to the region. In his collection, *The Half Inch Himalayas* (1987), which according to Bruce King “partly looks back to the past and in structure follows his change of homes from India to the United States” (7). However, he frequently returns to describing landscapes, mountains, rivers, lakes, springs, snow, huts and crop fields in all of his poetry collections. The poem “Snow on the Desert” taken from the collection, *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991) is a captivating piece of literature that explores the feelings of love, loss, and the fleeting nature of life. The poet crafts a profound analysis of silence and bittersweet recollections of lost love against the backdrop of Kashmir's snow-covered environment, through the evocative use of imagery, metaphors, and symbols. In the poem, Shahid comments on strange beauty of the natural environment, the desert's unfathomable geological antiquity. He describes how snow falls throughout the night and then, in the morning, the sun rays hit it and have an effect on human eyes that prevents them from seeing due to refraction. Ali claims:

... and the snow which had fallen all night, now
sun-dazzled, blinded us, the earth whitened
out, as if by cocaine, the desert's plants,
its mineral hard colors extinguished,
wine frozen in the veins of the cactus. (164)

These lines describe the harsh winter weather; the silent snowfall at night captivates everyone in the morning, but it also freezes everything and appears to put life on hold. Ali provides a richly descriptive and evocative depiction of a landscape transformed by a heavy snowfall where 'sun-dazzled' evokes a sense of bright, almost overwhelming light reflecting off the fresh snow, “blinded” emphasizes the intensity of the light suggesting the unpreparedness and overwhelming of the characters by the sudden transformation of the landscape. The metaphor of “cocaine” is used to describe the snow's effect on the landscape, emphasizing on the visual transformation of the environment, heightened sensory experiences and potential danger. Here, the reference to the term “extinguished” implies that when the snow temporarily erases these features, it implies a sense of loss and change. Hence, Ali uses the metaphor of snowfall in the desert as the metaphor for the unnatural and unexpected effects of climate change. Further in the poem, Ali talks about the big cactus plants called saguaros and says that they bloom only at night, “And you know the flowers/of the saguaros bloom only at night?” (Ali, 165). This compelling interpretation deepens the poem's significance, transforming it from a simple landscape description to a commentary on global environmental issues. Further he recalls the importance of time at the ending of the poem as:

every shadow, everything the earth was losing,
a time to think of everything the earth
and I had lost, of all
that I would lose,

of all that I was losing. (167)

Agha Shahid Ali seems to express a contemplative and introspective mood reflecting on the losses incurred by the speaker and the Earth, a sense of gradual decline or deterioration on a personal level and on a broader environmental scale. Ali captures a contemplation of loss from an environmental perspective and individual arena evoking a sense of melancholy and introspection, emphasizing the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world while highlighting the transient nature of life and the potential consequences of the action on the Earth.

The notion that time does not even stop for sun rays is suggestive of recognition of the relentless passage of time. Ali implies suggestively that the lost moment, the notion of its irreversibility cannot be regained subsequently underscoring the fleeting nature of existence and the importance of cherishing and making the most of the present. Ali, the revolutionary poet, claims that he sees history and the past whenever he looks in the sky, reflecting the sense of timelessness and continuity. It implies that the sky serves as a visual reminder of the vast sweep of history, encompassing the experiences and narratives of countless generations. Ali emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things and the enduring imprints of the past on the present. For example, the mention of the clouds further reinforces the idea of time's ceaseless progression, and its continuous movement serves as a metaphor for the relentless march of time, highlighting its unstoppable nature. Adil muzaffer explores these lines as "he seems to be concerned about the loss in the environment and finds its similarity with the loss in his own life" (77). Here, Agha Shahid Ali's observation underscores the impermanence of moments and the ever-changing nature of the world. In short, "*Snow on the Desert*" is a profound emotive poem that captures the vastness and silence of snow while delving into the complex feelings of love and loss. The poet effectively employs metaphors and symbols to convey a deep sense of longing, sorrow, and beauty.

The poem, "*I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight*" taken from the collection *The Country without a Post Office* (1997) consists of four sections. The narrator is in Delhi but he gives the account of the experiences of the Kashmir. The narrator wants to expose the "Real beauty of Kashmir" during winter with reference to snow, ice and cold to establish a wintry setting. The presence of these elements contributes to the overall atmosphere and the mood of the poem, evoking a sense of desolation, stillness and harshness. The depiction of snow falling as ash carries powerful connotations. It suggests a devastation that goes beyond the physical realm, hinting at the suffering, destruction and loss experienced by the people of Kashmir. The contrast between the delicate beauty of snow and its transformation into something destructive serves as a poignant theme in the poem. The juxtaposition of Kashmir's circumstances with natural phenomena such as snowfall, underscores the impact of human conflict and political unrest on the natural world. It reflects the profound connection between human experiences and the environment, highlighting how external forces can disrupt and mar the tranquility of nature. The poet sets the narrative of the elusive time, the weight of history, the enduring imprints of the past

and the interplay between natural elements and human experiences. Ali begins the poem as:

One must wear jeweled ice in dry plains
to will the distant mountains to glass.(4)

The beginning couplet sets the specific tone of the poem with the word 'ice' in the opening line to establish particular atmosphere of coldness, beauty, fragility and transformation to engage the attentiveness and imagination of the readers. This couplet employs vivid imagery and metaphor to portray themes of distance, longing, and the loss between reality and illusion. The phrase “jewelled ice” suggests something cold yet extremely valuable, indicating the idea of wearing or carrying something lovely yet frozen—possibly symbolizing the crystallized memories of a distant homeland. The “dry plains” evoke a barren landscape, in contrast to the concept of “jewelled ice” which implies a harsh setting in which the beauty of Kashmir is out of reach or only existing as a distant, unattainable dream. The mountains symbolise Kashmir, which is physically and emotionally distant from the poet. Further the poet says:

In autumn
When the wind blows sheer ice, the *chinar* leaves
Fall in clusters-
One by one, otherwise (5)

In these lines, Agha Shahid Ali creates an atmosphere of sadness and grief in the poem by giving a reference of autumn and *chinar* leaves. The reference to the wind blowing “sheer ice” connotes a chilling and harsh environment, signifying a landscape that is physically cold and emotionally desert. The *chinar* tree is highly valued in Kashmir due to its cultural and historical significance. The *chinar* tree is known for its broad, spreading canopy that provides ample of shade, as well as its distinct leaves that resembles with maple leaves. Its true beauty emerges in the autumn, when the foliage turns to a blood-red and mauve colour. The leaves gradually turn yellow and amber. Therefore, the *chinar* tree is portrayed in a state of decay, with its leaves dropping in clusters. The picture of leaves falling in groups hints to the Kashmiri people's collective loss and displacement, yet “one by one, otherwise” conveys a sense of loneliness, as if each leaf—or person—faces their fate alone. Agha Shahid Ali further claims to evoke the vivid and poetic description of the scene where snowfall is metaphorically compared to the ash falling from the sky as:

... and snow begins to fall
on us, like ash. Black on edges of flames,
it cannot extinguish the neighborhoods,
the homes set ablaze by midnight soldiers. (5)

The contrast of 'snow' to 'ash' appears to be an attempt to demonstrate how the cold weather is unable to calm the fires that have devastated the lives and homes of millions of Kashmiris. When expressing his inner world and unique experiences, Agha Shahid Ali typically draws from nature and uses natural images to do it in a way that is both universally appealing and effective. Nature has a significant

importance in Agha Shahid Ali's poems. Aadil Muzafar, comments on this poem as “this poem presents the snow falling, like ash, very destructive, it can hold the meaning of falling of snow literally during the winters or it can be the ashes produced from the burning of houses by soldiers” (80). It has served more as a vehicle for him to share his nostalgic fantasies about his own history. He particularly creates an attachment to his own original place, Kashmir, through these natural history stories. Given the natural imagery he emphasizes the relationship between people and the environment. The poem employs various natural symbols, metaphor, and imagery to convey the deep emotional and physical impact of Kashmir. For instance, the snow, Jhelum River, mountains, rocks and stones, *chinar* tree, rain etc. capture the poet's feelings of despair, loss and longing for his homeland. The poem's narrative is enriched by the employment of these natural metaphors and symbols, which provide various layers of meaning and inspire readers to reflect on the interconnections of nature, politics, and human emotion.

Conclusion

Agha Shahid Ali attempts to draw a parallel between the loss experienced by humans and the loss experienced by nature by exploring the issue of loss in both nature and human existence. He then describes a dream in which he perceives the symbol of loss as rain, quiet, and the desert. Ali expresses the disappearance of tribes using natural images such as the sun, moon, and water and contrasts the loss of human lives with the loss of the environment, recalling how deeply nature's influence and purity had penetrated the poet's head that he might recognize himself in the eyes of the natural world. “*Snow on the Desert*” contrasts the harshness of the desert with the purity of snow, symbolizing a search for peace and purity in the midst of chaos. In “*I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight*,” Ali's poignant depiction of Kashmir's landscapes highlights a profound sense of longing and displacement. Nishat Zaidi mentions that Agha Shahid Ali also “introduced a new idiom of expression, a new vocabulary, semantic range, and metaphoric and rhythmic possibilities” (63). He frequently uses environmental images in his writings. Through his poems, he highlights the fragility of the environment, drawing attention to the destructive impact of human actions on the natural world. Ali also comes to understand that there is an ongoing, reciprocal link between nature and humanity. Therefore, the state of human life, including all of its joy, agony, grief, and despair, are connected to nature in his poetry. He believes that if man can coexist with nature, both will benefit. Together these both poems capture the deep sense of yearning and the painful beauty of remembering a place that is both cherished and inaccessible, exploring the emotional landscape of exile and nostalgia through rich metaphors.

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Imperial Power and Heterotopic Spaces in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*

Suraj Soni*
Dr Vipin Pal Singh**

Abstract

A British novelist of Japanese origin, Kazuo Ishiguro, explores the influences of imperial power through foreign concessions in the city of Shanghai during the mid-nineteenth century. The foreign settlement in Shanghai creates multiple heterotopic spaces, offering a new environment juxtaposed with traditional Chinese culture. Focusing on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, this paper offers a close reading of Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000), delving not just into the physical setting of the Settlement but also into its complex cultural and social landscape. The spaces within the territory of the international settlement are not limited to their spatiotemporal construction but are intertwined with the Chinese community. From this perspective, the paper focuses on the way in which Ishiguro's work can be interpreted as a narrative of placelessness, worlds within worlds, and non-homes. By considering the interpretations generated by the characters through the lens of heterotopia, this study examines the differentiation between foreign power vis-à-vis International Settlement that legitimises the distinct yet paradoxical space shaped by imperialism, socioeconomic exploitation and cultural displacement.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, Michel Foucault, heterotopia, postmodern, *When We Were Orphans*

Introduction

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) argues in his 1986 lecture “Of Other Spaces” that the present epoch will “perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near-far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (22). This quote illustrates the rupture in the dominance of time, marking space as a significant concern in order to analyse the contemporary structure of society. Foucault's aim here appears to be the failure of modern utopian spaces, referring to them as “sites with no real place” (24). The concept of utopia tends to designate a state of mind where everything is perceived as perfect, particularly in terms of law and governance in general, leading people to believe the site is achievable when, in actuality, it is essentially a non-place. Foucault calls these places heterotopia and contrasts this with the idea of utopia in depicting the place as 'real' places produced by society as part of its continuous coming into being. The heterotopia can juxtapose several incompatible spaces in a single real place; as Angela Maya-Banbury notes in her 2018 essay, “heterotopia evokes an ultimate place of otherness” (117). This produces a setting where people find themselves able to engage (either voluntarily or involuntarily) in counter-mainstream experiences. It scrutinises distinct sites in a particular society where certain spaces operate to constitute a culturally based ambience of a place, person, or

group. Such places exist outside 'known' and, "by implication, conventional worlds (de dehors) whilst remaining intact as 'worlds within worlds' in their own right" (117). Furthermore, Foucault attempts to reconceptualise space, sites, and place by marking a clear-cut demarcation between heterotopias and utopias — a perpetual tension persists between the two, and in the postmodern theoretical frameworks, this manifests itself as an uncertainty between real and unreal space — akin to the uncertainty between fiction and fact, history and story, text and the world in the postmodern novel.

When We Were Orphans: An Overview

The novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000) begins in 1923 with a first-person narrator, an Englishman named Christopher Banks, a young, ambiguous English detective. Christopher is invited to the Meredith Foundation dinner, which is the dinner of renowned people of English society. He meets Sarah Hemmings, a fellow orphan, and becomes entangled in her life, which includes a marriage to Sir Cecil Medhurst, a diplomat involved in Chinese peace negotiations. The story shifts to Christopher's childhood in Shanghai. His father works for a company, Morganbrook and Byatt, which imports Indian opium to China. Christopher's mother calls this trade "un-Christian" and "un-British" (61). When Christopher is nine, both his parents go missing, first, the disappearance of his father and, then, not long after, the abduction of his mother. Determined to uncover the truth, Christopher returns to Shanghai in 1937 during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Despite facing dangerous circumstances and the chaos of war, he searches for clues about his missing parents. He encounters his old friend Akira in the middle of the warzone. Ultimately, he learns that his father ran off from Shanghai with his mistress, and warlord Wang Ku seized his mother. Years later, Christopher finds his mother in a nursing home, but she no longer recognises him.

The Shanghai International Settlement as Heterotopic Spaces

The type of colonialism China experienced in its territory is called concessions. These concessions operated with extraterritoriality, meaning they were not subject to Chinese laws or rules but to the laws of the ruling Western power. The British Empire established the first formal concession in Shanghai in 1845, following its occupation of the city during the First Opium War (1839-1842). This concession was followed by the 1848 American and 1849 French concessions. Western powers secured control over these concessions through military victory over the Chinese or trade deals. The Treaty of Nanking in 1842 marked the beginning of concession and extraterritorial rights given to the Western powers in Chinese territory. This treaty was one of the many unequal treaties that forced China to open its economy to foreign trade and control. The Britisher forced the Chinese to comply with the Treaty of Nanking, but unlike Hong Kong or Macau, foreign powers did not hold full sovereignty. The foreign powers could only rule specific areas, so they created a municipal council to serve their interests. The municipal seal of the Shanghai

International Settlement depicted several foreign flags, including those of Portugal, Britain, America, Denmark, Norway, Prussia, Sweden, and other Western powers. The International Settlements (e.g., Shanghai International Settlement, Beijing Legation Quarter, Kulangus International Settlement) came to an abrupt end in December of 1941 when Japanese troops stormed in during World War II. The Shanghai International Settlement was a unique geopolitical entity sitting at the mouth of the Yangtze River. The Settlement operated through its own set of laws and regulations, separate from those of China, creating a space where Western culture and its way of life coexisted with existing Chinese society. The Western influences made Shanghai a hot spot for jazz, with a significant crossover of Chinese singers and Western music. This juxtaposition of the influences and practices of the cultures reflects the heterotopic spaces of the Settlement, resulting in a complex and often contradictory environment. The international settlement in the city of Shanghai creates multiple heterotopic spaces within its own construction, offering a new environment alongside traditional Chinese culture and customs. The spaces within the territory of the Shanghai International Settlement are not limited to existing in their own space-time construction but are intertwined with the Chinese community. Thus, the Settlement serves as an encounter and negotiation between the East and West, attracting people from various backgrounds and creating a diverse and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

In this sense, the novel *When We Were Orphans* depicts the Shanghai International Settlement in the early decade of the twentieth century, examining the city as a place of a social and cultural landscape. This Settlement of foreign powers in the Chinese land showcases the complex transformation of the socioeconomic and political narrative that disrupted the entire nation to its core representation of cultural value in the decade leading up to World Wars. *When We Were Orphans* begins with a first-person narrator, an Englishman named Christopher Banks, a young, ambiguous detective. Christopher spends his childhood in the Shanghai International Settlement. He is born and raised in a “big white house” tended by an “English lawn” and “elm trees” (51). He spends most of his time playing games with Akira, a Japanese boy residing next door. They hang out with each other within the Settlement but are “absolutely forbidden to enter the Chinese areas of the city” as out there “lay all manner of ghastly diseases, filth and evil men” (54). Their world is protected against the harsh realities that surround them. Once, Christopher and his mother take an unexpected route, leading them into the Chinese area. Christopher describes the scene as “huddled low rooftops across the canal” and expresses “fear the pestilence” coming across “the narrow strip of water”, causing him to hold his breath for as long as he could (54). This picture of the warren, a labyrinth of back-to-back slums, and the life of impoverished Chinese factory workers shows the worlds within worlds, placeless places and non-home, which becomes pivotal in understanding Foucault's concept of heterotopia. A perpetual tension exists between indigenous Chinese people and the foreign settlements, highlighting the constating ideologies implemented by the British concessions. The truth concerning the

Chinese districts — as Akira informs Christopher — is that “[t]here were no proper buildings, just shack upon shack built in great proximity to one another. [...] There were, moreover, dead bodies piled up everywhere, flies buzzing all over them, and no one there thought anything of it. [...] The warlord was pointing to whomever he pleased and the giant would then proceed to lop his or her head off” (54). This quote indicates the transformation of the physical landscapes of the Chinese district, making the two worlds within the territory of China — One with all the affluence and another emblem of privation — paradoxically contradict and challenge the existing rule and regulation through the unequal treaty of Nanking. This reflects the kind of heterotopic spaces within the Settlement that seem to exploit indigenous Chinese people. The insight reveals the counterproductive nature of the British Empire in the Settlement.

The Shanghai International Settlement changes the social and cultural landscapes of China's geographical entities. The construction of the Settlement brought Western-style architecture, businesses, and lifestyles that unsettled traditional place-bound Chinese communities. Hence, this juxtaposition of different cultures with Chinese society influences the existing social structure, creating a world of societal hierarchy in a way that Western power could legitimise its dominance through concession. Furthermore, the Settlement constructs a space of its own, meaning the British replicate the socio-political environment of its homeland in a way to rule and trade within Chinese territories. The concession in China creates a particular 'isolated' site — a space of heterotopia — which does not acknowledge the local laws and rules. Therefore, the Shanghai International Settlement is a heterotopic space, meaning they can juxtapose a single real space with several spaces that are themselves incompatible. The municipal seal of the Settlement depicts several flags to showcase this conflict.

Christopher's father is employed by Morganbrook and Byatt company, which supplies Indian opium to China and against which his mother campaigned. They live on the company's property within the British colony of the International Settlement. The kind of life they lead hinges on the decision of the imperial trading for which Christopher's father works. The company of Morganbrook and Byatt exploits indigenous Chinese people; as Alyn Webby notes in his 2011 essay, “its legitimate trading activities, the company inflicts immense suffering on the Chinese by importing cheap opium from India into Shanghai. With the help of local warlords for distribution purposes, the firm profits from the addictions that they themselves had created” (186). The British have a long history of such exploitations, going back to the Opium Wars of 1839 and 1858, which forced China to open up their port for foreign trade. It is estimated that by 1909, a quarter of the entire Chinese population were addicted to Opium. This condition reflects the counterproductive nature of the British colony in Shanghai. The Morganbrook and Byatt company not only disrupts the traditional Chinese place-bound communities by importing cheap opium and fostering addiction but also brings suffering and unemployment, leading to fatalities from overdose or beheaded by warlords. The Company's actions significantly

transform the social landscapes wherein the opium sacks indigenous people of China. This change often contributes to the alienation of the Chinese community within their own physical and cultural locations, offering postmodern heterotopic spaces. Morganbrook and Byatt is a company that does not adhere to a legitimate structure, interfering with Christopher's family — which is visible in many of the unauthorised visits to his house by the health inspector, “checking as they did not only on hygiene matters, but also for signs of disease or parasites among household members, were potentially very embarrassing” (57). During one of the visits by the health inspector, he requests Christopher's mother that they dismiss the Shantung servants. This is partly because of the concerns about their hygiene and health and suspicions regarding their honesty. Inspector tries to convince Christopher's mothers, arguing in the following way:

Opium addiction in Shantung has now advanced to such deplorable levels that entire villages are to be found enslaved to the pipe. Hence, Mrs Banks, the low standards of hygiene, the high incidence of contagion. And inevitably, those who come from Shantung to work in Shanghai, even if essentially of an honest disposition, tend sooner or later to resort to thieving, for the sake of their parents, brothers, cousins, uncles, what have you, all of whose cravings must somehow be pacified (59).

This passage illustrates the nature of Morganbrook and Byatt company, who tend to dismiss people where opium addiction is at its peak, prioritising profit over the company's consequences on the actual landscape of China. Christopher's mother counterargues with an inspector that this problem — specified in Shantung — is caused by the company itself. She tells him that the “British in general, and the company of Morganbrook and Byatt especially, by importing Indian opium into China in such massive quantities had brought untold misery and degradation to a whole nation” (60). Morganbrook and Byatt — acting as an extension of British imperialism — facilitate the distribution of cheap Indian opium in China, putting the local people of Shantung into a cycle of dependency. This creates a heterotopic space where the oppressed indigenous Chinese people — grappling with a severe opium addiction — find themselves trapped in a vicious scenario, enabling the exploitative ideological agenda of the British empire to penetrate the existing social and political structure that is a no-win situation for the Chinese. In order to pay for their habit, “they were forced into cheap labour as servants for Morganbrook and Byatt. Because they are not given sufficient wages, some of them [steal] from their employers. If they are sacked, they will turn to opium as a source of consolation and the cycle will begin again” (Webley 187). This creates a double-bind demand for the Chinese, who cannot resolve and escape the situation. The situation of China — created by foreign powers via the establishment of concessions — depicts the exploitation of Chinese resources and labour, creating distinct socio-economic spaces where Western powers take precedence over local needs. The exploitation perpetuates inequalities and power imbalances, shaping heterotopic spaces of economic dominance and dependency. The imperial British ideological discourse

on the power dynamic within the space of cultural refraction facilitates the concealed dictatorship through global economic forces, leading to the emergence of heterotopic colonial spaces. This intersection between different cultures creates a hybrid space where different cultural norms and practices coexist, contributing to the complex social landscapes of colonial China.

However, the act of importing opium by Morganbrook and Byatt company is seen in a way that brings a lot of misery, trauma, and terror to indigenous Chinese people. The British colony in Shanghai International Settlement led to the construction of heterotopic spaces, marking a distinct space governed by Western laws and institutions. Morganbrook and Byatt is one such example that operates under British imperialism. This distinct space — having its own governance and legal system — shows the tension between the imperial capitalist company. The imposition of the necessity for, as Webley argues, “servile work on the poor people of Shanghai, combined with the importation of large quantities of opium, created the perfect conditions for mass addiction” (187). Paradoxically, this addiction becomes a pretext for refusal to employ them, exacerbating their poverty and reinforcing their reliance on opium as a means of coping. Christopher's mother tries his best to fight against the opium trade, which, in other words, means going against the British government itself. Christopher's mother is a crucial person in the anti-opium campaign who refers to the activities of Morganbrook and Byatt as “un-Christian and un-British” (61). Christopher's mother considers building the British empire an essentially civilising activity, adhering to the peace and good of civilisation. Nevertheless, the contradictory space — created by imperial capitalism to its victims — imposes a condition where the influence of opium has devastated local or regional communities. The widespread opium addiction signifies the profound social and economic disruption in actual landscapes of the city caused by colonial exploitation, leading to the decline of traditional place-bound communities, as well as in their cultural 'landscapes'. Christopher's mother faces a moral dilemma anticipated by the imperial capitalistic company in perpetuating such exploitation. She opposes her family's association with the imperial British company Morganbrook and Byatt, debouncing its actions as a “sinful trade” and “a disgrace” (70). She requests her husband to disassociate himself from the company, arguing, “You're making us all party to it! All of us! It's a disgrace. [...] How can your conscience rest while you owe your existence to such an ungodly wealth?” (70). This statement illustrates the ethical conflict inherent in benefiting from systems perpetuating injustice and suffering. Whether she likes it or not, her position as the wife of a company employee means that she is part of the machinery of the empire. By refusing to ignore the company's exploitative practices or the imperial British economic nature, she questions the complicity of employees and urges them to rethink their moral responsibility.

In this manner, Christopher's mother is caught up in the opium-dominant Chinese place. She tries her best to influence some women and men to her cause — regarding the anti-opium campaign in China — engaging in numerous meetings with

diplomats, clergymen, and Uncle Philip. The argument over the “opium trade politicizes Christopher's childhood by placing it on the knife-point of conflicting political and commercial interests” (Webley 188). The religious stance Christopher's mother adopts to resist the activities of Morganbrook and Byatt paradoxically mirrors the same religious rhetoric often employed to justify the oppressive economic forces she opposes. She asks her husband to check on the possibility of returning to England. This option is not available as leaving Shanghai would financially ruin the family, as her husband says, “We can't do it, Diana. It'll be the ruin of us. I've looked at everything. We'll never get back to England. We can't raise enough. Without the firm, we're simply stranded” (86). This insufficient amount of funds leads to a painful situation for her, leaving the family trapped in the heterotopic spaces servicing the interest of imperialism in its most corrupt and destructive manner. Thus, the intertwining of economic forces and moral ambiguity obscures the social and cultural landscapes, further entangling the family in the web of colonial exploitation.

Conclusion

The heterotopia is a site that tends to govern according to its legal, administrative, and economic systems outside conventional social and cultural norms. This paper, by discussing *When We Were Orphans* as a critical literary representation of sociocultural landscapes and reconceptualising the place-bound identity — seeks to explore the function of imperial power through Foucault's concept of heterotopia. By showcasing the imperial practice of the British empire, Ishiguro, to a certain extent, challenged the legitimacy of colonialism, which subsequently brought the marginalised voice to the forefront to distort the hegemonic practices. The Shanghai International Settlement — in its nature of construction — creates heterotopic spaces that fail to conceptualise or acknowledge the continuous production of social space. The Settlements present a contradiction of worlds within worlds, placeless places, offering the disparities between indigenous Chinese people and Western powers. The Settlement is not limited to a geographical entity or land distribution to the foreign powers, but the kind of laws and rules that each concession held depicts the cultural refraction and political narrative.

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Frustration and Aggression: A Comprehensive Analysis of Nancy McKenzie's *Queen of Camelot*

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Abstract

Frustration is an emotional response that occurs when an individual's efforts to achieve a goal are blocked or thwarted. It is characterised by feelings of disappointment, anger, and irritation, and can arise from a variety of situations, including unmet needs, obstacles and perceived injustices. While aggression is a behaviour aimed at causing physical or psychological harm to others. Aggression is a range of behaviours that are intended to cause harm or injury to another person, oneself, or to objects. The frustration-aggression hypothesis, proposed by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears in 1939, suggests that frustration can lead to aggression. The hypothesis asserts that frustration always leads to some form of aggression, and aggression is always a consequence of frustration. This paper aims to analyse how frustration leads to aggression in Eliane's life in *Queen of Camelot* by Nancy McKenzie. The paper also discusses the causes of Elaine's frustration that paved the way to different aggressive behaviours in her.

Keywords: Frustration, Aggression, Arthurian Literature, Retellings

Introduction

Frustration is the feeling of anger or disgust if a person does not get what he or she intends. It creates an emotional upsurge within oneself thereby making them aggressive. It is "the state that emerges when circumstances interfere with a goal response" (Dollard 7). Frustration is the root cause for aggressive behaviour in individuals. For example, when a child abstains from doing what he or she likes, the child would throw tantrums and behave very badly. Likewise, adults will also be aggressive if their goals are unfulfilled. A sense of satisfaction arrives only when a wish is fulfilled but a sense of frustration and disappointment develops if the desires are unachieved. Frustration has become the common call of today's world; an individual gets easily offended when something does not happen according to the way they intended. This leads to a series of anxiety, depression, alienation, aggression and other mental issues.

Aggression on the other hand is an undesirable and antagonistic behaviour with intent to harm or hurt someone. "Aggression is any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment" (Baron 7). Too much frustration leads to aggressive behaviour and will target the frustrating object or a submissive substitute. When frustration is not let out it leads to too many problems such as self-destruction or could be displaced against others. Aggression includes both physical and verbal abuse aimed at harming others so that a person could vent out their disappointments or frustrations. As in the case of

children, they willingly hit their parents or siblings, or they hurt themselves if their desires are unfulfilled. When a goal is blocked it leads to frustration and anxiety that eventually makes an individual behave harshly. Violent actions and abuses become the only way of healing frustrations and disappointment.

The frustration-aggression hypothesis, proposed by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears in 1939, suggests that frustration can lead to aggression. According to this theory, when individuals are blocked from achieving a goal or fulfilling a need, it generates frustration, which in turn can trigger aggressive behaviour. This aggression is seen to alleviate the frustration. The theory “states that frustration can have several outcomes, one of which is aggression, but that aggression is always the product of frustration”(Gilbert 321).The primary postulate is that frustration, which occurs when an individual's goal-directed behaviour is thwarted, is a primary cause of aggression. According to this view, when people are prevented from achieving their goals or desires, they experience frustration, which in turn can lead to aggressive responses.

The hypothesis posits that aggression is an emotional response to frustration. It denotes that aggression is not just a reaction to external events but is also tied to internal emotional states caused by frustration. “the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression”(Dollard 1). The hypothesis doesn't propose that frustration always leads to aggression, but rather that it increases the likelihood of aggressive behaviour. Aggressive behaviour serves as a cathartic process that alleviates the emotional tension caused by frustration. The intensity of aggression may vary depending on factors such as the individual's personality, their past experiences, and the situation at hand.

Nancy McKenzie is a well-known American author who has written several historical novels, often set in mediaeval or fantasy settings. Her novels combine detailed historical facts with compelling storytelling, making them popular among fans of historical fiction. McKenzie often centers her novels on well-developed characters, particularly women who are less commonly explored in historical fiction. Her storytelling combines historical facts with imaginative elements, often weaving myth and legend into her narratives. Her prominent works include *Queen of Camelot* (2002), *Grail Prince* (2003) and *Prince of Dreams* (2004). *Queen of Camelot* is an Arthurian retelling that brings out the legends from the perspective of Guinevere, Arthur' wife. This novel breaks the stereotypical portrayal of many characters, especially the Queen, Guinevere. She is depicted as a wise, strong, bold and independent woman as opposed to the passive, adulteress and coward. The novel spans from the childhood days of Guinevere, her marriage to King Arthur and the life after. The novel deeply elevates the standards of the Queen and captures a high regard for her as it brings out the emotional turbulence and hardships that she undergoes. The story from her point of view not just focuses on the Queen but also brings to light the other major characters like Mordred and Lancelot, their good nature.

Just like Guinevere, another woman also plays a major role in the novel, especially in

Guinevere's life. Elaine is Guinevere's cousin, and it is she who creates most of the problems in Guinevere's life. Though in the beginning of the novel, both have a very good bonding, later it turns up to be hostile. When they were little girls, they shared secrets, played together, ate and slept together. They were more of friends than cousins and knew the likes and dislikes of each other as Guinevere says, "he befriended me on sight and made me feel at home from my first moment"(23). Elaine was deeply madly in love with King Arthur while Guinevere showed zero interest in him. Though Elaine has not even seen Arthur once, she dreams about his appearance, craves to see him and wishes to marry him.

Discussion

Elaine holds deep admiration and respect for King Arthur. Her desire to marry him is partly driven by genuine affection and the idealization of Arthur as the perfect king and husband. "Elaine had never lost her faith in Arthur. She had believed every wondrous tale she had heard about him"(94). Marrying the king would elevate Elaine's status significantly. In the Arthurian world, alliances and marriages are often politically motivated, and Elaine's ambition reflects her understanding of these dynamics. "Frustration occurs when anticipated reward is reduced, delayed, or removed completely"(Breuer 4). Marrying King Arthur was Elaine's goal, and it was only a dream since Arthur married Guinevere. Guinevere, as Arthur's wife and queen, is the primary obstacle and reason for Elaine's frustration. Guinevere's established relationship with Arthur makes Elaine's desire seem unattainable.

Elaine's love for Arthur serves as a source of both joy and pain for her throughout the novel. On one hand, her admiration for Arthur's leadership, nobility, and vision for Camelot fuels her desire to contribute to his kingdom and support his endeavours. She respects him deeply and sees him as a figure worthy of her devotion. However, Elaine's love for Arthur is also tinged with sadness and longing, as she knows that Arthur's heart belongs to Guinevere. Despite her best efforts to win his affection, she is unable to capture Arthur's romantic interest, leading to feelings of unfulfilled desire and frustration. "A goal has to be personally significant if the blockage of its attainment is to evoke negative affect"(Breuer 4). The unrequited love becomes a source of internal conflict for Elaine, as she grapples with her feelings while navigating the complexities of Arthur's court. Elaine's ambition to marry King Arthur and her subsequent disillusionment when faced with the realities of court politics and Arthur's loyalties create a breeding ground for aggression. Her unfulfilled desires manifest as a sense of betrayal and anger towards the circumstances and the people involved.

Elaine's frustration often comes out as emotional outbursts especially when Guinevere becomes the reason for blocking her goal. These moments reveal her inner conflict and the intensity of her feelings. Her inability to achieve her desires leads to moments of raw emotional expression, highlighting her vulnerability and desperation. "Frustration occurred whenever pleasure-seeking or pain-avoiding behavior was blocked"(Dollard 21). When Elaine finds out that King Arthur is about

to marry Guinevere, she becomes aggressive and mad. As Guinevere in *Queen of Camelot* says, “laine’ misery was heart-breaking to see”(54). Elaine bursts into tears and feels completely dejected and sad. Her grief was so much that she couldn't bear the pain of her friend marrying King Arthur and kept wailing for so long. Guinevere even tried to comfort her, she said “ sorry Elaine. I had no idea. I knew you idolized him; he has been your hero since tales about him first started to go round. But I never knew you really -expected to -”(54). Elaine was very much aware that it was impossible to marry King Arthur, as she says, “ knew it was hopeless, but I couldn't help it”(54).

Elaine grew hysterical when her mother promised to marry her to one of the King's companions, and she suffered dreadfully at the thought of it. “he motivational energy that powers aggression is provided by an emotional state such as anger or rage which is a primary inborn reaction to frustration”(Abeles 62). Elaine's anger or rage could be easily witnessed in her words, as she says, “t would be too awful! To be there in the High King' court and married to someone else. I couldn't stand it! And I don't want to marry anyone else! I shall never marry! Never!”(54). This clearly brings out the frustration that Elaine undergoes after her goal is blocked by Guinevere. When Elaine comes to know that Guinevere couldn't help falling in love with Lancelot, she asks Guinevere if there is a possibility to exchange: “hat you may take Lancelot, and I Arthur”(114). This utterly illustrates how Elaine patiently waits for a miracle to happen in her life. She somehow hopes that there is still an opportunity to make things up and marry King Arthur. When Guinevere denies her idea of exchanging loved ones, Elaine denotes that “t seems so unfair”(114).

Elaine undergoes a series of frustrations even after knowing that nothing can be done to stop the union of Arthur and Guinevere. After the marriage, when Guinevere gets ready to spend the night with Arthur, Elaine says, “h, Gwen, dear Gwen, don't go! I can't stand it!”(135). Elaine could not stand the thought that Arthur and Guinevere were going to be one, and this thought killed her deep inside. She feels completely desolate and struggles against her tears. Elaine' profound disappointment and resentment pop out when she advises Guinevere, “e obedient and please him,”she whispered. “ust remember, I would give half a lifetime to be in your place!”Biting her lip, she whirled and raced for the stairs”(137). Elaine often thinks about the things she would have done if she were in Guinevere' place.

Elaine harbours complex feelings towards Guinevere, who is both a figure of admiration and a source of jealousy. Guinevere' central role in the life of Arthur fuels Elaine' frustration, contributing to her aggressive tendencies. The intensity of aggression is often proportional to the level of frustration experienced. Greater frustration typically leads to extreme aggressive behaviour. Aggression is “he behaviour intended to harm (physical or nonphysical) another individual”(Abeles 62). A series of frustrations and disappointments has led to aggressive behaviours in Elaine. Elaine exhibits passive-aggressive tendencies, such as withdrawing, sulking, or making indirect comments aimed at causing discomfort or highlighting her discontent. These behaviours are subtle ways of expressing her frustration without

open confrontation.

Elaine's envy and desperation drive her to consider schemes that could tarnish Guinevere's reputation and diminish her influence. She starts to manipulate other women in the kingdom by talking ill of Guinevere and how "he has failed the High King Arthur as she has failed the people of Britain"(171). According to Buss, aggression can be classified into two types,

The first is on the basis of organ systems involved: physical versus verbal aggression. The second is on the basis of the interpersonal relationship: active versus passive aggression (4).

Likewise, Elaine tries to tarnish the image of Guinevere for not being able to give birth to the rightful heir to the kingdom. Guinevere was upset about things Elaine gossiped with the other woman in the kingdom. Elaine said to them, "o not worry ... Lancelot will cure her. He always does. However low she is, he will make it right as rain"(172). Elaine was very much conscious how Guinevere would be offended and hurt, but she did not bother. She enjoyed the pleasure of hurting and abusing Guinevere both in her absence and presence.

Elaine's frustration drives her to take drastic, sometimes reckless actions in an attempt to change her situation. She takes a desperate yet foolish action of helping Melwas, who had unrequited love for Guinevere, to kidnap and marry her. "aggression was the "rimordial reaction"... and was thought of as being originally and normally directed toward those persons or objects in the external world which were perceived as the source of the frustration"(Dollard 21) and Elaine's frustration drives her to take drastic, sometimes reckless actions in an attempt to change her situation. She takes a desperate yet foolish action of helping Melwas, who had unrequited love for Guinevere, to kidnap and marry her. During Guinevere's absence, Elaine was found in Arthur's bed, she had tricked him by imitating Guinevere's voice. But Arthur somehow managed to identify her and narrowly escaped from Elaine's wicked schemes. These actions depict how Elaine has come out with aggressive efforts to assert control and achieve her goals despite the barriers she faces.

Elaine's jealousy and frustration with Guinevere reach a boiling point, leading her to confront Guinevere directly. Elaine's aggression often comes through in sharp, cutting remarks and heated confrontations, particularly with Guinevere. When Guinevere caught Elaine red-handed, there was a huge verbal outrage between the two. "'ou do not deserve him!" Elaine spat, "'ou are barren! Give him up and let him wed a fertile woman who will bear him sons!"'(200). Elaine keeps defending herself, saying that she did nothing and never had any alliance with Melwas in the abduction. Elaine had planned so wisely that she asked Melwas to not just kidnap Guinevere but also to rape her so that the High King would get rid of his wife.

The continuous experience of frustration creates significant inner turmoil for Elaine. This emotional distress fuels her aggressive tendencies and shapes her interactions with others. Elaine often finds herself comparing her situation to Guinevere's privileged position, feeling overshadowed and inadequate. This constant comparison fuels her feelings of frustration. The verbal outbursts are direct

expressions of Elaine's internal frustration as she says, "othing was denied you! You took everything away from me,... Everything I ever wanted was given to you! It was I who honored Arthur from my youth, not you. It is I who should be his Queen, not you! ... It is not fair! You will destroy him! ... Oh God I cannot best it! Kill me and have done!"(200).

Elaine took greater revenge by disguising herself as Guinevere and seducing Lancelot when he was heavily drunk. She had a very clear plan of seducing Lancelot and making him her own since she failed to marry Arthur. "ggression is not always manifested in overt movements but may exist as the content of a fantasy or dream or even a well thought-out plan of revenge"(Dollard 10) and Elaine imitated Guinevere's voice, and since Lancelot was intoxicated, he couldn't distinguish the difference. She also wore the same dress that Guinevere wore that night, and all this tricked him into falling into Elaine's trap. Elaine was clever enough to make a gown of the same fabric that Guinevere would wear, and she drugged Guinevere and Arthur so that they would leave the hall early, leaving Lancelot vulnerable and lonely. As Guinevere says, "hat revenge was this! How must she hate me! But the worst of it was that she did not love Lancelot; she cared nothing for him; she did it only to take him from me"(235). The impact of the revenge was so great that Guinevere couldn't tolerate the thought of Elaine bearing Lancelot's son.

Elaine's aggression reaches the utmost level wherein she confronts Guinevere to King Arthur without any fear. Her main motto is to hurt, inflict pain on Guinevere, and tarnish her image. Since Elaine could not harm Guinevere physically, she tries to create lot of problems there by aggravating Guinevere's sufferings and damaging her inner peace. Elaine still wants Arthur, and Guinevere herself says that Elaine will "ook only for a way to hurt me" Guinevere pleads with Elaine, saying, "hy don' you go and let us all be?"(260). Elaine often compares herself to Guinevere, seeing her as both a rival and an unattainable ideal. Guinevere's beauty, position, and influence are sources of envy for Elaine, who feels overshadowed and overlooked. Elaine once tries to verbally abuse Guinevere and confronts about the Queen's fidelity to the King without any hesitation. Elaine tells him that Guinevere is upset about Lancelot's departure, and "he wishes my husband to stay ... She wants no one but herself to bear Lancelot's son"(260).

Elaine's love for Arthur never faded, even after he had lived happily with Guinevere for so long. "he strength of instigation to aggression varies directly with the amount of frustration"(Dollard et al. 28) and Elaine could not overcome her deep frustration even after hurting and punishing Guinevere for obstructing her goal. She confessed her frustration even to Arthur, saying, "ou should have chosen me, my lord. All those years ago, I can give you what u want in a wife"(260). Elaine vents out her frustration and agony over not accomplishing her target then and there in the novel. Never once does she regret any of the desperate and antagonistic actions she has taken in order to unleash her frustration and wretchedness. Elaine's manipulative actions reveal her strategic mind and willingness to bend situations in her favour, driven by her unrequited love for Arthur, her jealousy of Guinevere, and her ambition to gain

power and recognition.

Conclusion

Elaine's aggressive actions in *Queen of Camelot* by Nancy McKenzie are driven by her deep-seated frustrations, unfulfilled desires, and intense emotions. These actions, whether verbal, manipulative, or physical, reveal the complexity of her character and her struggle to navigate the painful dynamics of unrequited love and jealousy. Elaine's aggression is a coping mechanism, a way for her to assert herself and express her inner conflict, making her a compelling and multi-dimensional character in the narrative. By understanding Elaine's actions through the frustration-aggression hypothesis, it is clear how her frustrations lead directly to her aggressive behaviours, aligning with Dollard's theory that frustration invariably results in some form of aggression.

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Problematizing the 'Culture': The Anthropocene in Danial Quinn's *Ishmael*

Sulagna Panda*

As the current epoch focuses on anthropocentrism, the paper analyzes the role of cultural institutions and their subsequent reverberation in our surroundings. As a philosophic eco-fiction, Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* uses conversational tone to emphasize the trend in our cultural institutions that perpetuates a mode of life in dire need of scrutiny. Moving beyond the nature vs. culture binary, Ismael, through his Socratic dialogue with the narrator, concretizes the danger of homogenization and the megalomania of human species. As a captive of the civilizational system and concomitantly unaware, the narrator moves from his unconscious realization to a more deliberate discussion on how culture is primed and perceived as per man's requirements. The paper aims to demystify the culture of the specialness of man as a separate entity represented in our cultural artifacts and the associated notions of man as born to enact the story of his uniqueness.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Cultural prison, Heterogeneity, Ecological Sustainability

Introduction

The dominant trend of anthropocentrism as a point of discussion in academia and a notion in our quotidian existence has pushed the matter to such an extent that it has ended up naming the epoch the Anthropocene. It was proposed in 2000 by Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen and marine ecologist Eugene Stoermer but remained contested for decades. What makes it remain adrift is its timeline - its onset, surge, etc. and the question of human dominance. For a brief overview, it is assumed that its commencement coincides with early agriculture hastening the process of forest clearance and the subsequent human settlements, which are all interlinked into one. In Crutzen's opinion, it began with the industrial revolution. However, the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, who has extensively studied human influence on earth systems, defined it as:

It is not a unit of time - but of the *extent* of human impact on the planet. From the beginning, the term referred to the extraordinary scale of human influence on the planet (156).

In Quinn's eco-fiction, the gorilla, namely Ismael, a rather peripheral entity, looks at humans through the prism of species diversity and defamiliarizes the narrator to see earth as a planet with lives on it irrespective of any hierarchy. While talking about his own origin, he divulges, "They are fully aware of being a family but are very little aware of being individual" (Quinn 13). Hence, being an individual is a cultural prerogative, and with it come institutions that give meaning to our existence. The notion of species supremacy over humans is nothing but a consequence of cultural practices and stories that have been told to us over a period of time. Ismael's observation goes to a greater extent where he reveals, "No one ever sat you down and

said, here is how things came to be this way, beginning ten or fifteen billion years ago, right up to the present. Rather, you assembled this explanation like a mosaic: from a million bits of information presented to you in various ways by others who share that explanation. You assemble it from the table talk of your parents, from cartoons you watched on television, from Sunday school lessons, from textbooks and teachers, from news broadcasts, from movies, novels, sermons, plays, newspapers, and all the rests... (Quinn 42).

The gorilla portrayed in Quinn's *Ismael* isn't a traditional anthropomorphic character divulging the plight of the natural world; rather, he is aware of his identity as an animal and human perception of him as associated with the wilderness. What Ismael observed as he was moved from a zoo to a traveling menagerie is that in a zoo, both the incarcerated creatures and the creatures who visit them are equally strange to each other. But it's the position that privileges and puts some behind bars as objects while others as viewers. Our idea of nature as an object to be relished and used for our gratification is the reason behind the parks and tourist destinations that come up after a massive clearing of natural habitats, endangering biodiversity. Ismael observes that there's no such difference between animals captivated in zoos and those that freely roam in the wilderness; rather, it's the story of a privileged species (humans) about animals as wild who have to be caged/tamed and protected/restored in case of extinction. Humans have rendered themselves responsible as destroyers and protectors, as per the demands of the situation.

Captives of Cultural Prison

"culture is a people enacting a story" (Quinn 43).

Ismael's discussion on captivity sprang from his own incarceration in a zoo but moves to a more metaphysical notion of captivity where the prisoner unconsciously approves his being imprisoned in cultural wires. Firstly, Ismael's conversation moves to a more pertinent idea of captivity and mother culture, where he divulges that humans are the captives of their own civilizational systems. We are compelled to follow a certain path to remain on track. As Ismael asserts, "other culture teaches you that this is as it should be. ...This is the story man was born to enact, and to depart from it is to resign from the human race itself, is to venture into oblivion. ...To step out of this story is to fall off the edge of the world" (Quinn 39). Mother culture tells us our survival depends on the elimination of our competitors, which means "kill off everything you can't eat. Kill off anything that eats what you eat. Kill off anything that doesn't feed what you eat" (Quinn 139). But Aldo Leopold's observation seems to go the other way around, which stems from his personal experience of killing wolves in "hinking Like a Mountain" As he writes, "I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunter's paradise. ...I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view" (115). Leopold's realization that a single act of extermination of one species can trigger an instability of unfathomable scale is a warning for our deeds. The destruction being wrecked by the megalomania of human species is what humans

have been culturally programmed to perform over centuries.

Ismael proposes the idea of two groups: takers and leavers, and how they follow different cultures in their daily lives. "the leavers and the takers are enacting two separate stories, based on entirely different and contradictory premises"(Quinn 45), where the leavers are primitives who became oblivious entities, whose era ended some ten thousand years ago with the birth of agriculture in the Near East, while the takers are the civilized ones. Takers are known by their cultural institutions and practices, like the creation myth, which positions man at the climax of creation, though "man's appearance caused no more stir than the appearance of jellyfish" (Quinn 63). As takers believed in the life of glory, their ultimate destiny became to conquer and rule the entire universe. The takers exterminate their competitors, which never happened in the wild where other species protect their territory and food (kill) but are never hunted down to see them dead, like the farmers and ranchers who killed the coyotes and foxes because they wanted them to die for their benefits. They also destroyed their food sources, which denied them food. As Quinn rightly asserts, "You may compete, but you may not wage war" (Quinn 135). Quinn's pertinent observation of the culture of the taker is a culture of dominance, a culture of acquiring more for betterment at any cost. Our consumption pattern is also culturally set. We exist because we consume every day, not just nutritional items but also cultural items. Our ability to possess changes our social identity and position. That's what makes humans protectors and preservers under the guise of this cultural shield. While human science has been very optimistic about its achievement over the years but the recent debate over anthropocentric perception has put it into question. Humans' aspiration to acquire the supreme stage has been detrimental to species survival. The natural phenomenon of the earth had nothing to do with human presence as such until humans thought of its application in their lives. "Newton's achievement was not in discovering the phenomenon of gravity, it was in formulating the phenomenon as a law" (Quinn 106). There's something fundamentally wrong with human nature because they don't follow a peacekeeping law like that of other species. A lion doesn't kill everything one day to satisfy his hatred; rather, he just kills one to satisfy his hunger. "It is a peacekeeping law, the law that keeps the community from turning into the howling chaos the takers imagine it to be. It's the law that fosters life for all - life for the grasses, life for the grasshopper that feeds on the grasses, life for the quails that feeds on the quail... (Quinn 124). A perfect equilibrium exists in nature with limited human interference as a protector or destroyer, and it is indispensable for ecological sustainability. But our cultural captivity does obstruct us from thinking the other way.

Deconstructing the cCreation mMyth

The Socratic dialogue between the unnamed narrator and Ismael dives into the great stories of human civilization, including how species appeared chronologically and how human had to appear at the end to propagate their dominance. But these abstract structures are more consciously designed to materialize the narrative of supremacy. "no creation story is a myth to the people who tell it. It is just a story"(Quinn 54). What

Ismael defines as all these is nothing more than an “nsspoken assumption” something that has to be deliberately made to give justification to anthropocentric existence. But it never started that smoothly. The beginning was fraught with terrible forces, and certain relief came with their turning into agriculturists. Initially, it was; “hat man built up, the wind and rain tore it down. The field he cleared for his crops and his villages; the jungle fought to reclaim. The seeds he sowed, the birds snatched away. The shoots he nurtured, the insects nibbled... (Quinn 78). The endless stories of conquer, fierce battle, and unending glory are more concocted tales to perpetuate the myth of capable humans. Fragility, chaos and disturbances are what forged the survival of human.

To comprehend the present cultural crisis fully, it is indispensable to look back at some of the founding pillars of our cultural institutions, like religion, mythology, cultural practices, lifestyle, etc., that fashioned our perception and consciousness. Though the roots of all sciences are believed to be occidental, it was only in the late eleventh century that the proliferation of Latin translations of Arabic and Greek scientific works led to the advent of the western tradition of science. What follows after this is the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the Great Acceleration, etc. The human relationship with nature changed with the change in agricultural tools and methods of tillage. The change in the structure of the plough from the one that merely scratched the earth to the vertical plough that tore open the earth's surface, changed the intensity and force with which the land was attacked and tilled. “an' relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly, man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature”(White 9). Gradually, there was a movement from the cyclical notion of time in Greco-Roman mythology to the Christian concept of time as nonrepetitive. The story of creation, where God created everything in a chronological manner and finally conferred man with the title of authority over all, synchronized the rest of the contradictions. As Lynn White states, “.. Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen... Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia' religions, not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is god' will that man exploit nature for his proper ends”(10).

The nature vs. culture (human society) binary that stemmed from the theological doctrines gradually permeated our consciousness and started to get reflected in the elements of our cultural creativity. The idealistic paradise, unstained Eden, and Arcadia are the conscious optimistic manifestations of nature, as they were intentionally perceived to gratify the customer' demand (the reader' demand mainly upper class). Similarly, the wilderness epitomized danger, menace, and threat that had to be tamed or controlled. As Christopher Manes asserts, “ature is silent in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative”(15). The power to communicate with signs, gestures and language is not an entitlement of one species, which is humans. There are thousands of species, like gigantic elephants, tiny birds and numerous plants, who communicate with the help of their respective

mechanisms and have a world of their own. But their world and its interpretation are systematically subsumed in the interpretation of the human world with a purpose to keep them silent and unarticulated for the centrality of humans. Because “to regard nature as alive and articulate has consequences in the realm of social practices”(Manes 15). In his book *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault has rightly pointed out how power resides with the privileged class. The utterance of this specific group is heard because they possess socially and historically accepted titles, which makes their utterance meaningful as compared to the noise of others. Hence, the discourse of exploitation and plunder of nature, when it percolates through the mouths of these speakers, gives a different picture of nature being trimmed and shaped for our benefit.

In spite of our anthropogenic *hubris*, what we really are is the culmination of coincidences and historical accidents. Whether it's agriculture, capitalism, the human population, or the world war, they have not remained the same as the way they began. Hence, it is illogical to claim that something inherent in us compelled us to arrive in the Anthropocene, rather it's a mere act of stumbling into something by chance. Definitely, these ultra-modern institutions do play a role in the process of acceleration, but there are some life-form connections that exist on the planet itself where one affects the other instinctively. The agricultural revolution of around 10,000 years ago was possible because of a shift in climatic conditions with an increase in carbon dioxide and warm weather, which happened towards the end of the ice age and it had nothing to do with human control. But in the process, human beings have become a dominant species on earth, a geological agent with a free hand to destroy these conditions needed for our own survival. As Dipesh Chakrabarty rightly asserts, “Our falling into the current phase of the Anthropocene (when we begin to regard ourselves consciously as a geological agent) was neither an ancient nor an inevitable happening. Human civilisation surely did not begin on condition that, one day in his history, man would have to shift from wood to coal and from coal to petroleum and gas”(39).

The essentialist notion of the specialness of man in mythologies and disciplines has to be relooked to implant the notion of heterogeneity and diversity as norms. Because humans have consumed and transformed enough of the earth's resources, they are master species now, and others exist at their will. In spite of this master narrative depicting human potency, human fragility is also relatable, which is not only in fictional narratives of writers like Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, J.G. Ballard, Cormac McCarthy, John Wyndham, Margaret Atwood, etc. but also a reality in this age of climate change. As Dipesh Chakrabarty states, “To call human being geological agents is to scale up our imagination of human. Humans are biological agents, both collectively and as individuals. They have always been so. There was no point in human history when humans were not biological agents. But climate scientists' claims about human agency introduce a question of scale. Human can become a planetary geological agent only historically and collectively, that is, when we have reached numbers and invented technologies that are on a scale large enough

to have an impact on the planet itself. To call ourselves a geophysical force is to attribute to us a force on the same scale as that released at other times when there has been a mass extinction of species” (31). Re-examining the cultural pattern might be of great help when the trend of anthropocentric hubris has caused a real challenge.

Conclusion

The Socratic dialogue between Ismael and narrator opens up the anthropocentric notions at work beneath all our cultural negotiations. Hence, the crisis is more of a cultural crisis, which Ismael points out in every discussion. To dismantle the anthropocentric pattern on which our sustenance lies might not be the sole proposition, but re-examining those cultural frameworks that guide our action can be of use. As a cultural product, humans who follow a human centered approach have to acknowledge the fact that diversity cannot be erased under the impression of cultural notions.

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Disability, Diaspora, and Everything In-Between: Reading Porochista Khakpour's Memoir, *Sick*

Ashiqua Ahmed*

Abstract

Disability studies have gained more interest and readership in the past few decades and have become an academic discipline on its own with new concepts and theories. In the changing terrain, disability studies now have been placed alongside race, gender, and sexuality, and other areas as well. It reflects on their co-dependence and how the disability minority community is also treated or perceived as “the other.” To understand this idea further, Iranian-American novelist, Porochista Khakpour's memoir, *Sick* (2018), has been taken up for discussion. Porochista Khakpour's memoir, *Sick*, intertwines two emotions: of not feeling at home in one's own body and of not feeling at home anywhere in the world. *Sick* not only tries to create awareness about the rarely acknowledged Lyme disease but also examines how a person's gender and ethnic identity can affect the experience. Through close reading of the text and disability studies theories, this paper aims to understand disability, its sociological and political implications, and the journey of a woman of color, navigating through it.

Keywords: chronic illness, disability, lyme, diaspora, marginalization

Lennard Davis in the introduction of *The Disability Studies* says:

For centuries, people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group. As 15 percent of the population, people with disabilities make up the largest physical minority within the United States. (15)

This statement holds true not only for the United States but for the rest of the world as well, as people with disabilities are often sidelined as weak, inferior, or the “other,” thus marginalizing their existence. Marred with certain prejudices, this group of people is often discriminated against and shunned by their friends and families as well. Disability studies, hence, has evolved not only as a social or political theory but also as a movement to amplify awareness about this section of the marginalized community. Studying disability is “a prism through which one can gain a broader understanding of society and human experience” (Linton 118). It aims to achieve a better understanding of minority communities, their rights, racism, equality, independence, health, the human body, sexuality, gender, and so on.

While it is difficult to define disability or affirm it to one particular statement, Davis believes that the word 'disability' hints at something missing either fiscally, physically, mentally, or legally (15). According to the disability studies scholarship, disability has become a more capacious category, incorporating people with a range of physical, emotional, sensory, and cognitive conditions (Davis 162). Moreover, the definition proposed by the United Nations brings out an interesting connotation

occupational activities, and ascertains that it can result from genetic defects, accidents, or the sequelae of chronic illness (Hall 263). The spectrum of 'disability' has expanded over time including both physical and mental health crises. Notably, Stedman's Medical Dictionary (1976) identifies disability as a "medicolegal term signifying loss of function and earning power..." (400). It signifies that even if a person does not look "disabled" or might not have any visible physical condition, they can also be included in this category. Wendell also adds to this discussion saying that many people who might be perceived as disabled by others might not identify as such, whereas some people who consider themselves disabled might not be considered so by everyone else, such as someone suffering from a chronic illness (Be 368), thus widening the concept of perceived disability.

Joseph Shapiro refers to the disabled community as the largest minority community in the United States, with more members than communities tallied by race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation amongst other socially constructed identity categories (295). However, disability studies as a field of study, is fairly new - it emerged only in the 1970s and gained momentum in the 1990s. Disability studies earlier tended to lean more towards an anthropological approach by understanding the weaknesses and limitations of the body. It also attempted to evoke sympathy towards people with disabilities among the "normal" readers. Today, disability studies go beyond these boundaries and power dynamics "in favor of advocacy, investigation, inquiry, archeology, genealogy, dialectic, and deconstruction" (Davis 17). Relatively new scholarships have accommodated the voices of theorists and writers from varied backgrounds and experiences, paving way for better comprehension at the core of disability issues. A counter narrative to the majority or dominant narratives also ensues from this, signifying the intersectionality of disability studies with existing socio-political issues of race, religion, class, gender, and so on.

Prominent proponents of this new wave of disability studies include: Nirmala Erevelles, who talks about the analogy of disability and race; Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, who introduces the concept of feminism in disability studies; Cynthia Wu, who discusses the intersection of race, ethnicity, and disability; and Robert McRuer, who talks about the relation between queer theory and disability. Quite necessarily, this diversity in discourse reflects how disability is beyond a medical impairment or condition and transients into a social construction. The discussions and theories, especially by people belonging to different minority or oppressed groups provide a nuanced understanding of disability studies, which make it more relevant in contemporary times and also give both the writers and readers a better scope to position the people dealing with disabilities without treating them as "lesser", and demystifying the stigma associated with them. While the concepts of all the aforementioned theorists have not been discussed in details in this paper, it is imperative to at least mention a few of them since they paved a new path of thought process and discourse in disability studies.

Introducing the concept of the "intersectional gaze," Erevelles discusses how dominant groups of the society perceive the minority groups, and how they reinforce

the stereotypes attached to the minority communities. Adding to this idea, it is often observed that this gaze or exoticisation is more frequent in the case of immigrants from Asia and the Middle Eastern countries. Notably, living in diaspora, the immigrants in America already deal with issues of assimilation, citizenship, identity, and racial profiling to name a few. Along with these, there is a constant negotiation of their connections to places and their ideologies and affiliations, with their loyalties often questioned.

Diaspora is a key concept in understanding transnationalism and global politics in the contemporary world. In simple words, diaspora is the dispersal of people from their native homelands to other parts of the world, be it voluntarily or involuntarily. The umbrella term of diaspora includes members of the migrant community such as refugees, expatriates, guest workers, asylum seekers, and so on. Even after they settle in the host countries, a sense of nostalgia binds them to their ancestral homelands, the influence of which is seen in their culture and identity. It is a constant struggle between upholding their old traditions and accommodating the culture of the new country, leading to the formation of a hybrid identity. The concepts of diaspora, hybridity and identity vary among the different generations of migrants, which counters the branding of all migrants as homogenous. Moreover, for Muslims and people from the Middle Eastern countries, the process of assimilation becomes further difficult due to the constant stereotyping of them as evil or “the other”. This is also seen in Poroehista Khakpour's memoir, *Sick*.

The memoir in discussion, *Sick*, deals with her journey of getting diagnosed with Lyme disease, a disease that is considered a hidden epidemic in the USA. It does not necessarily have prominent symptoms which makes it more difficult for people to understand the severity of it. This memoir also explores how as a woman of color she navigates her life through her chronic illness or disability and her ethnic identity. For people living in the diaspora, it is already a sense of homelessness that they live with. The intensity of this feeling manifolds when one belongs to a Middle Eastern country and lives in America, owing to the recurring complex political conflicts between the countries. This predicament in fact compelled Khakpour to associate her condition with PTSD, for a very long time:

I've looked for answers from my first few years on this earth, early PTSD upon PTSD, marked by revolution and then war and then refugee years, a person without a home. Could that have caused it? Was displacement of the body literally causing a feeling of displacement in the body? (11)

Born in Iran, Khakpour along with her parents migrated to the United States in order to escape the Iranian revolution, when she was a child. However, the memory of the Iranian revolution, bombing and curfews, the eventual sudden displacement from her country, and trials of assimilating into a new country reflect in her view of the world and self. Hence, her initial symptoms of fatigue, dizziness and fainting were associated with her mental trauma and of her being a woman.

In a patriarchal society, both women and the disabled are regarded as weak and lesser than men. In the essay, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability,” Susan Wendell

says, “Disabled women struggle with both the oppressions of being women in male-dominated societies and the oppressions of being disabled in societies dominated by the able-bodied. They are bringing the knowledge and concerns of women with disabilities into feminism and feminist perspectives into the disability rights movement” (244), thus reflecting that women are doubly marginalized. Adding to this idea of feminist disability theory, another proponent, Garland-Thomson says, “Feminist disability theory addresses such broad feminist concerns as the unity of the category “woman,” the status of the lived body, the politics of appearance, the medicalization of the body, the privilege of normalcy, multiculturalism, sexuality, the social construction of identity, and the commitment to integration” (257). Khakpour's memoir rightly discusses such elements thus reflecting on the interdisciplinary nature of disability studies and how intersectionality matters.

Khakpour states, “Lyme disease is a clinical diagnosis, a disease that is transmitted by a tick bite. The disease is caused by a spiral-shaped bacteria (spirochete) called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The Lyme spirochete can cause infection of multiple organs and produce a wide range of symptoms” (9). However, because of its unpredictability, hidden symptoms and no proper method of understanding the parameter, the lyme disease is not detected and understood by many people in the medical healthcare system as well. Her constant visits to the doctors over a long span of years only led to a culmination of misdiagnosis and medicines. Hence, when the doctors could finally locate her disease, it came more as a relief to her, the relief of finding a proper term for what was wrong with her, “At some point, with chronic illness and disability, I grew to feel at home. My body was wrong, and through data, we could prove that” (12). Her search for a proper term for what her body was feeling is analogous to her search for a home or identity in America.

The stigma attached to the disease reminds Khakpour of the stigma of being from Iran in America. Hence, a parallel can be drawn here between her experience of being a lyme patient to that of her experience as an Iranian in America: misunderstood, frustrating, and lonely. She also found it quite ironical that after surviving the revolution and war in the old country and poverty in the new country- the thing that most affected her life was a tick or *Kaneh*, which means pest in the Persian language.

When not using her cane, Khakpour did not look sick or “disabled”. In this politics of visibility, she belonged to the minority group whose disability was not physically evident and not given enough importance, thus showing how perceived disability has a certain power to dictate the journey of a person dealing with disability. For Khakpour, each time she had a relapse of lyme, her psychiatric condition worsened first, succeeded by her physical health. Some of her symptoms are anxiety, depression, fatigue, fainting, and dizziness, inability to swallow food, rashes, insomnia, forgetfulness, and so on. Besides these, multiple car accidents gave her concussions and it became indeterminate if her failing memory was a result of her illness or brain damage from the accidents. Irrespective of the reason, her failing health pushed her to a dormant stage where she could not read or write for months, thus affecting her livelihood as a writer. Talking about depression and lyme, she says:

And with all these illnesses my body was failing—I was losing weight rapidly in five-pound chunks due to chronic diarrhea, my hands would shake so hard I could barely hold a glass of water, and I was so fatigued that more than a walk from bedroom to bathroom meant an hour of lying down, unsleeping, staring blankly at the ceiling. Everything hurt, every part of my body felt like its wiring was all wrong, I felt like a foreigner in a hostile country, never adjusting or accepting that this was what it had all come to. I couldn't quite fight it, but I could not be at peace with it either (79).

Notably, Khakpour's relapses often frequented during a global turmoil, especially with any incident associated with Muslims or Iranians. She recalls becoming sicker after the Paris attacks, and when Trump became the President of USA. Growing up Iranian in America, Khakpour had already faced discrimination and hate crimes on account of her belonging to the Iranian community, and such incidents only aggravated her PTSD and stress. She says, "It's a return to hearing "go back to your country" regularly, especially online, and it feels like the most familiar nightmare" (118).

Recalling the conversation she had with a tow truck driver once, she says the driver casually admitted to not liking Arabs and that he found Khakpour to be one of the better ones. This was after the driver had asked her name and country of origin and discussed a range of topics from Muslims to Iran to 9/11 to the Paris attacks. While Iranians do not identify as Arabs, this incident also reflects the Western tendency to homogenize people from other parts of the world. Already in pain from her accident, Khakpour failed to counter the driver but this incident of acute xenophobia affected her to a great extent. Even though Khakpour wanted to avoid a racist encounter that night, she found herself in the middle of one, leaving her further exhausted and paranoid.

Another instance of this constant sense of racial marginalization is reflected when Khakpour faints in a hotel lobby. The first thing she uttered after gaining some amount of consciousness was that she did not want to be treated at a place where she might face racism. Being a woman of color in the USA, she had this fear of being further devalued, unheard, or stigmatized. She was already "the other" from all aspects; the "disabled" in a world of "able" people, woman in a male-dominated society and the postcolonial being in a western country, making her in fact triply marginalized. In her book, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Literature and Culture*, Garland-Thomson says, "Living with the fundamental conditions of an ill body does not merely involve the experience of contingency, lack, and limitation in activity and role performance; it also inaugurates consignment to an identity category that signifies disadvantage and oppression" (41). This statement is found to be true in Khakpour's case as well, as she has to constantly challenge her physical ailment as well as the notions of people regarding her.

Besides race and gender, certain other important aspects of disability studies include healthcare finance and the presence of support systems. In Khakpour's case, she lacked both. Besides the pain and marginalization, Khakpour addresses that the worst part of her journey was her family and lack of money. Khakpour had mentioned her

medical expenses because of dealing with late-stage Lyme had been approximately 140,000 dollars at that point. However, the insurance policies do not cover this disease. At the same time, the sensitivity of people regarding the disease is also minimal. As shared by Khakpour, “Lyme is a disease that many in the medical profession, unless they specialize in it, find too controversial, too full of unknowns, to fully buy it as legitimate. It's thought of as the disease of hypochondriacs and alarmists and rich people who have the money and time to go chasing obscure diagnoses” (22).

Moreover, it has been observed that people, including many medical helps and professionals, do not have the necessary skills to converse with someone dealing with disability, or how people with disabilities are perceived as “the other” or not normal. This idea of a normal or whole body, without any anomaly, is problematic in itself. She states:

And the deal with so many chronic illnesses is that most people won't want to believe you. They will tell you that you look great, that it might be in your head only, that it is likely stress, that everything will be okay. None of these are the right things to say to someone whose entire existence is a fairly consistent torture of the body and mind. They say it because they are well-intentioned usually, because they wish you the best, but they also say it because you make them uncomfortable (64).

In an essay titled “Brown Album,” Khakpour narrates her experience with race, the Iranian tendency of “passing” as white, hatred and her illness in a nuanced manner. Along with these, she also writes about her experience of living as a paying guest for a certain amount of time in her life. When an elderly white couple took her in, the husband would ask her every day if the Iranians were planning to kill the Americans, and that Trump should be supported and he was merely misunderstood. Khakpour tolerated this for some time because she was grappling with poverty and did not have the finances to rent a house. However, she was asked to leave the house when she started putting her opinions on the table. The next family she lived with also eventually turned out to be racist and the one after that did not help her with resources and was not sensitive to her condition. She was again asked to move out when she called out the “white privilege” of the couple. This has been discussed further by Nirmala Erevelles in her essay “Race:” Social conditions of poverty also contribute to racialized subjects “becoming” disabled. The incidence of physical and mental illness in people of color communities, for instance, differs drastically from that of their white counterparts. (147)

Even though literature and films have included people with disabilities for decades, the characters are explored either as comic relief, villains, or extraordinary persons who could overcome their limitations. Ordinary people with disabilities, with their struggles and mundane lives, have hardly been projected or represented and hence life writing, sharing one's authentic experience is an important step in furthering the discourse. Couser in his essay, “Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation” states:

Like life writing by other marginalized groups—women, African Americans, and gays and lesbian—life writing by disabled people is a cultural manifestation of a

human rights movement...Disability autobiography should be seen, then, not as spontaneous “self-expression” but as a response—indeed a retort—to the traditional misrepresentation of disability in Western culture generally. (400)

It can be added that “disability autobiography is often in effect a post-colonial, indeed an anti-colonial, phenomenon, a form of autoethnography, as Mary Louise Pratt has defined it: “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with [read: contest] the colonizer's own terms” (401).

In fact, in an interview with John Williams, she said that she had never intended to write an illness memoir but eventually wrote it when people started asking for her guidance in their illness journey after she wrote about her condition on Facebook posts. Life writing, hence, is an important medium of changing the perception of people towards people with disabilities, giving them dignity as well as becoming a mode of resistance and representation. Throughout the memoir, Khakpour tries to create awareness about the lyme disease, its hidden symptoms, the stigma associated, the medical expenses, and the inability of her parents and friends to understand her suffering, thus making her feel more isolated. Escaping from a country going through a religious revolution, a fascist government and later a war, Khakpour's parents had a difficult time adapting to a new country and culture. Moreover, Khakpour's father especially lived with the illusion that they could go back to Iran and carry on with their old lifestyle. Living in this diasporic state, her father did not invest in a house for a long time in America, with them constantly shifting in cheap rental homes exposing the already ill Khakpour to a common American household problem of mold, which further contributed to her sickness. Grappled with their own issues, Khakpour's long-term condition became secondary, making her lose the parental response or support she required.

Khakpour says, “To find a home in my body is to tell a story that doesn't exist. I am a foreigner, but in ways that go much deeper than I thought, under the epidermis and into the blood cells. I have started to consider that I will never be at home, perhaps not even in death” (12). Disability is a multi-dimensional and complicated process in itself. From expensive healthcare facilities to the stigma associated with certain illnesses, and navigating life through work and disability, this memoir gives a small glimpse of most things a disabled person has to cope with. It also reminds us that disability studies should be more reflective of gender, race, and ethnicity as well. It also solidifies the necessity to cater economic, emotional, and social support to people dealing with disabilities. Disability studies is a comparatively new genre in the field of literature and the representation of minority groups is even less in the area as of now. Through life writing, Khakpour has essentially created a discourse and paved the way for further narratives to develop, thus expanding this inter-disciplinary genre. This also reflects how disability cannot be studied in isolation but has larger implications on the sociological, political as well as psychological dimensions of life.

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Ethical Dilemmas in Pain Management: Insights from Travis Rieder's Memoir *In Pain: A Bioethicist's Personal Struggle with Opioids*

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Abstract

This paper critically examines Travis Rieder's memoir, *In Pain: A Bioethicist's Personal Struggle with Opioids*, and its exploration of the challenges inherent in opioid prescription for pain management within the healthcare system. The paper dissects the subtleties of the "Opioid Dilemma," a term coined by the author to encapsulate the fine balance between pain relief and the risks associated with opioid dependence and addiction. Furthermore, the paper examines the ethical principles of non-maleficence and beneficence in the context of opioid therapy. The study endeavours to challenge existing stigmatisations surrounding substance use disorders and advocate for a more compassionate and nuanced understanding of addiction. Ultimately, by synthesising insights from Rieder's memoir and existing literature, this paper seeks to underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in medical education, clinical practice, and healthcare policy in navigating the terrain of opioid therapy in pain management within contemporary healthcare systems.

Keywords – Addiction Stigma, Healthcare Ethics, Opioid dependence, Pain management,

Travis Rieder, a faculty member at the Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics, highlights the everlasting challenge of comprehending, communicating and effectively managing pain in his memoir, *In Pain: A Bioethicist's Personal Struggle with Opioids*. His narrative recounts the aftermath of a severe motorcycle accident in 2015, which led to multiple surgeries and an escalating opioid regimen to alleviate the intense bodily pain he was experiencing post-surgery. However, managing withdrawal symptoms that emerged as a consequence of the pain medication proved a more daunting task than pain management. Rieder's personal experience with opioid therapy serves as the backdrop for his philosophical critique of the healthcare industry's indifferent approach to opioid prescription. Rieder received opioid analgesics during hospitalisation post-surgery to manage his pain; however, he encountered inadequate support from healthcare professionals upon discharge in terms of minimising the use of the painkillers. Despite seeking assistance from his surgeon and personnel at a pain management clinic, Rieder felt abandoned by the healthcare system as he struggled with debilitating withdrawal symptoms in the aftermath of taking opioid painkillers. His narrated ordeal sheds light on the lack of guidance and support available to patients navigating opioid tapering management. Despite Rieder's persistent efforts to seek help, medical practitioners offered little meaningful assistance or guidance necessary for him to overcome his growing dependence. The narrative hence also underscores the subjective and complex nature of withdrawal symptoms, which remain less understood by healthcare professionals compared to pain itself. Clinicians have a duty to relieve patients' physical pain and suffering while avoiding medications that may cause long-term harm. However, there exists a significant knowledge gap regarding opioid tapering

in modern medical education. Through the memoir, Reider analyses the aggressive and misleading marketing practices of multiple pharmaceutical conglomerates in an effort to expose several systemic problems across various levels of the healthcare system. Reider notes that medical institutions, the pharmaceutical industry, and regulatory bodies inadvertently fail patients. He goes into detail about how Purdue Pharma, a large pharmaceutical company, falsely marketed an opioid drug called OxyContin as highly effective while remaining minimally addictive for pain management, a claim unsupported by evidence but still managed to be approved by the government regardless. This misled both physicians as well as patients and subsequently nurtured a culture of widespread opioid use. Purdue's marketing downplayed the risk of addiction and suggested no need for opioid tapering knowledge and experience for clinicians or patients. By differentiating between physical tolerance and dependence, Purdue shifted blame onto patients, stigmatising those struggling with opioid dependence. This convenient yet deleterious tactic not only stigmatised pain patients struggling to discontinue medication but also turned the narrative to portray them as inherently flawed individuals rather than victims of a larger systemic issue. Reider explains how the current healthcare system lacks comprehensive pain management and tapering strategies, leaving patients like himself feeling betrayed by those who swore to do no harm by the Hippocratic oath (Ho 2112).

Throughout the book, Travis Reider addresses what he calls “The Opioid Dilemma.” He explicates a catch-22 situation and states -

The Opioid Dilemma is the very real, very difficult requirement that physicians take pain seriously and treat it responsibly, while simultaneously being responsive to the power and danger of a central pain-relieving tool—one that is contributing to an epidemic of addiction, overdose, and death. (Reider 69)

The author emphasises that in the continuing practice of opioid prescription for pain management, healthcare practitioners are susceptible to two types of errors. The first of which is overprescription, which entails furnishing patients with quantities of opioids exceeding that of actual requirements, which results in the administration of opioids to patients who do not require them or the doses surpassing the necessary levels. Both outcomes are unfavourable, as opioids carry the risk of physical dependence that leads to addiction and, if misused, can lead to adverse health consequences. The second issue is under-prescription, whereby patients with genuine and significant requirements for pain management are not provided with an adequate quantity of opioids for pain relief. The contemporary discourse surrounding the "opioid epidemic" (Lyden 123) primarily revolves around the problem of overprescription. However, it can be argued that overprescription arises from healthcare professionals' desire to utilise the available resources that alleviate patients' pain. Thus, the resolution to the overprescription quandary is not as straightforward as completely eliminating opioids from the equation, as opioids are medically acknowledged for their efficacy in managing pain in specific scenarios. Consequently, removing opioids from pain management practices would result in individuals like Travis Reider, who underwent five consecutive surgeries and who

subsequently requires a substantial quantity of opioids for pain management, having to experience undue suffering. Reider advocates for prescribing opioids only to patients in need and in appropriate quantities. He acknowledges the challenges associated with implementing such an idealistic practice and delineates the sources of errors in opioid prescription. Reider observes that patient misuse of opioids is prevalent. Drawing from personal experiences, he attributes this phenomenon to the body's acclimatisation to the dosage, prompting patients to perceive a need for higher dosages to alleviate pain adequately. This tendency leads to two outcomes: patients are inclined to increase their dosage, and they may exhaust their opioid supply before the refill date, necessitating frequent physician consultations for additional opioids. Consequently, trust in the patient-physician relationship diminishes, as patients cannot rely on their physicians anymore to fulfil their increasingly perceived needs, while physicians are reluctant to deviate from recommended dosage regimens. Compounding this issue is the insufficient training provided to physicians regarding effectively tapering patients off opioids. Reider highlights an intriguing case where physicians are trained to taper patients off other painkiller substances such as benzodiazepines, which, if overprescribed or overdosed, can lead to immediate fatalities. When queried about the evident deficiency in managing opioid tapering, Reider received responses from physicians that indicate a manifest lack of proficiency in the area -

Trying to channel his colleagues, he offered, "If you don't know how to taper benzos, you'll kill someone. If you don't know how to taper opioids, your patients might suffer, but they'll survive. Right or wrong, the latter is optional in a way the former isn't." (Reider 129)

The physician here attempts to carve out a demarcation between the process of discontinuing benzodiazepines, another wildly used painkiller and opioids but, by doing so, inadvertently downplays the severity of the effects of over-consumption of opioids. This distinction, however, is inherently flawed due to numerous documented cases of patients experiencing fatal consequences from improper weaning off opioids, which lead to potential overdoses. While such occurrences may be infrequent, they remain a recognised problem within medical practice. Travis Reider also highlights another significant issue, namely epistemic injustice, that manifest in the failure to take an individual's pain seriously because of existing stereotypes and/or prejudice. Reider illustrates this through the case studies of two patients, Darius and Connor, who are in line for pain treatment. Reider, describes the two of them contrastingly, with Darius uncannily being portrayed as a potential addict or manipulator, while Connor, despite exhibiting fatigue and irritability, is portrayed as well as deemed legitimately in need of opioid medication. The prevailing bias is that Darius's appearance and demeanour lead many to perceive him as seeking drugs for non-therapeutic purposes, while Connor's presentation is readily accepted as indicative of genuine pain. The distinguishing factors between Darius and Connor lie not in their inherent circumstances but instead in the language they use to articulate their pain and other factors related to their physical appearance. The disparity in how their testimonies are received, with Connor's being taken more

seriously than Darius's, reflects a form of epistemic injustice, specifically testimonial injustice. Darius's testimony is discredited based on prevailing prejudices and stereotypes rather than being evaluated on the basis of objective scientific evidence (Reider 73). This bias manifests in significant ways, resulting in individuals from racial minority groups, such as people of colour, to have lower chances of obtaining adequate pain medication compared to their white counterparts. Pain reports from people of colour are frequently not accorded the same level of seriousness or value as those from white individuals, bringing into the limelight the systemic disparities in healthcare. Travis Reider also underscores another critical aspect: opioids are efficient in managing acute traumatic pain, such as post-surgical recovery, but their efficacy is limited in treating long-term chronic pain. As opioids may serve as efficient pain relief for most situations, they often end up becoming the default treatment option across various medical conditions. However, their effectiveness varies widely from case to case, leading to challenges in appropriate opioid prescription practices.

In his memoir, Reider presents several thought-provoking inquiries. Firstly, he questions the accountability for establishing and supervising his opioid regimen, mainly focusing on who bears the responsibility for tapering his opioid usage. Secondly, he investigates the systemic factors within the healthcare system that contributed to what he perceives as a complete abandonment by medical professionals during his phase of opioid dependence. Third, he deliberates on potential changes aimed at improving how healthcare practitioners address the opioid dilemma, with the goal of reducing rates of overprescription as well as underprescription. The first two questions primarily seek to understand the complexities that engulf opioid management, while the third question delves into actionable strategies to mitigate the dilemma. Reider also explores the crucial distinction between bodily dependence on a substance and addiction. He emphasises that he, in fact, did not develop an addiction to opioids but instead experienced physical dependence due to the withdrawal effects when attempting to taper off the medication. It is noteworthy that Reider's motivation to minimise and eventually cease opioid consumption contradicts the typical behaviour exhibited by individuals struggling with addiction, who often resort to extreme measures to acquire the substance they crave. His unwavering commitment to discontinue opioid use underscores his assertion that he was not addicted but rather physically dependent on opioids because of his pain. Despite experiencing strong bodily dependence due to prolonged medication use following surgeries, Reider asserts that his judgment remained unimpaired, and his ability to refrain from taking opioids was unaffected. While he endured significant discomfort during the tapering process, he steadfastly believes that his overarching desire to taper opioid consumption, driven by long-term benefits for himself and his family, remained relatively intact. Reider refers to these desires as "higher-order" (122) motivations and emphasises their prioritization over the base desire to alleviate physical pain. This distinction is pivotal, as it underscores Reider's assertion that he was not addicted to opioids but rather

physically dependent on them. However, when seeking professional assistance to taper off his prescription, Reider encountered a bureaucratic impasse. On approaching medical professionals, he was directed to addiction services, where he was informed that his situation fell outside their purview. This bureaucratic loop left Reider without a resolution, underscoring systemic deficiencies in addressing nuanced cases of opioid dependence within the healthcare system.

In his meditation on addiction, Travis Reider provides an insightful examination of prominent models that theorise the affliction, beginning with the moral model. This paradigm conceptualises addiction as a moral failing, often attributing it to a weakness of will, a deficiency of character, or a moral vice. Within the framework of virtue ethics, addiction is perceived as indicative of a lack of certain virtues, such as strength of will or sound judgment. Consequently, individuals who have an addiction are often subject to criticism and societal disdain under the moral model. In contrast, the brain disease model portrays addiction as akin to a disease that plagues the mind. This perspective shifts the blame from the individual to the disease itself, thereby acting as an advocate for therapeutic interventions rather than punitive measures. However, Reider contends that the brain disease model overlooks the role of one crucial element: individual agency. By absolving individuals of responsibility for their actions, the brain disease model diminishes the significance of personal agency in overcoming addiction. Consequently, individuals who successfully manage to conquer their addiction may not receive proper recognition or praise, as their actions are attributed solely to the disease rather than their own efforts. The third model, known as the learning/developmental model, posits that addiction arises when the brain becomes overtly fixated on a rewarding behaviour, essentially learning maladaptive associations between the world and emotional state. According to Reider, the solution lies in the unlearning of these associations in order to modify behaviour patterns. While Reider refrains from explicitly endorsing either the brain disease model or the developmental model, he explicitly rejects the moral model (258). He argues that the moral model oversimplifies addiction by reducing it to a mere failing of individual character. This reductionism fosters damaging stereotypes, epitomised by the "junkie" image perpetuated in campaigns such as the "war on drugs" (Knapp 294). The "junkie" stereotype carries the negative connotations of being unclean, criminal, and lacking in willpower. Reider contends that such perceptions adversely impact the maintenance of addiction services, which he says are chronically understaffed and underfunded. Also, within the moral model framework, addiction is viewed as a personal failing, thereby absolving society of any responsibility for intervention or support. Consequently, there is little impetus to allocate resources toward addiction services, as the onus is placed solely on the individual to overcome their addiction. The prevailing societal attitudes, shaped by the moral model, perpetuate stigmatisation and hinder the provision of comprehensive support for individuals in need of assistance with opioid dependence or addiction.

The principle of non-maleficence, a cornerstone of biomedical ethics, mandates that

physicians uphold an ethical duty to avoid causing harm to their patients (Varkey 18). This foundational principle encompasses a range of moral imperatives, including refraining from actions that may inflict pain or suffering upon patients. In practical terms, non-maleficence requires physicians to meticulously assess the benefits and risks of all medical interventions and treatments, and opt for those that promote patient well-being while mitigating potential harm. However, as physicians may lack the requisite training or resources, it is pertinent to acknowledge that they may encounter challenges in assisting patients seeking to taper off opioids. This gap in support could potentially result in long-term harm when patients are required to discontinue opioid medication.

In addition to non-maleficence, the principle of beneficence holds significant sway in guiding medical practice. Beneficence mandates that physicians must actively strive to promote positive patient outcomes (Varkey 18). Unlike non-maleficence, beneficence imposes positive obligations, that necessitate physicians not only to abstain from causing harm but also to take proactive measures to enhance patient well-being. This principle assumes particular relevance within the realm of pain management, where physicians endeavour to mitigate patient suffering, even if it entails the utilisation of potentially addictive opioids. The doctrine of double effect reinforces this ethical stance by suggesting that permitting unintended harm to achieve a favourable outcome may be ethically justifiable (Beauchamp and Childress 162). Prescribing opioids may forestall unnecessary pain or suffering, which aligns with the principle of beneficence; however, according to the principle of non-maleficence, the prescription of opioids entails significant risks of harm and thus warrants caution. The juxtaposition of these two principles creates a tension where the prescription of opioids represents a balancing act between the imperative to alleviate pain and the imperative to minimise harm. As such, the goal is to navigate an intermediate position that satisfies the ethical imperatives of both beneficence and non-maleficence. Morality dictates that medical professionals provide opioids to patients for pain management, thereby fulfilling the principle of beneficence while concurrently offering guidance to taper opioid use as treatment progresses, aligning with the principle of non-maleficence. This approach strives for an ideal balance that mitigates the risks associated with both underprescribing and overprescribing opioids. To achieve this objective, physician training in opioid tapering is essential, coupled with the assignment of a dedicated professional responsible for assisting patients in tapering their opioid usage. This proactive approach aims to optimise patient care by addressing the complexities inherent in upholding ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence in the practice of opioid prescription. A portion of Reider's memoir details a quest to figure out which physician or health care professional was responsible for his treatment, and he says in this regard

What we don't know yet, though, is exactly who screwed up, and in what way. Someone should've helped me, and Konowitz, but who? And what precisely was their responsibility? If someone had a relevant responsibility—what in my

professional life as an ethicist I often call a “duty” or an “obligation”—then we need to get clear on what exactly that was. (Reider 139)

The absence of a designated individual who bears the responsibility of overseeing opioid tapering underscores a form of systemic deficiency rather than individual culpability. Additionally, a need to explore of alternative medications for pain management emerges. Reider highlights instances where alternatives to opioids exhibit comparable effectiveness in specific contexts. These alternative medications offer milder side effects and lower risks of bodily dependence or addiction. Moreover, raising awareness of biases in healthcare systems that contribute to epistemic injustice and other forms of discrimination is nothing less than crucial. Such biases influence the accessibility of opioids, as well as overall healthcare experiences related to prescription medications. By acknowledging and addressing these biases, healthcare providers can strive towards a more equitable distribution of pain management resources and improved patient care outcomes. Efforts to mitigate the stigma surrounding drug use and addiction should extend beyond the confines of the medical field. These stigmas persist prominently and impact individuals' behaviours, as evidenced by Reider's experiences. While Reider did not perceive himself as addicted to opioids, he was nonetheless acutely aware of the societal perception that he might be. This awareness of stigma influenced his interactions with others and shaped his reluctance to openly discuss his treatment involving opioids. Reider's hesitation to share his story accentuates the pervasive influence of societal attitudes toward addiction and drug use. The fear of judgment and societal scrutiny compels individuals to conceal their struggles, which consequently hinders any open dialogue and potentially impedes the already limited access to necessary support and resources. By challenging entrenched stigmas, we can strive to create environments conducive to open communication and compassionate support for individuals grappling with substance use disorders.

In conclusion, Travis Rieder's narrative, *In Pain: A Bioethicist's Personal Struggle with Opioids*, brings to the forefront the challenges inherent in the healthcare system's approach to opioid prescription. Rieder's personal journey, interweaved with a commentary of the pharmaceutical as well as the healthcare industry's systemic failures, illuminates the pressing need for a more nuanced understanding of pain management and opioid tapering. Rieder's call for improved medical education, designated responsibilities for opioid tapering guidance, exploration of alternative pain management strategies, and the dismantling of biases contributing to epistemic injustice highlights the broader systemic changes required to address the opioid dilemma. This memoir not only sheds light on the intricacies of pain and dependence but also advocates for a more compassionate and informed approach to opioid prescription and patient care.

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Other Side of the Stethoscope: A Call for Empathy through Selected Autopathographies

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Abstract

Doctoring was once both the art and science of healing. Paradoxically, with the significant advancement in the medical profession, the science of curing is so advanced that the art of healing is left behind. Clinical knowledge "formed itself at the very bedside of the patient" (Foucault 93), emphasising the equal role of patient and practitioner in the itinerary of illness. However, biomedicine and medical technologies have significantly widened the gap between all-knowing specialists and know-nothing patients. Illness narratives highlight this distortion during hospitalisation. This is evident in Sacks' *A Leg to Stand on* (1984) and Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* (2016). Sacks, a neurologist with an injured leg, and Kalanithi, a neurosurgeon with lung cancer, find themselves in a mundus inversus. Their autopathographies interweave themes of injury, illness, patient-practitioner relationships, critique of medical practices, and a call for empathy. This paper, presented in three sections, refers to Foucault's medical gaze, Engel's biopsychosocial paradigm, and the theoretical framework on medical humanities provided by Kleinman, Hawkins, and Charon to argue for deeper and more humane medicine.

Keywords: Art of caring, Science of curing, Clinical empathy, Doctor's desk, Patient's bed

Introduction

Disillusionment with medicine is becoming increasingly apparent. Almost every discussion surrounding illness narratives supposedly starts with talking about a problem in medicine, and the problem has something to do with decreased patient satisfaction, increased physician burnout, poor doctor-patient relationships, commercialisation, medicalisation, and technologisation. However, in spite of our disagreement on the comparative importance of these issues, we could probably agree that humanity is suffering in some way in medicine. The scope of the medicine was always the same, i.e., service. Therefore, at all times, the physician requires certain qualities, such as empathy and compassion, along with knowledge concerning the nature of the disease. Medicine is undergoing one of the greatest revolutions in history. It has become more and more technical and specialised. With these extraordinary developments, satisfaction must be optimum. Then what are the causes of dissatisfaction and disillusionment of patients?

Besides the dismal side of progress in medicine evident in commercialisation and over-medicalisation, there has also been the development of a new prototype of a physician alongside the old: a less of a healer or listener but someone who converts people into cases, conditions, facts, and figures. Several scholarly trends and debates, such as medical humanities, narrative medicine, health activists, and media, have advocated humane medicine, critiqued the patient-provider relationship, and

addressed the need for “biopsychosocial” (Engel), not just biomedicine models. The sub-genre of autobiography, “Illness Narrative” (Kleinman), encompasses the experience of enduring or succumbing to illness comes in this line. The illness narratives can be seen as a moral movement which calls for a positive change in medicine or being therapeutic to the readers. In general, illness narratives always have narrators from either one side of the stethoscope, the "sick bed", or the "doctor's desk" (Helman). The present paper focuses on the illness narratives from both sides of the stethoscope where doctors become patients and chronicle their itinerary of illness as manifest in two autopathographies - Oliver Sacks' *A Leg to Stand on* (1984) and Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* (2016).

Text: On the Selected Authors and their Autopathography

"Physician-writers" or "Doctor-writers" is most often used to describe a physician who writes creatively. Apollo was the god of both poetry and medicine. From Hippocrates through Anton Chekov to William Carlos Williams, doctors have been intersecting literature and medicine. Anglo-American Dr. Oliver Sacks (1933-2015) and Indian-American Paul Kalanithi (1977-2015) are significant in the list of physician-writers. Sacks, the neurologist, is best known for his clinical tales, such as *An Anthropologist on Mars*, *Awakenings*, *Hallucinations*, *Migraine*, *Oaxaca Journal*, *Seeing Voices*, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, and *The Mind's Eye*, among reading literature aficionados. However, *A Leg to Stand on* differs from the rest of his books, for which he, the physician, is now the patient. Sacks recounts his harrowing experience with a bull on a Norwegian mountain, which resulted in a severely injured leg. The narrative unfolds across seven chapters, beginning with "The Mountain" and continuing through "Becoming a Patient" and "Convalescence," detailing his illness experience, poor patient care, troubled doctor-patient relationship, post-operative syndrome, and a sense of depersonalization.

At the age of 36, after a decade of rigorous medical training and with prestigious career opportunities lying ahead, Kalanithi could see "the Promised Land, from Gilead to Jericho to the Mediterranean Sea" and a "nice catamaran" (Kalanithi 13), where he with his wife and hypothetical children would sail on the weekends. However, just as this promising future seemed within reach, cancer presented itself. In 2013, Kalanithi was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer, after which he penned the autopathography - *When Breath Becomes Air*. Becoming the Pulitzer finalist under the Auto/Biography category in 2017 and translated into more than 30 languages, *When the Breath Becomes Air* is presented in two parts, along with a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue describes how Kalanithi reads his scans and detects cancer in the very room where he had seen hundreds of patients over the years. Following the prologue comes Part I, titled "In Perfect Health I Begin," which talks about his early life, love for literature, and call for medicine. Part II, "Cease Not Until Death", goes back to his diagnosis and declining health. The epilogue was written by Paul's wife, Lucy, posthumously.

Cased and Conditioned

The single biggest problem with patient-centric care is that it brands the suffering individual as merely a case and condition, fitting them into the framework of biomedicine while overlooking their personhood. In *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, Foucault critically examined modern medicine. He systematically critiqued the concept of “spatialization” (16)—namely, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels—that has historically distanced patients from practitioners due to the influence of biologically oriented medicine. Foucault also observed the emergence of professionalism in medicine, where the medical gaze examines patients “horizontally and vertically in graded depth” through the newly acquired “anatomy-clinical experience” (167), which made “the invisible visible” (183) during the nineteenth century. He termed this gaze *Le regard médical* (the medical gaze) (Foucault 9). Under this gaze, a patient is reduced to mere dysfunctional organs to be fixed rather than a person to be holistically healed.

Sacks and Kalanithi were also caught in the gaze. On the day of his graduation, marking the end of nearly seven years of residency, Kalanithi found himself in the emergency room wearing a patient gown instead of attending the graduation ceremony in his robes. Brad, the junior resident, was in charge on that particular day. When Kalanithi reviewed his medication list, he noticed a pill was not on it, without which his bone metastases activated and resulted in excruciating pain, as in point ten on the pain scale. So, he wanted to inquire about this with his resident. Brad appeared past midnight and did not even try to listen to his patient's suffering and concern; he was rather dismissive. The junior resident also tartly remarked that if it were not for Kalanithi and his reputation, they would not even be having this discussion, prompting reflection on the suffering endured by commoners under such individuals. Confused and angry, Kalanithi writes, "I could see that in Brad's eye I was not a patient, I was a problem: a box to be checked off" (89). Furthermore, indifferent Brad asks Kalanithi if he cannot wait till morning for his treatment. Brad was working the night shift. Kalanithi will be someone else's problem if Brad pushes away a little time. For Brad, Kalanithi was simply one of his to-do lists.

Kalanithi, a strong advocate of seeing patients as a person, not a problem, narrates his residency experience, which is didactic for other doctors. After experiencing a seizure while engaged in the familiar quotidian activity of shopping at the mall, a young woman found herself in an ICU bed surrounded by many unfamiliar machines, with constant beeping sounds and the strong smell of antiseptics. Surgery should be made, but Kalanithi fully knows that if he launches the procedure, the possible complications, and the success rate, the patient will likely refuse. In the report, he could accept his patient's refusal and consider his duty to be discharged like Brad. He gathered her family with his patient's consent, and the decision was made together. She chose an operation and never seized again. He states, "I had met her in a space where she was a person instead of a problem to be solved" (Kalanithi 48), contrasting with Brad's clinical gaze.

Sacks also suffered from being cased and conditioned. After the operation went just

fine, the challenges began for him, one of which is anosognosia, the inability to recognise one's body parts. Before the surgery, Dr. Swan desultorily explained the procedure to Sacks, stating that the diagnosis was straightforward: a tendon was torn, it would be reconnected, and that was all there was to it. However, Sacks later reflected that Swan's comments, while accurate from a purely anatomical perspective, took on a much broader, although unintended, meaning, as E. M. Forster's idea of "only connect" suggests (104). From the surgical standpoint, the doctor had fixed his patient's leg. However, he has no clue regarding Sacks' scotoma problems post-surgery. Sacks' prognosis undeniably demanded much more than fixing his quadriceps quickly. With the clinical gaze, which is loquacious, Swan epitomises the model of biomedicine in contrast with biopsychosocial when he says how the orthopods are like carpenters who do their job when they are called and adds how he cannot waste time talking to Sacks. Thus, Swan lacks "narrative competence" (Charon vii) when he postulates that he is a practical man who has work to do and talking/listening to his patients is beyond his business. By dismissing his patient's subjective experience, this doctor exemplifies Foucault's concept of the medical gaze, which cases and conditions the disease in the biomedical paradigm, taking for granted the psychological and social aspects of the ill.

Know-All Doctor and Know-Nothing Patient

In an article titled "Foucault," the National Library of Medicine affirms how medicine creates a power structure and how medical tribes tend to dominate rather than share. This article also discusses how the medicine controls and catalogues people into the to-do lists of appointment slots, perch them in the hospital's waiting room, practices for points and above all, "talk above their heads" (Misselbrook 3). Through their illness narratives, the selected narrators tactfully present the professionalism and hierarchy generally prevalent in their profession by self-confessing and looking back at their doctor's desk retrospectively. Sacks, after finding himself with a severely injured leg, first thought that there had been an accident and someone he knew was hurt. Later, he realised that someone was himself, and with that realisation came the pain, fear, and horror of the patient's bed. As a physician by profession, Sacks examined his leg before being rescued by reindeer hunters. The moment he decided to be a physician, the horror, fear, and emotion was gone, and his doctor part took over. Of this transition from the doctor's desk to the sick bed, he writes:

And then, the horror, so overwhelming for a moment, disappeared in the face of a "professional attitude."

"Ok, Doctor," I said to myself, "would you kindly examine the leg?"

Very professionally, and impersonally, and not at all tenderly, as if I were a surgeon examining "a case," I took the leg and examined it - feeling it, moving it this way and that. I murmured my findings aloud as I did so, as if for a class of students: I concluded, summarising my findings; "a fascinating case" . . . I turned with a pleased smile to my invisible audience, as if awaiting a round of applause. And then, suddenly, the "professional" attitude and persona broke down, and I realised that this "fascinating case" was me-me myself, fearfully disabled, and quite likely to

die. (Sacks 5)

Kalanithi, in the prologue, states that over the last six years, he had examined the number of such scans, albeit from the other side of the stethoscope. However, the scan he examined that day differed from all he had ever seen, for it was his own. This time, he was not wearing a white coat but gowned in the patient's robe. Realising the situation and his emotional state, Kalanithi wonders, "Why was I [he] so authoritative in a surgeon's coat but so meek in a patient's gown" (13). In this purge of anger and frustration, Kalanithi confesses to the reader, as well as self-confesses through the act of writing this memoir, that he has also been indifferent to his patients' experiences. At that very moment, his failed empathy rushed back to him, the memory of times when he discharged his patients' worries and ignored his patient's pain when other demands pressed and questioned how many times he noted and packaged his patients into neatly packed problems, the significance of which he failed to recognise. Kalanithi, from his sick bed, questions his agency on his doctor's desk and wonders whether he was empathetic and compassionate with his patients and their families or practised medicine by solely focusing on the "empty formalism" and "rote treatment of disease" by dismissing human significance (Kalanithi 46).

Words. Words. Words.

The next lamentation in the hospital setting is communication. A medical review on primary care consultation lengths in low- and middle-income countries found that the typical consultation time is five minutes or less in 18 countries, representing about half of the world's population. This brief consultation time has significant implications, as it disproportionately affects the healthcare quality for many people globally (Irving et al.). Clinicians commonly cite time pressures and targets as excuses for these problems. It is widely believed that longer consultations will lead to more accurate diagnoses, improve quality of life, and, much more importantly, patient enablement. In any patient experience survey, failure of communication comes high on the catalogue:

"The doctor looked at the screen, not at me."

"I was talked at, not with."

"I was asked a list of questions and expected to answer Yes or No."

"Nobody listened to my story". (qtd. in Robertson and Clegg 10)

In one of the chapters "Becoming a Patient," Oliver Sacks quotes from Donne's *Devotions*, written after recovering from typhus: "I cannot rise out of my bed till the physician enable me, nay I cannot tell that I am able to rise till he tell me so. I do nothing, I know nothing, of myself" (qtd. in Sacks 21). With this epigraph, Sacks enunciates the importance of the physician's words and denounces how his surgeon denied him the same. As the chapter title suggests, Sacks describes his experiences beyond the doctor's desk, detailing his stages of hospitalisation. As the hours passed, from six to eight, Sacks continued to wait for the doctor. Finally, around nine, Dr. Swan, the surgeon, arrived and talked at but not with him. Sacks longed to share the

entire story of his injury and his psychological trauma following it but was silenced by the system, which demanded only the salient facts.

Sacks wanted to communicate with his doctor so severely. Thus, he said, "But...." (Sacks 30), but the doctor had already wheeled out. "But," followed by an ellipsis, seemingly representing the denial of communication, keeps occurring in the book. For instance, Swan entered Sacks' room on a grand rounds day, where everything was cleaned up and ship-shaped. He neither looked nor greeted Sacks. Instead, he took the chart fixed at Sacks' bed outrightly. Sacks tried again to communicate with his surgeon but was met with silence as the surgeon simply walked away. Sacks attempted to speak, saying, "But ..."(81), but was ignored. With an irritable movement, Swan held up his hand to that of a policeman halting traffic, followed by his juniors; the procession wheeled from the room. All the optimism he had shown in his meeting with the physician left him questioning what kind of doctor and person Swan was. He had not listened to him at all and had shown no concern. This doctor seemed indifferent to his patients, utterly unconcerned with their needs. Sacks further observes that such a person neither listens to nor learns from those he treats. Instead, he dismisses them, regards them with disdain, and treats them as if they were of no consequence.

Similarly, Kalanithi and other doc-writers concur that a doctor's words can heal or hurt the sufferers. Kalanithi emphasises that for someone from the "kingdom of the sick" (Sontag 3), such as a patient with a severe head injury, the neurosurgeon's words are as crucial as their surgical skills. He observes that his highest ideal as a doctor was not solely to save lives but also to serve as a trusted partner for the patient and their family. Highlighting the significance of a physician's words, he illustrates how conversations with surgeons can leave lasting impressions on family members, influencing how they remember the death of their loved ones. In Kalanithi's words,

When a patient comes in with a fatal head bleed, that first conversation with a neurosurgeon may forever color how the family remembers the death, from a peaceful letting go ('Maybe it was his time') to an open sore of regret ('Those doctors didn't listen! They didn't even try to save him!'). Words are the surgeon's only tool when there's no place for the scalpel. (Kalanithi 47)

Conclusion

Sacks and Kalanithi gave an account of unthinking and unsympathetic surgeons through Swan and Brad, respectively. However, there is much that is positive about clinicians and health professionals. Usually, when the question of empathy comes, doctor-writers or scholars complain about how medical education and clinical practice have prepared them so poorly. However, Kalanithi and Sacks attach lapses in empathy to the individual failures of clinicians. Contrasting Brad and Swan, Kalanithi and Sacks presents sympathetic physicians Emma and an unnamed Norwegian doctor. Kalanithi describes Emma as compassionate, and his relationship with her is always in harmony. When Kalanithi was in a dead bed where his kidneys started to fail, his mouth became dry, and serum sodium reached a fatal level. Also,

when the nephrologists, ICU doctors, endocrinologists, oncologists, and gastroenterologists surrounded him, the last thing Kalanithi wanted was Emma's presence. Her presence gave him a sense of calm amidst the chaos of hospitalisation. Her words, filled with kindness and warmth, made him "feel better" (Kalanithi 86).

In the same line, Sacks describes a young Norwegian surgeon he met in his early period of injury. After all the physicians he had ever seen or will see in the future, the image of a particular Norwegian doctor remains bright and fond. Sacks describes this Norwegian doctor as embodying health, courage, humour and, above all, an exceptional empathy for his patients. Rather than speaking in a jargon-filled, textbook manner, this doctor barely spoke but demonstrated genuine, active empathy. Like Emma's visit to Kalanithi, this doctor's visit to Sacks made him "feel immeasurably better" (Sacks 25). In short, Emma and Brad seemingly upheld the Hippocratic Oath: "I will remember that there is an art to medicine as well as science and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist drug" (Modern Version, line 8).

Thus, the select narratives poignantly reveal how a purely biomedical approach, epitomised by unempathetic physicians like Swan and Brad, could lead to the depersonalisation of the sick. Conversely, the positive experiences with empathetic physicians, such as Norwegian Doc and Emma, underscore the therapeutic power of humane and more profound medicine. It is, therefore, sufficient to say that both of the selected surgeon-storytellers, through their autopathographies, open the oft-closed ills within their profession. They also gently coax the medical community to put the art of caring alongside the science of curing, ensuring that the timeless art of compassionate care complements medical science advancements.

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A Study of Memories Mediated through Generational Conversations in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*

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Abstract

Eva Hoffman's memoir, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989), records the memory narratives of torments, Eva Hoffman's family members suffered during the Holocaust. The victims have frequent memory glimpses of Holocaust horrors and these memory narratives occupy the everyday conversations in the domestic spheres of the victims. The recurring conversations surrounding their sufferings formed a legacy of memories. These everyday conversations form the communicative memories which operate through interaction and socialization. The memory narratives of the *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* are studied with the concepts of “communicative memory” and “cultural memory” proposed by Jan Assman. The communicative memories signify the events of recent past and the temporal horizon of the communicative memories is minimal. The personal memory of the sufferings could exist till the lifetime of Eva and her parents, whereas the cultural memories could solidify the memory narratives up to 3,000 years. The articulation of memory narratives of Holocaust sufferings in everyday conversations in Eva Hoffman's family were crystallized through recording those horrors in the memoir which act as the medium of cultural memory.

Keywords: Memory Narratives, Communicative Memory, Cultural Memory.

Memory is a temporally transcending phenomenon that can record and retrieve the events of the past. The personal memories are natural and spontaneous formation of the memory structure with respect to the experiences of the individual. The personal memory comprising the gruesome occurrences tend to haunt the individual through intermittent appearances in the psyche. Encyclopaedia of Philosophy defines memory as remembering “an event, an action, a person, a place, a feeling, a procedure, etc. and where something is, when a certain event happened, who did a certain thing, how to do something and how something looks, sounds or feels” (Sydney 265). The personal memories of Holocaust are constituted by the stored glimpses of horrific perils in the survivors' repository of self. The survivors have confronted the Holocaust trauma of segregation, ghettoization, mass murders, gassings in concentration camps and various inhuman conditions like starvation, deprived of proper shelter and clothing, exposure to cold and dreadful diseases. The philosophy of memory “have tended to concentrate on those uses of 'remember' in which it takes as its object of event- memory to the past events and actions occurring within the lifetime of the rememberer” (Sydney 265). The sustenance of Holocaust memories is marked by the magnitude of inhuman destruction and ruins caused by the Nazis. The survivors are tormented by the lingering horrors of Holocaust though its time has receded.

Holocaust memoir, the significant literary genre of Holocaust literature records the

horrors and terrors Jews suffered during and aftermath of the Holocaust. The memoir recorded by the victims, survivors and the second - generation writers, embodies the concrete narratives to the Jewish sufferings and accounts to the documentation of the Nazi crimes. The Holocaust memoirs enclose the narratives of prewar lives of Jews , the experiences of Jewish exclusion and segregation in the Nazi regime, Jewish ghettoization, the starvation and the diseases in the ghettos, the deportation in the cattle cars, the gruesome daily routines of concentration camps which includes prisoners digging their own graves, standing for the rollcalls in the snow, the meagre ration, spread of contagious diseases, the sexual violence, the medical experiments conducted on the victims, the death marches, the liberation of concentration camps and lives of survivors in emigrated lands. The remarkable Holocaust memoirs include *Night* (1960) by Elie Wiesel presents the experiences in concentration camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz* (1995) by Olga Lengyel provides the traumatic accounts of Jewish victims exploited for conducting medical experiments in the concentration camps, *Auschwitz and After* (1985) by Charlotte Delbo records the resilience and survival exhibited in Auschwitz, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (2001) by Ruth Kluger recounts the horrific experiences in concentration camps of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz- Birkenau, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (1979) by Helen Epstein presents the impacts of Holocaust trauma inherited by the children of the victims, *After Long Silence: A Memoir* (1999) by Helen Fremont describes the Jewish identity being restored through the memories of Holocaust.

Eva Hoffman was born in Poland and had emigrated to Canada and then to United States. She had received her doctoral degree from Harvard University in English and American Literature. She had served as professor at various institutions- Columbia University, University of Minnesota, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She had also worked as an editor and writer at The New York Times from 1979 to 1990. Her works include, *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (1989), *Exit into History: A Journey Through the New Eastern Europe* (1993), *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (1997), *The Secret: A Novel* (2002), *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004), *Illuminations. A Novel* (2008), *US: Appassionata* (2009), *Time: Big Ideas, Small Books* (2009), *How to Be Bored* (2016).

Through her memoir, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, Eva Hoffman records the memory glimpses of her family members suffered during the second world war. She records that her Jewish family belonged to a town near Lvov in prewar Poland. The family members, excluding her parents, were persecuted in the Holocaust. The memoir comprises the narratives of her parents' struggles to survive the second world war, their narrow attempts to escape from the perpetrators, the life in Poland after the second world war, their migration to Canada, the struggles in assimilating the social and cultural differences of the migrated land and acquiring the new language. Eva collected the memories of past in fragments from her parents

through frequent everyday conversations. Memory as an epistemological entity, Jan Assman defines it in his article as, something which constitutes the identity of individuals with reference to time:

“Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and collective level. Identity, in its turn, is related to time. A human self is a 'diachronic identity,' built 'of the stuff of time' (Luckman). The synthesis of time and identity is effectuated by memory” (Communicative and Cultural Memory 109).

The memory functions in three distinct spheres: neuro, social and cultural. The neuro or the inner level of memory is characterized by the mental images which identifies the self of an individual by creating personal memory structure. “On the inner level, memory is a matter of our neuro-mental system” (Assman Communicative and Cultural Memory 109). The social level of memory is marked by the communication and interaction between the individuals forming a social group. The members of a group who share a set of values, traditions, beliefs in common, construct the communicative memories through socialization. These memories always exist in informal manner through everyday speech and signifies the events having close temporal proximity. Assman defines social memory as, “memory is a matter of communication and social interaction” (Communicative and Cultural Memory 109). The cultural level of memory is characterized by the progression through specialized and canonized figures or carriers of memory. The temporal transcendence is the unique feature of cultural memories which create absolute fixity of events of past. Assman defines cultural memory as, “cultural memory is a kind of institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sights of gestures, are stable and situation transcendent” (Communicative and Cultural Memory 110).

Eva Hoffman inherited the memories from her parents, as all the other members in her family had perished. She affirms that every Jew she knew had lost one of their family members in the Holocaust and almost all her friends had no grandparents. She considers preserving her family's pain is as significant as affirming her Jewish identity. “My mother wants me to know what happened, and I keep every detail of what she tells me in my memory like black beads. It's a matter of honour to remember, like affirming one's Jewishness” (Hoffman 24). Eva as a daughter of the Holocaust victims has the right and responsibility to claim the memories though she hasn't experienced the terrors personally. The horrifying memories assimilate into her personal memory space forming Eva's Jewish identity. There is an overlapping of memory and identity, the memories of Holocaust merge with Jewish identity as it recognizes the Jewish past, providing knowledge about the catastrophe and creating a necessity to memorialize the horrors of Holocaust. The play of communicative memories between Eva and her parents marks the significance in locating the glimpses of the past struggles. The communicative memories are marked by the “varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications. These varieties, which M. Halbwachs gathered and analysed

under the concept of collective memory, constitute the field of oral history” (Assman *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity* 126). The everyday conversations of survivors are filled with the articulation of awful memories of the past and these conversations tend to occur in specific time periods when evoked by corresponding elements like the death anniversary of the victim died in the Holocaust, the newspaper articles, etc.

There is a spontaneous and frequent articulation of awful memories in the domestic spheres of the Holocaust victims. Eva's mother remembered her sister regularly, who was gassed to death in the concentration camp. It was informed to the family that she was one among the victims who were obliged to dig their own graves. “The man who saw her go into the gas chamber said that she was among those who had to dig their own graves, and that her hair turned grey the day before her death.” (Hoffman 6). The killing centres were established in the concentration camps to murder the victims by using carbon monoxide gas in mass number. Auschwitz–Birkenau was the major killing centre with four gas chambers which was equipped to kill 6,000 prisoners in a day. The Jewish prisoners were employed to cremate the dead bodies and they were also ordered to dig their own graves where they would be buried after the gassing. The memoir records the dreadful conditions of the victims in the concentration camps such death by poisonous gas chambers, the psychological trauma of the victims, digging own graves, etc., The memory of this dead woman is too intense to vanish and Eva's younger sister Alina was named in her remembrance. The painful image of the deceased aunt forming the neural memory makes appearance to the memory surface at regular intervals. Eva's mother gets invoked of strange compassion and terrible burden for her younger daughter, which Eva had inherited herself. Eva resolved as a young girl secretly to search to this deceased aunt when she would grow up, as the man who witnessed her in the concentration camp might had mistaken her for someone. The tendency to search the lost family members aftermath of the war is prevalent among the survivors as the possibility of accessing the concrete information about the lost members is insufficient. The victims remain to live with the hope of finding their loved ones.

“It's the middle of a sun- filled day, but suddenly, while she's kneading some dough, or perhaps sewing up a hole in my sweater's elbow, my mother begins to weep softly. ' This is the day when she died,' she says, looking at me with pity, as if I too were included in her sorrow. 'I can't stop thinking about her’” (Hoffman 6).

She records that her father was a “powerfully built man” (Hoffman 7) who had saved her parents' lives “repeatedly during the war by acts of physical strength and sheer wiliness” (Hoffman 7). Eva had born two months after the end of the second world war when her parents in drudgery of moving from Lvov to Cracow. Her parents rejoiced her birth as significance of new beginning and Eva was named after her both grandmothers who died in the Holocaust.

Her parents had many narrow escapes in their quest of survival, which Eva heap up in her memory beads. During their stay in the peasant's attic, they were acquainted with a maid, Ciocia Bronia, who camouflaged her Jewish identity to survive the war.

The Nazis demanded the Jews to carry the identity cards indicating their Jewish heritage and some Jews acquired the false papers and false identities with help of righteous gentiles to pass as non-Jews. Eva's parents had cleaved to the maid aftermath of the war as the three had lost all their family members. The entire Jewish community was confronted with the traumatic reality of having lost their relatives by the end of second world war. The bereft victims created close bonds with their camp inmates and the friendship acquired during the catastrophe.

As the Jewish roundups and deportation to the concentration camps were intensified in the Polish towns, Eva's father and his two brothers were considered a prize catch for eluding the gestapo officers. The Nazis deported the Jews in trains or trucks to the concentration camps in occupied Poland, where the deportees were murdered immediately with poisonous gas. Eva's father was identified by one of the prisoners in the deportation truck and arrested to the nearby house reserved for herding the prisoners in nights. He managed to escape the reserve by sliding through a crack open in the door and he was chased by the barking dogs. He ran faster into the forest, wandered the snow until he was rescued by the local peasant. Her family was saved by the local peasants throughout their survival journey.

“The German in charge of course stopped and ordered my father to get on. None of the people on the truck came out of the war alive. My father did because, as the Germans stopped the truck for the night and herded people into some house reserved for this purpose, he noticed a door that was a crack open and slid through it” (Hoffman 24).

Another bead of Eva's memory narrates her father's escape during their stay in the forest bunker as he came out to forage food in night. The priest in the village church provided him some bread. There was a small minority of religious leaders, ministers and priests resisted the Nazi racism and provided shelter and other aids to the Jews. Her father was grabbed by two drunk Ukrainians on his way back to the bunker and he attacked them furiously and threw himself into the nearby river, staying in the freezing water for the whole night until the drunkards move away.

“But one night on the way back, he was grabbed by two young Ukrainians - strong and drunk - who told him they were going to take him to the gestapo...But as they were crossing the bridge of a local river, my father threw them violently, letting them fall against the bridge's railings and then jumped into river though it was half-iced” (Hoffman 24).

Eva's aunt, her father's sister, was one of the Jews who consented to work for Germans during the second world war for the favour securing the lives of family members. Her child was killed though she worked for the Nazis. “He heard the Jew say to the German, 'I work well for you, don't I?' Your father's sister was saved that time, my mother goes on, 'because she promised to pay them. But by the time she got back with gold, the child was dead, of course.’” (Hoffman 252)

Eva acquired her family's memory narratives through the articulation of memory instances in the everyday domestic communication with her parents at different time periods. The memories which find place in everyday communication makes the foundation for the oral history of victims' terrible experiences of the past. The

temporal horizon of these memories is minimal as the memories of the sufferings can only exist in parallel to the lifetime of Eva and her parents. Jan Assman puts it as, “this horizon does not extend more than eighty to (at the very most) one hundred years into the past” (Collective Memory and Cultural Identity 127).

The solidification of memories is inevitable to create the fixity with temporal transcendence through culturalization. The transition of memories from communicative zone to cultural area could be directed through various tools. Jan Assman puts it as, “These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance). We call these figures of memory” (Collective Memory and Cultural Identity 129).

The memories comprising the horrible death of Eva's aunt in the concentration camp, her father's sufferings during the war and survival narratives, the death of her cousin remained in her family domain, could vanish with the passage of time. By recording the horrors and sufferings in the memoir *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, these communicative memories of the Holocaust horrors get solidified and transferred into the domain of cultural memories.

The cultural memories attempt to achieve temporal transcendence of specific occurrences, experiences owning significant values and the transcendence is established through institutionalized external forms. The objectivized carriers of memory like artifacts, feasts, icons, symbols, religious scripts, texts, monuments, rites, folklores, memorials, museums, etc. act as the solidifying agents of cultural memories. The culturalized memory narratives of Eva's family in the memoir crystallizes the horrors, as Jan Assman describes the “cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time” (Collective Memory and Cultural Identity 129). The culturalization of memories requires special qualification of artistry to incorporate the memories. The memoir as a medium of cultural memory gets registered into the canonized structure as a literary text and would be preserved as a formally archived memorializing tool. This status of gaining systematic documentation as a literary memoir ensures the sustenance of the memory narratives of the horrors Eva's family suffered during the war for a longer time span. In his article, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” Jan Assman describes that the cultural memory is characterized by “the concretion of identity” (130), “its capacity to reconstruct” (130), “formation” (130), “organization” (131), and “obligation” (131). The culturalized Holocaust memories bring out the association of three poles: the symbolic forms or the memory tools like the literary texts written by the Holocaust victims and survivors, the crystallization of horrific Holocaust memories and the identity of the Jewish community which owns those memories. The memoir tends to connect the sufferings of Eva's family members, the Holocaust memories owned by Jewish community and the horrendous effects Holocaust created on every Jewish individual. The memoir reconstructs the endangered lives of Jews during the second world war, as hiding in the bunker, segregated from the public, loss of family members, starvation, gassings in concentration camps, deportation, the loss of

livelihood in the aftermath of the war, migration. Jan Assman describes the reconstruction of cultural memory as “no memory can preserve the past. What remains is only that 'which society in each era can reconstruct within its contemporary frame of reference' ”(Collective Memory and Cultural Identity 130). The memory instances of Eva's family collected in the memoir has constructed a potential “formation”(Assman Collective Memory and Cultural Identity 131) for the objectivation of torments endured by Eva's parents and the memoir serves as a specialized and canonized literary work of the cultural memory which “always depend on a specialized practice”(Assman Collective Memory and Cultural Identity 131). The memoir serves as the reminding factor of inhuman annihilation of Jews and the sufferings endured by the Jewish victims during the Holocaust. The narrative structures preserved in cultural memory contributes to promote humanity and prevent the antisemitic violences against Jews. The Holocaust memoirs would insist the mankind to derive moral lessons from the horror to avoid such a catastrophe again in the future.

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Reimagining Emily Dickinson: Exploring Adaptation and Perspective in the Television Series *Dickinson*

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Abstract

This paper examines the process of adapting literary works, specifically poetry, into the film/television medium through the lens of the series *Dickinson* (2019). It analyses how the show transforms Emily Dickinson's poems into episodic narratives, capturing the essence of her eccentric persona, paradoxical themes, and ironic undertones through a dark comedy approach. The study applies several film adaptation theories, including Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation as a creative interpretation and reinterpretation, to understand the show's adaptive strategies. It explores into the adaptation techniques employed to convert particular poems like "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" into visual episodic explorations of Dickinson's perspectives on death and spirituality. Furthermore, it examines the diverse interpretations and perspectives the show offers in its modern adaptation of the poet's life and work, subverting traditional portrayals. The comparative analysis sheds light on how *Dickinson* (2019) reinvents the concept of literary adaptation itself by presenting a unique take on Dickinson's poetry and persona. This study contributes to the current discourse on the convergence of literature, media studies, and adaptation in the context of contemporary television, focusing on the transformation of poetic works into episodic visual narratives.

Keywords: Adaptation, Visual Episodic Explorations, Interpretation, Literary Adaptation.

Introduction

Adaptation has been in the roots of literature for ages. We see myths being adapted into stories and plays since long ago. Famous examples include James Joyce's *Ulysses* adapting Homer's *Odyssey*, and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* reimagining Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Written plays of Shakespeare have been turned into films for a long time. Notable adaptations include Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) based on *Macbeth*, and Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996). The studies like Thomas Leitch's *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* (2007) and Deborah Cartmell's *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (2012) offer comprehensive insights into this phenomenon. Earlier, texts were being read and written forms were more popular compared to cinema. But with time, tables have turned. With the introduction of cinema and new-age technologies, cinema has become the bigger branch. When asked about Harry Potter, it is generally the film that comes to mind for everyone. The novel is thought of later. This shows how important film adaptation has become for all of us. The first adaptation, although it has no particular date, is around the early 20th century. Since then, we have seen novels, plays, stories, and poems being adapted into various ranges of films, short films, and series. This brings us to the basic question of what adaptation is, what its

roots are, and how one can study adaptation.

Linda Hutcheon in her book, *A Theory of Adaptation* says that it is impossible to study literature just by studying cinema and films. She talks about how adaptation influences one in day-to-day life. Hutcheon argues that "adaptation is how stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places" (176). She further elaborates on the expanding scope of adaptation in the postmodern era, stating:

"The post-moderns have clearly inherited this same habit, but we have even more new materials at our disposal—not only film, television, radio, and the various electronic media, but also theme parks, historical enactments, and virtual reality experiments" (Hutcheon 116).

Traditionally, cinematic adaptations have primarily focused on transforming plays, novels, and short stories into visual narratives. However, this narrow view overlooks the potential of other literary forms, particularly poetry, as rich sources for adaptation. However, Alena Smith's series *Dickinson* (2019) challenges this paradigm by innovatively translating Emily Dickinson's poetic works into a visual medium. The show beautifully encapsulates the life of Dickinson adapting from her poems. Whenever we look at Dickinson's biography, we see her as a quiet woman who just talks about mysticism. But the show gives adaptations a new twist by interpreting her poems and moulding them into stories. This study exhibits the same that how poetry can be adapted into movies, films or series.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to explore the intricate process of adapting poems into films, with a specific focus on Emily Dickinson's poetry. It seeks to analyse the various methods used in these adaptations and examine the diverse perspectives showcased in the television series, *Dickinson* (2019).

The Genesis of Adaptation

Adaptation is not the mere conversion of texts in movies rather the use of these texts everywhere in life. Theme parks, musical videos, video games, other novels or texts can be an adaptation of a text.

In general, adaptation is a piece of work that represents another work. Rowling's Harry Potter series for say has been now adapted into several forms like movies, video games, theme parks etc. Writers and artists generally adapt texts into films, music videos, graphic novels and other novels. Adaptations are not mirrored images of the source text. Thus, while approaching and critically analysing an adaptation, one should view it under the lens of a new creation. It is not the original text's author's creation rather a new one. You might view it as a new film and not as a mere copy of the original creation.

The Process of Adaptation

Adaptation is so ubiquitous to our times that Walter Benjamin rightly says that "storytelling is the art of repeating stories" (Benjamin 90). Adaptation might be

viewed under the lens of a minor entity of a said text. It is generally viewed as a medium that takes away the originality of thought of the writer. It has sometimes been recognised as "a wilful inferior form of recognition" (Hutcheon 2). Critics generally argue that the text always has richer language, images do not intrude on the original ideas of the author thus maintaining the raw content. But it is not the case always. Sometimes, it is the movie adaptation that gives wings to the imagination. In her book "A Theory of Adaptation," Linda Hutcheon says that adaptation is "repetition, but repetition without replication" (7). The writer describes adaptation as a theory.

Adaptation of Poems into Films

A film might be roused by a novel; however, it uses an alternate vehicle through which to recount its story. Movies are visual, aural, and they are devoured inactively in an aggregate climate—ordinarily in an auditorium with a crowd of people, yet in addition in the home, regularly within the sight of loved ones. When we talk about the adaptation of poems into films, it is generally related to the poems that tell a story, the narrative poems. A recent example that we see is of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmavat*. It was a poem that was adapted into a film. The poem talks about the legends of Queen Padmavati. The poem talks about the bravery of Rajputs and the queen herself. It is a saga of love and actions of a wife. The movie adapts the poem beautifully and portrays Padmavati in the same light. She is a queen of valour.

Dickinson is an American comedy drama television series about Emily Dickinson created by Alena Smith. Starring Hailee Steinfeld as Emily Dickinson, the series aired for 30 episodes over three seasons from November 1, 2019, to December 24, 2021. There are no stories that Smith adapts in the series *Dickinson*. Dickinson's poems were short and metaphysical. There might be a hidden story in some but not all. This is the craft of the show. Each episode picks up one poem of the poet and weaves a story around it making it beautiful. When you watch the show you not only go through Emily's life rather her poems too. How the thought of that poem might have occurred in her head, what story might have gone behind it. What makes it even beautiful is the tinge of dark comedy that Smith adds the plunge of the American woman of that time.

Examining the Diverse Perspectives in the Adaptation of Emily Dickinson's Poetry in the Series

The Unique Style of Dickinson

When it comes to writing style, you might not come across the variety that Dickinson possesses. One can't define the time of the maturity of her poems. They are versatile from the beginning. Also, as no one knows their order of writing, it is difficult to determine the timeline of these poems.

Dickinson's unique style has inspired numerous film adaptations. Beyond "Dickinson," other notable examples include "A Quiet Passion" (2016), which explores her life and poetry, and "Wild Nights with Emily" (2018), offering a

revisionist take on her relationships. The poem "I Heard a Fly Buzz - When I Died" was adapted into a short film in 2006, demonstrating how even a single poem can inspire cinematic interpretation.

If one sets out to define poetry from Dickinson's perspective, she says that if no fire can warm her, that is poetry. This sentiment is reflected in her poem "There's a certain Slant of light":

"There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –" (Dickinson 258)

Syllables have significant use in Emily's poems. She uses syllables as the commuters of her work. A word just begins to live, its flesh is to communicate thoughts for her. This is evident in the opening lines of "A Word is Dead":

"A Word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.
I say it just
Begins to live
That day." (Dickinson 278)

One can analyse that Dickinson writes for various factors. The most important being that she believes that language has the power to change. She writes with complexity. One must apply various methodologies to understand the complex analogies, lack of normal punctuation, irregular manipulation of grammar, and nonreferential interpretation of what she means. Her poem "Tell all the truth but tell it slant" exemplifies this complexity:

"Tell all the Truth but tell it slant —
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise" (Dickinson 1263)

Thus, Emily Dickinson becomes a prominent figure in the history of literature. Her works widens our perspective not only about mysticism and metaphysics but also things like love, war, nature and everyday things we see around us. Studying her work is like a boon to all her readers as she gives us a broad perspective of life.

Television Series *Dickinson* – A Diverse Perspective

Emily Dickinson, often portrayed as a reclusive, mystical poet, is depicted in the series *Dickinson* (2019) as a lively, feminist teenager challenging 19th century patriarchal norms. The writer Alena Smith blends historical realism with modern elements like slang and music to explore Dickinson's vibrant personality, wit, and political consciousness. Central to the show is Dickinson's relationship with Death, brilliantly personified by Wiz Khalifa, first appearing in the pilot episode ("Because I Could Not Stop for Death" 22:15). Hailee Steinfeld's enchanting performance captures Dickinson's paradoxical blend of humor, hope, and existential musings. Smith subverts traditional views by presenting Dickinson not as a shy spinster, but

an ambitious advocate for women's rights. While some creative liberties are taken, the compelling narrative reveals the complexity of Dickinson's character and dismantles perceptions of her as merely a reserved, melancholic figure.

The tense dynamic between Dickinson and her father, who loves her poems but fears societal censure, symbolizes the patriarchal pressures she resisted through her bold independence and refusal to conform. This is particularly evident in a heated exchange in the second episode ("I Have Never Seen 'Volcanoes'" 15:30). "Dickinson" offers a refreshing, feminist reappraisal of the famous poet's life and psyche through an entertainingly modern lens. In the show, Emily is made to realize that she belonged to a rich household. She might not have the right to vote but she had the privilege to study. Her family could afford a maid and thus she could take her time out to write. It was all because of her father. In the show, it is well portrayed through an episode where a black actor who is asked to play Othello tells Emily, "You always have your father to keep you safe" ("I Have Never Seen 'Volcanoes'" 18:45).

Metamorphosis of Death – Adapting Dickinson's Poems and Elements

Death has always had a corner in Dickinson's heart. It is said that she used to visit the graveyard near her house every now and then. Death also takes up an important character in the show. Death is not just an element but a PERSON in the show. In her famous poem "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," Death carries her around the city in a carriage. Smith wanted to portray that alive. She says to portray that she wanted to have a person whose aura was greater than life. A person who could fill the audience with electricity.

Wiz Khalifa plays the role of Death in the show. His mere existence makes everyone go crazy. We first see this electrifying presence in the pilot episode ("Because I Could Not Stop for Death" 22:15). Khalifa levels up the show like no other. The relation of death and Emily can be beautifully traced down in the entire show, with a particularly poignant interaction in the third episode ("Wild Nights" 18:30).

Episodes of the Show and Poems by Dickinson – A Comparative Analysis

The Apple TV+ series *Dickinson* innovatively structures each episode around one of Emily Dickinson's poems, adapting the literary work's themes and ideas into a symbolic portrayal of the poet's inner life. This section attempts to compare the show's interpretation of Dickinson's poems with deep analyses, focusing on two key episodes: the pilot "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" and the season finale "I Felt a Funeral in My Head."

"Because I Could Not Stop for Death", the pilot episode introduces Death as a metaphysical presence, mirroring the poem's personification. Hailee Steinfeld portrays Dickinson as an arrogant but talented young writer constrained by 19th century norms yet embracing her bold, feminist voice.

Dickinson scholar, Cristanne Miller argues that the poem "Because I could not stop for Death" presents death as "a gentleman caller or suitor" (Miller 147). The show

takes this interpretation further, with Emily describing Death as "gentleman and sexy as hell," adding a modern twist to the period drama. The episode's portrayal of Emily's nightly carriage rides with Death aligns with Helen Vendler's analysis that the poem "enacts the process of dying" (Vendler 10). However, while Vendler sees the poem as a "solemn, even terrifying experience" (11), the show presents Death as an escape and even a romantic figure for Emily.

"I Felt a Funeral in My Head", the season finale, titled after another of Dickinson's famous poems, captures the essence of the series. It depicts Austin and Susan's wedding while exploring Emily's inner turmoil. Judith Farr in his study interprets "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" as a portrayal of mental breakdown, suggesting that "the poem dramatizes the speaker's terrifying loss of self" (Farr 203). The show's representation of Emily lying alive in a coffin during a dream sequence vividly illustrates this interpretation, with Emily declaring it a celebration of "the greatest poet who ever lived." However, the show diverges from some critical interpretations. While many critics, like Sharon Cameron, view the poem as an exploration of "the mind's encounter with its own dissolution" (Cameron 89), the series presents it as a moment of self-realization and artistic awakening for Emily.

The comparative analysis reveals that while *Dickinson* often aligns with critical interpretations of the poems, it also takes creative liberties to modernize and dramatize Dickinson's work. This approach allows the show to provide an immersive exploration of her pioneering artistic psyche through a vivid period drama lens, while still maintaining the core themes and ideas present in her poetry.

Conclusion

The study highlights the role of adaptation as a modern trope, particularly in poetry, through the show *Dickinson*. By reinterpreting Emily Dickinson's life and work through a feminist lens, the series offers a contemporary perspective that reflects societal parallels between the 1850s and today. It presents a fresh narrative approach for television and cinema that requires a deeper understanding. Rather than merely retelling a story, the show interprets it for a modern audience, reflecting both the society of Dickinson's time and contemporary sensibilities. As Hutcheon defines adaptation, "adaptation is not slavish copying. It is the process to make adapted material one's own" (20). The series captures Dickinson's rebellious spirit, resonating with contemporary audiences, while Alena Smith's interview in the BUILD Series highlights how the portrayal reflects the poet's essence, even if historically loose.

The show's reflection of the 1850s requires understanding the role of women in that era. The 19th century confined women to domestic roles, with little public or intellectual freedom. Dickinson's poetry, often about isolation, death, and identity, subtly critiques these societal constraints. Her work like "The Soul selects her own Society" reflects this defiance. Similarly, the show portrays Dickinson as ambitious and non-traditional, resisting patriarchal norms.

Alena Smith's adaptation intertwines modern elements—contemporary language,

music, and drama—offering a fresh perspective on Dickinson's life. As Linda Maleh writes in *Forbes*, "Dickinson truly shines whenever it's leaning into its wildest antics." By blending historical context with modern creativity, the series reimagines Dickinson's legacy for today's audience.

Given the prevalent use of social media among modern audiences, there is a notable preference for consuming visual content such as films and shows. This preference has led to the immense success of cinema, television, and OTT platforms. By delving into unconventional genres like poetry, creators like Smith can unveil compelling narratives, as seen in the portrayal of a remarkably ambitious woman who produced a vast body of work, despite facing challenges in getting her writing published.

For researchers, analyzing adaptations and their influence on the public is crucial. James Poniewozik writes in *The New York Times*: Over the first season, the poet marshals her powers and learns about the challenges for women in the 19th-century literary world through a series of encounters, including a Christmas dinner with the ambitious Louisa May Alcott (Zosia Mamet), who trash-talks Nathaniel Hawthorne, loves to run ("That's an actual fact about me"), and brainstorms the plot for *Little Women*, looking for a page-turner to "rake in that cash." (Poniewozik)

Adaptations serve as a means to unveil hidden gems, a concept effectively employed by Alena Smith in her work on the television series *Dickinson*. By adapting the life and writings of the renowned poet Emily Dickinson, Smith has brought renewed attention to Dickinson's literary legacy and the complexities of her life. Through the creative interpretation and reimagining of Dickinson's story, Smith's adaptation has the potential to introduce a new generation of viewers to the depth and significance of Dickinson's poetic voice.

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Female Agency and Postfeminist Narratives in *Mom* (2017)

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Abstract

Postfeminism is the term used to describe modern gender construction patterns and concepts that elicit both pro- and anti-feminist emotions. It delves into the shifting gender dynamics that have evolved due to the feminist movement. Focusing on individual empowerment, personal choice, and a shift away from communal feminist activism, it disregards the monolithic narrative of the second-wave feminists—eventually giving way to a new kind of pluralistic and multifaceted sensibility. Numerous films focusing on women have been made between 2010 and 2020, portraying them as subjects exercising autonomy, choices, and self-determination. Resisting the patriarchal shackles, these emerging women epitomise liberation, emancipation, and self-sufficiency. *Mom* (2017) is one such movie that presents the protagonist as an empowered being, albeit it simultaneously highlights the problematic aspects of the postmodern Indian woman. The article explores postfeminist sensibility through the film's character, Arya. Arya is a postfeminist teenager living in a time when feminists have predominantly achieved their fundamental goals; however, the film raises the question, 'Have women truly attained liberation'? Even though women's social, political, and economic circumstances have changed, men's perspectives must alter drastically. From objectification to subjectification, there is a shift, yet being in the subject position is only sometimes advantageous. The study critically examines how Arya's persona is portrayed and constructed, highlighting the conflicts between her experiences of sociocultural realities and her postfeminist goals. It challenges the notion that achieving mobility and independence is sufficient for women. The paper further critiques the postfeminist idea that more choice equals more freedom.

Keywords: Postfeminism, *Mom*, Empowerment, Individualism, Choices, Justice.

Introduction

In the book *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (2009), Brabon and Genz define postfeminism as "An optimistic and celebratory picture of a confident, assertive group of young women who are reporting high levels of achievement and success across private and public sectors" (65). Highlighting how women are portrayed in modern society as having the ability and desire to "have it all" (98). Postfeminism values women's autonomy, individuality, and self-expression to challenge conventional notions of feminism. Accepting and allowing room for all choices—whether they involve sexual liberation or restraint, the veiled or the revealed, economic dependence or independence, or embracing or rejecting motherhood—is essential. Postfeminism, to put it simply, is pro-choice; it allows for the expression of the individual based on personal preference. Discourses around postfeminism portray feminism and feminists as harsh, punitive, and indifferent to the actual needs of women. In other words, feminist ideals deny women the right to experience the sensation of their bodies. Postfeminism, on the other hand, holds that

women are conscious of being sexualised and can take advantage of this. This decision to be free also means dismantling the Madonna and whore complex.

In her book *Post-feminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory, and Cultural Form* (1997), Ann Brooks states,

"Postfeminism expresses the intersection of feminism with postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism, and as such represents a dynamic movement capable of challenging modernist, patriarchal and imperialist frameworks" (4).

In her opinion, the situation and circumstances that led to the rise of the feminist movement no longer exist. The demands of 21st-century women are different than those of their predecessors. Therefore, these women tend to identify themselves more with humanist ideals than feminists. She believes postfeminism represents feminism's 'maturity into a confident body of theory and politics, representing pluralism and differences and reflecting on its position with other philosophical and political movements similarly demanding change' (1). Thus, Ann Brook re-fines feminism for 21st-generation women so that feminism is no longer seen as a static movement but an ongoing enterprise that intends to work on egalitarian and humanitarian grounds.

In a similar vein, Patricia Mann, in his *Micro-Politics: Agency in Postfeminist Era* (1994), states that postfeminism forces us to "reach beyond the boundaries of a feminist audience" (118). In his view, postfeminism is neither de-limiting feminist gains nor revering its ideologies; instead, it talks about the silences and pauses, the confusions and the contradictions, the said and the unsaid, and eventually taking academic discourses beyond the boundaries of the limited feminist audience. In the words of Patricia Mann, postfeminism acts as a 'frontier discourse' that 'brings[s] us to the edge of what we know and encourages us to go beyond' (208).

However, many postfeminist theorists critique postfeminist notions of consumerism, neoliberalism, and sexual liberation, simultaneously appreciating postfeminist sensibility's inclusivity. In her essay "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility" (2007), Rosalind Gill discusses postfeminism as more of a 'distinctive sensibility' or an ethos than a critical movement. She defines postfeminism as a shift from objectification to subjectification, focusing on individuality, personal choice, and self-surveillance. She also highlights the natural differences that exist between the sexes in her statement,

"Feminism was deemed to have lost its way when it tried to impose its ideological prescriptions on a nature that did not fit; what was needed, such literature argued, was a frank acknowledgement of difference rather than its denial" (159).

Gill takes a very different approach when it comes to postfeminism. She refers to it as a sensibility that considers both feminist and anti-feminist ideas, making it engaging and multifaceted. In the concluding part of the article, she states,

"On the one hand, young women are hailed through a discourse of 'can-do girl power', yet on the other hand, their bodies are powerfully reinscribed as sexual objects; women are presented as active, desiring social subjects, but they are subject to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance which has no historical

precedent" (163).

Maintaining the critical attitude, Angela McRobbie, in her work *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2008), defines postfeminism as a profoundly problematic attitudinal shift among young women. She challenges Baumgardner and Richards' "pro-capitalist femininity-focused repertoire," which "plays directly into the hands of corporate consumer culture eager to tap into this market based on young women's rising incomes" (158). McRobbie argues that individualism functions as a social process that impedes women's advancement and that postfeminist ideology becomes an exchange process where women gain symbolic equality through the use of "double entanglement," or female empowerment combined with females being ridiculed - a "well-regulate liberty" (22–23). Moreover, she criticises the functionalist claim that the breakdown of the previous social structure merely creates more options for agency and choice, contending that enhanced reflexivity frequently creates new forms of patriarchal authority and reinstates gender hierarchies (47).

The Blurred Lines of Empowerment: Postfeminist Ambiguity in *Mom*

The paper delves into the intricacies of postfeminist sensibility and uses it as a framework to analyse the film *Mom* (2017), directed by Ravi Udyawa. *Mom* is a tale that empowers and positively portrays women and simultaneously delves into the legal aspects of the crime associated with the gendered body. On the one hand, it disseminates the underlying message that a robust and agentic woman exists via Devki's character; however, on the other hand, it mediates on the authorised forces of law that often fail to offer justice to the victims. This inadequacy stems from the defective mechanisms that support patriarchy, not from the incompetence of the judicial system. The systemic oppression distorts the truth to turn the verdict in their favour. As a result of this failure, the females incapable of exercising their agency become victims of their circumstances. Arya seems empowered to choose where and where not to go. However, it ends up being an impartial freedom for her, as she faces terrible consequences for her choices. Being unable to protect herself from the unfortunate situation, Arya bears the brunt of the incident, which causes immense mental toil. On one occasion, she even attempts suicide. The film raises issues with the legal system and the dishonest and unscrupulous officials in charge of it. Because men predominate in the symbolic world, their decisions often focus on men. Due to this, law enforcement agencies occasionally cannot tell the difference between the truth and a lie.

The narrative examines how the legal system fails modern women and how this forces them to use their agency to exact revenge on those who wronged them. The film further reveals the intricacies and nuances of the modern woman who has achieved fundamental human rights like socioeconomic equality, the right to choose, and legal protection. Nevertheless, she remains the victim at the hands of patriarchy. For this reason, the conceptualisation of postfeminist ideology becomes a battleground of contestation, contradiction, and ambiguity. Nevertheless, the film

raises the question, "Are women safe?" Despite the laws and amendments made by the judiciary, women are prone to crimes like molestation, sexual assault, rape, and murder.

The film's text establishes Arya's relationship with her stepmother, Devki, in the opening scene. Arya, an adolescent, struggles with internal conflict and disarray because she resents her stepmother. She acts with contempt towards Devki despite her best attempts to show herself as a compassionate mother. Arya perceives Devki's subtle rejection of her eagerness to attend the party on the Zodiac farm as a restriction to her independence and finds it irritating. Talking about choice, Rosalind Gill, in her article "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility" (2007), states,

"The notion that all our practices are freely chosen is central to postfeminist discourses, which presents women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever" (153).

As a postfeminist, Arya desires to live her life on her terms without anyone's interference. She feels comfortable in her skin and prefers doing things that make her happy. She is depicted as a contemporary, independent woman who lives in a family that grants its female members independence, in contrast to the previous lady who continued subjugating within the household headed by a patriarchal father. Postfeminists glorify these ideas of personal autonomy, freedom, and decision-making that modern women have attained. It states that the world and women's positions have changed. However, the narratives that the patriarchal subjugation of women has ended can be a façade in the guise of liberation that could potentially subjugate women once more. Besides, it implies that the depoliticisation and transformation of women's movements could make women more vulnerable. In addition, when the flashy discourses of women's empowerment are normalised in popular culture, it becomes difficult to convince people to distinguish between plausible and doubtful. Any status quo is seen with the eye of suspicion. Even parents are wary of pushing their children against their will if they want to. As Gill states, postfeminist media culture has placed a new emphasis on self-surveillance, self-monitoring, and self-discipline, which is intimately tied to personal choice (155).

Furthermore, liberal philosophies that overemphasise personal autonomy and choice frequently result in catastrophic events. Living in a world where women can exercise their freedom and sexual autonomy, Arya forgets that women are still objectified despite being disciplined, self-monitoring, and keeping strong surveillance over themselves. For a postfeminist, women in contemporary times are independent and self-sufficient and not restricted by any power disparity. This conceptualisation further complicates the situation for a female, for they are made accountable for their choices and decisions. So, on one hand, postfeminist sensibility offers many choices; nevertheless, another trap lies within the choices. What appears to be liberation often turns out to be an act of "double entanglement" that McRobbie conceptualises in her work *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2008). According to her, 'double entanglement is the coexistence of neo-conservative values concerning gender, sexuality and family life with the process of liberalisation regarding choice

and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations" (McRobbie 12). In the chapter "Postfeminism and Popular Culture," McRobbie articulates, she claims,

"By means of the tropes of freedom and choice, which are now inextricably connected with the category of young women, feminism is decisively aged and made to seem redundant. Feminism is cast into the shadows, where, at best, it can expect to have some afterlife, where it might be regarded ambivalently by those young women who must, in more public venues, stake a distance from it for the sake of social and sexual recognition" (11).

Feminists opposed the reinstatement of "girliness" by postfeminists. Postfeminists, on the other side, believe that second-wave feminism is too radical and that not all women can relate to its extreme viewpoint. For individuals who choose to live their lives on their terms rather than according to the rigid narratives of earlier feminist generations, postfeminism serves as a stabilising force. However, McRobbie, by denouncing a sexually suggestive appearance, subverts the concept of individual autonomy. She claims that this kind of feminist activism "permits the subtle renewal of gender injustices, while vengeful patriarchal norms are also reinstated" (55).

In contrast, she contends that postfeminist ideology becomes an exchange process where women gain symbolic equality through the use of "double entanglement," or female empowerment combined with female ridicule - a "well-regulated liberty" (22–23). Further, McRobbie challenges the functionalist argument that the dissolution of the old social order only produces additional opportunities for agency and choice, arguing that more reflexivity frequently creates new forms of patriarchal authority and reinstates gender hierarchies (47). Despite women's ability to make choices and respond conveniently, society has not become empowered enough to accept women exercising their agency. This idea is illustrated through a scene in which a guy named Mohit attempts to flirt with Arya as she and her pals are having a good time at the party. Nevertheless, she ignores him and instead keeps a safe distance. When Charles sees that his cousin Mohit is compensating for his frustration by consuming drugs after being rejected, he asks him, "Do you want her"? As if she is an object of desire for male 'scopophilia' discussed by Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). This whole idea is further accentuated by



the background music, whose lyrics go like this, "It is my life. I will live the way I want" (17:34 – 18:38). The language and tone explicitly reflecting Charles's masochistic and sadistic tendencies are in stark contest with the background music that reiterates the notion of choice, empowerment, and feminine agency. By contrasting these two contestant ideas, the film's text highlights the paper's theme.

The very next moment, when Charles approaches Arya and tries to have a drink with her, she politely rejects his offer. His pals make fun of him for not being able to get Arya's attention. Charles's rage due to his inflated ego compels him to seek revenge. Consequently, he, along with his friends, attack, assaults, and rape Arya. This tragic incident brings the idea of choice into question, perpetuated by postfeminists. Furthermore, postfeminism holds women responsible for their decisions, inadvertently reinstating patriarchy. For this reason, in the face of such catastrophic events in modern life, such sensibility falters.

In the similar scene, Arya tells her companion that she wants to go home, and her buddy appears inebriated and unconscious; postfeminism promises freedom, but this freedom sometimes results in terrible situations. If Arya's buddy had been more watchful and aware of her alcohol use, maybe things would have turned out differently, and Arya might have escaped the horrible incident. This is not to imply that postfeminism is not worthy of respect. Its inclusive and pluralistic methodology makes it more enduring. This liberating notion, however, is only applicable in a culture where women are completely empowered and treated as equals rather than as objects of desire or sites of sexual pleasure.

Legal System and Postfeminism: Arya's Path in a Flawed System

Arya's suffering and subsequent search for justice occur in an environment that purportedly favours female empowerment but is riddled with inconsistencies. Arya's narrative exemplifies postfeminism's emphasis on autonomy, with personal revenge portrayed as empowerment. However, this individualised approach obscures the structural character of gender-based violence, as well as the need for broader societal change. Arya's dependency upon her stepmother, Devki, to exact vengeance complicates the concept of empowerment, implying that her agency is dependent on others' acts rather than her own. Gill asserts,

"Where once sexualised representation of women in media presented them as passive, mute objects of an assumed male gaze, today sexualisation works somewhat differently in different domains. Women are not straightforwardly objectified but are portrayed as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so" (151).

Postfeminism theorises that the portrayal of females in contemporary media is more of an active, desiring subject who decides to represent themselves as they want. This particular conceptualisation foregrounds the idea that women have surpassed the conventional representations on-screen, and there has been a shift in how they are perceived. From being an object to becoming an active subject, women are

becoming more autonomous concerning their bodies and sexuality. However, these kinds of representations are quite debatable as they abstruse the fundamental structural concerns and power subtleties that disseminate and prolong systematic gendered violence. Arya looks fantastic when she wears the gorgeous red dress, reflecting upon the postfeminist choices to look as sexy as she desires. However, what happens that night reveals that though women appear quite empowered and active subjects, they are still oppressed by the patriarchal mindset. No means' no' is still incomprehensible to men who stereotype women. As a result, she becomes a victim of horrendous crime. Callously raped and thrown into the narrow drain for dying reminds us of the never-ending perpetual vicious nature of gendered violence. The female body, despite self-surveillance and monitoring, cannot protect itself from the embedded structural issues that often remain underplayed or ignored by postfeminist discourses. McRobbie tries to make sense of these and other apparent contradictions, such as how the new feminism is so strikingly similar to traditional femininity from the past but at a higher cost, what impact this has on the modern feminist movement, and when feminism became mainstream. She voices her concerns: "Women are currently being disempowered through the very discourses of empowerment they are being offered as substitutes for feminism" (49).

Arya's character stays largely silent and objectified, her autonomy drowned out by her stepmother's acts. Moreover, her persona draws attention to the shortcomings of postfeminist ideology. She is portrayed as a passive receptor of violence instead of an active seeker of revenge; therefore, Devki's action to reclaim the female agency is not enough to testify to Arya's empowerment. Through Devki's personal vengeance and vigilante justice, the movie tries to tell a story of female empowerment and suggests a break from passivity. However, it does not address the structural assault against women that still exists. The structural flaws are evident in a scene where Anand Sabbarwal, Arya's father, punches Jagan in a rage, for the court acquits all the perpetrators. Instead, he is accused and arrested for contempt of court. In that particular moment, when Inspector Matthew consoles Devki, she utters,

"What will you understand? You can get away with rape in this county, but you cannot even slap a rapist?" (51: 50)

Therefore, it follows that it is unsafe to use postfeminist ideology in a setting where evidence can be destroyed. In this context, McRobbie argues that greater reflexivity frequently restores gender inequalities and gives rise to intriguing new ways to establish masculine dominance, refuting the utilitarian claim that the destabilisation of the old social structures implies more options to obtain autonomy and independent thinking (McRobbie 47). How postfeminism focuses on individual agency and autonomy often reveals a complex relationship with legal frameworks like the judicial system. Thus, it becomes important to have more significant institutional and systemic shifts that are necessary for true emancipation and justice. The original acquittal of Arya's attackers highlights the structural flaws that shield offenders while disregarding the rights of victims. This constitutional incompetence, which compels people like Devki to perform extrajudicial activities,

is an essential reflection of the authority's incapacity to protect women and administer justice. Postfeminist ideas of taking charge and exacting personal vengeance are consistent with Devki's vigilante justice. However, this strategy is not without its ethical and legal complexities. Since institutional correction is not Arya's source of justice but rather a personal grudge, postfeminist empowerment falls short of bringing about real justice. Besides, postfeminism's emphasis on individual responsibility can occasionally mask the need for structural changes. Besides, the complexity of Arya's case highlights the conflict between postfeminist principles and the workings of the legal system. Despite being an inspiring tale of personal empowerment, the story is insufficient to change the larger structural injustices or solve systematic problems with a focus on individual actions. In addition to personal fortitude and initiative, true justice necessitates strong, dependable legal institutions that assist and safeguard victims. Arya's transformation from a victim to a vengeful icon highlights the shortcomings of postfeminist strategies that place more emphasis on individual empowerment than group effort and structural reform. To effectively address and eradicate gendered violence, the film finally urges a more thorough examination of the conception and administration of justice, moving beyond individualistic remedies in support of a more extensive overhaul of societal and legal frameworks.

Conclusion

The film's narrative brutally exposes the flaws in the justice system while portraying the real problems that innumerable victims face. The apparent reality of persistent institutional inequalities muddies the postfeminist perspective of autonomy through self-determination instead of relying exclusively on individual perseverance. Arya's persona perfectly captures the complex and frequently troubling facets of the postfeminist mindset. Her path through pain and her quest for justice highlights the shortcomings of this worldview when confronted with societal injustices and systemic inefficiencies. The transformation of Arya from a horrific sexual assault victim to a symbol of retaliation highlights the postfeminist idea of regaining control over one's own life. However, given how closely her story is tied to her stepmother Devki's activities, Arya's empowerment appears to be mediated by someone else's involvement rather than being fully autonomous. This relationship highlights a crucial conflict within postfeminism: although it promotes individual agency, it may conceal the systemic and social aspects of violence against women. Therefore, toppling long-standing sexist institutions requires both collective efforts and structural changes to achieve genuine autonomy and equality. In light of this, the film's heartbreaking story effectively refutes postfeminist sensibilities. It promotes a more nuanced and thorough approach to feminist praxis by highlighting the need for human agency and structural change to achieve true gender equality and justice.

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Eschatological Enclosures: The Necropolitical Paradigm of Hunger in Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia's film *The Platform* (2019)

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Abstract

This study discusses the relationship between necropolitics and hunger in the dystopian context of the Spanish film *The Platform* (2019), directed by Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia. The paper explores how the film depicts a vertically stratified society with distinct social classes, whose power dynamics are closely tied to the control and distribution of food, using the concept of eschatological enclosures. The platform, serving as both a metaphorical and tangible means of sustenance, establishes a system of ranking that determines the destinies of individuals according to their designated levels. Using Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, this research examines how the film's design of imprisonment and deprivation mirrors larger socio-political methods of control, dehumanisation, and existential nihilism. The report contends that the deliberate limitation of resources and the resulting extreme desperation, which leads to cannibalism, highlight a necropolitical system in which decisions regarding life and death are carefully managed to maintain and perpetuate systemic inequity. Through this lens that the paper employs, the film proves to not merely be a narrative of survival but serve as a profound commentary on the destructive power of necropolitical governance.

Keywords: Necropolitics, Eschatology, Hunger, The Platform, Food, Death, Class, Power.

Necropolitics: Theorizing Sovereign Power and Death

The etymology of what is known as 'Necropolitics' today has seen considerable contributions over the years that led to theorizing the concept in a way that it could be studied in relation to science and fiction concomitantly.

Early accounts of Hannah Arendt's that offer an examination of totalitarianism and the condition of being stateless, like her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), contribute to the development of necropolitical theory. Arendt analyses the process by which totalitarian governments deprive individuals of their rights and humanity, leaving them without a state and exposed to the risk of death. "The stateless person, without right to residence and without the right to work, has lost all distinctive political qualities and becomes a mere human being. He is driven outside the human polity altogether" (Arendt 297). This removal of legal and social safeguards corresponds to the mechanics of Necropolitics.

Frantz Fanon's examination of colonial violence in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) offers a historical framework for comprehending Necropolitics. Fanon explores the dehumanising consequences of colonial governance, wherein the colonised individuals endure severe acts of violence and are frequently perceived as disposable, "[...] as if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation, the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil" (Fanon 6).

Michel Foucault's research on biopolitics establishes the foundation for

comprehending the convergence of life, mortality, and authority. In his *The History of Sexuality* (1976), he asserts thus: “For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention” (142). He examines the methods by which governments exercise authority over populations through regulatory procedures that guarantee the maximisation of life. However, he also alludes to the more sinister aspect of this power, where control over life inherently involves decisions about death.

Giorgio Agamben expands upon these concepts by introducing his theory of the 'state of exception' and 'bare life.' In his 1998 book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, his dissent on reducing individuals to a state of mere existence: “in the biopolitical horizon, the distinction between the political and the biological life and the opposing decisions are blurred” (Agamben 111) is strongly related to Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics, in which the ruling power has the authority to determine who lives and who dies.

The term came into use as is today, with the seminal essay titled *Necropolitics* (2003) written by Achille Mbembe. According to Mbembe, Necropolitics is a concept that delves into the dynamics of power and control over life and death, extending the discussion beyond biopolitics to examine how political authority determines who is deemed disposable. The concept examines contemporary sovereignty by showing how states and political institutions wield power through death, misery, and systematic exclusion of specific groups.

Achille Mbembe expands on Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics, which centres on the management of life and populations, in his exploration of Necropolitics. Foucault's concept of biopolitics, examines the ways in which contemporary governments exert control by overseeing physical bodies and governing biological functions.

Mbembe develops on Foucault's concepts by redirecting attention from the administration of life to the administration of death. In the context of Necropolitics, sovereignty is defined by the power to determine which individuals are allowed to survive and which individuals are compelled to perish. “In order to define what, in contemporary politics, is characterized by the deployment of necropolitical power, I have referred to the notion of death worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead,” opines Mbembe in his *Necropolitics* (2003). This manifestation of power is most apparent in situations involving warfare, colonisation, and systemic violence, and subjected to circumstances that bring them closer to the brink of death.

Judith Butler's research on the state of being vulnerable and the dynamics of life and death also adds to the discussion on the governance of death. Butler's works *Prearious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009) analyse the differential valuation of lives, highlighting how certain lives are considered more worthy of grief and

importance than others. “Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life? [...] The differential allocation of grievability [...] operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human” (Butler, xiv). The unequal assessment of lives highlights the ways in which certain communities are more susceptible to increased vulnerability and mortality.

Eschatological Perspectives and Their Societal Ramifications

Eschatology is the branch of theology and philosophy concerned with the final events of history, the ultimate destiny of humanity, and the end times. The term is derived from the Greek word “*eschatos*,” which means last or ultimate. Eschatological beliefs and narratives explore fundamental inquiries regarding the destiny of the world, the afterlife, and the ultimate meaning of human life. These ideas frequently shape the moral, ethical, and existential aspects of human existence.

Throughout history, eschatological thought has manifested in diverse forms across different cultures and religions. “Eschatology is the doctrine of 'last things,' a study of those events, which conclude time and commence eternity. It is not an area of interest and inquiry peculiar to Christianity for both philosophers and non-Christian religionists, ancient and modern have asked: What is individual's final destiny?” (Rose 234) Secular eschatologies also exist, particularly in modern and contemporary contexts, where notions of progress, apocalypse, or technological singularity replace traditional religious narratives. These non-religious explanations mirror the aspirations and concerns of society for the future, frequently shaping conversations around the potential collapse of the environment, nuclear warfare, or other threats to existence.

Moreover, eschatological narratives can legitimize or challenge existing power structures. Apocalyptic visions can serve as a source of inspiration for revolutionary movements, providing marginalised groups with hope for radical restructuring of society. On the other hand, powerful nations might employ eschatological concepts to strengthen their control, by appealing to a heavenly endorsement or ultimate fairness to validate their governance.

In contemporary society, eschatological themes persist in cultural productions, from literature and film to political rhetoric. These reflections embody the shared concerns regarding worldwide issues, such as climate change, economic instability, and pandemics, while also presenting ideas of adaptability and rejuvenation. Therefore, eschatology is an essential perspective that cultures use to understand and navigate their current situations and envision their futures.

Comprehending the influence of eschatology on societal structures and existential paradigms is essential for understanding how communities create meaning, navigate power dynamics, and envision their collective destinies. In this particular context, Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia's Spanish movie *The Platform* might be interpreted as a contemporary narrative that explores the connections between survival,

morality, and systemic inequality within a restricted and hierarchical setting.

***The Platform* (2019): The Necropolitical Plot**

The Platform (2019), directed by Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia, is a poignant cinematic exploration of Necropolitics. The film is set in a vertical prison where inmates are housed in cells stacked on top of each other. A platform laden with food descends from the top, stopping for a limited time on each level. Those at the top levels eat well, while those below are left with increasingly scarce and contaminated food, often leading to starvation and death.

The structure of the prison in *The Platform* serves as a metaphor for the necropolitical control over life and death. The allocation of resources is strictly hierarchical, reflecting societal inequalities where those at the top thrive while those at the bottom suffer. The film starkly illustrates how power structures determine who lives and who dies, and the dehumanizing effects of extreme scarcity and competition for survival. The characters in the movie embody different responses to this necropolitical environment. Some attempt to organize and share resources, while others succumb to brutality and cannibalism.

Eschatological and Necropolitical Intersections in *The Platform* (2019)

The film opens with Goreng waking up in a cell on Level 48 of a vertical prison. The platform descends for the first time, showcasing a feast that has been ravaged by those on the levels above (00:03:05). This scene highlights the hierarchical distribution of resources, illustrating how those at higher levels consume abundantly while those below fight for scraps, exemplifying the necropolitical control over life and death. As Mbembe states in his *Necropolitics* (2003), “Sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not.” (Mbembe 114) The descent of the platform can be seen as a daily “judgment,” where each level's residents face their fate, mirroring eschatological themes of salvation and damnation. According to Foucault, “in the biopolitical frame, the management of life takes center stage, but always shadowed by the omnipresent power to kill” (*Society Must Be Defended* 11).

Trimagasi explains to Goreng how the vertical prison works, detailing the random monthly level changes and how survival depends on adapting to food scarcity or abundance (00:21:10 – 00:22:17). Giorgio Agamben in his work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) opines thus: “The state of exception is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, it is a suspension of the judicial order itself.” (71) This conversation between Trimagasi and Goreng underscores the arbitrary nature of power and survival in the system, illustrating how the authority controls and manipulates the inmates' existence. Trimagasi's acceptance of the kind of system whose, “exercise of modern power is based on a double relation: the power to 'make' live and 'let' die” reflects a fatalistic view of existence, akin to eschatological acceptance of one's fate in the afterlife. (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 103)

After a month's time when the inmates are shifted to other platforms, Trimagasi and Goreng wake up in level 171. Goreng struggles to wake up realising that Trimagasi has tied him to the cot in order to survive off of him cannibalistically. When Goreng tries to convince Trimagasi that they could survive together, he replies thus: "You have a good heart, Goreng. But good hearts don't survive in this place. I won't kill you right away. I'll take only what I need, piece by piece. It'll keep you alive longer. It's the only way" (42:03:20). Trimagasi then proceeds to use a knife to cut pieces of flesh from Goreng's body while he is still alive. Goreng's pain and desperation are palpable, and he realizes the horrific reality of their situation. This interaction vividly portrays the extremities of human behaviour when survival is at stake. Trimagasi's actions underscore the desperation and moral decay induced by the necropolitical system of the platform. It also demonstrates the power dynamics at play, where Trimagasi exerts control over Goreng's life and death, reflecting the broader theme of sovereignty and the administration of death. As Arendt says in his *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), the first essential step on the road to total domination is to kill the juridical person in man," Goreng being the representation of the juridical law which amounts to fairness and justice for all in equity. (447)

As Goreng and Baharat descend on the platform to distribute food, they encounter increasingly desperate and violent inmates at lower levels, some of whom have resorted to cannibalism (01:04:00 – 01:27:00). The descent symbolizes a journey into hellish conditions, akin to Dante's "Inferno," reflecting the ultimate consequences of societal neglect and moral decay. "The bare life is exposed to death, at the mercy of the sovereign who can kill with impunity." (Agamben 34) The stark contrast between higher and lower levels highlights extreme necropolitical control through deprivation and enforced violence. "Rebellion in the face of totalizing power structures is an assertion of life against the politics of death." (Mbembe 113) This act of rebellion directly challenges the necropolitical order by attempting to subvert the system of scarcity and violence imposed by the authorities. Goreng's refusal to succumb to cannibalism, despite extreme hunger (00:50:10 – 00:52:45), represents a moral and ethical stand against the system's attempt to reduce him to a state of barbarism and bare survival. As proposed by Frantz Fanon, "ethical resistance to dehumanization is a key aspect of countering necropolitical power." (12)

As the prisoners struggle, Imogui, initially a believer in the system's fairness, hangs herself after losing faith in change, leaving Goreng and Baharat to continue alone (01:03:55). "Life itself appears only as a form of survival, the simple fact of living no longer forms the basis of political order." (Agamben 120) Her death powerfully comments on the despair and hopelessness under a necropolitical regime. Imogui's suicide parallels eschatological themes of sacrifice and redemption. However redemptive this act seems, "the social and political death inflicted upon marginalized communities is a form of necropolitics that sustains the power of the sovereign" (Mbembe 121).

Miharu, a fellow inmate, descends the platform in search of her child, whom she

believes is in the prison (00:25:10). Her relentless search for her child symbolizes personal rebellion against the system's dehumanizing control. Her actions highlight the persistence of maternal love in the face of overwhelming necropolitical oppression. As Agamben suggests, “even in spaces of abjection and death, acts of resistance and defiance embody a refusal to be reduced to bare life” (36).

As characters Goreng and Baharat decide to try to go to every level to ensure equal distribution of food, they happened to find a child, contrary to the prison's rules stating that no children are allowed (00:57:30). They decide to send her up on the platform as a message. The child symbolizes a messianic figure or a new beginning, evoking eschatological themes of rebirth and salvation. As Lee Edelman opines, “the child is the figure through which the imagined future of the nation is played out, yet also the site of its most profound anxiety.” (12)

As Goreng and Baharat descend, they also encounter hostile inmates who try to kill them to take the food. They defend themselves, but also make allies who support their cause, emphasizing solidarity and cooperation (00:54:51 – 00:57:00). This scene challenges the necropolitical framework by showcasing the power of solidarity. It demonstrates that mutual aid and cooperation can subvert the divisive and violent strategies of the system. “Solidarity among the oppressed can form a powerful counter-narrative to the divisive tactics of necropolitical regimes” (Butler 77).

During the final ascent, Goreng places the child on the platform and sends her upwards, staying behind as the platform ascends (01:28:15 – 01:31:05). “Hope in a deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy that things are going well, or a willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously heading for success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good,” the hope being the child in this scenario challenging the necropolitical diegesis. (Havel and Hvizdala 124) This act of rebellion against the necropolitical structure symbolizes the potential for change and the breaking of oppressive cycles. The ascent of the child signifies hope and the possibility of redemption, embodying eschatological beliefs in transcendence and the emergence of a new order. “The idea of eschatological redemption is not simply a hope for a better future but an active stance against the injustices of the present.” (Moltmann 314)

In the final moments, Goreng chooses to walk away, leaving the child on the ascending platform (01:31:10). His departure signifies a relinquishment of the system's control over him. This decision of Goreng's symbolizes his ultimate rejection of the system's necropolitical authority. It reflects a personal emancipation from the structure that sought to dominate his existence. “True freedom involves the rejection of oppressive systems and the reclaiming of agency over one's life and death.” (Arendt 68)

These scenes collectively illustrate the film's profound exploration of necropolitical and eschatological themes, offering a powerful critique of societal structures and the human condition, highlighting acts of resistance, solidarity, ethical stands, and symbolic gestures that assert the value of human life and dignity against systemic

oppression.

Conclusion

The movie narrative serves as a powerful symbolic representation that skillfully combines the theoretical concepts of necropolitics and eschatology. The penal facility divided by social class highlights societal control over life and death, emphasizing injustice. Analyzing the movie through necropolitics reveals how rule and tyranny sustain structural inequality and existential futility.

The film's narrative arc clearly exemplifies the concepts of necropolitics as expounded by scholars like Achille Mbembe, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and other theorists. The vertical jail serves as a representation of the hierarchical structure prevalent in contemporary civilizations, when individuals at the apex have plentiful resources, while those situated further down are compelled to struggle for their existence. This stark stratification is a direct representation of necropolitical governance, where the distribution of resources and the decisions of who lives or dies are meticulously controlled to maintain systemic dominance.

The platform's descent, burdened with depleting food, acts as a potent symbol for the capricious and merciless nature of authority. This demonstrates how individuals in positions of authority exploit resources in order to coerce compliance and maintain a state of inequity. This metaphor is consistent with Foucault's notion of biopolitics, which refers to the control and regulation of life that is constantly accompanied by the potential authority to cause death. The concept of the "state of exception" (41) proposed by Agamben is clearly prominent in this context, as the prisoners are dehumanised and deprived of their basic rights, exposed to brutality without any means of seeking justice. "The Holocaust was as much a triumph of bureaucratic rationality as it was a manifestation of racist hatred and madness" (Bauman117). When race can fuel humans to turn violent against one another, a purely biological need for food can push them to any lengths and the ones to be questioned who constructed such a system that does not treat inmates equitably.

The characters' varied responses to the necropolitical environment highlight the ethical and moral dilemmas inherent in such a system. Trimagasi's fatalistic acceptance of the system's brutality reflects a resigned acceptance of necropolitical control, akin to an eschatological acceptance of one's fate. Goreng's moral struggle, particularly his refusal to resort to cannibalism, underscores the profound ethical resistance to dehumanization. This resistance is crucial, as it embodies a refusal to be reduced to mere survival, a theme echoed by Frantz Fanon and Judith Butler in their respective works on dehumanization and vulnerability. As Enrique Dussel, et al. suggests in his *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* "ethical resistance involves a refusal to accept the conditions of domination and violence, instead asserting alternative forms of being and becoming in the world" (296).

The mission undertaken by Goreng and Baharat to distribute food equally challenges the necropolitical order directly. Their descent into the lower levels,

encountering increasingly desperate inmates, symbolizes a journey into societal neglect and moral decay. This act of rebellion, though fraught with danger, represents an assertion of life against the politics of death, a powerful counter-narrative to the divisive tactics of necropolitical regimes.

As an eschatological narrative, *The Platform* centers on “redemption and renewal, offering visions of hope and possibility in the face of existential despair.” (Elliot 121) The discovery and ascent of the child at the film's conclusion symbolize hope and the possibility of redemption. The child, a messianic figure, embodies innocence and the potential for a new beginning amidst systemic brutality. This act resonates deeply with eschatological themes of rebirth and salvation. By sending the child up, Goreng and Baharat challenge the necropolitical structure, suggesting that even within the most oppressive systems, there is potential for change and renewal.

While *The Platform* offers a rich tapestry of necropolitical and eschatological themes, there are limitations to this analysis. The film's allegorical nature means that its interpretations can be highly subjective. Different viewers may perceive the symbolism and messages in varied ways, influenced by their own socio-political contexts and personal experiences. Additionally, the film's extreme depiction of violence and deprivation may overshadow the subtler nuances of its critique, potentially alienating some audiences.

Despite these limitations, the scope of this analysis extends beyond the film itself. “The production of human life, the control over bodies and populations, is fundamental to modern forms of sovereignty. This biopolitical control constitutes a new form of power” (Empire, 203). *The Platform* serves as a microcosm for examining broader socio-political structures and the dynamics of various such powers, control, and survival. The necropolitical framework can be applied to various real-world contexts, from colonial histories to contemporary geopolitical struggles. The eschatological aspects of the film also provide a valuable lens for exploring how societies envision their ultimate destinies and moral frameworks. The relevance of the movie in contemporary discourse cannot be overstated. The film's exploration of systemic inequality, resource scarcity, and moral decay mirrors pressing global issues such as economic disparity, environmental degradation, and political authoritarianism.

In conclusion, *The Platform* is a powerful narrative that transcends its dystopian setting to offer profound insights into the nature of power, survival, and human dignity. Despite the oppressive structures and brutal conditions, the characters' actions demonstrate that rebellion and ethical stands against dehumanization are possible. The ascent of the child symbolizes the potential for a new beginning, challenging the necropolitical order and suggesting that even in the darkest of times, there is a possibility for change and redemption. This profound commentary on the destructive power of necropolitical governance urges us to reflect on our own societies and the ways in which we can strive for a more just and equitable world.

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Relevance of Biopics in the Contemporary Age: A Study of the Politics of Representation in *Becoming Jane*

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Abstract

As adaptations of the lives of historical subjects, biopics are fictionalized cinematic biographies interlacing the 'real' and the 'reel'. Biopics could be reverential or subversive, create or demolish myths, under-present or even misrepresent and thus generate diverse critical responses. In the real world, unlike men, women are hardly encouraged to be heroes, thus it is not surprising that though we have many Great Men biopics, female biopics are few and women author biopics are fewer still. Like the literary canon, Hollywood also has been dominated by male voices. So, the very presence of women author biopics is a positive step. However, what lives Hollywood chooses to commemorate, when and how—may depend on a complicated web of motives. Who tells the story and how it is represented, which aspects are chosen or excluded, may involve a patriarchal system of reduction. Since cinema can colonize the mind, the representation of a woman author in a biopic could strongly determine how we perceive the author and her socio-cultural role. Though biopics have a rich tradition, it lacks serious academic analysis—Judith Buchanan's *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship* (2013) and Browyn Polaschek's *The Postfeminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf and Austen* (2013) are the only detailed scholarly works on author biopics. With more and more writers turning into cinema subjects, the cultural phenomena is rendered appropriate for critical re-examination. Considering that biopics can mirror a complex mesh of cultural understanding of gender and history, this paper attempts to bring forth the particular attraction of the figure of the woman author for cinema and also its cultural implication through a feminist perspective on the politics of representation in the film *Becoming Jane* (dir. Julian Jarrold, 2007) which is a biopic of Jane Austen.

Keywords: biopics, women author biopics, representation, gender, culture

Film biopics and adaptation share a common set of relations---both distil and dramatise their sources—a life and a source text respectively. As with the written biography, screen biography also mixes the factual and the fictional, it is a refraction of the story of the historical person, as adaptors often take liberties to make the biopic function as a screen drama. Screen biographies engage in a complex process of intermediality, it is not a simple one-to-one correspondence between source and adaptation. The directorial style, the screenwriter's perspective, the casting, all combine to form the inter-textual network of the biopic and are crucial in shaping the subject on screen. . It is an important genre because it is one of the ways in which a cultural myth is produced and propagated. But unlike cinematic adaptations of literary works, the biopic was neglected for a long time in film and academic scholarship as rightly pointed out by Neerja Vyas and Sushila Shekhawat in 'Statistical Style Analysis of Hindi Biopics: Exploring the Genre Conventions in Recent Years' (2021) which aligns with similar views voiced by Robert A.

Rosenstone in *History on Film/Film on History* (2006) and Dennis Bingham's *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (2010).

A chronological literature review of select works on biopics would reveal that major work on the biopic began with Carolyn Anderson's bibliographical essay 'Biographical Film' (1988) which treats the evolution of the genre from 1929-1986. Anderson's study provides a profile of the biopic genre based on conventions illustrated by around two hundred biographical films with special attention to the ways in which key films demonstrate characteristic generic patterns. Examining the different types of biopics, Anderson observes that the brilliant artist who remains personally inadequate is a type that features in numerous biopics such as the film on the tormented artist Vincent Van Gogh, *Lust for Life* (1956, Kirk Douglas). Anderson's study of the different types reveals the elasticity of the biopic genre. The story of the biopic's evolution as traced by Anderson is one of mutation and change. The author maintains that our concepts of fame, stardom and greatness have been subjected to dispute and alteration. In the year 1992, George F. Custen published his seminal work *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* where he examines 291 biographical films produced by major studios between 1927 and 1960 and the biopic's entry into the province of television around 1960s. His work provides definite analysis of how Hollywood biopics construct public history. Custen examines the decisive roles played by producers, directors and stars, the knowledge of other films and constraints of censorship in shaping the values in biopics, irrespective of their subjects. Custen maintains that the biopic is a kind of historical artefact which is ideologically motivated rather than disinterested, it monochromatically deforms the representation of race, gender, profession and so on. Custen goes on to observe that unlike documentaries, biopics employ actors to play the life history of its historical subject, thus they are dramatised and fictionalised films. Custen maintains that in the biopic there is often a "double level of the articulation of fame" (34). Star images are manoeuvred so as to stabilise an existing set of signifiers around the image of the historical subject represented—while we do appreciate "Queen Elizabeth I for her statecraft we also admire her because she is Bette Davis" (34). Dennis Bingham in his copious study *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic As Contemporary Film Genre* (2010), states that the biopic is perhaps "the most maligned of film genres" and objects to both the dismissal of biopics as dull and to their characterization as "entertaining lies" (11). Through a detailed analysis of more than twenty films, Bingham argues that the genre has undergone developmental changes common to other genres. He also draws attention to the shortcomings of the female biopic which is seldom either sympathetic or revisionist—mostly interested in seeing its subject suffer. Its history has been so different from the male versions that it requires a separate telling.

At this point, it is imperative to state that none of the above works focus on author biopics exclusively. The only available comprehensive works on author biopics are - Judith Buchanan's *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship* and Browyn Polaschek's *The Postfeminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf and*

Austen, both published in 2013. Buchanan examines the cultural experience of making films featuring writers both real and imaginary from the silent film age to the present. She engages in a scholarly discussion of how the mysterious process of literary imagination at work is cinematically represented. Though the interest of viewers in the writer subject is generated by the writer's literary achievements, one of the problems of screening lives of writers is that the act of writing itself can be unexciting to watch. Buchanan also investigates the cultural and commercial agendas involved in cinema's compulsive return not to just literary material but also to the literary process in particular. Examining the case of women writers, Buchanan observes that the act of writing in the case of women authors has been variously represented on screen—an act of self-affirmation in *My Brilliant Career* (1979), a life-saving strategy in *An Angel at My Table* (1990), and an integral part of personal identity in *Iris* (2001). A common marketing strategy employed by female author biopics states Buchanan, is to establish greater familiarity and intimacy with the subject through the titles which feature their first names e.g. *Iris*, *Sylvia*, *Enid* and so on. On the other side of the gender divide is *Wilde*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Byron*, *Bright Star*, *Capote* and others. According to Buchanan, in a way this reflects the tension between private and public realms with reference to female experience which is more often tied to the private as suggested by Bingham. The evidence also prompts the question whether such a strategy ultimately undermines the cultural authority of the writer-subject. In her scholarly study *The Postfeminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf and Austen* Browyn Polaschek explores the influence of postfeminist culture on cinematic treatment of female biopics. The author admits that there are very few biopics that can be called feminist in the first place. *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* is in the author's view the best example of a feminist biopic as it tells the story of a little known woman, one who was known primarily as the wife of the great musician. The postfeminist biopics according to Polaschek furthers a core goal of feminist work—to revise history and include the achievements of women for a broad audience. In the context of the films under analysis, Polaschek observes, that they contain feminist elements but most importantly, they are positive films as they celebrate their subjects for their contribution to art.

Since films based on the lives of women authors are increasingly being screened today, the time is ripe for a reconsideration of their significance in contemporary culture. When Roland Barthes proposed the death of the author, he was indeed referring to the male author because historically women have seldom enjoyed the privileges of authorship. It is true that contemporary biopics have helped to promote the figure of the woman author, but it has generated many an intense debate about the commodification of literature, culture and the persona of the author. While Polaschek appreciates the biopic *Becoming Jane* (dir. Julian Jarrold, screenplay Kevin Hood and Sarah Williams 2007) for its celebratory rendering of Jane Austen, this research paper undertakes a discussion of the film *Becoming Jane* to reveal how Austen scholarship gets corrupted by commercialization. Again, in *Whose Lives Are*

They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre, Dennis Bingham states that unlike the celebratory biopics of 'Great Men' who always overcome every obstacle to create something of lasting value—a painting or a vaccine---the classic female biopic is characterised by “Madness, hysteria, sexual dependency, the male gaze and a patriarchal authorship” (310). When the female biopic reappeared in the 1980s, it was “safe, timid, and compromised” (292). This prompts us to revisit what Virginia Woolf states in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Woolf not only draws our attention to the absence of women as authors but also observes that women are mostly represented by men in their works and they serve “...as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (33). In the light of the above discussion, this paper aims to study to what extent women author biopics transform reality into myth and whether they render a reductive portrait of the subject or a revisionist one.

Biographers and filmmakers are turning from the works to the life of Jane Austen in contemporary times, we are caught, as it were, in 'an Austen moment'. Interestingly, scarcity of biographical information has led to heavy, fictionalisation as a method of investigation in the Austen biopics. That a writer who remained a spinster all her life and died young could evoke romantic love so powerfully caught the fascination of several filmmakers resulting in the films providing Austen a romantic adventure by showcasing a simple between the life and works of Austen. In academic scholarship, Jane Austen is never assessed as a narrator of simplified love stories. She is rather held as a critique of the social norms of her day. Her novels are satirical representations of romantic love. The romance blueprint of Austen biopics proved to be a powerful marketing strategy that generated capital but one is left with the disturbing question-what happens to the 'real' Jane Austen in this capitalist project.

One might trace the alteration of the historical self of the author to early biographies such as the very first biographical description written by Henry Austen. About the author's life Henry Austen states that it is 'not by any means a life of event' (*Biographical Notice of the Author* 137). Austen is described as a sweet, pious, docile, elegant, accomplished and domesticated woman. Her creativity is deliberately ignored by her brother Henry Austen. James Edward Austen Leigh who brought out *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1869) contributed further to the over simplified persona already crafted by Henry: 'We do not think her as being clever, still less as being famous; but we valued her as one always kind, sympathising and amusing' (10). According to her biographer Claire Tomalin (*Jane Austen, A Life*), the lines found on her gravestone omit her greatest claim to fame as a novelist. Not less than five decades passed before her family included a second tablet to her gravestone stating, 'Jane Austen, known to many by her writings. In her book *Searching for Jane Austen* (2004), Emily Auerbach observes that James Edward Austen Leigh is not a reliable biographer. She demonstrates how Edward Austen conceals the truth from the readers and presents Austen's letters with significant alterations. He reports one of her letters as starting like this:

'My Dear Cassandra,

I thank you for so speedy a return to my last two....'

Whereas the letter actually begins like this:

'My Dear Cassandra,

Having just finished the first volume of *Le Veilleesh de Chatteau*, I think it a good opportunity for beginning a letter to you while mind is stored with ideas worth transmitting—I thank you for so speedy a return to my last two.... (8 November, 1800).'

(quoted in Auerbach, 9-10)

According to Auerbach, the omission of the opening passage indicates Edward Austen's intention of presenting Austen as merely a dear aunt instead of 'Aunt Jane [who] alludes to literary works or [who] boasts of her intellect.' (10) Thus, Edward Austen belittles his aunt's intelligence time and again in the *Memoir* which was the first full scale biography of the author and what began with Edward Austen continues in the present, today we are still feeling the effects of the Jane Austen myth.

To demonstrate the present day working of the Jane Austen myth, we shall fall back on an analysis of the modern day Austen biopic *Becoming Jane* (dir. Julian Jarrold, screenplay Kevin Hood and Sarah Williams 2007). The title of the film *Becoming Jane* seems to be directly taken from Jon Hunter Spence's biography *Becoming Jane Austen* (2003). However, criticism on the film states that it not only as an adaptation of Spence's biography but also as an adaptation of the novel *Pride and Prejudice* because it certainly magnifies parallels between the author's life and the novel which she began in the year 1796, just prior to when the film is set. The film rewrites Jane as Lizze (in her initial dislike for the man she eventually loves) and Lydia (in her decision to elope with Tom). Jane Austen myths have been and continue to be fortified by the paucity in biographical information and from the very beginning Austen's spinsterhood has remained integral to this myth. It was initially heightened by her own family in the course of their promotion of 'Aunt Jane'. Other major elements in the Austen myth that are reiterated time and again relate to the uneventfulness of her life and the limited scope of her art (what she herself famously called 'two inches of ivory'). Though there is very little historical proof, biographers and filmmakers tend to offer narrative conviction that Austen 'both loved and was loved' (Brenda Weber, 187). The biopic *Becoming Jane* focuses on the love affair between Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy. It is amusing that Tom Lefroy is not only placed at the centre of her life but also at the centre of her writings. At the time of Christmas-New Year's of 1795-96, at the age of twenty, Austen met Tom Lefroy. He was a young Irish law student who eventually became the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland. Lefroy was at the time visiting his uncle and aunt at Hampshire when the two of them met. They spent some time together over a few weeks and there is much debate about how much Austen was in love with him and to what extent this brief relationship inspired her writing. What we know about Tom Lefroy is chiefly through what is documented in two or three letters which Austen addressed to Cassandra. In one such letter dated January 9, 1796 Austen mentions Lefroy among other things. She writes about Lefroy that he 'is very gentlemanlike, good-looking, pleasant young man' (Le Faye, 1) and further states that in the ball they had behaved

in the most depraved and shocking manner 'in the way of dancing and sitting down together' (Le Faye, 1). The next extant letter to Cassandra written from Steventon, dated 14-15 January, 1796 she anticipates, with her typical irony, a forthcoming party at the residence of Lefroy's uncle:

I look forward with great impatience to it, as I rather expect to receive an offer from my friend in the course of the evening. I shall refuse him, however, unless he promises to give away his white Coat. . . . Tell Mary that I make over Mr Heartley & all his Estate to her for her sole use and Benefit in future, . . . as I mean to confine myself in future to Mr Tom Lefroy, for whom I do not care sixpence' (Le Faye, 3)

She wrote on the following day: 'At length, the Day is come on which I am to flirt my last with Tom Lefroy, & when you receive this, it will be over—My tears flow as I write, at the melancholy idea' (Le Faye, 4). It is certainly possible to glimpse an attraction in these words but the film develops it into a full-blown romance. In her biography of the author Claire Tomalin interprets the experience of this brief romance that failed:

A small experience, perhaps, but a painful one for Jane Austen, this brush with young Tom Lefroy. What she distilled from it was something else again. From now on she carried in her own flesh and blood, and not just gleaned from books and plays, the knowledge of sexual vulnerability; of what it is to be entranced by the dangerous stranger; to hope, and to feel the blood warm; to wince, to withdraw; to long for what you are not going to have and had better not mention. Her writing becomes informed by this knowledge, running like a dark undercurrent beneath the comedy. (Ch. 12, "Defence Systems," 122)

However, biographers like Jon Spence magnify the relationship manifolds and develop from it a full-fledged love affair. Though Austen's tone in the letters is very mild, Spence writes in *Becoming Jane Austen*:

The energetic intensity of *Pride and Prejudice* attests to the effect that falling in love had on Jane Austen. It is an irrepressibly happy novel. Between October 1796 and August of the next year Jane wrote *First Impressions*; it was her unique way of thinking about Tom Lefroy and of celebrating her delight at being in love—and at being loved. The novel that she later called 'my own darling Child' was to be a gift of love from Tom Lefroy. Writing was her natural way of filling the time she waited for him to finish his law studies and return to Steventon to marry her' (104).

Thus, Jon Spence, who connects Austen's life to her work, convinces readers that Lefroy served as Austen's inspiration. The movie *Becoming Jane* takes a similar approach—*First Impressions* is expanded into a story about Jane Austen's development as a writer, with one exception—the endings. Austen, who is denied a 'happy ending' in real life, performs a form of 'wish fulfilment' by delivering a happy ending for her heroine. Thus, the biopic refreshes the Austen myth while also celebrating *Pride and Prejudice's* happy ending. This approach ignores Austen's career as a writer addressing problems such as gender, class, education, human nature, love, marriage, and family. As a result, a biopic like *Becoming Jane* forces us to reconsider the long-running debate over the status of female writers in the literary canon. We are once again made to believe that little has changed in terms of

honouring the literary genius of women writers. Though popular culture has elevated the author to superstar status, she rarely receives the recognition she deserves as a talented novelist. Emily Auerbach observes that as late as 1935, John Middleton Murray called his famous wife Katherine Mansfield 'a tiny artist' and even suppressed and distorted her works: 'A perfectly exquisite, perfectly simple human being. . . Her art was not really distinct from her life; she was never what we understand by a professional writer....' (quoted in Auerbach, 77). What we hear in these sentences is a retelling of the Austen story, which appears to have become the archetype of the female novelist. We know that Katherine Mansfield changed the landscape of modern short fiction while simultaneously supporting herself through her work. She wrote while dying of tuberculosis: 'I really ask for time to write it all—time to write my books, I live to write.' As she informed her husband 'I'm a writer first and a woman after—more even than talking or laughing or being happy I want to write' (Auerbach,78). This is the worst fate an artist can suffer—the neglect of the intelligent use of faculties.

While *Becoming Jane* takes some liberties that cannot be forgiven, the film does have some interesting moments. One such scene occurs when Austen meets Ann Radcliffe. There is no historical evidence that such a meeting actually occurred between them, but Austen had clearly read her books. During this imagined conversation, Radcliffe pushes Austen to pursue a literary career while simultaneously highlighting the limitations that female writers faced at the time. Radcliffe tells Austen that her independence came 'at a cost'. She describes how, in those days, having a wife with a thought was deemed improper. Having a wife 'with a literary reputation was considered nothing short of scandalous.' The screenwriters have effectively illustrated some of the well-known obstacles that female writers had to overcome in order to join the "literary marketplace" by including this scene. The biopic shines at these points even though it "invents" something that has no historical precedent. But it stops being a fair portrayal of the author when Austen starts to resemble Elizabeth Bennet, a woman deeply in love with a man who we are all obliged to thank for inspiring *Pride and Prejudice*. The movie as a whole, falls short of capturing the essence of Austen, a multifaceted woman who turned ordinary life into extraordinary writing with her humour, moral sense, and most importantly, her "craftsmanship." Therefore, the issue is not so much with fictionalization but with the impact that fictionalization has on the development of the author's cultural identity, as film adaptations have the ability to significantly impact the public's cultural memory of Jane Austen in the modern era. Also, the author's "celluloid" persona sometimes represents a formulaic or even entirely different persona from the author's historical self. Such a disruption undermines the quieter, more subdued voice of the author, through text, which ultimately dissolves in the glamorous furor of the visual. While the adaptation of texts release multiple often fertile interpretations of the original text, the adaptation of the author, in this case produces versions which satiate commercial concerns of mass entertainment thereby frustrating the original expression of the creative writer, overshadowing it with the

veil of popularity.

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'Fashion Everydayness' of Chick Daseins: Analysing Select Chick (Lit & Flick) Narratives

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Abstract

The impression of 'everyday' perambulates from species to discipline, and the parameters and paradigms catering to the definition of 'everyday' perpetually oscillate at an individual level. Chick lit is the concurrent literary genre that particularizes women's everyday accounts. Innumerable pursuits aiding the efficacious completion of a day, detailed in chick lit, are exciting as female protagonists embark on a daily mission to fulfil their needs and goals. Fashion influences our lives at varying degrees and latitudes. The desire to augment the appearance by focusing on current trends in clothing and styling dominates chick-lit heroines (Chick Daseins). The paper seeks to foreground 'fashion everydayness' and how it meanderingly underwrites the formulation and projection of the identity of Daseins. The mental, psychological, physical, and physiological aspects of these Daseins collectively contributing to living their 'everyday,' are weighed by concentrating on fashion as a substantial parameter. The psychology of fashion aligning with the psyche of the Chick Daseins, the role of fashion in establishing gender/sexuality fluidity, the fashioned body, and 'fashion everydayness' as touchstones of intersectional axes will be studied.

Keywords: Chick lit, Chick Dasein, fashion everydayness, body, identity, gender, sexuality

For Heidegger, 'everydayness' is a fundamental situation in which people first discover themselves and primarily remain. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the expression 'Dasein', which translates into "being there" (*Britannica*), to denote human beings and their condition of being in the world. According to Heidegger, Dasein is the "destination of being" (qtd. in *The Thinking Lane*), addressing both the human being and the uniqueness of the human being. Hermeneutics reveals Dasein's comprehension of being and the fundamental structures of being that Dasein itself contains. The concept of Dasein has three facets: "being-there existence . . . intersubjectivity . . . subjectivity" (*The Thinking Lane*). Intersubjectivity has consistent bearings on Dasein's subjectivity: Dasein cannot subsist without a social context, including oneself and others. The authentic/inauthentic existence of Dasein is determined through comprehension of its 'mine-ness' and how it relates to others. The interaction between subjectivity and intersubjectivity regulates Dasein's everyday life (*The Thinking Lane*).

The "everyday undifferentiated character of Dasein" (Heidegger 69) is "averageness" (Heidegger 69) or 'everydayness'. "In this everydayness there are certain structures which we shall exhibit—not just any accidental structures, but essential ones which, in every kind of being that factual Dasein may possess, persist as determinative for the character of its being" (Heidegger 8). The paper foregrounds an idea of 'fashion everydayness' that plays a crucial role in altering/countering the mundane everyday condition of Chick Dasein, establishing the authenticity of its

being. The narratives chosen for current perusal are chick lits and chick flicks, which narrows the definition of the Dasein to mainly women and their being in the world. The reformation Dasein encounters in her everyday life is scrutinised and explained by a scaffold of fashion.

Heidegger asserts that the “basic everyday relationship lies in our employment of tools, or 'equipment'” (Richardson 16). However, he employs these terms to refer to substantially more than one would typically think. For instance, they cover not just “hammers and chisels but also chairs, clothes, books, pavements, timber, and even the sun” (Richardson 16–17)—that is, every resource we use to accomplish our goals. Hence, the attitude or relationship with an entity defines it as ready-to-hand equipment. Here, the nomenclature “ready-to-hand” (qtd. in Richardson 17), which Heidegger exercised for the entities above, is ascribed to fashion.

Fashion, inseparably fabricated, embellishes the aesthetics of the body. The consumer culture of fashion, integrating its diverse range of products and the various pointers of identity, caters to the manifold hermeneutics of the body and, hence, the individual. For every individual, the body is their expression to the outside world. The regulation and disciplining of the body have always been a critical concern for all, regardless of gender and sexuality. Like how the body projects itself, fashion that embodies the lived body directly or circuitously highlights the various stratification categories prevalent in society. Class, race, sex, gender, and religion are among the intersectional axes of identity that fashion and fashioned bodies create, practice, and propagate.

Caroline J. Smith, in *Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit*, has detailed the various associations of the chick lit genre with fashion, be it in terms of career or the fashion sense in clothing and appearance, as most chick protagonists are fashionistas. In *See Jane Write: A Girl's Guide to Writing Chick Lit*, it is mentioned that there are “some chick lit characters [who] enjoy their fashion collections” (Mlynowski and Jacobs). The general perception that chick lit is all about fashion is derided in the text; however, the ultimate link between fashion and the genre is undeniable. The characteristic frivolity and humour of chick fiction are drawn to a certain extent from the protagonist's indebtedness to fashion and the resultant shopaholic behaviour. The bodily insecurity of female leads is medicated by dedicating oneself to a makeover process, ensuring overall enhancement. The desire to augment appearance by focusing on current trends in clothing and styling dominates Chick Dasein. Therefore, 'fashion everydayness' is explicitly visible in them, including the flamboyant covers of the genre itself. Fashion exerts a critical underpinning in all aspects of life, initiating a dialogical interaction between one's psyche and body with the onlooker. Fashion is a broader phenomenon beyond its cultural construction, configuration, and implications, connoting the intersectional axes of identity, psychology, and bodily paradigm at the individual level. Chick fiction is seamlessly coupled with fashion and its undercurrents, as the protagonists majorly employ fashion as a medication for their less confident selves and to establish their individuality. Fashion is predominant in politicizing and bridging the

personal and public spheres.

Fashion's deep-rooted association with the everyday psyche of Dasein has gained momentum in the contemporary world, which, consecutively, helps establish its authenticity. The apparel chosen to adorn the lived bodies and the makeup used to embellish the beauty of the overall appearance manifest an individual's inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions and project our struggle to break away from humdrum 'everyday' appearance. The fashion industry has been engaged in a dialogical relationship with Dasein's psyche and the outside world. The Chick Daseins, cherry-picked to conduct this study, are bracketed with fashion in countless ways: career orientation, personal enhancement choice, or both.

Swati Sharma's heroine, Maya Kapoor, in *Fashionably Yours*, corresponds to the typical prototype of a village girl dreaming big and landing in the metropolitan city of opportunities, Mumbai. Veering from the path towards Mr Right, Maya treasures her desire to become a fashion writer at the prestigious "Glamorous" (Sharma 2) and furiously works to effectuate her goal. Since achieving and living the dream is a tricky and twisted road to embark on, she managed to attain the "position of 'Feature Writer' with the online division of Style magazine" (1). The fabula of *Fashionably Yours*, when considering the career orientation of Maya, her best friend Anu and her love interest Aryan revolve around fashion magazines, photography and the makeup industry. As Sharma commences her first chapter, the chick Dasein, Maya Kapoor, in a sound sleep, is dreaming of her voguish and accomplished career glittering with fashion statements: "It was a crisp morning and I was dressed in black from head to toe, looking every inch perfect. Black Prada jersey dress, black stockings, black Louis Vuitton pumps, black Chanel vintage handbag and kohl rimmed eyes. . ." (11). The immediate impression delivered to any reader by the cited excerpt is Maya's confidence and career progression, which are significantly and exceptionally achieved and reflected through fashion, the choice of apparel, and complementary accessories. Rebecca Arnold, in *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the Twentieth Century*, has rightly stated that "the outfit represents the last gasp of self-assured 'power dressing'" (1), and this is evident in Sharma's detailing of her Chick Dasein's fascinating dream sequence. Prada and Louis Vuitton, the luxury fashion giants in Milan and France, respectively, are the markers of an individual's purchasing and consumer standards and the indicators of the class, social status, and identity of an individual.

The dream of Maya visualising herself in a Black Prada jersey dress mouths various facts besides the outfit. Black transgresses its primary colour purpose and functions as a pungent tool to express and portray a pool of emotions and styles. The exclusivity offered by the brand names is augmented by the power exerted by the wearer, which is projected through the black colour. There could be contradicting interpretations regarding the colour black, as it is frequently associated with death and sadness. Nevertheless, "Black had become a colour which said you were serious; it said you meant business; it said you were strong, possibly formidable" (qtd. in Nicholls-Lee). This proposition extensively mirrors Sharma's intention behind the

characterisation of her Chick Dasein, Maya Kapoor. The appearance description stated above defines Maya and her ambition for life. Her strong will to dream big and pursue her passion despite her mother's disagreement and caution is fashionably communicated to the readers with Maya's dream. Regardless of her antagonistic relationship with her boss, Natasha, Maya's meticulous dedication and travail epitomise her character as the 'chick' in chick fiction who daringly takes chances in life to taste the sweetness of financial liberty through her career.

The trajectory of Maya's career pursuit oriented towards the fashion industry, especially the cosmetics and makeup tutorial vlogging that heightened her popularity as a "fashion goddess" (Sharma 194), helped her realise her dream job at "Glamorous" (239). Fashion, here, played an imperative role in moulding Maya's life and precisely forefronts its multifaceted impact in a person's life, be it identity formation, a successful career, or, in general, attaining material, emotional, and psychological equilibrium in life. Furthermore, fashion is employed to thwart ordinary everydayness, foregrounding the manifestation of 'fashion everydayness' in Chick Dasein. Maya's untiring will to conquer her dream career is also a marker of the authenticity of her being, which is indeed an interplay of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In Rebecca Arnold's words, fashion "reflects and indeed takes part in the construction of ideas surrounding the body and its display. Frequently trivialised as mere surface, fashion provides a space for image-makers and consumers to experiment with and challenge mainstream notions of physical display" (xiii). The foremost appliance of clothing and fashion is associated with the body; therefore, fashion ornates the lived body and physical appearance. Henceforth, the body of Chick Dasein is an everyday situation or everydayness.

The notion of body image and its widespread concern among women has witnessed a rapid surge with fluctuating lifestyles, technological advancements, and media influence. Anxiety regarding body weight, shape, and overall appearance conquered mainstream women's concerns. Such a body image concern leading to anxiety is witnessed in the fifteen-year-old Nikki Shah in Neeta Shah's *Bollywood Striptease*. Bitten by an acting bug, she is insecure about her appearance, especially her body weight. Nikki is daydreaming of performing as the heroine of Saif Ali Khan, visualising herself as radiantly gorgeous. However, she is shaken awake and brought back to reality by a furious History teacher, Miss Ganguly. The regret and insecurity of Nikki are evident as she confesses: "I was the same old overweight Nikki with a close-cropped hairstyle and geeky glasses, the butt of my peers' sly jokes and snide comments" (Shah 2). Being an adolescent hitherto fraught with transitional physical and psychological changes, Nikki was struggling with her body weight and appearance primarily because of her dream to rule over the Bollywood industry.

Women are more affected by body politics as they knowingly or unknowingly are battling to procure a corporeality that highlights their femininity and excludes them from being ostracised for being fat and thereby deviant. Women nowadays are experiencing momentous body image discontent, especially concerning weight and dieting. Judith Rodin, Lisa Silberstein, and Ruth Striegel-Moore in "Women and

Weight: A Normative Discontent” reported that “for an overwhelming number of women in our society, being a woman means feeling too fat” (267). Women fortuitously believe that their body shape plays a significant role in shaping their lives, thereby constantly engaging in self-surveillance and self-discipline. Before reaching womanhood, Nikki was deeply mindful of her body, which resulted in what Foucault terms 'biopower' that “operates on our very body” (Pylypa 21), making people consciously or unconsciously subjected to self-surveillance and self-discipline. Foucault considers the body as a “site” (qtd. in Punday 510) where scientific, social, and economic surveillance” (Punday 511) takes place. The shameful and timid 'everyday' of Shah's Chick Dasein, due to her deviant fat body of eighty-five kilos, affected her self-esteem, and she subjected herself to rigorous training at the gym and followed a diet-controlled consumption (Shah 9). In eight years, she slenderized herself, becoming “thirty-two kilos lighter” (5), looking more like a fashion model than a chartered accountant. Nikki procured a thin, healthy body with a “great sense of style, long hair, flawless complexion and chiselled features” (5).

Can Nikki's attempt at procuring a curvy, patriarchy-dictated body, disregarding her genuine physique, be considered a liberated act? Here, she willingly submits to the power mechanism that intends to produce docile bodies. Satram Ramani's chick flick *Double XL* knits a completely contradictory story as the protagonists, Rajshri Trivedi (Huma Qureshi) and Saira Khanna (Sonakshi Sinha), are indisposed to conform to the body normativity instituted by patriarchal society. These two talented 'oversize' Daseins are grappling with the body standards required to realise their dreams of becoming a sports presenter (Rajshri) and a leading fashion designer (Saira). Rajshri, who is well-informed about cricket, cannot exhibit her knowledge and talent due to her body. Saira, on the other hand, is a fashion designer who is always looked down on due to the general conception that fat people have no fashion erudition and in no way could belong and thrive in the fashion industry. These two women encounter each other at their lowest point, instantly strike a spark, and set off to London to conquer their dreams.

The anxiety induced by a deviant body and failure to procure the desired career transforms the lives of Rajshri and Saira. For Heidegger, moods are crucial means of revealing human life, and anxiety is the primordial mood that plays a methodological role in *Being and Time*. According to him, anxiety is the essential state of nothingness, and nothingness opens the door for us to develop into individuals and actively pursue our freedom. This nothingness-inducing creativity and power help Rajshri and Saira to dismantle the stereotype as they are reluctant to shrink their body size to get acceptance in society. Unlike Nikki Shah, their desire to achieve their dreams never knocked on the doors of gyms or dieticians since they never heed the slogan: “Get undressed--but be slim, good-looking, tanned!” (Foucault 57). The dream that could have been transmuted into a power-regulated desire to attain “the 'perfect body', through such disciplinary practices as physical fitness activities and the monitoring of body weight” (Pylypa 25) remained original

as Rajshri and Saira embraced their bodies to proudly with extreme confidence exhibit their unbeatable talent and progressive thinking in their respective professional endeavours. The final speech made by Saira Khanna after the culmination of her fashion show featuring her exclusively curated designs that suit individuals of any size (significantly oversized) exemplifies the change: “I want to make clothes that are sized to your attitudes” (*Double XL* 01:58:15-01:58:20). Making Rajshri her showstopper foregrounds the need to redefine the concept of body, beauty and fashion everydayness. The everydayness of fashion houses remaining non-inclusive of oversized apparel is thrashed, and Saira reconfigures fashion everydayness by designing garments for deviant bodies.

Resuming Nikki's journey, the tremendous bodily transformation affecting the general outlook and perception made Nikki bid farewell to her monotonous chartered accountant profession and pursue her dream career in Bollywood. This is where barges fashion in the professional sense, as the text provides a comprehensive account of the selection of outfits, styling, and makeup to complement several moods and occasions, especially when a portfolio is made for a beginner like Nikki in the unacquainted world of Bollywood. The portfolio is an assortment of the utility the term fashion has in Dasein's life, precisely for a woman in the media, film, and modelling industries. The various postures are achieved through a careful and thoughtful choice of garb that incites a specific look and disposition in the wearer and the onlooker, contributing to modifying everyday appearance. Fashion unveils intersectional axes of identity like class, caste, race, culture, etc., and these are recurrently handled in “mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias, or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalise those who are different” (Crenshaw 1241). Here, the difference is projected through fashion; for instance, for the Indian look, Nikki decided on a black sari with a sexy halter blouse” (Shah 21), and it can be critically evaluated as an attempt to make a statement about race/nationality. The Indian look is achieved through wearing a sari; the general assumption is that if one appears in a sari, their roots return to India, symbolising Indian customs and traditions. Nonetheless, the sari and the choice of its kind and styling also function as a class/caste marker, as the “members of the upper classes fought to maintain status by asserting their superior taste and financial strength through the elitism of couture” (Arnold 4).

Even though fashion has exhibited stratification, it has affected gender fluidity as it is no longer a feminised business. Gender identities continued to change and become more ambiguous around the end of the 20th century, maybe as a result of more than a century of debate surrounding sexual equality. Fashion came to symbolise the subversion of both femininity and masculinity (Arnold 99). Gender, according to Judith Butler, is not congenital; instead, it is “an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts” (Butler 519), and therefore, gender is not a stable, unalterable identity but a fluid and hazily constituted one. The constructive nature of gender contradicts everydayness as the everyday or traditional notions of

gender are reconstructed temporally. Gender fluidity is best depicted through fashion, as women started wearing trousers, t-shirts, and shorts regularly; initially, the male attire was symbolic of masculinity. Nikki's "girl-next-door" (Shah 21) look wearing trousers also illustrates this scenario.

There is also a significant disparity in gender and sexuality, as fashion is scholarly and journalistically documented as corresponding to a "gay industry" (qtd. in Stokes 220), which is best demonstrated by Madhur Bhandarkar's chick flick *Fashion*. In the fashion design industry, despite being regarded as a female-oriented workspace, gay men are celebrated as media darlings who are indispensable to the industry's survival and have more success than their counterparts in the general labour market (Stokes 220). Madhur Bhandarkar's choice of fashion designers could have been based on the conception above. Since he is known for realistic filmmaking, Bhandarkar's fashion designers were gay men who enjoyed the focal point due to their sexual orientation and skill in the workspace. Nonetheless, their sexuality is shunned when it is placed in the traditional heteronormative family setup.

Sociological research on gender-differentiated employment reveals that men performing women-designated works possess what Christine Williams terms a "glass escalator" (qtd. in Stokes 221) for professional advancements. In contrast, women in male-oriented works are shunned with the experience of a "glass ceiling" (qtd. in Stokes 221). Rahul Arora (Samir Soni) and Vinay Khosla (Harsh Chhaya), the top-notch gay designers in *fashion*, have 'glass escalators' in the fashion design workspace. Fashion, a seemingly feminized workspace, is hijacked by men, especially gay men, leaving women to experience both gender and sexuality-based discrimination. The female models who enliven Rahul and Vinay's artistic, innovative, and aesthetic creations are easily replaceable as they do not enjoy the power of bearers of art. Shonali (Kangana Ranaut) was the showstopper and the face of every fashion show and fashion magazine before introducing the main protagonist, Meghna (Priyanka Chopra). However, this elite professional experience was shattered as Shonali's contract was cancelled by the prestigious modelling company Panache to sign Meghna. The financial liberty she enjoyed through her modelling career was snatched away, delineating the impermanence of women in the modelling industry. The gay designers enjoy an upper hand as they set the bar as well as pass verdicts topsy-surveying the career of female fashion professionals.

The tapestry of everyday of Chick Dasein is delineated through fashion as it acts as the mouthpiece of an individual's socio-political, economic and cultural identity. The long-standing association between Chick fiction and fashion is inexorable, as Chick Dasein's relationship with fashion mirrors a feminist sensibility that establishes their individuality and liberty of choice. 'Fashion everydayness' encapsulates the psychological, bodily, and other intersectional parameters of identity, including gender, sexuality, class, and race. The way of living, which Heidegger terms as 'everydayness', stands to reason that lived beings' fundamental structure would be most accessible in this context. However, there are other

conceivable modes of existence for people to which some of this description may not apply. The other conceivable everydayness of Chick Dasein is achieved through the 'ready-to-hand' fashion equipment. The ubiquitous temperament of fashion describes the concept of 'fashion everydayness' that tends to eradicate the insipidness concomitant to the everyday of Chick Daseins, ascertaining their authentic being in select chick narratives.

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Reading the Signs of the Film *Qala*

Pallavi Panda*

Dr. Urvashi Kaushal**

Abstract

Films, as a multimodal means of communication, convey the meaning to the viewers with combinative use of various components, such as sound effects, dialogues, visuals, space etc. Along with dialogues, the non-verbal cues given by visuals on the screen, are significant to decode the meaning. Semiotics of the cinema (theory of film as a system-of-signs), propounded by Christian Metz, emphasizes the deployment of visuals or filmic images to understand the denotative and connotative meanings. Incorporating Metz's concepts, the present study examines the system of signs (the relation of signifier to the signified) through visuals in Anvita Dutt's *Qala*. Acknowledging the dearth of studies on the film's cinematic technique, the paper highlights the need to take connotative and denotative meanings into cognizance to understand the psyche of the protagonist. The paper, therefore, undertakes a shot-by-shot analysis to connote the complex mindscape of *Qala*, which is portrayed through certain symbols, props, space, and atmosphere in the movie.

Keywords: signs, signifier, signified, semiotics, connotative meaning, denotative meaning, film studies

Introduction

The movie *Qala* (2022), by filmmaker Anvita Dutt, seamlessly blends the elements of emotions, psyche, fantasy, dreams, complexities of human connections and familial relations. It depicts the journey of *Qala*, who in order to become a famous singer becomes both the culprit and victim of some sinister events. Along with an evocative narrative technique that oscillates between the past and the present, the visual universe created by Dutt with captivating symbols, colours, and images give the viewers an immersive cinematic experience. The movie also makes a societal commentary on the condition of female singers in the Hindi music industry of the pre-independence era. Hazarika and Dowerah highlight the patriarchal ideology *Qala* is subjected to within and outside the family (704). The birth of a still-born son (*Qala*'s twin brother) transposes into mental abuse of *Qala* by her mother. The self-doubt in *Qala*'s personality, therefore, is understood by Kumar and Raghuvanshi as a consequence of unfair treatment due to gender bias (662). Agarwal and Kumar study the impact of the dominating mother figure on *Qala*, as they argue motherhood to be “deeply rooted ideology, similar to patriarchy” (1). In their biopsychosocial study, Bashir and Mishra analyse psychosis of *Qala* as a result of the hallucinations after *Jagan*'s death, troubled relationship with her mother and aspiration to become a successful singer in a male-dominated industry (350). Highlighting these studies pertaining to social and psychological aspects, the present study proposes the need to examine the visuals used in the movie. The paper aims to study the visuals or 'signifiers' to explore the connotative and denotative meanings in selected frames. The term 'connotation' refers to the 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional

etc.) of the sign, whereas denotation refers to the definitional or literal meaning (Chandler). Signs are more open to interpretation in their connotations than their denotations. This paper aims to study such connotative meanings of particular frames in order to highlight the traumatic mindscape of Qala.

Theoretical framework

In *Course in General Linguistics* (1959), Ferdinand De Saussure theorises words as 'signs', which is made of two parts: 'signifier' (sound/image) and 'signified' (the concept). The study of language as a system of signs is called 'semiotics'. Film, understood as a 'cinematographic document', is constructed with 'coherent structures' and 'organisations' as it is composed of filmic materials working together (Bateman and Schmidt 48). The filmic material, constituting the cinematographic document, is like any 'semiotic' object functioning with complex 'signs', which point towards 'something that is not there' (48). Therefore, these filmic materials as 'signs' provide access to information (49), which can be decoded only when the basic materials like images, sounds, lighting, props etc. are analysed in each frame of a film. In order to analyse the film *Qala*, the paper draws upon the theory of 'film semiotics'.

The theory of film semiotics, propounded by Christian Metz in *Film Language* (1974), denotes cinema to be structured like language. Unlike sentences of verbal/written language breaking into words, a film could be fragmented into large units called 'shots' (Metz 88). Gilbert Harman interprets Metz's theory to state that a film's basic unit, 'shot' is laden with specific meanings; therefore, the semiotics (theory of film as a system-of-signs) of the cinema is concerned with specific ways in which films can have significance or meaning for normal spectators, such as nature of film image, relationship between sound and image or the effects of various kinds of editing (15). Furthermore, the basic materials of the film, like the images or sounds that constitute the plot, are signs of denotation (16). But connotation is "what is signified by the sign, when the sign combines aspects of the basic materials of the film and the story that those aspects denote" (Harman 16).

Additionally, Metz, prompted by this connection between the narrative and denotation, goes on to consider denotation and connotation in regard to the semiotics of cinema (96). Semiotics of the cinema can be considered as both semiotics of denotation or semiotics of connotation (96). When the semiological study of film develops and begins to form a body of knowledge, it takes into account both denoted and connoted signification at the same time (96).

Since, not only content but also how that content is "cinematically narrated through style and structure" is a significant part of investigation (Vyas and Shekhawat 1938), the paper, using Metz's concepts, attempts a shot-by-shot analysis with an understanding of camera angles, colours, lighting, props, space. Acknowledging the importance of "delicate cinematographic nuances" (Srinivasan and Shekhawat 294), the signifiers present in selected frames are analysed to understand the denotative and connotative meanings, which consequently gives insight into the complex mindscape of Qala.

Analysis

The film *Qala* includes a multitude of signifiers and signifieds to connote and denote psyche and shades of emotions, which the paper attempts to highlight using Metz's concepts. For instance, Qala's sadness deepens when her mother praises Jagan's (an orphan boy without formal training) singing, and takes Jagan as her apprentice to train him and launch him in the music industry. While Urmila finds her lost son in Jagan, Qala feels as if she is pushed to the periphery. Her anxiety and envy are well reflected in the scene where she is seen running towards the maze-like pattern carved in the ground outside the house.

In a long-shot frame she is placed far from the lens and the structure of the maze takes the central position. The maze here connotes Qala's mental state. Metz states that the study of connotation takes us closer to understanding the art of cinema by placing it on an equal semiological footing with literary art, but with its own aesthetic arrangements and constraints, such as, “versification, composition, and tropes...framing, camera movements, lighting effects” (96). Moreover, these arrangements serve the connoted instance that is superimposed with the denoted meaning (96). The maze captured in low-key lighting, half covered in snow denotes her ongoing dilemma of homelessness inside her home and her inability to flee home due to her desire to win her mother's approval. Filmic effects should not be “gratuitous” but must remain “subordinate to the plot” (97). While semiotically analysing the film one can say that chilly atmosphere, which constantly forms the *mise-en-scène*, bereft of any colour connotes Qala's loneliness. Likewise, the chilly landscape, with skeletal trees beside the maze, adds to the sombre mood in the frame. In contrast, the warm light comes from the house that Qala, in her anxious state, cannot be a part of.

On the other hand, Jagan, oblivious to the troubled mother-daughter relationship and the fate that awaits him, tries to befriend Qala and comes outside to help her, to give her shelter from the snow fall. In the frame (figure 1) the aerial shot captures Qala and Jagan at the heart of the maze. Both of them are ambitious, equally talented, passionate about singing, and have the same dream, but are treated differently due to their gender. Hence, this image can be read as a 'signifier' holding different meanings in context of historical setting, gender difference, the power dynamics existing inside the domestic and professional space. In order to explain Metz's theory, Sister Mary Christopher Baseheart highlights that there is a “semiotic function” (a relation of signifier to signified) existing between “certain signs” of the denotation and certain connotors (30). The signs of denotation consist of their own sets of signifier and signified, as it is a question of “signs.” Additionally, within the code of connotation, these signs play the role of signifiers, and the connotors are the signified that corresponds to them (30). Following Metz, she states that such a rule applies to “certain signs of the code of denotation” and not to the code as a whole (30). Therefore, the frame (figure 1) simultaneously holds signs of denotation and connotors.



figure 1. Qala and Jagan at the centre of the maze

Apart from this scene, the symbol of the 'maze' reappears (in the form of mercury maze puzzle) in another shot during the conversation between Qala and Jagan. When he declares his wish to be singing more and winning the Golden Vinyl someday, Qala's reply echoes the same wish: to bring the award home for her mother. Hence, both of them belong to this maze, but the difference in treatment they receive as singers is decided by their gender. However, Jagan's opportunity to be a singer is replaced by Qala, who mixes mercury from the puzzle game into his milk before his performance in front of the music producers. This truth is revealed towards the end of the movie with the symbol of the same maze.

Even though the real reason behind Jagan losing his voice is not revealed until the end, Qala's facial expressions, her exaggerated display of fear, and props used in different frames, like a mid close-up shot, which shows Qala reading *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, with a nervous expression on her face, hints at her involvement with the unfortunate event. The book used as a prop has a connotative meaning to it, since the theme of the book is about the dichotomy of good and evil residing in the same person. Metz believes that in cinema sometimes “symbolisms” or connotations of various types are linked to objects residing outside of the film, that is, in the culture (141). Likewise, the character of Qala, in spite of having good intentions of proving her worth to her mother, commits evil actions.

For Jagan, singing is like breathing as he shares with Qala. When he loses his voice, he cannot bear it and takes his own life by hanging himself from a tree. The scene of his death takes place in the snowy landscape outside the warmth of the domestic atmosphere that Urmila Manjushree created for him. When Qala finds Jagan's body hanging from a tree (figure 2.1) the lens positions her in a wide mid long shot where the legs of the corpse are used as focal point in the frame. Here, only the legs are displayed, but the element of shock clearly visible on Qala's face demystifies the identity of the corpse in front of the viewers through element of association with the plot. Furthermore, screen rotation of the camera shifting from a horizontal to vertical angle changes the frame without any break in between. The new long shot with vertical frame (figure 2.2) can be studied to be denoting the point of view of the subject, in contrast to the earlier frame, where camera stands for the point of view of the audience. The frame denoting Qala's point of view (figure 2.2), shows her trying to run away from Jagan's hanging body while the dead body seems to be gravitating towards her.



figure 2.1. element of shock

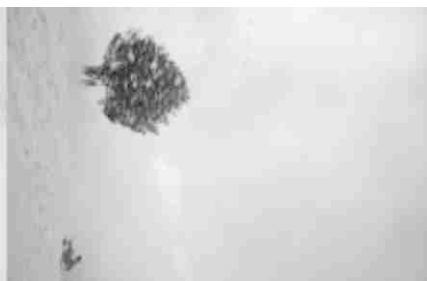


figure 2.2. vertical frame

In a way, the frame (figure 2.2) symbolises the growing guilty conscience within Qala, from which she tries to run away, but cannot. Rather, she is trapped inside her

anxious state of mind, because she wanted to replace Jagan but not at the cost of his life. Hence, this frame works as a brilliant display of Qala's troubled mindscape over Jagan's death. Using Metz's theory, Baseheart states that only through indirection of their signifiers, the codes of connotation can be determined in the denotation (i.e. the sounds and images produced by the analogical codes) (31). It explains the cinematographic style which is first and foremost a collection of signifiers that exists in the "materiality of the images and sounds" (31), and the signifieds that correspond to the style are not directly produced but are grasped through deep analysis and understanding (31). Hence, both these shots, though designed with minimal figures and props, carry deep layers of meanings and capture Qala's changing emotions from shock and fear to guilt.

When Qala finally wins the prestigious Golden Vinyl, her mother does not acknowledge her victory. The contrast between Qala's professional glory and her troubled mental state can be seen in the following frames. In the first one (figure 3.1), the combination of pastel colour, her posture with the sitar, the award of golden record in the backdrop, high-key lighting, and the symmetrical space of the room portrays the sense of a cheerful mood. In contrast, the second frame, the shot inside her maternal home, with low key lighting, asymmetrical space division between the subject and the setting, her shadowy figure looking towards her mother's room with anticipation creates a feeling of dejection (figure 3.2). Furthermore, the second frame portrays her longing for her mother's acceptance.



figure 3.1. professional space



figure 3.2. personal angst

Qala's sense of guilt over the past mistake haunts her and that is represented through certain symbols. Two shots involving Qala one after the other stand in unison because the second shot can be studied as a resultant of the first one in terms of action and its consequence. In the first shot, the insect crawls down on Jagan's corpse, while in the second the imaginary insect moves on Qala's face, slowly moving towards her eye. In her disturbed mental state, she imagines the same fate to be awaiting her. Moreover, the sense of guilt never leaves her. As a result, she imagines herself to be Jagan on whose dead skin the insect is moving unbothered.

Furthermore, mercury as a signifier is used in various shots. Qala imagines mercury to be dripping from her hand. This frame, which purposefully blurs her face in the reflection on the mirror with mid-close-up shot and focuses closely on her hand with an extreme-close-up shot, portrays the dual realities existing simultaneously: the tangible or real surrounding reflected on the mirror, and the imagined reality existing

only for Qala. Hence, viewers get to see Qala's point of view with the use of low lighting and the imagery of glistening silver mercury on her palm. They catch a glimpse of Qala's mind with this signifier (mercury). Moreover, this particular shot explores her guilty conscience by evoking similarity with the scene from the Shakespearean play, *Macbeth*, where guilt ridden Lady Macbeth hallucinates about her hands being smeared with blood after the killing of Duncan. According to Harman's interpretation of Metz's theory, such a shot follows the use of certain conventions or connotative "codes" that films exploit in order to indicate their denotations to substantiate the plot (Harman 17). Hence, such symbols recurrently used in the movie highlights the theme of guilt and trauma.

Along with this scene the symbol of mercury reappears in a shot, where Qala imagines the sleeping pills to be mercury disintegrated on the table as she touches them with her finger. The prop of mercury is made clearly visible in the frame, while Qala's face and upper body seem blurry. The parts of mercury are used as the focal point. Within the frame the space is compressed and the low-key lighting with a mix of black and blue reflects an icy-blue setting. It elicits a dark and gloomy effect in front of the viewers, who are unsure of Qala's next step as she is brooding over the scattered parts of mercury. However, there is a release of tension in the next shot where she tries to gulp down all the pills but is interrupted by her secretary and the doctor. Therefore, this shot represents Qala's point of view or her distorted mindscape, in contrast to the audience's awareness that the shards of mercury are sleeping pills in reality.

Another shot after she has won the Golden Vinyl, presents her guilty conscience as she hallucinates her awards being replaced by Jagan's face who calls her a 'thief'. The shot brings out her buried guilt, in the form of Jagan's ghost even at the time of her success. Here, the signified of connotation [the guilt], is understood only when the corresponding signifier [the boy's face] brings into play the signifier [the award] and signified [Qala's past action] of the denotation at the same time (Baseheart 24). In a shot towards the end, the real subjects (the reporters) and the imaginary figure (Jagan's apparition) are put together in the same frame, which highlights Qala's disturbed psyche. Unable to hear the reporters' questions, Qala has a conversation with Jagan, and the frame brilliantly captures Qala's point of view by putting the imaginary figure under the focal lens of the camera.

Furthermore, the troubled mental state of Qala is represented through the signifier of the snow and it is a recurring symbol throughout the film. As Metz pointed out, even though "absolute laws" are lacking, there are certain dominant habits concerned with "filmic intelligibility" (99). For this film, snow (a recurrent symbol) signifies her loneliness. In a shot Qala experiences snow fall inside the music studio, which blurs the lines of reality. She is unable to hear any sound amidst the conflict between her inner and outer world. Her mental agony, in sharp contrast to normalcy of the studio, is represented by darkness and snow. The studio filled with snow suggests Qala's drowning in silence, as she is unable to speak out the reason for her disturbed mental state. Additionally, this shot depicts the final mental breakdown of Qala as a result of the days of suppressed emotions and traumatic memories.

Conclusion

Therefore, based on Christian Metz's concepts, the present discussion highlights the connotative and denotative meanings of various shots. It has attempted to note down the various cinematic techniques used in the movie to create the visual universe in front of the viewers. Furthermore, by connecting the protagonist's troubled mindscape, emotions with the various symbols, chilly atmosphere, props, barren

landscape, dark ambience, the paper explores the semiotic function (relationship between the signifier to the signified) creatively used in the film to give the audience a unique cinematic experience.

NB: All the still images used in the paper are from the movie *Qala*, directed by Anvita Dutt.

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A Postcolonial Reimagination of Aesthetic Theory for Indian English Literature

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Abstract

It is a general assumption in literature that politics and aesthetics do not go hand in hand. The dominance of Kant's ideas about aesthetics that give precedence to beauty and pleasure as against aesthetic value have historically contributed in the segregation of political and aesthetic where aesthetics is a disinterested judgement and politics is rational. This has relegated aesthetic theory as a *bête noire* in postcolonial discourse considering that Postcolonialism has strong political investment because of its engagement with empire. This paper by discussing the ideas of various philosophers and literary critics like Jacques Ranciere, Adam Chmielewski, Aukje van Rooden, Bill Ashcroft and Terry Eagleton has pointed out that aesthetic theory had political undercurrents from the start and its disconnect from political has detrimentally divorced art from social engagement that could prove fatal to for the survival of literature. It also discusses the often neglected theories of *Rasa* and *Dhvani* to highlight the rich aesthetic tradition of India. After making a diachronic examination of various national and global theories on aesthetics a postcolonial and political paradigm is presented that can be used to understand Indian English literature in general, and Indian English novel in particular, as simultaneously political and aesthetic.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Aesthetic Engagement, Beauty, Indian Aesthetics, Indian English Novel Postcolonialism, Value

*For it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon
that existence and the world are eternally justified
- The Birth of Tragedy, Friedrich Nietzsche*

The liberal humanist idea of art as autonomous, as something that can be read independent of socio-economic or historical perspectives or independent of the postulations of literary theory foregrounds an 'intransitive' notion of art. That art does not need to relate or belong to anything beyond itself and constitutes its own internal logic. i.e. is 'intransitive' was at the heart of literary philosophy of the Aesthetic Movement. Their slogan *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake), coined by the philosopher Victor Cousin in 1818, echoed their belief that “art exists for its own sake, or for the sake of beauty, in utter indifference to moral and political considerations, and in entire freedom from didactic or educational purposes” (Habib 491). This notion of the autonomy of art as something emancipated from the influences of church, science and state in regulation of its own internal logic has “turned into a millstone around the neck of today's literary writers” (Rooden 168). The Postcolonialists, the New

Historicists, the cultural materialists and the resistance of 'anti-autonomists' – those who view autonomy as an existential threat to the survival of literature – argue for the abandonment of this “Romantic illusion” in order for literature to regain social and historical relevance and posterior survival (Rooden 168-9). Jacques Ranciere in his essay *From Politics to Aesthetics?* (2005) argues that this autonomy, or as he calls it, the 'loneliness' of writing, was “search for a new paradigm of writing” with an underlying politics to concoct a new religion supplanting the old “decaying religions, and giving to the young democracy the sacrament of a community both ideal and sensory” (20). He further argues that literature adheres to its own politics, and the metapolitics of aesthetics was to create a religious 'sensory community' in place of a dissenting political community that “promised a non-polemical, consensual framing of the common world” (18).

In a somewhat similar argumentation Terry Eagleton in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990) views aesthetics in intricate connection with autonomy arguing that any cultural production achieves autonomy once it becomes a commodity in the society: it gets dissociated from various social functions and achieves a status of 'disabling' “self-referentiality” that not only divorces art from other social practices thereby allowing the hegemonic faction or the *distribution of the sensible* to “find an idealised refuge from its own actual values of competitiveness, exploitation and material possessiveness” but also “provides the middle class with just the ideological model of subjectivity it requires for its material operation” (9). Eagleton views aesthetics as an ideology “at the heart of middle class's struggle for political hegemony” but also finds it self-contradictory and “radically double-edged” that has a potential of destabilising its own ideological manifestations (3). Apart from functioning as an ideology ministering to “naturalise” or “organicize social practices” it also is a human capacity against “all dominative or instrumentalist thought” in favour of “the self-determining nature of human powers and capacities which become... the anthropological foundation of a revolutionary opposition to bourgeois utility” (9) (10).

It is thus only convenient to argue that the presence of autonomy in literature, although questionable in some ways, enables an independence that is capable of acting in resistance against the forces that exploit it. Hence the claim of autonomists that autonomy is the 'spine' of literature and its dissociation rather than its association would lead to the death of literature cannot be simply discredited. That literature can be read in itself in independence even in the all-pervasive political climate of modernity although true cannot be accepted as a wholesome argument given that literature has achieved the status of resistance because of its capacity for presenting counter discourses against major hegemonic epistemes. However, the concept of autonomy in literature can be sustained if it is understood not in the nineteenth and twentieth century context where it is often defined in a dualistic opposition to heteronomy but in 'relational paradigm' as has been observed by George Dickie, Bourdieu, Aukje van Rooden and by such theories of Cultural Studies and New Historicism. Van Rooden reimagines autonomy as a transient association between a

text and context that redefines itself on every new reading or change of time or situation. The reimagination does not present autonomy as universal but rather “singular in each instance” because every new act of writing and reading would relationally reconstitute autonomy. The working of literature thus becomes “participatory” demanding “a receiver in order to exist, not as an artefact, but as art. This is to say that works are not intrinsically literary, but become literary in interaction” suggesting that socio-cultural, political and historical factors play as constitutive a role in aesthetics as self-sufficiency does (190).

Bill Ashcroft's discussion of transcultural “contact zone” in his essay *Towards a Postcolonial Aesthetics* (2015) can be understood as a relational reading of any postcolonial cultural production with respect to empire and postcolony. His views about the contact zone as “a constructive rather than a contestatory space” wherein multiple cultural contexts conflate to produce a transcultural text is not very different from van Rooden's idea of a “relational paradigm” wherein autonomy is an ephemeral tie between a text and its context that is reconstituted on every new reading (Ashcroft 2) (Rooden 190). Where Van Rooden cogitates the idea on an ontological level, Bill Ashcroft's deliberation is more politically inclined. He draws from Ernst Bloch and Terry Eagleton's works where aesthetics is denied its detachment and universalism and treated as a hegemonic ideology begotten from Enlightenment to establish middle-class as a universal subject (2). He maintains that,

“Just as some people's thinking is regarded as “philosophy” while that of others is not, so some writing is considered “literature” and other writing is not. The aesthetic judgment of the dominant class is regarded as a standard of “taste”.” (2)

On account of such marginalisation of postcolonial literature from the ambit of English literature, postcolonial theory maintains a very suspicious outlook towards aesthetic theory. This does not in any way mean that postcolonial writing does not possess aesthetic qualities, however, can those aesthetic qualities be identified in wholeness with the postcolonial nature of the work is the pivotal question that Bill Ashcroft attempts to answer. After establishing the emanation of postcolonial writing from the transcultural contact zones he argues that for postcolonial writing to qualify as aesthetic there is a need for *aesthetic engagement* rather than *aesthetic judgement*, differentiating between the two on the basis of “value” (4; italics in the original).. An aesthetic judgement assumes an “ideologically determined” “intrinsic Value” based in the hegemonic group whereas aesthetic engagement “elicits a perception of *values*” arising from “the qualitative effect of the stimuli on the senses and are completely separate from the values of a dominant class or culture” (4). The aesthetic engagement derives from the “materiality of the language”, which is a hybridisation of appropriated dominant language to the localised context in a transcultural space (6).

Beyond Kantian Aesthetics

Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790) makes a distinction between two types of beauty; *pulchritudo vaga* (free beauty) and *pulchritudo adhaerens*

(adherent beauty). The difference between the two is the presupposition of *concept*, while the former dissociates itself from any pre-given concepts relying entirely on the senses to perceive the object as in itself it really is, the latter aligns itself with concept making a presupposed rational understanding of the object (60). Kant favours *pulchritudo vaga* as purely aesthetic because our imagination is in a state of free play making our judgement of the object entirely disinterested and thus pleasure-giving as against the partly aesthetic *pulchritudo adhaerens* in which the presupposed concept allows us to make a cognitive judgement. Even though our taste stands to be enriched by this connection of aesthetic and intellectual, such connections merely establish rules for “a union of taste with reason” making it “fixed and amenable to rules” (Kant 62) (Habib 373).

This dominant claim about the disinterested nature of art has sustained for centuries because of the authority of Kant's oeuvre in the Western philosophical tradition. The self-sufficient, self-regulating autonomy reduced the status of art as a life-enriching ornament that society can sustain without, and the role of aesthetics also shrank from social and political involvement because aesthetics was conceived as the study that deals with arts alone (Chmielewski 30). Adam Chmielewski's book *Politics and Recognition: Towards a New Political Aesthetics* (2020) elaborately discusses the reasons behind the absence, or more precisely, forestalling of aesthetics from political spheres. The prime reason being that the sphere of politics is an “area of intense and interested activity, oriented towards achieving pragmatic aims” in contrast to the critical outlook towards traditional aesthetics as being “affected by the ambience of innocuousness, ornamentality, unnecessariness, and relative unimportance of its subject matter” (30). The impasse that originates because of these oppositions is voiced by Jan Paweł Hudzik by asking “how could political passions be connected with aesthetic disinterestedness?” (qtd. in Chmielewski 30). Chmielewski's response is a straightforward no, not unless we come out of the shadows of Kant's aweing opus and view perception from the neo-positivist conception as non-imitative and non-passive in favour of Shusterman's argument that art creates and transforms society instead of representing it (30). It is apparent though that Shusterman is taking a radical jump to a constructive and transformative ability of art bypassing its representational quality altogether, but this jump does not land him on the wrong conclusion. Arnold Berleant also holds Kant's distinct separation of aesthetics from natural and moral domains accountable arguing “that aesthetic value is pervasive and always present” (11). He further argues that Kant's separate categorisation of aesthetics was “based on non-aesthetic consideration” and that “aesthetics must extend its scope both critically and constructively and provide a renewed sense of the social importance of art” (12) That art does not stand as a beautiful means of escape but participates in socio-political and historical events has been more than substantially demonstrated by feminist, Marxist, postcolonial and postmodern literatures to name a few. Chmielewski's argument that the ultimate purpose of aesthetics is “the pedagogy of emancipation which encourages criticism and opposition to the established dogmas and authorities” rests on these opinions and they are not dissimilar to the views that Berleant expresses in his book *Re-*

Thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts (2004) that exclusion on the basis of aesthetic disinterestedness, which, as we have seen, has deep social and political implications leading to “social as well as cultural hegemony and challenges to the exclusiveness not only mark an end to traditional aesthetics but leads for a way towards *aesthetic engagement* (Berleant 27,30, 42) (Chmielewski 31). Berleant suggests that

“...aesthetic engagement captures far better than disinterestedness the perceptual, cognitive, and somatic involvement that responsive appreciation joins to powerful art. And it reflects better than any other concept the actual integration of the arts and their appreciation in the ongoing process we call human culture” (45).

The impact of social and political conventions on human perception is thoroughly discussed by the Algerian-born French political philosopher Jacques Ranciere through his concept of *the distribution of the sensible* that he developed in his book *The politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2000). He describes *the distribution of the sensible* as simultaneously “something common that is shared and exclusive parts” (12). What he means by this is that the distribution of the sensible is at once both inclusive and alienating in a given social setup leading, broadly speaking, to the division into two groups one dominant and the other dominated, one recognised and the other avoided or dismissed, and one with agency while the other rendered mute. Politics, according to Ranciere, happens on this plane: it happens between the two oppositions of the distribution of the sensible wherein the established social order is challenged by the other in the category. And since the distribution happens on the basis of sensible (what is seized by senses) aesthetics plays a central role in politics. This idea of politics is a positive struggle that intends to disrupt the inegalitarianism in the distribution of the sensible by undermining the 'police' order which according to Ranciere are the “implicit rules and conventions which determine the distribution of roles in a community and the forms of exclusion which operate within it” (Sayers). The aesthetics is political because 'aesthetic regimes' “determine distributions of the sensible in the artistic domain and lend insight into the distributions that characterize larger society” (Duignan).

A Case on “Indian Aesthetics”

It must not come to us as an interesting surprise that the native theories of aesthetics like *Rasa* and *Dhvani* were developed centuries before some of the western theories of aesthetics. In fact, *rasa* theory as later extended by Bhattanayaka after its initial formulation by Bharata in *Natyashastra* (around 500 BC) is an affective theory, like Aristotle's *theory of purgation*, that transforms the spectator/reader into *parmatama* (divine soul) that achieves *atma-sakshatkara* (self-realisation) and *swarupananda* (infinite subjectivity). Centuries later, Kant put forth the, not so dissimilar, concept of universal subjectivity based on *sensus communis*, sense common to all. What differentiates the two from each other is *rasa*'s stress on spirituality whereas Kant basis his aesthetics as divided from religion and morality. The word *rasa* means *the pleasure drink of gods* and from Bharata the word symbolises pleasure driven by witnessing a drama or reading of poetry.

The *Dhvani* theory was developed by Anandvardhana in his ninth century treatise

Dhavanyaloka. *Dhvani* literally means sound. However, *Dhvani* theory deals with “indirectly evoked meaning or suggestivity as the characteristic feature of the literary meaning” separating literary writing from other kinds of writing (Satpathy 46). He borrows from Bharatrihari's treatise named *Vakyapadiya* (around sixth century AD) in which the latter proposed that the technical *sphota* enables the dissemination of the meaning of a word or sentence. Anandvardhana combines *dhvani* with *rasa* theory to argue that the affect of *rasa* is achieved through *dhvani*. Kapil Kapoor suggests that the subsequent theories of Indian aesthetics find their origin in *rasa* and *dhvani* theories by arguing that “all the subsequent literary theorists in the tradition found the combination of *rasa* and *dhvani* theories both adequate and sufficient to analyse the constitution of meaning in literature” (qtd in Satpathy 46-47). Both R. B. Patnakar and K. Krishnamoorthy in their respective articles *Does the Rasa Theory have Modern Relevance?* and *The Relevance of Rasa Theory to Modern Literature* discuss the relationship between Indian aesthetics, especially *rasa* theory, and Western aesthetic tradition by focusing on the commonalities and the points of departure. R. B. Patnakar for example discusses the various complexities of universality (*sadharanikarana*) in Indian aesthetics and then compares it to Aristotle's and Kant's concept of universalism (89-91). These comparisons are established on philosophical and epistemic plane to raise the opulent Indian aesthetic tradition at par with its western counterpart without much attention being paid to the socio-political complexities of such comparisons.

The decolonial need to revive the Indian aesthetic tradition after recognising “the crisis in Indian criticism”, as Ganesh Devy calls it in his book *After Amnesia* (1992), has grown significantly in the past three decades. However, the revivalism is bound to be a meaninglessly retrotopic venture if it establishes a monolithic literary or critical tradition under the high of nationalism in rejection of the colonial influences. Such monoliths are not only suggestively delimitating but essentially instable in view of the evolution a given society undergoes over time. As Dr. Sumanyu Satpathy points out “what nowadays largely passes as 'Indian' aesthetics is actually a Hindu view or theory of literature” (43). In fact, the terms 'India' or 'Indian' receive criticism on their monolithic basis such as

“The term 'India' may be valid in the pages of an atlas, but as a cultural label it is hopelessly inadequate and simplistic. A product of colonial historiography, the term brings with it a politically coloured self-image and the suggestion of cultural amnesia” (Devy 2).

Indian aesthetics is uniformly used to designate all literatures produced in India irrespective of their linguistic, religious, mystic or other cultural differences. For this reason, G. N. Devy chooses to call different Indian literatures as *bhasa* literatures or *bhasa* criticisms (*bhasa* meaning language) because they have their independent histories and with their development challenged “the hegemony of Sanskrit and the culture developed through that language, *sanskriti*” (6).

The reclaiming of these native theories is imperative for the reimagination of aesthetic sensibilities at present to connect now with the roots. However, a

puritanical approach towards reclaiming of the native past, as has been observed in some postcolonial cases, creates a divorced discourse that mostly gets sidelined because of its impracticality. Zygmunt Bauman in his book *Retrotopia* (2017) calls this a yearning for “the past as the future” – a sentimental and delusional yearning for return to an idealised precolonial past significantly different from the current scenario (17). But because of the multiculturalism and multilingualism of Indian literatures that did not initiate after the British colonial enterprise but has historically been a shade of Indian literary tapestry Harish Trivedi proposed a “composite literary corpus” that he proudly – for its native genealogy – called *panchadhatu* (five elements) in *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (1995) in which “one would [canonically] study together five literatures of different linguistic and/or provincial/national origins, assembled and perhaps even alloyed together in such measure and proportion as may be found appropriate from time to time and space to space.” (241). He does not argue for the abandonment of English literature believing that it “would be a negation of our history bordering on vandalism” but rather appropriate it to the native context by creating for it a milieu where it is not given a superior regard (241-42). He gives his five elements of “composite” canon as follows: English literature, literature in English from outside England, literature translated into English, literature of the local Indian language and classical literature in its original language (242-43).

The thrust of this study lies on the second element of the *panchadhatu*, i.e., literature in English from outside England which in this case is Indian Writing in English. Now, the position of English language in India and subsequently, Indian English literature have been ontologically challenged since India gained independence in 1947. But it goes without saying that English has deepened its roots in the Indian soil too strong to be eradicated. Politically in some corners it might still be seen as a language of the occupier but culturally it is no less Indian than any other vernacular language. Deliberating on the use of language as a mode of poetic expression K. Ayyappa Paniker states that the language used has an “intrinsic value” to the writer. He rejects the physical form of the language and argues that any writer can be rootless or “cosmopolitan” if there are no “regional features” in their writing. “To be Indian he (the writer) has to be rooted somewhere in India – geographically, historically, socially or psychologically” (Paniker 15). He rejects the idea that a language of foreign origin cannot capture the native essence. Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) argues for a similar point by saying that it does not matter where the writer comes from or which language he uses as long as where he writes about is sincere and worthwhile.

The development of political consciousness and the subsequent involvement in the social institutions which lend political connotations to any literature was a much later phenomenon in case of Indian English literature as compared to the rest of the world (Bhatnagar 3). M. K. Bhatnagar in *Modern Indian English Novel: A Critical Study of the Political Motif* (2003) states that the political consciousness primarily manifested itself as national consciousness in pre-independence times because of

the prolonged subjugation at the hands of British and continued to remain so for some time even after independence (4). However, with a shift in the socio-political scene wherein individual choices and decisions cannot be extrapolated from the institutions that influence and guide them the “socio-economic interests as well as the political consciousness has now assumed the character of the dominant emotion” (4). Carlo Coppola in his essay *Politics and the Novel In India: A Perspective* also suggests that the pre-independence novel was politically inclined in its assertion for freedom from the British rule (2). However, the post-independence literature dealt with a “perplexing reality”. There was a sentiment of distrust about the new government as the people believed that only the colour of rulers had changed, the rule essentially remained the same, i.e., exploitative. The political landscape also underwent an evolution, what had remained hidden under the rubric of national consciousness during British rule began developing cracks in the form of linguistic politics, caste exploitation and communalism. Writers, especially novelists, combined these political events with “the formal aspects of writing: plot structure, innovative narrative techniques, complexity of characterisation, a new *versimo* in dialogue, etc” creating a unique prognosticated combination of politics and aesthetics that was theoretically explored decades later (Coppola 4-5).

The representation of native experience in what was once an absolutely foreign language has provided Indian English literature with a transcultural dimension. Indian writers in English from the very onset have been aware of transculturalism of writing in the second language. Srinavasa Iyenger in the introductory chapter of his book *Indian Writing in English* (1973) recounts that for an Indian writing in English is “to be Indian in thought and feeling and emotion and experience, yet also to court the graces and submit to the discipline of English for expression” (13). The very act of carving space for Indian English Novel, or Indian English writing in general, in the global canon is political and consequently, a politicisation of aesthetics. “We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians.” These words by Raja Rao prefacing *Kanthapura* (1938) are not merely an appeal to Indian writers to aestheticise English language to Indian sensibilities, but also a direct political engagement with the Canon, an overt negotiation for space against the hegemonic universalism and timelessness of Western art.

Conclusion

Although Indian Writing in English has since its inception been regionally and nationally rooted, the debates surrounding the use of the language of erstwhile masters for the native representational and creative process, and the new developments in aesthetic theory make revision from the aesthetic paradigm into this area promising. The above discussion on aesthetic theory revolving around the ideas of philosophers, theorists and critics alike point us towards the reconstruction of a new conception of aesthetics, or towards New Aesthetics (as Adam Chmielewski would call it), that does not entirely negate the old debates surrounding aesthetics but brings some of the concepts along to a more inclusive aesthetic tradition. This new

tradition of aesthetics does not eliminate cognition in its aesthetic approach and does not produce an aesthetic judgement but rather an *aesthetic engagement*.

The discussion incept by contending the 'disinterestedness' of aesthetics afforded to it by the concept of literary autonomy and by Kant's dominant philosophy that divorced cognition from the aesthetic judgement. The challenge is mobilised by using the ideas of Aukje van Rooden, Jacques Ranciere and Terry Eagleton who view that there is an underlying politics at the core of aesthetics the purpose of which is to create a non-dissenting 'sensory community' that upholds the status quo and is given a latent licence to generate their own self-governing principles that do not challenge the dominant order but merge with it. Rooden proposes a *relational paradigm* for understanding literature. This paradigm breathes new life into the concept of autonomy as something that is not aloof but is re-imagined on every new reading, i.e., she does not view autonomy as separate from time and context but as something that begets anew on every new participation.

The general ontological reimagination of aesthetics is furthered to postcolonial and political aesthetics by bringing in the ideas of Bill Ashcroft and Adam Chmielewski respectively. They both redefine aesthetics away from its traditional role of a pleasure giving judgement. Where Bill Ashcroft argues for a value based *aesthetic engagement* that originates from the transcultural contact zone, Chmielewski is in favour of understanding aesthetics from neo-positivist perspective that includes cognitive perception as part of aesthetic judgement. Their discussion coalesced with Berleant further downplay the malignant role of aesthetic disinterestedness. Berleant talks about aesthetic engagement independent of Ashcroft but together their discussion advances out of the exotic innocuousness of beauty to an invested tool for determining value and extracting knowledge.

Once the postcolonial and political nature of aesthetics is satisfactorily established the discussion is directed towards the Indian Writing in English. The old Indian aesthetic tradition of *rasa* and *dhvani* are highlighted and compared to the modern aesthetic theories to establish the cultural opulence that so often gets neglected as a consequence of colonial amnesia. However, a definite caution is advocated to not attempt a puritanical reconstruction under blinding nationalism that disavows the current socio-political scenario. The aesthetic paradigm in Indian context cannot be constituted chronologically because it did not occur as a voluntary movement in India like the Renaissance in the second half of the twentieth century but happened to come into being as a direct consequence to writing literature that is sincerely Indian in a language that has become Indian. The transculturalism of Indian Writing in English and the modern Indian experience cannot solely be understood using old aesthetic tools, but only by an equal marriage of aesthetic theories from East and the West can yield to us a paradigm fit for understanding current moods of Indian experience represented in Indian English Novel in particular and Indian Writing in English in general.

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Humanistic Approach of Greek Writers in Contemporary Medicine – A Perspective

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, modern medical science delivers efficacious health care that cannot be imagined before. But, amidst scientific and clinical developments, it forgets to consider the patient as a human being and overlooks the empathetic relationship between doctor and patient. The degradation of the patient from subject to an object of biomedical gaze poses a serious threat to medical ethics. To implement a patient-centred-approach, humanistic perspectives on healthcare are needed. As the discipline of humanities spreads its web beyond the traditional barrier, the rigid boundary between science and literature has become flexible and porous. The emergence of interdisciplinary humanities gives birth to an academic field like health humanities. To bridge the gap between humanities and medical science, this paper tries to apply a humanistic approach towards medicine for the treatment of patients and to do that, references have been taken from Greek writers.

Keywords: medical science, interdisciplinary humanities, Greek writers

Introduction

A medical student is introduced to medicine by means of a “detailed dissection of a dead body” whose name and personal stories seem irrelevant (Evans 188). This unnamed medical model makes the clinical examination an unemotional act where the body rather than the person becomes the centre of attention (Evans 188). Recent advances in medical science emphasise the curing aspect of the diseased body instead of caring for the whole person. The emergent tendency of “cure without care” (Pellegrino 9) and the objectification of the patient rekindle the notion of ethics in contemporary medicine. “[I]nterest in humanity” is a prerequisite of a healthcare professional because “the secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient” (Peabody 882). The humanistic approach to healthcare emphasises care over cure, which can be attained through a healthy doctor-patient relationship.

Medicine/health and the humanities have always been interconnected. It's as if they are fraternal twins, inseparable in their beginnings and then, over time, they drifted apart on a sea of scientific and technological progress, becoming estranged from one another. Today, feedback from patients, students, and a handful of artists, alternative healers, and physicians, among others, has rekindled an interest in reuniting the humanities, health, and health care. (Mennin et al. 56)

In the formal education system, the division between the arts and the science is so strong that medical students “have lost touch with the methods and purposes of the arts and humanities” (Bleakley, *Routledge Handbook* 21). Literally, “aesthetics”

means “‘sense impression’ or using the senses,” and from that perception, biomedical science is also “‘intrinsically aesthetic’” because an “‘insensible medicine (one that sets out to dull or anaesthetise) seems ridiculous” (Bleakley, *Routledge Handbook* 21). The rigid boundary between science and literature has become flexible and porous with the emergence of interdisciplinary humanities, which gives birth to an academic field like health humanities.

Arthur W. Frank mentions that humanities “‘offer equipment for surviving illness’” (Frank, “Being” 18). In scientifically and technologically developed contemporary society, “[h]umanistic research can” also “‘produce knowledge as beneficial and urgently needed as anything that comes out of a science lab’” (Davidson and Goldberg 46). The emergence of interdisciplinarity indicates that people need “‘better interpretive tools’” to face the “‘difficult and ongoing problems’” of the modern world (Davidson and Goldberg 49). Humanistic perspectives focus on the human condition, human suffering and healing and place the experiences and emotions of the patients at the central point. It looks at patients as the complete structure of body, mind, and soul rather than reducing them to “‘diseases and bodies’” only (Cole et al. 8). Giving reference to Plato, while describing a holistic approach to medicine, David Heyd mentions, “‘Treating human beings as if they were just bodies is irrational. Somatic medicine must accordingly give way to a more holistic approach’” (Heyd 378). Humanistic attitude towards medicine conveys that healthcare professionals “‘are not merely plumbers of the body; they are, or should be, caring and compassionate witnesses to the experiences of patients and their significant others and to their own experiences’” (Cole et al. 14).

Objectives

The first objective of this study is to explore the relevance of Greek writers in contemporary medicine. Secondly, this paper tries to bring a humanistic touch to the medical field so that sick people feel less stressed during their illness and comfortable in the hospital atmosphere. The third objective is to establish a bridge between medical science and humanities through the emerging field of health humanities:

After all, we all depend on multiple resources. We need medical ones, of course, but not everything in our society that brings us health and wellbeing needs to be directed by medics. Not everything needs a medical model or a medical explanation. Whether you are a doctor, a nurse, an occupational therapist, a patient, a friend or family carer, the arts and humanities are available to you. (Crawford and Brown 403)

Hippocratic Oath

When discussing the medical field, the first thing that comes to everyone's mind is the Hippocratic Oath. The Hippocratic Oath, the most famous Greek medical text, is used widely in the medical field, and “[i]t requires a new physician to swear upon a number of healing gods that he will uphold a number of professional ethical standards” (“Greek Medicine”). At its beginning, names of four Greek gods have

been mentioned. Apollo is considered the god of “healing,” Asclepius, the god of “medicine and healing,” Hygeia, the goddess of “physical and mental health,” and Panacea, the goddess of “universal healing, particularly through the power of herbs” (Daly 12, 17, 69, 99). The main focus of the Hippocratic practice of medicine is “the importance of understanding the patient's health, independence of mind, and the need for harmony between the individual, social and natural environment” (Kleisiaris et al.). Hippocrates, the “Father of Medicine,” was “the famous Greek physician of the fifth century BC” (Tsiompanou and Marketos 288). The book *Corpus Hippocraticum* consists of almost 60 medical treatises written by him and his students (Tsiompanou and Marketos 289). According to Hippocrates, a physician must help reduce the suffering of the people and communicate the cause of the disease to the people in an easily understandable way. Ordinary people face difficulty in realising medical terms, but it would be easy if someone described these terms for them in an easy manner (Hippocrates 77). Hippocrates has focused more on medical observations of ill people: “[H]abits, lifestyle, food intake and their symptoms and signs of disease” of sick people should be taken into account (Tsiompanou and Marketos 290). Hippocrates placed the ill person at the centre of the treatment process, unlike modern medicine, which gives more importance to disease than to the person affected by it.

Greek Literary Works and Health

Reference to Hippocrates has also been found in other Greek literary texts. The relation between literary works and medicine is not a modern phenomenon, but it exists since the ancient period. Plato and Aristotle's works are the examples supporting the statement in the earlier sentence.

Plato

In Book I of *Republic*, Plato highlights the doctor's role as a healer of the sick, not a moneymaker and says that a doctor should always consider “what is advantageous for his patient,” not “what is advantageous for himself” (Plato, *Republic* 18, 20). In *Phaedrus*, which is considered “the most important of the pre-hellenistic testimonies about Hippocrates” (Tsekourakis 164), Plato gives a hint about Hippocrates' treatment method:

Socrates: Well, do you think one could understand the nature of soul satisfactorily without knowledge of the nature of the whole?

Phaedrus: If Hippocrates the Asclepiad is right, one can't understand the body properly either without going about it in this way. (Plato, *Phaedrus* 62)

The meaning of the “nature of the whole” is disputed. G. E. R. Lloyd has given four interpretations. It may indicate first, “the whole of nature or the universe;” second, “the whole of the body;” third, “the whole of the body-soul complex;” and finally, “the whole of whatever subject happens to be under discussion” (Lloyd 172). However, it can be assumed that the universe is not referred to as a model of the body since Hippocrates “was a bit of a reductionist” (Plato, *Phaedrus* 102). By

mentioning Hippocrates, Plato may want to suggest that one part of a body cannot be understood without taking the whole body into account. Similarly, the working of the soul cannot be comprehended “unless we understand the soul as a whole” (Plato, *Phaedrus* 102). Lloyd implies that if the “whole” refers to the whole human body, Plato may want to convey the message that a doctor should “study the whole patient” and then proceed to further treatment process after carefully examining the symptoms of the patient (Lloyd 173). Plato may want to attribute a “holistic viewpoint” to the treatment method of Hippocrates, which means a doctor cannot process treatment for a disease associated with a particular part of the body without curing the whole body (Tsekourakis 166). A doctor “must always cure the parts and members of the body in perspective to the whole body” (Tsekourakis 166). In his last and longest dialogue, *The Laws*, Plato provides two categories of doctors, “slave” and “free” (Plato, *Laws* 178). “Slave” doctors usually treated slaves and did not pay any heed to the patients' voices. He prescribed as per his experience “as if he had precise knowledge, and with the self-confidence of a dictator” (Plato, *Laws* 181-182). Medicine that had been provided to the slaves was “concerned only with symptoms” and “aimed at alleviating these rather than restoring health” (Heyd 382). Whereas a “free” doctor gave treatment to the free people, and his method involved the construction of “an empirical case-history by consulting the invalid and his friends” (Plato, *Laws* 182). This way, he learnt from the sick people and gave “the individual patient all the instruction” he could have provided (Plato, *Laws* 182). This process gives birth to a “continued co-operation” between a doctor and a patient (Plato, *Laws* 182).

Aristotle

Aristotle's *Poetics*, famous for the discussion of tragedy, may indicate the therapeutic benefit of tragedy in the last line of the definition by referring to *catharsis*. The real meaning of *catharsis* is disputed. Patricia Novillo-Corvalán also gives a hint at the therapeutic effect of tragedy: “At the same time, the medicinal aspect of tragedy is, of course, integrally linked to the elusive Aristotelian notion of 'catharsis' that lies at the heart of the theatrical experience through the purification, or purgation, of the emotions” (Novillo-Corvalán 134). The term *catharsis* came from the Greek *katharsis*, meaning bodily purgation of impurity (“Catharsis”). Aristotle wanted to convey the message that “many tragic representations of suffering and defeat” did not leave the audience feeling depressed but relieved (Abrams and Harpham 408). Though tragedy cannot remove all the impurities, because “it is inhuman not to experience any pity at all,” there can be a therapeutic benefit in that “it provides an effective remedy for a bad condition of the soul” (Cavarnos 57). Since the soul and the body are interrelated, it must exercise a good influence on the body through the soul, too. A holistic medical treatment perspective has been highlighted in these literary works with a patient-centred attitude. There is a lack of these two techniques in contemporary medicine, and to mitigate this scarcity, health humanities is required.

Emerging Field of Health Humanities

World Health Organization mentions, “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World 1). The word “health” comes from the Old English “hælp,” meaning wholeness. So, a sense of wholeness is essential for a person to feel healthy. The main concern of health humanities is “privileging of 'health'” (Bleakley, *Medical Humanities* 44), and it has been considered as an “intellectual and emotional balm” not only over the injuries that are caused by disease but also over the “dehumanising wounds” caused by over scientific and mechanistic healthcare system (Kumagai and Naidu 83). Health humanities is “a way to get back in touch with our emotional selves, our humanity, to rekindle our sense of purpose and idealism in serving others” (Kumagai and Naidu 83). It gives importance to patients' voices by placing them at the centre of the treatment process (Levy 107) and allowing them to contribute to their recovery. It aims to include “viewpoints and contributions” not only from within medicine but also beyond medicine and “value the experiences and resources of the public” (Crawford and Brown 402). Instead of embracing a medicalised definition, health humanities want to adopt “a decentralised, democratic approach” by undermining the science-arts hierarchy that can create a hindrance in the application of “the arts and humanities for health and wellbeing” (Crawford and Brown 402).

Modern medicine has undergone a major shift away from the “classical perception of medicine as an art, based on patients' stories of their illnesses, to medicine as a science, based on the doctor's clinical observations and supported by the rapid developments in scientific procedures” (Crawford et al. 18). To implement a patient-centred-approach and create a “humanitarian healthcare,” patients' narratives should be unlocked (Crawford et al. 60). In their illness, patients need an attentive listener who will pay attention to them and “not to the computer screen” (Crawford et al. 70).

Importance of Narrative Medicine

Narratives help reveal oneself and connect human beings with each other. Regarding the importance of narrative, Rita Charon says, “narrative does things for us, perhaps things that cannot be done otherwise” (Charon 39-40). When a person becomes ill, s/he loses “'destination and map' that had previously guided the ill person's life” (Frank, *Wounded* 1). The story that an ill person narrates is not just about illness, but it is told through a body that is wounded (Frank, *Wounded* 2). If the wounded voices are ignored, they will never completely recover from illness. The medical chart of a patient becomes “a billing ticket or an electronic wasteland of abbreviations and answers to yes/no questions” (Charon 191). Narrative-based medicine encourages “a felt response to persons rather than simply a clinical problem-solving mentality” (Bleakley, *Medical Humanities* 17). This act of narrative helps the narrator and the listener come closer and can turn a hospital into a “medical home” (Clark et al. 146). Charon mentions that disease recognition and treatment cannot proceed without

recognising the connections among body, mind and self, and narrative listening does that job (Charon 67).

Conclusion

Technological advancement, bureaucracy, corporate influences and evidence-based approaches make medicine a hard science and business, and it overlooks the doctor-patient relationship. Medical ethics, concerned with the “obligations of the doctors and the hospital to the patient,” is based on a healthy doctor-patient relationship which comes from “mutual trust and respect between two parties” (Markose et al. 1, 3). From a humanistic perspective, healthcare should emphasise on patient-as-a-subject-centred approach rather than viewing patients as malfunctioning organs which need servicing. In this method, the patient is considered as a human being rather than being reduced to a bed or cabin number only. Patients' voices have been lost amidst the over-scientific healthcare system, and narrative medicine tries to bring back their voices and allow them to contribute to their own recovery process (Levy 107) Communication is an indispensable part of the doctor-patient-relationship because the knowledge which is acquired through the communication is far more effective than the knowledge gathered from experiment. This communication leads to more ethical care and recognises the patient as the subject. Frank mentions that the narrative account of a patient is not only about illness, but it should be considered as an expression of a wounded body (Frank, *Wounded* 2). Treating the body and caring for the mind and emotions should go hand in hand. Charon also underlines the holistic approach of medical treatment by saying that “narrative listening,” which consists of the connections among “body, mind, and self,” can be beneficial because treating only one part and leaving the rest will not cure a patient completely (Charon 67).

The development of the modern medical science has not been denied. However, amidst scientific experiments, modern medical technology and medical jargon, the patient as a human being is lost. Giving reference to relevant Greek texts and focusing on the patient-centred-treatment and compassionate doctor-patient relationship, this article tries to bring back the lost humane touch to contemporary medicine. Modern medicine should rest on experimentation as well as communication because scientific experiments alone cannot provide effective healthcare. Revisiting the classical writers and the joint power of humanities and medicine are necessary to bring back the humanitarian side of medicine and to establish it as modest and empathetic towards patients' sufferings. This can be possible with the emerging field of health humanities, the fundamental principles of which are “mutuality, equality and parity of contribution” (Crawford and Brown 402).

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Tracing the Lines toward a Dalit Theory: Its Scope and Prospects

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Abstract

Due to their lack of diversity and inclusivity, Indian social theory and its theorizing of social reality are seen as lacking. Experiences tend to draw boundaries between various notions of self and community. Attempts have been undertaken in the field of Indian social sciences to group various experiences into a small number of universal categories. But these attempts lack inclusivity as they are lopsided with the biased discourses of the dominant communities and cultures. Thus, the social science practices in India are far from being egalitarian. The upper caste scholars dominate the social sciences, bringing their biases to the discipline and excluding the social scientists from the lower castes. Admittedly, Dalit literature is the articulation of Dalit people's angst and cry for spaces in mainstream culture. From the nineties onward, a transition occurred in the Dalit assertions: the writers of the Dalit communities placed themselves at the centre of what was being written about their communities. Life and lived experiences became a key to theorizing Dalit literature. My paper will interrogate the relationship between experience and theory, addressing Dalit literature and Dalit aesthetics. This paper will also present the problematic aspects of theorizing Dalit literature.

Keywords: Theorizing, Dalit literature, experience, theory

Introduction

In the domain of the social sciences, theory denotes a systematic framework of ideas or principles used to conceptualize social phenomena. It provides a means to accumulate and explain data, helping researchers in the process of their analysis and in building hypotheses. Theorizing encompasses the process of applying data to understand various phenomena in human societies and cultures. Again, theorizing comprises critical thinking and empirical research, as well as discourse within the academic circle to aid understanding in the field. "To theorize" implies what one does to generate a theory. Theorizing is chiefly a process, whereas theory is its result. It is obvious that one fulfils what the other lacks, the two being complementary to each other. There are mainly two obstacles to creative theorizing: one is ineffective dealing with data in the process of theorizing, and the other involves over-dependency on existing theory (Swedberg 3). In Indian social science practices, theories are not adequate, and the researchers' contribution to the existing stock of knowledge in social science is scanty. The scenario of Indian social science practice is that the act of theorizing by the researchers is being stunned, and the existing social science theories are biased and unequalitarian. In the last six decades, social science practice in the Indian academic context has spawned a cultural hierarchy, splitting it into those academics who are engaged in empirical social science and those privileged few who consider themselves as distinguished erudites far superior to the former. The latter are privileged upper-castes and hold that the experience or the

empirical grounds on which an enormous bulk of literature like Dalit literature is written are subservient to theory. Is experience subordinate to theory? Or does theory precede experience? Is it possible to theorize Dalit literature? In view of the inequalitarian nature of Indian social science theory, can we theorize Dalit literature from the perspectives of experience and revolt for cultural space? This paper will raise all these debatable issues. Moreover, as Richard Swedberg argues, the aversion to theorizing and the overemphasis on theory tend to miss the scope of discovery. Therefore, this paper, with an ambition for original discoveries, will attempt to theorize Dalit literature with the rudiments of theorizing from historical and sociological context of Dalit literature.

Dalit literature and Dalit Representation:

The word 'Dalit' owes its origin to the Sanskrit word 'Dal' which means 'broken', 'split open', 'crushed' or 'downtrodden'. It was Mahatma Phule in Maharashtra who first used the word 'Dalit' to denote the downtrodden people treated as 'untouchables' for ages in caste-ridden Indian society. In a broad sense, 'Dalit' stands for those who have been systematically and institutionally subjugated, being deprived of their social, political, economic, and cultural rights in their quotidian lives. More recently, however, 'Dalit' includes those termed as Scheduled Castes in administrative parlance.

The movements of the downtrodden communities, specifically the Dalits, started in India in 1958 by thinkers like Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. The militancy of the social movements very soon secured a place in Dalit literature, the writings of and about the Dalits. The array of writings that are recognized today as "Dalit literature" began a few decades ago in Maharashtra. It was Baburao Bagul who pioneered Dalit literature in Maharashtra. *Jevha Mi Jat Chorali*, a collection of Bagul's short stories, realistically depicted a cruel society where Dalits are inhumanly treated, thus setting a motion in the journey of Dalit literature. Gradually, Dalit literature was strengthened by the contributions of a number of other writers like Daya Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal (founder of Dalit Panther), and N.R. Shende. Though Dalit literature started in the form of a 'movement' in the late 1960s it was Annabhau Sathé (1920–1968) who provided this 'movement' with an initial impetus. Since the last few decades, Dalit writers across different regions of India have been substantially contributing to the formation of Dalit resistance by waging a rebellion against the overbearing religion and tradition as well as the hypocrisy of 'untouchability'. They have built a new aesthetic to raise the voice of subjugation and exploitation rooted in their angst and grief. Dalit literature thus delineates 'a lofty image of grief—a major rudiment of the Dalit aesthetic. It, in the words of Limbale, “artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule endured by Dalits” (Limbale 30).

Role of Experience and the Politics of Dalit Representation

Dalit representation in Indian literature is a debatable issue yet unresolved in the

critical and theoretical realm. To understand the problem, the idea of representation and the politics behind it need to be addressed first. Stuart Hall speaks of three fundamental approaches of representation: intentional, reflective and constructionist (Ahmed 1). In the intentional approach, the meaning of representation involves the user's intention; in the reflective approach, there lies an ontological distance between a thing and its representation as it works like a mirror; and the constructionist approach, quite different from the former two, holds that meaning is arbitrarily generated through representation itself. Therefore, representation which itself is not free from being problematic, raises some fundamental questions: who is representing? What or whom is being represented? What are the approaches of representation?

Taking into account a constructionist approach, if we address Dalit literature and the representational problem of Dalitness in it, then we see a tension between two contrary opinions. One section of critics and Dalit writers argue that Dalit life and Dalit consciousness are accurately portrayed by the writers who are Dalits by birth and that Dalit literature by the Dalits and the writings about the Dalits by the non-Dalit writers should be treated as separate entities. Other section cites some non-Dalit Indian writers who spawned a world-wide reputation and won awards too by depicting Dalit scenarios with consummate artistic skill and realism. Many Dalit critics have strongly opposed the way Dalit life is represented in the works of non-Dalit writers like Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand. The historical realism aimed to be represented in Dalit literature is different from the one found in the fictions of Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand and Yashpal. Their narrative objectivity was "shadowed by the political concerns and imperatives of contemporary history" (Gajarawala 577). Their realism owes to the historical moment, the people trapped within it, and therefore historicist reading practices. "Dalit literature is a movement that claims to represent in its protagonists a collectivity while insisting on their own radical singularity, a movement that derives legitimacy from historical specificity while asserting a post-historical consciousness" (Gajarawala 578). In the 1967 seminar by Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad, many delegates asserted that it is impossible for the non-Dalits to articulate caste-specific experiences, and hence whatever they write about the Dalits would be imaginary. So only the Dalits who have direct experience from their birth and from their suffering can authentically express Dalit consciousness, and they alone have the claim to be called the authors of Dalit literature (Haldar 162).

The obstinate claim made by the Savarna critics is that all literatures must be studied and assessed in the light of a universal standard or a framework of universal ideals. They hold the view that any scholar, writer or critic, irrespective of their caste, can tap into the experience of 'other', here the Dalits, and can portray their lives and discourse on it. They emphasise that theory is a universal academic phenomenon and has no relation with experience. This view dismisses the role of experience in the process of building theory. But Dalit writers counter this view by arguing that a non-Dalit writer cannot write Dalit literature as Dalit literature is essentially an expression of Dalit Chetna (Dalit consciousness).

Theoretical representation of Dalit issues in Indian social science calls forth the intricate relation between experience and theory. Gopal Guru in *The Cracked Mirror* emphatically postulates how Indian social science lacks an egalitarian theory as its practice is beset by a cultural hierarchy: on the one hand, there are those academicians whose social science practice is 'empirical' in nature, and on the other, there are few privileged theorists who claim themselves as bestowed with distinguished reflective capacity and intellectually higher than the former (9). Guru states, "Social science discourse in India is being closely disciplined by self-appointed juries who sit in the apex court and decide what is the correct practice according to the canons" (13). Thus, the mainstream social science and its practice in India lack a legitimate egalitarian principle, subverting the confidence and self-esteem of the Dalits.

Dalits, however, need to do theory for a few reasons. First of all, theory, to them, is a social necessity to deal with the 'reverse orientalism' which looks upon the Dalits as the lowly empirical self and the Savarnas as the higher theoretical self. Dalits— their language, gesture— often become a source of political and cultural satisfaction to the Savarnas who seek to 'museumize' the former as objects of amusement. Theory, therefore, has to be a social necessity for Dalits "in order to become the subject of their own thinking rather than becoming the object of somebody else's thinking" (Guru and Sarukkai 25). Secondly, doing theory requires a lot of patience, discipline and endurance to get recognition. Therefore, Dalits need to avoid seeking temporal gains that could retard a person from sticking to long and strenuous intellectual projects. Dalits often make room for non-Dalit scholars and academicians to represent the Dalit emotions of atrocities on the intellectual platforms; such representations remain confined within the intellectual discourses only without reaching the social sphere. Theory in such an intellectual atmosphere needs a movement from the realm of emotion to that of rationality. Dalits often attempt to compensate for theoretical insufficiency with their brilliant poetry. Poetry, admittedly, helps the Dalits convey their issues through metaphors and aesthetics, but not through ideas. Finally, Dalits have to do theory out of inner necessity. Provided they have the sense of freedom, they have to feel a moral compulsion to understand and reflect on their experience. They may represent their experience on higher intellectual platforms to attain the theoretical heights of their reflections, but they have to maintain a moral choice to return to the Dalit experience so that their reflections are enriched with the depth of ever-fresh reality.

Dalit experience—the lived experience of the Dalits—is seen at the centre of Dalit aesthetics, and the Dalits alone have the right to theorize this experience. Dalit representation through either metaphors or empirical research is not a compulsion for the Dalits. Instead, there are sufficient reasons for their choice of empirical research. The lived experiences of the Dalits are rich enough and authentic on their own, so they can represent their causes without taking recourse to theoretical representation. Again, Dalits have direct access to a caste-ridden society where they face atrocities and injustices in their daily lives; they are exposed to a reality with a

comprehensive view of it, so they may feel that they do not need theoretical representation. This view may lead one to assume that the ontological position of the non-Dalits makes them incapable to accurately represent the Dalit issues. “Though Dalits do not generate any theory”, observes Gopal Guru, “their research can always contain some valuable theoretical insights and their experience alone can illuminate aspects of human relations” (Guru and Sarukkai 23).

Gopal Guru's stance that the lived experience of Dalits should be the basis of Dalit theory is enriched by Sundar Sarukkai's elaborate analysis of experience and lived experience. Sarukkai argues that lived experience is one over which the experiencer has no choice and, hence, no control. There lies an inseparable relation between one who experiences and the context of that experience. This unbreakable relation ushers in a situation where necessity is inevitable and choice is absent. The fundamental difference between experience and lived experience is that while the former can be replicated or simulated, the latter cannot occur to anyone by his or her conscious choice. Lived experience involves not the freedom of experience but the absence of freedom and choice in an experience. Thus, it can be argued that only Dalits can have Dalit experience.

The relation between experience and theory, however, is a problematic one. To theorize means to secure a position where one can say something about an experience. Only the owner of an experience has the right to say about it—to theorize it. But to theorize an experience—to assert it at the conceptual level—involves a shift from the particular to the universal. Dalits are the owners of their experiences, but they may not have a full view of the conceptual world that provides them with those experiences. To get an experience at the personal level and to theorize it at the universal level engender the problem of empirical versus theoretical, which remains unsolved.

Experience arises from what can be termed emotion, whereas theory involves reason; experience is context-based and local, whereas reason aims to establish these local specificities at the universal level. Guru, however, seems to claim that there is an ontological relation between experience and reason. It is the Dalit experience and its representation in their literature that constitute the Dalits' attempts to make their theory. But a mere reaction to lived experience is inadequate to do theory: reflection on experience is necessary to theorize. Guru proposes that: “Experience needs to be treated as the initial condition and theory as the essential condition for producing unified knowledge” (Guru & Sarukkai 123).

A question that is often debated is whether Dalit autobiographies can authentically portray Dalit experiences or not. An autobiography is a personal account rendered with emotional intensity. It cannot be denied that Dalit autobiographies have remarkable importance in representing Dalit causes. But autobiographies brought with them a concomitant problem: in autobiographies, there is always a possible danger that experience could be reified. But theory requires a careful accumulation of data to form a conceptual framework, going beyond the individual.

Prospective Attempts to Theorize Dalit Literature

Though there is an enormous corpus of Dalit literature already produced as of now, Dalit literature is yet to build its theory in the hegemonic Indian social science where Dalit writings are trivialised by the Savarna writers, critics and academicians who dismiss them as ugly, repetitive and biased as they do not adhere to the mainstream/Sanskrit aesthetics. Initially, Dalit literature deals with the Dalits' angst and protest, their dignity and identity, questioning the issues of politics, religion and male-dominated power structure. An attempt is made to show a reaction to Hindu religious images, icons and scriptures, and to replace them with alternatives. In 1956 Dr. Ambedkar did such attempt by publicly burning the *Manusmriti*, and later on embracing Buddhism.

The Dalit writings in the last few decades conspicuously deviated from the ethos of mainstream literature. In mainstream Hindi literature, for example, imagination, romanticization and idealization pervade the prose narratives, whereas the Hindi Dalit writers initiate an innovative kind of narrative, blurring the boundary between realism and fiction (Consolaro 27). Dialect and sociolect are held in high esteem, whereas the stylized syntax and the rhetoric of mainstream Hindi literature are abandoned. The hegemonic Hindu value systems and the supremacy of Hindu deities, images, icons etc. represented in literature are replaced by the Dalits' own deities, icons and counter-cultural value systems. The ideals of beauty and truth stemming from an abstract notion of archetypal value systems undergo a radical change, with an emphasis on the individual's lived experiences.

Translation has helped Dalit literature become more widely known, but this also presents a challenge because the Dalit sociolect, with its own registers and rhythms, is replicated in translation, losing its distinctiveness. Furthermore, rather than being a distinct Dalit discourse, the vernacular Dalit literature that is being translated into English tends to be a globalised Human Rights discourse. Another challenge to Dalit writings is that they are perceived as the result of the Dalits' counter-cultural battle for autonomy, which means that rather than being recognised as a legitimate literary genre, Dalit literature is seen as the source of social and political knowledge.

Dalit writings also suffer the neglect of the academics, critics and teachers. The question of whether Dalit texts contained in a syllabus should be considered a separate curriculum or not is still up for dispute. It is debatable whether Dalit studies will remain an autonomous field or become part of the current social science curriculum, for to treat it as an independent discipline is to aggravate its marginalised position, and not to do so is to invite the fear of losing its distinctiveness.

Conclusion

Theorizing in Indian social sciences is plagued by an excessive dependency on European theorizing systems on the one hand and an indifference to the intellectual traditions of India on the other hand. However, Theory about Indian traditions needs to be built on empirical and experiential ground. Though lived experience can be supported as a prerequisite to theorizing, the very notion of experience has a number

of other aspects. Experience, if not mediated by conceptual aspects, is not feasible, as to theorize 'experience' is highly suggested in Indian social science practices. In the discourse of theorizing Dalit literature, it can be argued that the lived experience of Dalits can be an authentic strategic apparatus for doing theory. The Dalit writers' efforts to build an alternative aesthetics and to theorize their lived experiences of injustice and oppression deserve appreciation. The attempt to theorize a phenomenon that revolves around the daily life of the Dalits but is cast aside from academic analysis is unique in itself. As of now, Dalit literature, however, has yet to travel a long way and hold a place in the canon. A tension yet unresolved is perceived in this regard: Dalit literature, on the one hand, aims to hold a place in the canon of mainstream literature by promoting an alternative aesthetics and on the other, it seeks to preserve a separate identity in the literary field with the same principles. The strategic apparatus of Dalit *Chetna* may be unique, but it is not enough to do a theory: Dalit literature produced as of now has been only an instrument of catharsis for the Dalits. The Dalit writers are yet to reconstruct the politics of marginality and difference. In the era of globalisation perhaps neo-capitalism will annihilate the caste hierarchy, and then new systems of oppression will emerge in the form of new internal colonization. Dalit literature, in that case, will have to reformulate or redo itself completely.

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When Chat GPT Is Asked to Write Poetry on ‘Death’ AI-Generated Poetry and Its Implications

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is quickly evolving. Chatbot GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) or Chat GPT is an AI language model developed to engage with its readers based on the questions it is asked. It works on patterns absorbed from the pre-existing data available online and forms multiple language structures. These responses, which are mostly informative and creative, provide explanations, propose solutions, and offer coherent conversations. If Chat GPT were tested on its skills for writing poetry on a particular theme, how would it perform? If ‘Death’ were the chosen topic for poetry, what recurring patterns would be found in its writing? What recurring images has it reclaimed, and from where? From the poetry of canonical writers like Emily Dickinson or Edgar Allen Poe, who have toyed with the idea of death, how do AI-generated poetry on death differ? Will readers appreciate them? This paper explores how poetry on death generated by ChatGPT is different from existing poetry on death and raises a larger question of whether an AI-generated text can be considered equal to an artwork of a poet.

Keywords: Poetry, Death, AI, Chat GPT, Metaphor, Creativity

“The inevitable effect of the advance of science would be to destroy the possibility of poetry”–*Keats*

Poetry is born from the receptacles of thought and feeling, which later involves fine-tuning of entangled emotions in a pattern or rhythm. So far. With the arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI) generated poetry, there is a rapid outburst of expressive information in the form of poetry. Can an AI write with passion, as a human, whose words are drawn from experiences of the everyday? What novel understandings of being human can it generate? Can its ‘mind’ that generates reasonable lines in rapid succession arouse emotion in the readers? While the academic world remains sceptical of the creative possibilities of chatbots, would a random reader who does not know of the source of the writing be appreciative of the same? This study analyses poetry generated by ChatGPT; the language model developed by OpenAI. It is an extended conversation of how poetry on a universal theme as death, written by an AI, is different from existing canonical poetry. Additionally, using quantitative analyses it studies if an AI-generated poem will be received by the public. This study raises critical questions on what can be considered creative work.

Science and the arts have had a symbiotic existence, yet their credibility was contested till late [The Two Cultures debate between C. P Snow and F.R. Leavis (1960) and the Science Wars (1990) to be remembered]. It led to the study of science as a cultural activity, where critics “should never dismiss the literary from the

scientific not the scientific from the literary”(Willis). This convergence of two hitherto disparate disciplines can be found specifically in surrealist poetry of the early 20th century which created a disjunction between “intentionality and writing, between words and coherent representational meaning” (Stockwell). It saw poetry evolve from rational to irrational and embrace automatism (a spontaneous expression of thoughts without conscious control). By letting go of the restrictions of deliberate writing, a surrealist work promoted stream-of-consciousness writing that enabled new images and new associations, so far uncommon, into poetry. French literary theorist Roland Barthes’ (1977) call for the death of the author popularized the need for the writer to be removed from the interpretation of the text. He argued that “every text is eternally written here and now” and to associate a text with its author was to give it a fixed meaning, a “final signified” which would be an oversimplification, a closing of the writing, that otherwise would kindle endless possibilities (Barthes 43). New Criticism of the mid-20th century coupled with the emphasis of language as sign (de Saussure and Baskin) and the intertextuality between texts (Kristeva; Clayton and Rothstein) had previously argued that the meaning of the text should be derived from the text itself and that all texts are interconnected. Hence the signified was not bound by the author’s discretion but could be reincarnated as what each one understood to be subject to his/her own experiences. Barthes’ proposition of identity diffusion is clear when he says

We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing. (142)

This stripping away of the conceiver of the text is regurgitated in the 21st century with the latest developments in AI where a text is born sans its human author. Automated Decision Making (ADM), a subfield of AI, encompasses sophisticated algorithms that utilize large language models to generate interactive data, enabling responses to external prompts and stimuli. Will integrating AI in creative environments challenge existing knowledge domains? Amidst language multifunctioning as text-to-speech translations or content generation, Open AI’s Chat GPT (Generative Pretrained Transformer) is adept in producing creative writing - well-organized essays, engaging stories, or artful poetry. An AI does not have emotions, experiences or creativity as a human poet, yet generates poetry based on word patterning. Chat GPT uses Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs), a type of neural network architecture that is used to detect patterns while creating texts, including poetry. ChatGPT also uses transformer architecture to learn the intricacies of language and create poetry. Therefore, taking input from the user, Chat GPT can capture coherent poetry.

It can be imagined that the way AI conceives a text is inspired by the human cognitive process. For example, metaphor has an innate connection to the brain.

Keith Holyoak analyses the regions of the brain where metaphor is born. The complex neural connections of the human brain process all cognitive and emotional data. Each activity that one is engaged in involves coordinated networking from multiple neural processing regions. Interestingly, there is a connected pattern of activity which explains why “neurons that fire together, wire together” This indicates that when one neuron fires, the other is also likely to fire (Holyoak 84). The more familiar or repeated the usage of the metaphor, the more the ease of sequential firing. Hence there is no single point where words evolve and combine to form metaphors, rather, it is a coordinated activity.

A single user-defined prompt to ChatGPT model or any allied language model can rapidly generate engaging poetry. For this paper, a sample of 30 AI-generated poems on the universal theme of death, each containing approximately 20-30 lines were compiled and analysed. They were generated with suitable prompts such as 1) ‘Write a poem on death’ 2) Repeated inputs in subject variation as ‘Write a poem of death and love’ ‘Write a poem on death and grief’ were used to generate original responses. 3) Image-specific inputs were given as ‘Write a poem on death with roses, playground, India, tiger’ 4) Contrasting elements were used as ‘Write a poem of death as God’ 5) Specific input such as ‘Write a limerick on death’ was also given. The pattern was repeated by rephrasing the prompt. The output was not edited in any way.

To understand this in detail, the first response to the prompt ‘rite a poem on death’ given to ChatGPT is added here. Its title has been given by this author.

A Poem on Death

In shadows' embrace, where silence resides,
A poignant tale unfolds, where life subsides.
Oh, Death, the eternal and mysterious guest,
whose touch unveils a realm, unmanifest.

Through tear-stained eyes, we glimpse your face,
an enigma shrouded in ethereal grace.
You beckon gently, with hands both kind and cold,
to guide departing souls, their stories untold.

In twilight's realm, where spirits find repose,
Eternity's curtain reveals what death bestows.
A journey beyond, to realms unknown,
where secrets reside, where truths are sown.

Though mourned with tears, in sorrow's embrace,
you gift release from anguish, pain's cruel chase.
A passage to solace, where weary hearts mend,
A realm where beginnings and endings blend.

This poem follows a traditional style of writing, with a consistent rhyme and meter. The tone is formal and optimistic. The poem treats death as a mysterious guest, who as in Emily Dickinson, awaits ebony attired. His attributes are described generously for he is an 'rbiter of fate' with hands that are 'old' yet 'ind' There is no violence here, instead, death is seen as a didactic presence that teaches resilience and reminds us to cherish life. Death releases one from pain, for pain is the villain, not death. The only regret is that people cross over before completing their stories. Here death cannot be blamed as he too is merely playing his part. The following figures of speech are employed here.

1. Imagery: The usage of vivid and descriptive language to create a mental image in the reader. "In shadows embrace"(creates a cryptic image of darkness, and obscurity)
"eternity's curtain"(the dramatic moment where the curtain of eternity is drawn back to reveal the afterlife)

	Prompt	Choice of words	D o m i n a n t	Tone
1	On death	Shadow, twilight, realm, whisper,	Death' poignant touch is a path we all must own.	Optimistic
2	Humorous poem on death	Realm, jokes, laughter, prankster, embrace, peace, destination, relief	Death, that cosmic prankster in the wings But hey, at least in death,	J o v i a l , Optimistic
3	On death and hope	Shadow, embrace, whisper, sigh,	Death is but a portal to an unknown space	Optimistic
4	On death	Realm, shadow,	Death' a partner in this	Optimistic
5	Parody on death	Shadow, mask, phantom, beckon,	A thief of joy, a heartless, callous hand, Death, the	Optimistic
6	Roses, India,	E m b r a c e , p l a y g r o u n d ,	In India's playground, where childhood's joys	Serious

A brief exploration of Chat GPT poetry on death will reveal that it is structured on universally accepted poetic conventions, following consistent rules of rhyme, meter, and line breaks. It does not carry a title. Words like 'shadow' or 'embrace' are used repeatedly, irrespective of any input given on the topic of death. The tone of

poetry is consistently optimistic and, in a few examples, neutral. The narrator maintains an objective third-person point of view which gives a detached, uninvolved rendering, falling short of establishing an emotional alliance with the reader. The poem remains as a well-wrought stand-alone text, complete and self-contained, yet lacking in emotional depth upon closer reading. There are no specific characters unless explicitly asked to generate. Neither is there a background, nor a historical context to the work that would connect the readers to the text. If the beholder so wishes, one sees in these, a prim exterior, rigid and formal, concealing emptiness within.

Cultural belief systems often find their way through metaphors in poetry. How has canonical poetry conceptualised these metaphors? From Aristotelian dualism (identifying a resemblance between the literal and the figurative) to poets in the Romantic tradition (drawing connections between disparate things), to Lakoff and Johnson (reflecting conceptual structures) metaphors have been more than simple artistic additions. Reading metaphor, death becomes the tenor (primary element) to countless vehicles (secondary element) with time. These conceptual metaphors are often so strong and widespread that they generate expressions that become the 'aturalised' way of understanding the world (Stockwell). Metaphors of death as a journey, the grim reaper, the setting sun, the closing curtain, the fading flower, and the final sleep have been used in poetry to capture the complexity of death.

Death is ingrained in every culture's understanding of the world they are in, a shared knowledge and a constant truth in a world of flux that has found an artistic expression, making it one of the most enduring and frequently explored themes in the poetry of all cultures. For example, poets of the 19th century regarded the subject of death as morbid at the same time fascinating. Dickinson's poetry or Poe's fiction emerged as a response to society's anxiety about death (triggered by a spate of diseases like cholera). New England's Protestantism in which Dickinson was brought up in saw preachers embrace a doctrine of consolation, where God was a loving parent, who prepared a home (maternal image) and there was no need for apprehension. A common interpretation was the metaphor of the bride (the church) and bridegroom (Christ), where it was guaranteed that the sinless, faithful bride (2 Corinthians 11.2) would be welcomed into heaven by the bridegroom. In 'ecause I Could not Stop for Death,' Dickinson personifies Death as a courteous bridegroom who "indly stopped" his carriage and accompanies her on a journey through the stages of her life, towards immortality.

By contrast, a brief glance at the poetry on death in the 20th century reveals a contrasting picture. The poetry of this period, underlined by the sociopolitical upheavals of the World Wars, saw the dissolution of trust in all meaning-making machines (God, country, words). Viktor E. Frankl once said, "if every age has its collective neurosis, it is an existential vacuum which is the mass neurosis of the present time" (Fairfield 64). Nihilism rejected the idea of conventional morality, dismissed the belief in the afterlife and viewed death as the end of conscious existence. To live in the present was important, rather than to desire death and an

imagined afterlife.

The consistent themes related to death seen in poetry are

Transience (fleeting time, ephemeral nature of life, inevitability of death)

The human condition (self-understanding, contemplation of mortality, the purpose of existence, vulnerability of man)

Loss and grief (expression of emotions),

Spiritual and metaphysical exploration (unknown, soul' journey, afterlife, being one with God)

Resilience (finding strength to carry on)

Cycle of life (nature' rhythm, memory)

The diverse range of emotions (anguish, regret, fear, awe, hope, celebration) displayed in discussions on death is noteworthy. Poems on death do not merely confine themselves to the tone of optimism found in AI poetry. Instead, they are elegiac (Whitman' *O Captain! My Captain!*), mystical (Donne' *Death, Be Not Proud*), sardonic (Ogden Nash' *A Tale of the Thirteenth Floor*), satirical (Allen Ginsberg' *Howl*), hopeful (William Cullen Bryant' *Thanatopsis*), and more. The layers of interpretation in the choice of images and metaphors make them distinct.

To know how the audience would respond to an AI-generated poem, a questionnaire was circulated among postgraduate students and teachers of English Literature. They were presented with three masked poems on death, out of which one was written by ChatGPT. The poems were, ChatGPT' On death, Keats's 'On Death' and Emily Dickinson' "Heard a Fly Buzz". A total of 180 respondents participated in the survey and 166 completed samples were used for the analysis. The objective of this study was 1) to see if the respondents could identify the AI-generated poem among the three 2) if they were to choose the best among the three, was there a possibility that ChatGPT-generated poetry could stand against canonical writers?

Results of the Survey

Author	Title	Number of respondents who chose the poem as the best of the three	Number of respondents who believed that this poem
Chat	P o e m o n	49	87
Keats	On Death	71	34
Emily Dickinson	I Heard a Fly Buzz	46	45

Findings

1. 87 of 166 respondents (52.4%) rightly identified Poem 1 as AI-generated. The Turing Test (proposed by Alan Turing in 1950) is designed to distinguish a machine' response from a human response or a machine' "rational human mindedness". Based solely on a masked text-based conversation, an evaluator is asked to engage with both a human and a machine and then determine which one is human and which one is a machine to see if the machine' reply possesses "rationality, consciousness, intentionality, caring, sensibility, self-consciousness, and free agency" (Hanna 35). If the evaluator fails to distinguish between the two, the machine passes the Turing test by its ability to generate natural language that a human is not able to distinguish from. Here, ChatGPT does not pass the Turing Test as the respondents correctly identify the AI text. As per the responses, the prominent reasons for identifying it were its mechanical structuring, deliberate attempt in constructing the poem, missing personalisation, random threading of images on death, a profusion of conventional ideas, and usage of universal images.

2. There was a significant number of people (29.5%) who liked AI-generated poems above the others.
3. Despite correctly assuming it to be an AI-generated poem, 14 respondents chose it above the others. Significant reasons for choosing it were its way of construction and interesting usage of language.

	Number of participants who chose the particular poem because they felt that the poem was better constructed
AI On Death	11
Keats On Death	10
Dickinson I Heard a Fly Buzz	6

4. Poetic creativity

	Number of participants who chose the particular poem because they felt that the theme of death was engaged with uniquely by the poet
AI On Death	17
Keats, On Death	33
Dickinson, I Heard a Fly Buzz	26

5. The role of emotion

	Number of participants who chose the particular poem because they felt the feeling of grief was clearer in it.
AI On Death	12
Keats, On Death	26
Dickinson, I Heard a Fly Buzz	8

Postmodern liberation of a text from its author's intentionality argues to locate the meaning of a text within itself and in the interpretations of its readers. Here, authorship was masked, and the readers were aware that the poem they were reading was on death. While Dickinson's unique treatment of death in her poem was more appreciated than ChatGPT's, the results show that it did not trigger enough emotion (presumably grief) in the reader. This raises a larger question: Do emotions play a crucial role in our preferences for art? If at a later age, sentience is added to AI, could the generated text be a creative work?

AI-generated poetry and human-created poetry differ in their treatment and execution. Each human poem resonates in part or whole the emotional turbulence its creator undergoes. This process of creativity, the birthing of a poem, where every word is thoughtfully sifted or crafted leads to the metamorphosis of words into poetry. Authorship as Craig and Kerr (2019) observe is a dialogic and communicative act that is inherently social, with the cultivation of selfhood and social relations being the very purpose of the practice (8). It is the craftsmanship that makes a poem a creative work. An AI assembles. A human creates.

Truth and pleasure coalesce in poetry. The multiplicity of layers of imagination, absent in AI-generated work, makes it incomparable to human-generated work. However, it is only a matter of time until AI develops consciousness. "As the state of the art continues to advance in AI and related areas... we are moving incrementally but surely into an age of digital authorship, in which digital works (i.e., software programs) will, relatively autonomously, produce other works that are indistinguishable from works of human authorship." (Craig and Karr 5).

Perhaps it is the apprehension of swift technological intrusion into creative spaces that caused the birthing of this paper. How can AI poetry not be validated? As mentioned earlier, a generative language model like Chat GPT makes poetry based on the specific inputs provided by the human user. Near future, if the human poet decides to use AI as an agent for his/her creative work, would the byproduct not be legitimized, given the human agent's claim of conscious choice in using the inputs? Craig and Karr using previous research cite how a court might treat AI-produced art as equivalent to human "work made for hire" (6). AI would be used as a narrative prosthesis and the collaborative product would be endorsed as copyrightable. As

such AI poetry does not commit copyright infringement as each of its outputs (even the images and the metaphors) are unique. This also begs the question of ethics in publishing to be addressed.

Extending Balkin, there is a fear of the possibility of a contextual substitution effect, where consumers can substitute art and switch to cheaper alternatives when prices increase (2). The jump from expensive artistic products (of human imagination) to quick opportunistic means of thrill (AI-generated art) does not seem far off. While the human brain may be compared to a computer, no human poet can compete with AI at the pace at which it produces its writing. If consumers settle for AI-generated art (be it fiction, poetry, or art) would it imply cultural erosion? If AI absorbs all uncollected knowledge of the past, exports consciousness into it, and circulates it into the future, no human poet would be able to compete with it, given the rate and the pace of commercial art generation. What if tomorrow the ontology of poetry itself changes?

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Nigerian Literature: A Study of Literary Tradition and Its Categorical Division into Generations

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Abstract

Nigerian Literature is the cornerstone of Africa, where Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and J. P. Clark became the leading founders of African Literature as canon literature. 20th-century African scholars presented a categorical division of Nigerian literature into generations. They projected the national experience through periodized Nigerian literature into four generations sharing socio-political qualities to represent the distinguished phase in literary growth. This paper deals with the timeline and literary leitmotif of each generation and the underlying difference between the generation's thematic concern and narrative techniques prevalent within the generation. The gradual transformation of themes through generation due to underlined exigencies will also be covered in this paper. It further discusses the specific works of each generation writers outlining the overall literary concern of that particular generation. The study will also reveal the individual writer's contribution to the evolution of literary creation of a particular generation.

Keywords: Nigerian Literature, first-generation, second-generation, third-generation, fourth-generation.

Introduction

African Literature was considered to be something that could not even exist in the literary canon, and often surprised others to get to know that Africa has 'that kind of stuff' called literature. (*Hope and Impediments* 2). The beginning of African Literature is considered retaliation or resistance against colonization that has downgraded the blacks. Scholars like Per Westberg also claimed African Literature as a product of colonialism, 'a political document' and 'handicraft more often than an art' (westberg 135), delve into the reconstruction of the present through an analytical examination of the colonized past. Later African literature became didactic and instructive in nature due to inherent exigencies to combat the political chaos in Africa. Fanon also considered African Literature as "a literature of combat, the sense it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation" (Fanon 155).

African Literary traditions are constantly changing due to underlying exigencies of society evident in various works of Nigerian Literature. This change is categorized in African Literature into "three stages" starting from "the age of anti-colonial struggle; the age of independence; and the age of neo-colonialism" (Hewett 76). African literature especially Nigerian literature historicizes the categories into generations sharing socio-political qualities to represent the distinguished phase in literary growth. The historicizing of the evolution of Nigerian literature into a generational paradigm was presented by 20th-century African scholars who find it appropriate to project the national experience through categorized generation

literature. Thus, Nigerian nationalism is disseminated in structured specific spatial-temporal outlines of a particular generation's literary creation sharing common beliefs, ideologies, and leitmotif. This paper briefly outlines the timeline and recurrent thematic concern of each generation writers with their specific works.

Discussion

Contemporary Nigerian critics divide the Nigerian literary canon into four generations. The underlining difference between the generations is the thematic concern and narrative techniques prevalent within the generation that are uniquely handled by every generation writers. The epochal boundaries between the generations are the gradual transformation of narratives that writers individually and collectively established through inherent literary motifs. Ogede in *Nigeria's Third Generation Literature (2023)* relates these generations with Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane's division of magnitude into three separate orders of shift and sensibility displacement occurring in the history of literature and art,

The literature of this country has gone through occasional “tremors of fashion that seem to come and go in rhythm with generations”; “the curves that run from first shock to peak activity”; “dying rumbles”; “derivative” imitativeness; “larger displacements”; “extended periods of style and sensibility”; “overwhelming dislocations”; and the “cataclysmic upheavals of the creative human spirit that seem to topple” established traditions, leaving “great areas of the past in ruins. (Ogede 6)

There has been a multitude of criticism of Nigerian literature's generational divide. Some scholars like Erritouni, contend that the generational criterion is not satisfying, “a divide based on generations could overshadow the existing bridges between the fathers of Nigerian literature” (Erritouni). Whereas Chris Dunton and Pius Adesanmi praised the Nigerian literary generational categorization, “the generational approach remains one of the cornerstones of literary criticism largely due to the possibilities it offers for a systematic understanding of literary trends and currents synchronically and diachronically” (Dunton 13). The generational divide does not mean that there are no overlapping themes and concerns among generations rather generation period does have relativity to other generations as well as there is no definite end to a particular era.

First-Generation Literature

The first-generation literature covers the period from the 1950's to 1970's approximately, pre- and post-independence. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara, and John Pepper Clark have the aim to counteract the colonial discourses that have stigmatized the Nigerian (African) people as 'primitive' and stereotyped and Africa as a black continent devoid of culture and tradition. It was a time when the underlined leitmotif was colonization and its effect on Nigerian people, and their traditional and cultural values resulting in an identity crisis. According to Gikandi, “Achebe can be said to have invented, or reinvented, the idea of African culture” (8),

and his major concern was to regain faith in native African culture and traditional values that had been eradicated by colonial missionaries. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) portrayed the tragic consequences of Christianity and Western missionaries on the natives of Igbo land where Okonkwo, the protagonist and guardian of Igbo culture sacrificed his life to save his culture and land which had fallen apart because of West assault. *No Longer at Ease* (1960) deals with the broken state of tradition and culture of Igbo land as the West holds the power of influence and moral police where protagonist Obi is unable to meet the communal responsibility that his Grandfather Okonkwo strived for, to preserve the native culture. Unlike his grandfather, he wants liberation from tradition and cultural values for which Okonkwo is driven to suicide to save it from Western missionaries. *Arrow of God* (1964) maps the struggle of the respected and powerful priest of God Ulu named Ezeulu who was torn apart between either to adopt the Western changes that colonizers brought or to remain firm to his duty to Igbo people and loyalty to his ancestor's tradition and culture. In short three of above mention novels categorized as the 'African Trilogy' depict the after-effects of colonization on Igbo land and its people. It is clear that "Achebe, through a complex system of narrative and linguistic forms, preserves Igbo speech which suggests the timelessness of orality amid the emergence of print, nation, and even empire" (Watts 74). Chinua Achebe's famously known work, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is identified as "the landmark foundation text of Nigerian First-Generation literature" (Ogede 7), offering a narrative perspective that "would prove influential, not to say path-breaking, a paradigm shift, for African literature subsequently" (Boehmer 141-142). He preserved the Igbo culture in his narrative giving a power and voice to indigenous culture that was lacking under the westernized notion and rule.

Beside Achebe, Wole Soyinka was next to be considered a leading writer of the first-generation who has written plays like *The Interpreters* (1965), *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), *A Dance of the Forest* (1960), *Madmen and Specialists* (1970), *Season of Anomy* (1973) and poems like 'Telephone Conversation', 'Abiku'. Soyinka explored the themes of religion, loss of faith, and the effect of colonization on identity and human ideologies. Along with Soyinka, J. P. Clark has also written plays like *Bekederemo's Song of a Goat* (1961) and *The Raft* (1964). Like Achebe, Soyinka and J. P. Clark had also depicted the cultural clash and loss of religious faith due to the colonial manipulative regime which led to the disintegration of native cultures and traditions. Amos Tutuola's most renowned works like *The Palm -Wine Drunkard* (1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) are embedded in Yoruba mythologies and religion with a constant struggle for identity with traditional themes. Besides these two works, he has also written *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955), *The Brave African Huntress* (1958), *The Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962), and *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* (1967).

Apart from introduction of plays and novels, first generation had a treasure of poems as well, *Bekederemo's Casualties* (1970) by J.P. Clark; *Lament of the Masks* (1964), *Limits* (1964), *Silences* (1962–65), and *Dance of the Painted Maidens* by

Christopher Okigbo; Poems *from Prison* (1969, published again in 1972 as *A Shuttle in the Crypt*) by Wole Soyinka. In short, it can be said that most of the first-generation writers with their literary creations in the form of plays, novels, or poems, portrayed the conflict between traditional and cultural values with modernity brought by the colonial regime, to which native cultures fell apart into broken pieces of deception and despair.

Second-Generation Literature

The second generation covers the period between the 1970's and late 1980's including writers like, Elechi Amadi whose non-fiction work *Sunset in Biafra* (1973) depicts the struggle of civilians and his experience as a soldier during the war. Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) had direct or indirect influence on the society and Nigerian Literature as well evident *Never Again* (1976) which is one of the famous works of Flora Nwapa and Chukwemeka Eke's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976) which depiction of the war atrocities on people which made them fragile with displaced identities. Civil war has affected the Nigerian literary scenario as one of the first-generation poets Christopher Okigbo sacrificed his life in war. *Survive the peace* (1976) by Cyprian Ekwensi deals with post-Biafran chaos faced by survivors of war with impending hunger, unemployment, and displaced self. Second-generation writers increasingly turned to the topic of political corruption and violence by demonstrating the anxiety of contemporary Nigeria amid the ongoing civil war and its predicaments.

Along with war narratives, Women's writing also grew in this period, women's voices started to emerge to write about the struggle and inequality they faced. Buchi Emecheta has written tremendously about women's experience and their struggle for identity, equality, and dignity in Africa. The most notable works include *The Joys of Motherhood* (1980) and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974). Besides these Emecheta has also written *The Slave Girl* (1977), *Kehinde* (1994), and *The Bride Price* (1976). She portrayed the culture of forced marriage of young girls without consent to gain huge amount of wealth from wealthy man as an exchange of them, as a bride price in *The Bride Price*. The novel also highlights the denial of women's education in the patriarchal society subjugating them to mere inferior entities. It won't be wrong to claim that Emecheta used her struggle as a source of her writings for women's independence and empowerment (Nadaswaran 146). *The Joys of Motherhood* (1980) depicted the dilemma of women after colonization as they are not befitted in the change traditional values influenced by colonial rule. Whereas *Kehinde* (1994) reflects women in transformed strong Igbo women owing their true self not just as, 'mother' or 'wife' but as a 'woman' in the true sense of having personal space and freedom. Buchi Emecheta has also written *Destination Biafra* (1982) from a feminist perspective where a woman joins the war on the side of Biafra. It depicts the war conflict, having a major impact on the overall social life of people. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) challenged the stereotype of traditional women portrayed by men in their work. The novel shows the protagonist who is empowered enough to

support and finance her family and has free will to make decisions as an independent individual rejecting the anti-feminist approach of African society.

Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa were considered to be the early prominent female writers who forwarded a legacy path for contemporary Nigerian women writers. Their works majorly cover the influence of civil war and conflicts, domestic violence, forced marriages, and sexual assault which debarred women's mental health and empowerment. This transformation is portrayed through the rejection of patriarchal rules and their ideologies of subjugation. Their portrayal of women's struggles in literary fiction created a space for contemporary writers of third-generation like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie to have a strong independent women character in their works.

Third-Generation Literature

It could be argued that the writers of the third generation – like Helon Habila, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ben Okri, Chris Abani, Atta Sefi, Okoye Ifeoma, Toyin Gabriel-Adewale, Tade Ipadeola, Helen Oyeyemi and Amatoritsero Ede – carry the burden of past generation literature where amalgamation of old and new took a flight of modified literature. Whereas writers of first-generation were in a sense inventing themselves and the struggle for their identity. Those who came under the category of third generation had received an idea of the duties of the Nigerian writer and the pressure to be an African writer in the modern world as for them, the parameters were already set to follow. The genre of Third-generation writers “emerged in the 1980s, marking a substantial shift in literary explorations of social and political life in Africa” (Ogede 1). According to Ogede, third-generation literature is a response to the crisis of existence in this particular age making the writers to be 'realist'. Third-generation writer, Habila, speaking in *Poets & Writers* magazine, set out to differentiate his work from that of Achebe and even of Ben Okri as his work doesn't follow the tradition that favoured oral histories. Instead, his work depicts 'the reality that is happening now.' As per Habila, third-generation writers are 'realists', as their narratives depict real-life issues like migration, environmental crisis, corruption, and socio-political decay. Writers like Helon Habila, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Tejo Cole, and Chris Abani, “explore the possibilities of transnational settings and the interpenetration of the global and the national” (Dalley).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who famously wrote *Americanah* (2013) is known as the daughter of Chinua Achebe because of her narrative style emphasizing the true picture of Africa disrupting the single story of Africa presented by colonial narratives so far. Achebe has already emphasized the need for African narratives claiming the need for African novel to be about Africa, to destroy the single story presented by those who had powers. Adichie in her 2009 TED Talks, states that single story not only create stereotypes but also make the single story the only story where that single story becomes the mere reality disrupting the true one. Adichie novels are embedded in multiple perspectives as she refrained from confining her novels to a single story. In the well-known works like *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)

and *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Adichie represented the conflict between traditional and contemporary modern cultures. She has also written *Things Around Your Neck* (2009), a collection of twelve stories which explored the complexities of Nigerian people and diaspora covering the themes of identity, gender and the experience of Nigerian immigrants.

Helon Habila, depicts the corruption, environmental crisis, and socio-political realities of Nigeria. According to him, literature is a commitment to benefit people not just to amuse them, his works are a blend of literature and politics as stated, “Habila's writing lies in his literal use of toponymy, in order to chart a poetics and politics of confluence” (Courtois 57). Habila famous works includes *Travellers* (2019), *Oil on Water* (2010), *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), and *Measuring Time* (2007). Habila has portrayed the multi-ethnicity and fragmentation inherent in the Nigeria covering the story of different parts of country.

Even Ben Okri who is famous for *The Famished Road* (1993) has the same narrative style in portraying the realities with a blend of literary creation. He has also written *Infinite Riches* (1999), *Songs of Enchantment* (1994), *Astonishing the Gods* (1996), to portray the corruption and violence of postcolonial Africa. His works provide a voice to powerless people during ongoing conflict between foreign and indigenous cultures. The major concern in portraying the history of Nigeria with modern conflicts and struggles is the hallmark to differentiate third-generation writers from other-generation writers.

Third Generation or Beyond: Fourth-Generation Literature

After third-generation writers, a trend emerges to revisit the indigenous culture and tradition similar to the theme of first-generation writers, having a modern twist of the globalized world. Contemporary Nigerian writers have torched their literary creations from their pioneers to create a new literary canon based on the autochthonous self. Over the past recent years, there have been attempts to foreground the culture, religion, and tradition as realities of the modern world, not just superstitions.

Some scholars categorized the later third-generation Nigerian writers as fourth-generation writers as they have started to resource their literary creation through cultural and traditional customs, unlike their predecessor writers who are realists. Contemporary African literature, instead of a linear progression in literary canon, gives something resembling a circle as they are going back to their roots emphasizing their cultural values and beliefs in their works, following the footprint of the first-generation writers. □ Writers are returning to their roots in a sense to rewrite the past, both literary and culturally with newer perspectives and techniques to showcase the cultural heritage of the precolonial era. They are revisiting their past culture to comment on the present, thus bridging their cultural and traditional values with the contemporary world as “the present is perpetually shot through with the ubiquity of the past” (Ogede 6). The revisiting of recent writers to their roots with complete indulgence in Igbo ontology excluding society supersede the cultural

narrative of the first-generation writers they are following.

Chigozie Obioma, Akwaeke Emezi, and Eloghosa Osunde are regenerating Igbo Cosmology and its cultural practices by blending oral tradition and elements of modern society. Contemporary African fiction seems incomplete without their oral tradition, as it is said, “to isolate the literature wholly from its cultural milieu, would rob the literature of its vitality” (Iyasere 108- 109) and “has been profoundly influenced by orality” (Gunner 69). African orality in the new millennium is not the residual of the past or any nostalgic source but it has become an interactive medium to comment on the present globalized scenario through the past cultural and tradition.

Chigozie Obioma, in his 2015 Booker-shortlisted novel *The Fishermen*, explores prophecy and its material consequences. Akwaeke Emezi's debut, *Freshwater* (2018), depicted from the perspective of multiple Ogbanje (spirit children) dwelling in a single host body who is not able to figure out her sexual orientation in the Igbo culture and invites the reader to think critically about the spirited body. Similarly, to *Freshwater*, the main protagonist of Obioma's second Booker-nominated novel, *An Orchestra of Minorities* (2019), is guided by a spirit being or Chi.

Eloghosa Osunde has written *Vagabonds* (2022) where the story of patriarchy, corruption, and LGBTQ life in Nigeria is presented to the readers with a spirit guide named Tatafo. Writers are portraying Igbo spirits and myths to raise the contemporary issues like environmental crisis, visual arts, and LGBTs in Africa that hitherto not being picturized through cultural lenses.

Fourth-generation writers are trying to preserve pre-colonial culture as they believe that the African novel is incomplete without the African culture and tradition. Their literary techniques resemble with first-generation writers to the extent that Chigozie Obioma is known as the heir of Chinua Achebe carrying forward the legacy. The writers of the fourth-generation are following the legacy of first-generation writers with a newer perspective presenting old wine in new bottle.

Conclusion

The Nigerian literature generation highlights the literary evolution of Nigerian literature over a period of time through a socio-political backdrop influencing literary creation and the writers of that particular era. The generational divide somehow systemizes the inherent particularity of each generation and its writers giving an insight into literary concern and techniques that made each generation unique in its way of dealing with narratives. The division of Nigerian literature into four generations captures the growth and evolution of Nigerian literature as a strong regional literature emerged from stereotyped colonized subjectivity. The writers of each generation contributed significantly through their narrative techniques making the generation unique with idiosyncratic themes in particular differentiating it from other generations.

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The Others as Mothers: Reclaiming Authority Amidst the Dysphoria of Postcolonial Black Masculinity

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Abstract

The awakening of a new image of motherhood in African literature, has undoubtedly been pioneered by the first-generation female novelists of Nigeria and Ghana, and that image has been updated with new consciousness by the third-generation novelists who contextualized their stories in the postcolonial matrix, to manifest the uncanny. This uncanny image of mothers indeed disturbs the gender dynamics and evokes an element of shock in the readers who are often used to the image of 'the rural, back-house, timid, subservient, lack-lustre' mother figures. It is when the writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ayobami Adebayo and Yaa Gyasi, give voice to the repressed and alienated experiences of motherhood through their coming-of-age female characters, that the trope of uncanny is provoked. A culture which idolizes the sacrificial, emotional, loving, caring and present images of mother, introducing the figures of absent, careerist, cold-hearted, selfish, and authoritative mother figures indeed seem horrifying. In this paper I would like to show how the postcolonial situation has been instrumental in catalyzing the degeneration of hegemonic, toxic black masculinity and the reinterpretation of motherhood that speaks not of oppression of women but of their authority over their bodies and their choices. These images given by the Nigerian novelist Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* or *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Ayobami Adebayo in *Stay with Me* and the Ghanaian novelist Yaa Gyasi in *Transcendent Kingdom*, allow the feminist arguments to go beyond the western-feminist tendencies of highlighting the repudiation and recuperation of motherhood. It is my intention to reveal the extraordinary experiments of these authors with the theme of motherhood through the lens of the postcolonial dysphoria of black masculinity.

Keywords: Motherhood, Careerist, Absent, Uncanny, Black masculinity, Dysphoria

The ramifications of the postcolonial politics are prominently represented through the literatures of Africa as the “writers concerned with the nature of African society could not avoid the trauma and drama that accompanied the imposition of European rule on the continent” (Irele and Gikandi 380). The African nations which had experienced the colonial rule followed by the independence and the internal political complexities, could not avoid the impact that the entire turmoil had on the psychology and the situations of the individuals stuck inside it. With the new thoughts and norms weaving a new cultural dimension of Africa, the old indigenous structures were threatened and that resulted into the alterations of the positions in the social hierarchy. Like every other aspect of the society, the societal expectations from the different gender groups also started changing which led towards the establishment of a new shade of motherhood that the people of the African nations were quite unfamiliar with. This notion of unfamiliarity or “unheimlich” as mentioned by Sigmund Freud focuses on the fact that “what is novel may well prove frightening and uncanny” and thus the new shades of womanhood and motherhood

which broke away from the conventional sacrificial image, created a sense of uncanny within the individuals (Freud 125). This fear about the unfamiliar traits of womanhood degenerated the hegemonic positions of the black male and led towards the foundation of unfamiliar manifestations of subordinate and complicit masculinities. Thus the “Modern African literature” which “was produced in the crucible of colonialism” could not avoid commenting on the changes that were brought forth by the colonial rule (Irele and Gikandi 379). While the first-generation male authors from Africa played a vital role in bringing forth the discussions about the effects of colonialism on the indigenous setup, the contributions of the female authors could not be eschewed in the matter as well. What they did was indeed significant as they illustrated those internal politics which were very easily avoided or not considered as important by their male contemporaries. The female writers diversified the representation of women and mothers which was limited to the “the rural, back-house, subservient” frame by introducing the “modern counterpart, individualistic and assertive” character frames (Henrietta and Nwodo 2, 3). The transformation in the power structure happened because of the colonial history as “what was at issue in the colonial encounter was the question of African autonomy” and this particular event became “a major subject in early writing from the continent” (Irele and Gikandi 381). In regard to this discussion, the literary output of the third-generation female authors from Nigeria and Ghana has been taken into consideration to understand how the postcolonial politics had been instrumental in shaping different shades of the female characters that were unconventional and diversions from the canon.

Motherhood as an Option and Not a Compulsion:

The theme of motherhood has been one of the most important concerns of African literature and that is only because the question of motherhood is integral to the culture of the continent. The myths of Nigeria and Ghana or for that matter of the entire Africa regarding motherhood point at the indispensable importance of the act of procreation to ensure the expansion and survival of the culture and “the idea of self-sacrifice emphasizes the centrality of motherhood in African society” (Akujobi 2). Although there are examples of those African nations which show a history of matrilineal social structure, still the predominance of patriarchy informs and justifies the one-dimensional projection of the vitality of motherhood in relation to the advancement of the culture and the value of the female body. The fact that it is in being a mother that the value of being a woman rests, it automatically directs the attention towards the patriarchal perceptions that evaluate every little thing in relation to the sustenance and profit of patriarchy. This might be one of the reasons why in male narratives the representation of motherhood seems very traditional and limited regarding possibilities. It is only in the works of female African writers that we find “female characters are not homogenous in their attitude to life” (Henrietta and Nwodo 21). Time and again the female authors have interpreted motherhood in different ways and while some addressed its importance in relation to the essence of

womanhood, others have understood the term from a very unconventional, unfiltered, and liberal point of view. But the goal of these writers has always been the same, that is to challenge the canon that celebrates the passive mother figure at the cost of the other possible manifestations of motherhood and womanhood.

Western feminism believes that “there has been no single, unified, monolithic response coming from feminism about motherhood” and that can be considered as true regarding the arguments provided by the black feminist authors as well (Kinser 2). It is by putting forward the different possibilities for women to assert the individual selves, that the female writers from Nigeria and Ghana have overpowered the single narratives of motherhood. There are two ways in which the idea of motherhood can be analyzed- motherhood as an integral part of the female being in reference to the unique experience of creating a life and motherhood as an option that can be denied or accepted according to the will of the woman. Considering the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ayobami Adebayo and Yaa Gyasi, this can be understood with even more clarity. These authors allowed the othered voices of women to surface and thus catalyzed the formation of different perspectives about motherhood. Women waiting eagerly for experiencing motherhood, women choosing career over motherhood, women opting for unconventional motherhood by adopting children or women completely abandoning the kids to experience the true essence of their female selves- all these ideas have been given equal importance in the stories of these female authors. These narratives kept themselves away from passing judgement on these different possibilities of enjoying womanhood and thus indulged in creating a sense of uncanny in the minds of the readers who were not familiar with these subverted images of womanhood. Rather than criticizing what is moral, immoral, right, or wrong, the third-generation female writers from Africa are more concerned about how women are addressing the void that is repeatedly created by the society that pushes her towards the threshold and feeds on her vulnerability. Undoubtedly it can be stated that the symbol of 'mother' as all powerful, creative, and full of vitality “takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes” in the stories of Adichie, Adebayo and Gyasi (Freud 151). These writers not only touched upon the significance of the image of a passive mother figure and its association with the land but also enhanced the chances of the image of the mother to take new meanings which are not always related to the traditional necessity of preserving the lineage, rather engaged with the idea of experiencing life in different ways.

Dysphoria of Postcolonial Black Masculinity

The reason behind focusing on the literature of Nigeria and Ghana is that both these nations experienced the socio-political complexities at almost similar time and in similar sequence. Beginning with their experience of a colonial past, conflicts between the ethnic groups (between Ashante, Fante and Akan groups in Ghana and Igbo, Hausa Fulani, and Yoruba in Nigeria) and followed by the political complexities in post-independent era, these two nations are somewhat united

through their experiences. Although it cannot be denied that the experience of the history of slavery by Ghanaians had indeed added a different dimension to their experience which was unknown to the Nigerians. Slavery comes with the notion of dehumanizing individuals and treating them as animals, which indeed had impacted the psychology of the people of Ghana in a different way than that of the people of Nigeria who had only experienced a complete cultural degeneration owing to the overpowering presence of the colonial power in the nation. Focusing on the gender power structure of Ghana which went through a drastic change, it can be concluded that this idea of not even considering Ghanaians as humans while trading them as slaves, had not only destroyed the existing ethnic hegemonic structure, rather the notion of a subordinate black masculinity was established in return. That created a fear within the black males regarding their capabilities of maintaining their dominant position inside their families. Their insecurities and emotional vulnerabilities along with the indifference of women towards their roles as mothers, created a sense of uneasiness among the complicit and subordinate black males. The questions of impotency and inability of the males to take forward the family lineage along with their careerist wives aiming towards independence thus became a vital theme to be considered by the third-generation female authors. While the earlier authors concentrated on only projecting the family power dynamics from one point of view, the female authors of recent times liberated the representation and tried to justify that story by considering the appearance of different subordinate shades of masculinities that enabled such a narrative of female empowerment to surface in literature.

Manifestations of Different-Motherhood

With the first-generation female authors setting the stage for the later writers, the subject matter, and their perceptions towards the question of motherhood seem to have evolved. The first-generation authors like that of Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo had dealt with the theme of motherhood extensively in their novels but in a way that was unconventional. At a time when motherhood was thought to be the epitome of womanhood and the thing that was celebrated, these authors could show their courage of dealing with that subject in a very unfiltered manner. Showing the careerist women who are keen on experiencing womanhood in their own terms, they had paved the way for writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ayobami Adebayo (from Nigeria) and Yaa Gyasi (from Ghana) to take that tradition forward. The third-generation female writers from Nigeria and Ghana have contextualized their stories in the 1960s and thus they have unraveled the untouched, hidden subjects through their modern feminist outlook. The first-generation authors who had lived through those experiences, had a different outlook towards that subject of motherhood and female being, but the third-generation writers have taken cue from their memories and reimagined the situations for women living at a time where nothing seemed stable in society. A time when men were going through confusions regarding their position in the society and

the fate of their motherland, women got a chance to express their unfiltered and unrestricted selves to alter the existing power structures. Thus, the character of Beatrice in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Olanna in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Gifty's mother and Katherine in Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* and Yejide in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me*, emphasize upon the idea of unconventional motherhood which comes under constant question and gets challenged in every single step by the society. These characters become the reason behind the existential and emotional crisis faced by the males, as they cannot fathom where they are and what are they expected to do because of the radical alteration in the gender-power relationship (Freud 125). This is where the discussion about Freud's uncanny surfaces as the emasculation of black masculinity due to the postcolonial interventions and the expressions of the unfamiliar womanhood owing to the changes in the perceptions about motherhood had revealed the insecurities of the hegemonic males and thus introduced a sense of uncanny within them. The unfamiliarity but their awareness about the female power had induced a sense of fear within the black males who were apprehensive about losing their position in the hierarchy.

Freud mentioned in his 1919 essay that “anyone who possesses something precious, but fragile, is afraid of the envy of others, to the extent that he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their place” (Freud 147). This idea is perfectly illustrated by the character of Eugene Achike in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* who repeatedly tortures his wife and children only to ensure his dominant position in the family hierarchy. It seemed as if Eugene had to prove his point that “to be masculine requires not only self-reliance and self-control, but control over other people” (Brittan 5). Thus, putting boiling hot water on Kambili's feet, beating Beatrice and Jaja into a pulp for not abiding by his order, are nothing but the expression of Eugene's insecurity about his powerful position in the family. In this story the role of the mother who turns out to be a destroyer of life rather than the creator and protector, seems to be Adichie's response towards the one dimensional and unjustified portrayal of mother figures in African literature. But her plot never seems utopic or unbelievable only because she substantiates every moment of the alteration of the power structure with valid rise and fall of pre-existing positions. Eugene's insecurity speaks of the insecurity of all the males of Nigeria who were experiencing the upliftment of the white masculinity to the hegemonic position owing to the colonial history and at the cost of the degeneration of black masculinity to the complicit and the subordinate roles. This inevitably creates a sense of dysphoria in the man who is unable to connect to his gender role that had earlier familiarized him with the expression of power and now that has transformed into powerlessness and submission. Adichie shows a rebellious but silent mother figure through Beatrice who becomes a mother that “destroys life directly and consciously” (Uko 57). Her act of slow poisoning her husband to save her children from being mistreated and tortured any further allows her to become an example of that mother figure who is a diversion from the canonical sacrificial and silent images of mothers.

Motherhood as a Verb Beyond Biological Manifestations

Even while considering the character of Olanna in *Half of a Yellow Sun* the tendency of epitomizing biological motherhood has been subverted. As “motherhood is often defined as an automatic set of feelings and behaviors that is switched on by pregnancy and the birth of a baby,” Adichie challenges that idea by depicting how even after not being the biological mother of Baby, Olanna adopts her with true affection unlike the real mother who abandons her (Akujobi 2). Furthermore, Adichie did not feel it necessary to define every female character in terms of their negotiation with motherhood and thus her character of Kainene nonchalantly chooses her career over any relation that could restrict her growth as an individual self. It is her “brazenly red lipstick, her tight dress, her smoking” that challenge the male gaze and subvert the game of power which tries to repress the female self by forcing upon them the traditional gender roles and expectations (Adichie 57). Kainene goes against all such expectations and becomes “not just like a son, she is like two” as her hyper-independent energy makes her seem more aligned with masculine energy than the feminine softness and passivity (Adichie 31).

A diversion from the existing portraits of womanhood or motherhood inevitably points towards the dissatisfaction of female writers towards the popular fictional images of women in literature. Yaa Gyasi, one of the most significant authors of Ghanaian literature expresses her opinion on the subject by sketching down the character of the absent mother figure in *Transcendent Kingdom*. Her attempts of normalizing the persistence of an absent mother figure, who remains unavailable emotionally and physically for her kids, direct our attention towards the idea that “the role of bad mother is, in fact, empowering” (Hansen 10). It is through her indifference towards Gifty and her existence that her mother exercises her choice of living her life in her own terms. Although it seems very normal for the readers to empathize with the narrative voice of Gifty who feels avoided and unloved all her life, still Gyasi provides equal emphasis upon the character of Gifty's mother to justify her reactions. The fact that the experience of motherhood is not very simple as myths have made people believe, is emphasized by Gyasi through the presentation of a complex experience of motherhood.

Barren But Complete

In African culture “a barren woman is seen as incomplete” but these contemporary female authors from Africa have tried to redesign a sense of completeness in female being even while evading the question of biological motherhood (Akujobi 3). The stories of failed motherhood are brought forth by contemporary authors because they find it necessary to ensure the development of a diversified image of womanhood which is not limited to the experiences of child-bearing and child rearing. One might choose not to be a mother, not to be present while the child is growing or even choose to deal with her own traumas and prioritize her own self over her duties as a wife or a mother- all these possibilities are explored by authors like Yaa Gyasi or Ayobami Adebayo. The traditional idea of masculinity states that

“a man is only a man in so far as he is capable of using his penis as an instrument of power” and Ayobami works with that idea in her novel *Stay With Me* (Brittan 47). Here the repeated failure of Akin to impregnate Yejide creates anxiety within him about his masculinity which leads him to even surrender himself to his brother rather than disclosing his insecurity to his wife. The fact that he thought it necessary to somehow impregnate his wife with the help of his brother Dotun and set up a conspiracy rather than speaking out about his impotency, makes the anxiety of Akin to reverberate in the novel prominently as that which “was intended to remain secret, hidden away...has come into the open” (Freud 132). Adebayo comments on the traditional fertility rituals of the Nigerians as well to show how radical the character of Yejide becomes, once she finds solace in solitude and not in fulfilling the expectations of her family. The character who once allows her husband to have a second wife only because of the belief that “it is one child that calls another one into this world” and “once she [Funmi] gets pregnant and has a child” she might conceive as well, becomes completely dissociated from the joys of being a mother only because she does not want herself to go through repeated mental and physical pain of childbirth and the dangers of child death (Adebayo 13). From being bold enough to face questions about childlessness by shielding herself with “apologetic smiles, pity-me smiles, I-look-unto-God smiles – name all the fake smiles” to surrendering herself to unscientific fertility rituals only to develop trauma, Yejide evolves as an individual only to realize that her happiness rests not in being a mother but being an independent individual who can act when needed (Adebayo 13). As she exercises her choice about enjoying the sexual company of her brother-in-law without knowing that everything was plotted, she grows as a person who shields herself from external expectations. She thinks that she “wanted to be a mother, to have my eyes shine with secret joys and wisdom like Moomi's” and at the same time she is terrified by the idea of suffering that is attached with childbearing (Adebayo 15). Adebayo normalizes the fact that women can get scared by the pains that are related to the experience of motherhood. With Yejide choosing herself over her kids, one cannot miss the writer's point of celebrating all shades of motherhood and not limiting the idea to the sacrificial and loving and caring figures of mothers. Emphasizing on the trauma that barren women went through in Ghana only to avoid the humiliation of being called a man- as society believed “women manufacture children and if you can't you are just a man”- Adebayo tries to bring up those stories about motherhood that remain suppressed (Adebayo 46). It is by not surrendering to the whims of the society and family that the character of Yejide creates a blueprint for a free, independent, and assertive mother figure who chooses to distance herself from experiencing motherhood even after gaining the experience after long struggle. The story of motherhood is generally narrated “as a drama in three acts: repudiation, recuperation, and, in the latest and most difficult stage to conceptualize an emerging critique of recuperation that coexists with ongoing efforts to deploy recuperative strategies” but the narratives of motherhood as found in the writings of Adichie, Gyasi and Adebayo, go beyond that design (Hansen 5). By giving voice to the

alienated and repressed experiences of motherhood, they become successful in diversifying the grand narrative of motherhood and womanhood. At the same time, they address and subvert the cultural narrative of African motherhood by looking at the myths from a different point of view. As authors of the new age, Adichie, Adebayo and Gyasi try to provide their unique insight in the theme of motherhood that has been tackled in different ways at different times by the first and second-generation Nigerian and Ghanaian authors. They deconstruct and reconstruct the image of African motherhood at the same time. The mother figures in Adichie, Gyasi and Adebayo's novels “adopt a positivistic view in crisis and do not just fold their arms in tears and self-pity... they think, plan, execute and concretize” (Henrietta and Nwodo 3). They challenge the passive presence of mother figures in literature who are always seen at the receiving end and not the other way round.

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Unveiling Patriarchal Ethics and the Female's Quest for Respectability in Select Short Stories of K. A. Abbas

Atabi Saha*

Abstract

The paper studies the spectrum of women, in select stories of K. A. Abbas, namely 'Sylvia', 'Flowers for Her Feet', 'Cold Wave', 'The Dumb Cow', 'The Sparrows' and 'Three Women.' It questions the relevance of Western ideologies in the context of systemic inequality and indigenous female literacy, in accordance to factors involving the accessibility of the same and Abbas' understanding of women's position, rising out of internal ideologies and socio-cultural factors. While 'professional women' were not respectable, Abbas charts a difference between women, who sought opportunities in the respectable world and had limited income or career alternatives, and the fallen women who were financially solvent. Conversely, the domestic women, as the respectable lot, were subalterns. As such, the paper depicts the transformation of women, in the colonised space, as a product of the larger transition, explores the extent of female emancipation and transcendence amidst patriarchal entrenchment, the possible sacrifices, the curious means of empowerment within supervision or beyond and whether it strengthens or challenges male supremacy. The paper also goes beyond the frame of the narrative to analyse the impact of the male author's gaze on the characterisation of the female characters in the selected stories.

Keywords: Respectability, Professional, Domestic, Systemic inequality, Transformation, Emancipation

Introduction

Khwaja Ahmed Abbas (1914–1987) is celebrated less as an author than as that acclaimed film director whose brilliant screenplays have won India four National awards, for films like *Idd Mubarak* (1960), *Shehar aur Sapna* (1964), *Saat Hindustani* (1970) and *Do Boond Pani* (1972). He has represented the Indian film culture internationally, winning Palme d'Or and Crystal globe Grand Prix, besides other awards and recognitions that make his accomplishments pronounced. For Abbas, visuals speak louder than words so that his other areas of expertise, such as literary writing and journalism, have been overshadowed by his outstanding Bollywood persona.

Female Emancipation and Challenges

'The Woman Question' became a sensational topic in late 19th century England, emphasizing a lot on women's emancipation. However, it betrayed a tendency to homogenise and overlook the issues of race, social class or ethnicity that affected the non-white, non-Western women. 'Women' here was not just a gender and though the concept of a self-sufficient woman gradually emerged, the scope of respectable employment that a coloured woman may enjoy amidst a patriarchal structure was minimal. Also, whether a financially independent woman could be considered at all

'respectable' was doubtful. Moreover, emotional autonomy is often experienced at a cost of social marginalization and loneliness.

Amongst Abbas' professional women, Sylvia, as a nurse, belongs to the respectable domain, dominated then by men. However, since respectability or status was usually synonymous with one's financial solvency, Sylvia's mere salary keeps her dangling between being respectable and not respectable. Instead of commanding a respectable aura as in the West, she is derogatorily assessed according to prevalent stereotypes as being "selfish and incorrigibly corrupt", whose "hearts are filled only with greed and lust" (41, 42). Sylvia resists by repeatedly asserting her name, reminding the readers while reassuring herself of being an individual who is often stripped off an essential identity of one's own. Her questions like "Was she not a human being?", "Did her heart and mind still function in the normal way?" and "Had the daily proximity of disease and death killed the instincts and impulses of life?" express her desires to be understood amidst the generalisations that overlook the sordidness of her occupation (41).

Sylvia, however, is not a damsel in distress but a clear-thinking individual who recognises flattering men. The narrator mentions, "Behind the courteous camouflage, she glimpsed the opportunism of the marketplace [. . .] she sensed the accents of authority" (43). She breaks the conventions of restricted mobility by moving between the wings of the hospital, claiming her presence in a medical profession where doctors are the superior custodians in an established hierarchy.¹ She asserts her much unrecognised ability to cater to the patients, perhaps more than the doctors, so that "[. . .] even in the dark she could recognize who was crying [. . .]" (44).

Sylvia resorts to role reversal and, like a man who may look for recreation in women, usually beyond domesticity, indulges in "affairs" with men, thereby challenging the ideal of a monogamous female who must prioritise emotional attachment over lust (42). She doesn't name the men, denying them a significant presence and identity and making them voiceless subalterns—something that patriarchy has always done to women. Her stereotypically fixated feminine profession is an alternative world where she sees herself on a "battlefield", as a "conqueror" who can combat "death single-handed", thus refusing to acknowledge the role of the doctor enough (48). Hence, the anglicised name of Sylvia becomes relevant because the author could not possibly bring a girl with a distinctly Indian name to be as brazen and assertive.

Another category of professional women with whom Abbas' narratives are strewn with are the prostitutes. They are placed outside the respectable boundaries, despite forming the *baboo's* recreational paradise, thereby dissolving the synonymy of financial solvency with respectability and independence. Male pimps like the "talking machine gun", Maseeta *abba* and the "guide" control the lives of prostitutes like Chandra whose legs are literally chopped off to prevent her from deserting the flesh market ('Flowers' 24, 17). Their mobility and visibility outside their designated domain occur under the guidance of the *baboos* who, driven by the patriarchy's scope of benefit and not to elevate the social stature of the fallen women, render them

with a kind of valid affiliation in their world. 'Flowers' depicts that they could become celebrity-dancers of the silver screen or, like Chandra, may have to return to prostitution, owing to disrespect and an unstable income amidst the constant search for “new faces” (14). Swati Ghosh mentions about prostitutes being “classic subaltern figures” who “were represented in relation to criminal activities” and “were identified for degrading the virtuous image of Indian women” so that “reformers, missionaries and public opinion were all against conceding residential space of the city for prostitution” (33). The crisis of limited career alternatives also causes Radha, the prostitute in 'Cold Wave,' to reject an impoverished Baldeo, for marriage could neither provide her with a comfortable life nor with independence, financial and otherwise. However, when the narrator of 'Flowers' mentions, “Four thousand rupees cash! [. . .] Overcoming all my usual scruples and self-conscious embarrassment, I took a taxi straight to that lane of ill fame in broad daylight”, the prostitute is brought from the periphery to the very centre, creating occasion for a *baboo's* livelihood ('Flowers' 33).

Prostitutes, nonetheless, have been depicted to be far richer than all other professional women. While Lado, the midwife in 'The Dumb Cow,' can earn one to five rupees per delivery, and Sylvia makes sixty-five rupees per month, Chandra gets five-hundred rupees or even more in a single evening from a private performance at a solvent customer's like the governor, police commissioner or the Seth Sahib. The comparison gets starker as a male journalist, one like the narrator in 'Flowers', draws a “monthly salary of one hundred eighty rupees” only (30).

The indigenous domestic women, comprising the respectable lot, are confined to homes in Abbas' narratives. Having no income of their own, they are dependent on the men and are vulnerable to exploitation, domestic violence and slavery, exemplified by Rahim Khan's wife in 'The Sparrows.' The narrator mentions, “There was no one to give him water to wash his dust-laden feet and hands, no one to give him supper, no one whom he could curse and beat [. . .]” ('Sparrows' 6–7). This male condescension extends beyond home, towards the old woman next door or her daughter-in-law whom Rahim Khan objectifies as a baby producing machine. 'Three Women' portrays the harrowing alternatives that these socially and financially handicapped women were offered beyond male affiliation. The polar opposites of the domestic woman and the prostitute merge as a lady, capable of being a beloved and mother, though not the wife of her admirer, is turned out to lead life as a prostitute until youth debilitates to turn her into a beggar whom hunger and poverty pushes towards embracing death voluntarily, probably under a train as happens in this story. Thus, if 'professional women' were not respectable, then how respectable these domestic women truly were?

Abbas challenges the revered institution of marriage and questions its relevance in the context of human relationships and gender inequality. While married women have been depicted as victims of social oppression and injustice, the professional ones are unmarried. While Radha cannot be accepted as Baldeo's wife, Chandra fails to secure love and matrimony. The marital status of the lady teacher, the

headmistress and the midwife in 'The Dumb Cow' is doubtful. Bholi, aspiring to become a self-sufficient person, fails to receive any desirable marriage proposal. Sylvia is approached by no eligible indigenous bachelor, for Indian society has always stigmatised nursing, and the widower wants her more as a personal "maid servant" than a wife, evident through his dispassionate and selfish marriage proposal that said "Look Sylvia, I live alone in this big house. There is no one to look after me. The two hundred rupees I get every month are all wasted away by the servants. If you marry me it will be nice for us both" (49, 45).

Sylvia, nonetheless, presents the best example whose emancipation can be traced in her prioritising of individual desire fulfilment and in her resistance to a society, that has neither love nor marriage to offer. Though she desires marriage for social acceptance, material comfort and motherhood, she discovers the futility of a bond that is bereft of love and respect and compromises her identity, for a wife cannot be a nurse with a questionable sexual morality. She transcends from conventional motherhood that needs acceptance of a male authority in marriage to a symbolic motherhood of her patients as her "children" whom she could control and who made her capable of performance, rather than sacrifice (49).

Female literacy was still a restricted comfort, for 'If girls go to school, who will marry them?' ('Dumb Cow' 85). Thus, none of the married women in Abbas' narratives are educated. Lacking the scope of empowerment that education could have affected, these women seek transcendence, or rather a diabolic gratification, by passing down the exploitation through successive generations of younger women, thus becoming mere tools in the hands of patriarchy. In 'The Dumb Cow', Bholi's sister and her mother show no interest in her education and are unable to visualise any worthwhile existence outside marriage. Further, Bholi's refusal to comply becomes synonymous with risking the "izzat" of the family (93).

Only two female protagonists, Sylvia and Bholi, have received formal education. The former showcases her technical expertise through her thorough knowledge of the case study of each patient and the meticulous care that a nurse is obligated to perform, in accordance to each type of ailment. She is not just an employee but a navigator who disseminates her role by recovering the dying patient in time and owns her professional space not as a mere feminine digression but as a serious commitment, engendered by an adequate educational grounding. Bholi, sent to school by a reluctant father, manifests transition from being a frightened, stammering and reticent girl to becoming a confident individual who takes interest in the matters of her surroundings, recognises social evils, protests against the same, takes decisions for herself and foresees financial autonomy (88). In assuring her father that "In your old age, I will serve you and mother", she breaks the age-old connection of parental nurture with gender, whereby sons have been considered to be the only dependable staff, and shatters the social construct of matrimony as a milestone in a female's life (94). Underlining women's capability of assuming serious responsibilities, she challenges traditional gender roles that label women as liabilities with shallow concerns.

While these are instances of female education happening in institutional structures mostly headed by the indigenous male literati, Chandra, in 'Flowers', represents women's innate thirst for “unchaperoned” knowledge, beyond patriarchal supervision, that could be “tantamount to losing control over their beings” (A. Ghosh 224). She can read and can utter profound truths like “[. . .] whoever is young must grow old, whoever is born must die one day. Why be afraid of something that is inevitable?”, thus showcasing her intelligence to a stupefied patriarchy, represented by the Seth Sahib (24). The narrator's version of a heroine who is sent to school by her prostitute mother to be brought up as “a proper little lady” seems to resonate with Chandra's probable past (31). Contrary to respectable women or educated men like Ram Kishan, who depend on others' opinions, and the Seth Sahib who engages in meaningless banter in imperfect English, Chandra is confident about her life being far more eventful, capable of igniting the “little imp” called “inspiration” (30). In asking the narrator that “Won't you write a story about me?”, she demands recognition and visibility in the civilised society (30).

Radha's pragmatism finds expression through her understanding of the essential link between money and a comfortable life. Despite being a woman and thus, the conventionally deemed emotional counterpart in a relationship, she knows her mind and rejects Baldeo who is left perplexed about whether “Am I proud or am I obstinate? Am I suffering for an ideal or for a foolish, boyish whim?” ('Cold Wave' 15). Again, contrary to Bholi's confused father, Bholi is “calm and steady”, making him and the readers aware of the infinite world of alternative possibilities for a meaningful existence outside marriage ('Dumb Cow' 94). Thus, Abbas provides us with multiple such instances where, opposed to the disoriented and bewildered male, the women come across as beings of competence and depth who carve their own paths to empowerment and who often effect an inversion to emerge as the guiding force, offering support and direction to the male characters, thus reshaping the power and agency in the narratives.

The 'Male Gaze'

Abbas also deals with the idea of male gaze and depicts female objectification as a rampant and acceptable phenomenon. In 'Flowers', patriarchal beauty standards see women as “filmable face”, “too fat or too thin”, “dark, bony, pimply faced, tall or short” or as having “ordinary features and a provocatively tilted nose” (17, 15, 17, 21). The image of the “dancer-hunting expedition” compares women to animals, fulfilling the alpha male's quest for adventure and victimization (15). Married women are nameless creatures, exemplified by Baldeo's mother in 'Cold Wave' and “Mother of Surrender” in 'The Dumb Cow' (85). Representations of women as “drop of honey”, “means of making money”, “wounded cat howling in the night”, sheep awaiting the butcher or dumb cow, besides presenting disturbing pictures of indigenous orthodoxy perpetuating social evil, causes fragmentation of the female body and diverts attention from her entire being, assailing her “matrix of [. . .] identification, and hence of the articulation of the 'I', of subjectivity”, leaving little

scope for her respectable survival ('Flowers' 28, 28, 18; Mulvey 10).

However, this male gaze extends beyond the narrative, affecting the author's perception and portrayal that betrays limitations, informed by the male desire of giving and taking control. Conditioned by patriarchy, his way of *looking* at them is "never innocent" (Kaplan 6). He structures his argument around these terms so that his women characters feature, in Laura Mulvey's words, as the "bearer of meaning, not the maker of meaning" (7). Instead of challenging the conventional social and cultural rubric, he reifies it by keeping his women enmeshed in it.

Abbas' envisions a radical possibility whereby financially independent women can exist beyond male protection. Though this seems to counter mainstream views, he has adopted an antithetical approach that includes a reference to the patriarchal and conventional cultural practices that this alternative means to counter. For instance, Sylvia's masculine defiance and approach makes her a "caricature of masculine array" and emphasizes the "mannish nature of women" that cropped up with the ascendancy of feminine independence (Nordau 8; Buzwell). This ridiculous and simplistic version highlights the patriarchal idea of the 'New Woman' who is a "free-spirited [. . .] sexually degenerate, abnormal, mannish, chain-smoking, child-hating bore [. . .]" and "[. . .] an embittered, over-educated spinster perpetually stuck on the shelf"—something that is not liberating. Moreover, this Western version of the 'New Woman' cannot, represent an Indian woman appropriately. Rather, there can be several other ways of asserting feminine identity that need not emulate male ways. There is a need to defeminise, out of whiteness and indigenous male superiority, to create an independent identity with a separate standing and, thus, crush the ego by moving out of the Self-Other paradigm. As Mulvey insists, "The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire" (8). Thought against this context, Abbas' portrayal seems just another subconscious way of satisfying the ego, a libidinous extension of oppressive mentality and is, thus, neither feminist nor a meaningful alternative.

Abbas' perspective that women are capable of either low paying respectable jobs or high paying disreputable stations is also very narrow and restricted. It represents the situation of female employment of the past century, as can be surmised from Rimli Bhattacharya's account of the high incomes of courtesans and the trifles earned by theatre actresses. Abbas' holding on to that same version in a modern world demonstrates his male narcissism that wishes to cling to the lack of the woman as a castrated being and her inability to transcend it that "produces the phallus as a symbolic presence" and boosts his sense of "scopophilia" that simultaneously informs his pleasure in looking and being looked at (Mulvey 6). Though his women are not eye candies, characterised by "to-be-looked-at-ness", craving for male attention, and though he does not think that, in Budd Boetticher's words, "In herself the woman has not the slightest importance", he indulges in their appearance as weaklings who are vulnerable to exploitation, and hence, not superior. He subtly

creates a hierarchy and indicates their need for male protection (Mulvey 11). Abbas' 'female stars' do not represent the 'ideal', are not likeable and hence, are not worth identifying with. He does not necessarily cast them as heroes who must evoke “a satisfying sense of omnipotence” in the readers and should be able to represent the Self as “[. . .] a center, an anchorage point, a standard of comparison, an ultimate real [. . .] a supreme value” so that one should be motivated to emulate his ways and transcend his own ego to be recognised and looked-at (Mulvey; Gardner Murphy, qtd. In Bhatt 51). He is unable to envision a fruitful combination so that there are two extremes—a professional woman doomed to loneliness and spinsterhood or a married woman who is uneducated, unemployed and victimised. This unrealistic spectrum, however, allows him to highlight the consequences of social condemnation following defiance and threaten female readers with castration anxiety, forbidding imitation and endorsing patriarchal ideologies. Thus, Abbas comes across as a patriarchal figure who has styled his heroines accordingly so that, instead of self-gratification in the female readers, he can subtly manipulate and curb female aberrant attitudes into an established normalcy.

It must also be noted how domestic females are unable to secure much space in his narratives. This informs the paradox in Abbas' presentation whereby this conventionally docile and desirable group, since they do not pose much threat to phallogentrism, are not being thought about enough and are relegated as beings of the periphery. However, on the other hand, the author does not want to give enough space to the threatening ones—probably the reason why he does not include women in powerful roles like doctors specially, who were enjoying lucrative careers by then and who can disrupt the male desire. Also, he conveniently chooses to overlook certain sections of female professionals like barbers, sweepers, vegetable-sellers, farmers etc. whose existence has been recorded in Sumanta Banerjee's account. This methodical absence allows Abbas to reinforce a certain established hierarchy wherein some professions, below the economic ladder, are just not worth any mention in an essentially patrilineal structure. They are considered to not contribute enough to the society and the economy and thus, are not masculine enough for representation. As such, his male gaze demonstrates the instinctive disdain for anything feminine. Also, it must be noted that most of the docile women are mothers, whether it is Baldeo's mother, Bholi's mother, Rahim Khan's wife, his neighbour, her daughter-in-law or his past lover, depicting the little possibilities that patriarchy allows for the existence of the female beyond the designated gender roles. While motherhood is often valorised in the indigenous culture, it reinforces the lack of the female by focusing on her image as “the bearer of the bleeding wound” and as such, reinforces the male authority and phallogentrism (Mulvey 7).

Conclusion

Thus, Abbas, within the frame of the narrative, has been able to put forth many of the serious concerns that the indigenous society in an emerging 'New India' was dealing with in its transition from tradition to modernity. Though he has attempted to carve

an emancipated female persona that was very becoming, considering the contemporary scenario, the transition, viewed from his perspective, remains incomplete due to his restricted outlook, effected largely by the impinging of patriarchal conditioning on his consciousness. Nonetheless, Abbas' portrayals of women's struggles and triumphs pave the way towards contemporary discussions on preconceived notions about gender, gender inequality, societal norms and social injustice, while serving as a reminder of the ongoing journey towards greater multifaceted empowerment and inclusivity.

Notes

¹“In media as well, nurses are often portrayed as subservient to medical professionals [. . .]” (Nair and Sarin, 101). Further, as Nair and Healey observe, “Nurses are supposed to be submissive workers who take orders well and do not question the doctors. [. . .] Many of them complain of being “shouted at and being treated like inferiors” in hospitals by doctors.” (17).

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Threads of Post-Memory and Materiality: Partition Narratives in Aanchal Malhotra's *Remnants of a Separation*

Komal*
Dr. Bhavya**

Abstract

The exploration of memory, whether individual or collective, holds a significant place in understanding one's relationship with the past, personal or national. Years after the partition of India in 1947, a catastrophic event marked by widespread violence, death, and mass migration, the study of its traumatic memories took a pivotal turn. Prominent authors and historians like Urvashi Butalia, Veena Das, Ritu Menon, and Kamla Bhasin initiated a valuable change by amplifying the voices of women who experienced partition and reinforcing the significance of the memories of the survivors. Recent scholarship emphasises the tangible mediums, such as texts, artefacts, and photographs, through which memory is mediated. Marianne Hirsch introduced the term “post-memory” as a generational migration of memory from the first generation of a holocaust to the later generations in the form of traumatic experiences through photographs.

This shift in focus led to examining the belongings and materials carried by migrants across the newly formed borders, which became repositories and sites of cherished memories from before the upheaval. For many, these items served as lifelines amid the turmoil, aiding their survival in adverse conditions. Through a critical review of Aanchal Malhotra's book, *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory*, alongside other scholarly contributions, this article seeks to analyse the scope of material memory studies in the context of one of the largest mass migrations in history. By doing so, the paper sheds light on its complex aftermath in the form of memory and post-memory of partition-related trauma.

Keywords: Partition of India 1947, Trauma, Material Memory, Migration, Postmemory

Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 is considered the single most appalling event in recent South Asian history. The political partition of India on religious lines, destructive legacies manifested in the form of communal vigour, loss of lives and properties, unplanned decisions of political leaders, contests over power-sharing (Pandey 21), disputes over borders, and colonial chicanery still resonate in contemporary times. “One will never know exactly how many people died in the riots that accompanied it (India's Partition), but around seventeen million people had to relocate themselves across the newly drawn boundaries” (Settar and Gupta 7). The figures for loss of life due to partition in 1947 in the warring communities were between 200,000 and 250,000, and the number of Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim women who were raped and abducted was close to 100,000, according to Khosla (qtd. in Das 59).

Much has been written on the subject, and a whole body of writing has fledged around the Partition. Prominently, B.R. Ambedkar's *Thoughts on Pakistan* (1940),

Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (1946), Rajendra Prasad's *India Divided* (1947), A. R. Desai's *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (1948), Bipan Chandra's *History of Modern India* (2001), and countless other historical works have paved the way in the field of historical writings on partition. These works contain an abundance of facts, reasons, and effects of the irreparable loss due to Partition. However, history frames the partition primarily as a political development, emphasising that the birth of India and Pakistan emerged from the prolonged struggle of our freedom fighters. It focuses more on the overall impact on various communities due to national upheavals than delving into the personal suffering, harrowing experiences, and grim narratives of the time.

The Intricate Historical Legacy - Literature Review

In her analysis of *Violent Belongings* (2008), Kavita Daiya critiques the historical oversight of Partition, noting its initial neglect as a significant event in favour of emphasizing 1947 as the culmination of colonial oppression. In *Remembering Partition* (2001), Gyanendra Pandey poignantly describes the profound impact of Partition as tearing apart families, communities, and identities, likening it to dismantling nationalities (43). The forced displacement of nearly ten to twelve million people (Puri et al. 131) left them uprooted and hopeful of returning, but ultimately abandoned homes, livelihoods, and belongings amidst newly drawn borders. Mohammed Absen Chaudhri's poignant query underscores the enduring questions of what to do with abandoned properties and resources left behind, highlighting the profound human and material losses inflicted by Partition (Chaudhri 98).

It is important to acquaint ourselves with the history of partition. However, it also becomes pertinent to pay attention to the other recent accounts by scholars like Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* (1998) and *Partition: The Long Shadow* (2015), Yasmin Khan's *The Great Partition* (2007), Ritu Memon and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (1998), Gyanendra Pandey's *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (2001), Alok Bhalla's volumes of *Stories on the Partition of India* (1994, 2012), Nisid Hajari's *Midnight Furies* (2015), Kavita Daiya's *Violent Belongings* (2008), and others that mark a significant step forward in the rethinking of Partition's history. These other individual narratives in fiction and non-fiction tell us the tale of survival, trauma, and pangs of dislocation and relocation accompanied by horrendous riots and mass murders. They provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, enriching perspectives on partition.

The public history of the 1947 Partition of India is represented through various humanistic platforms beyond literature. The 1947 Partition Archive, founded in 2010 by Guneeta Singh Bhalla, is a digital repository that has documented over 10,200 eyewitness accounts, raising awareness through diverse creative and scholarly expressions and preserving personal artefacts. Similarly, the *Partition Museum Delhi* (2023) and Amritsar (2016), led by Kishwar Desai as Chairperson,

both founded by TAACHT (The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust), and the *Partition Museum*, Kolkata (2018), founded by Rituparna Roy, fill a significant gap by memorializing the Partition's "difficult heritage" (Zabi 129), reflecting that they arise from the strain between the memory of war, genocide, or conflict in the history of a nation. Additionally, the BBC show *The Repair Shop* highlights the restoration of cherished heirlooms, demonstrating how such artefacts, once revitalized, can "reanimate and revive the memories their owners have invested in them" (McCarroll and Kurby 1).

Drawing on the significance of objects in carrying meanings and memories, this research investigates how migrants confront the hurdles of resettlement and the deep-seated experiences linked to post-memory through their attachment to evocative "material memories." It seeks to demonstrate the therapeutic potential of these material memories in the fictional narratives of Partition, where characters place their aspirations for a brighter future in these relics from their past.

Aims and Objectives

The research focuses on exploring three specific narratives from Aanchal Malhotra's *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition Through Material Memory* (2018), which delve into the significance of personal belongings and their meaning to their owners both during and after the partition period, chosen from a total of twenty-one stories. These objects are viewed as conduits that connect owners to past values and cultures, embedded memories, and the role they play in teasing out those memories in the everyday lives of respondents; hence, they are called material memories.

Through the lens of material memory and post-memory frameworks, the study seeks to depict the trauma of the 1947 partition, providing deeper insights into individual experiences often overlooked by conventional historical accounts. By focusing on how these material objects and relics encapsulate an alternative narrative within themselves, the objective of the research is to offer a fresh perspective on understanding partition fiction. It highlights the profound impact of these personal objects on shaping memories and identities across generations (Hirsch 20012, 3).

Memory and Postmemory

Pierre Nora (1989), the pioneer in the field of memory studies, contends that through channels or sites, memory solidifies and manifests itself as the medium through which the depleted reserve of collective memory condenses and finds expression, "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" or "becomes the medium through which the exhausted capital of collective memory condenses and is expressed" (Nora 7).

Aleida Assmann (2008) observes that contemporary historians face a challenge to their traditional prominence as they navigate through what has been termed the "memory boom." The memory boom "reflects a general desire to reclaim the past as an important part of the present, and to reconsider, to revalue, and to reassess it as part of individual biographies and the way individuals position themselves in a wider

historical perspective” (54).

Marianne Hirsch, a professor of comparative literature and gender studies at Columbia University, focuses on the memory of the Holocaust within the second generation and has authored numerous works exploring family narratives found in both literature and photography. She comes up with the term “Postmemory”, described as “the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before- to experiences they 'remember' only through the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up” (5). The exploration delves into the significance of objects such as photographs, read for their domestic interiors, household items, and clothing, in narratives of returning to a displaced home. She believes that intergenerational transmission has emerged as a significant focus of study and explanatory framework in contexts like “the Indian partition; and others” (19).

The study of memory has become crucial in understanding the Partition of 1947 and its impacts. Individuals faced profound choices and losses during this period, leading to significant life changes. Aanchal Malhotra categorizes memory into official, political, geographic, personal, collective, and a complex category "resting between fact and fiction" (36), which includes temporal shifts and intergenerational aspects. Marianne Hirsch (2012) highlights the need for ethical and theoretical discussions on trauma and intergenerational memory transfer (2), emphasizing the urgency of addressing how these memories and traumas are inherited and understood across generations.

Belonging through Belongings

Aanchal Malhotra, an oral historian and writer, was born in 1990 and is based in New Delhi, India. She co-founded the Museum of Material Memory, an online repository exploring family histories and social ethnography through heirlooms from the Indian subcontinent. Malhotra is renowned for her extensive writing on the 1947 partition. Her first book, published as *Remnants of a Separation* in South Asia (2017) and internationally as *Remnants of Partition* (2019), received the Council for Museum Anthropology Book Award 2022 and was shortlisted for several prestigious literary prizes. Her second book, *In the Language of Remembering* (2022), examines the enduring cross-border generational impact of partition and was acclaimed as one of History Today's Best Books of the Year in 2022. Malhotra's latest work is titled *The Book of Everlasting Things* (2022).

Taking the above discussion on memory, post-memory, and the intergenerational act of transfer, the paper discusses the below three stories from the book by Malhotra, namely: “A Gaz for My Father and a Ghara for My Mother: The Heirlooms of Y.P. Vij,” “Stones from My Soil: The Maang-Tikka of Bhag Malhotra,” and “From the Folds of Life: The Household Items of Sitara Faiyaz Ali.” The items discussed in the stories hold memories of a specific time and location, remaining dormant and untouched for generations, and “act as a stimulus for recollection” (Malhotra 4). Malhotra specifically examines how this past manifests in material memory. Her

goal is to integrate a coherent narrative of personal experiences that bridges the past and the present (8-9).

The choice of this book is considered crucial because it is the first of its kind. The selection of the three stories from the twenty-one featured in the book is based on several reasons: *first*, their suitability in terms of length and format for a research paper; *second*, the direct connection of the first two stories to the author's paternal and maternal ancestors, offering a more intimate and insider perspective of the partition experience. The first two stories depict Hindu families who migrated from Pakistan to India during Partition. The *third* reason for the selection is that the third story features the experiences of a Muslim narrator whose family migrated from India to Pakistan, departing from her family residence in Dalhousie and relocating to Lahore, Pakistan, contrasting with the migration patterns in the first two stories. Thus, the selection of these three stories offers a comprehensive and compassionate approach to exploring partition through the lens of personal objects carried by refugees across the India-Pakistan border.

The first story, "A Gaz for My Father and a Ghara for My Mother: The Heirlooms of Y.P. Vij," is about the author's paternal grandparents and great-grandparents. Malhotra's grandfather, Vishwa Nath Vij, showed her a collection of old objects, including an old lock and its key, a bookend, some old photographs, some dog-eared books, a vessel, a *ghara*, and a yardstick, a *gaz*. When the grandfather started to speak about the *ghara*, he looked "boy-like, his face lit up, and he talked excitedly" as if in the objects, he found a trail to the past back to Lahore "exploring and rediscovering" (Malhotra 43).

The mother of the author's grandfather brought that *ghara* in her trousseau from Lahore and used to churn *lassi* in it. The *gaz* belonged to the great-grandfather, who was also from Lahore. Vij was thankful that he and the family shifted to Delhi just before partition and did not face the atrocities of crossing borders during those days. The objects he showed belong to pre-partition times; they still evoke memories of the time in the present, having witnessed the flow of refugees and the bloodshed during partition. That was the time when the author understood the authority of material objects to bring something intangible to the surface.

What I had just witnessed was the physicality- texture, scent, surface- of an object catalysing to preserve and invoke the memory of a person, a time, an event that was regarded as the most catastrophic in the contemporary history of the Indian subcontinent. (46)

It expands on the concept of the "testimonial object" (Hirsch 24), illustrating how we inherit not just stories and images from the past but also a bodily and emotional connection to the material world that surrounds us. As time passes, the grandfather explains that memories of unimaginable events tend to fade and lie dormant. When asked whether their culture and history are being forgotten, he vehemently responds, "We are not forgetting! The children are!" (53). The grandfather's statement strongly aligns with what Anam Zakaria, an oral historian, highlights in the prologue of her book *The Footprints of Partition*: "... for as we lose the Partition survivors and move

further and further away from 1947, we are at risk of absorbing an increasingly rigid and myopic narrative of Partition and its entirety. The repercussions of this, needless to say, are grave” (13).

The second narrative, "Stones from My Soil: The Maang-Tikka of Bhag Malhotra," delves into the challenges encountered by the author's great-grandmother and her six children during Partition. Bhag Malhotra, the author's grandmother, recounts the hardships endured by her family while migrating to Delhi from Muryali in NWFP, Pakistan, amidst the tumult of partition. In an alarming tone, she starts to talk about her deceased father, showing his photograph. She talks about her *haveli* in Pakistan, a large building with long corridors. She talked about her family's land, fields, livestock, and wealth.

Bhag's voice trailed off while mentioning the occurrence of partition. After the partition, the haveli was turned into a college and hostel.

In the years between 1942 and 1947, we saw ... we saw what was happening to the Hindu families around us. Many were not as lucky as we were to escape when we did... it was the year that saw the worst side of humanity. (101)

Explaining the grim reality of female victims, violence extends far beyond imagination. Bhag says that the women were told to kill themselves by jumping into wells for the sake of saving their “*izzat*” (104) from being robbed by the hands of people of the opposite faith. She vividly remembers the site of trains filled with mutilated, blood-soaked bodies. Amid their conversation, Bhag was drawn to a particular piece of jewellery: a sizable pendant that had once adorned her mother's forehead as a *maang-tikka*. This cherished item belonged to Lajvanti, Bhag's mother. Reflecting on its significance, Bhag remarked, “And, in a way, this piece of jewellery was the only thing that remained of her land as well; the stones were from its soil. It was born there, just like her” (109). In another light, this enduring piece of jewellery, traversing both time and distance, served as a tangible bond that brought Bhag and Lajvanti closer together.

The third story, “From the Folds of Life: The Household Items of Sitara Faiyaz Ali,” is about a house in Dalhousie that the narrator's (Sitara's) father built with his own hands. Sitara says, “Even seventy years later, in my memory, that house is still a home” (321); Although so much time has passed, in her recollection, the house remains a place that embodies the essence of home. Sitara holds photographs of the house; one was a monochrome image from the time of 1947, and another was a coloured and recent one. Hirsch captures the significance of photos in reflecting upon the experiences and profound impact of a traumatic experience. She talks about what it feels like to be the child of the survivors of the Holocaust who had to undergo displacement and exile.

Sitara mentions the time during the partition as “*taksim ke samay*.” Malhotra felt quite reserved when Sitara politely stopped her to ask questions about the term used in the middle of her narration. It reminded her that remembering is not without its challenges; some individuals remain doubtful about the potential outcomes that may arise from sharing and preserving these memories- “...remembering the past was a

tedious and gradual exercise. Some things sat at the very core of one's existence, and the slightest indelicacy in handling such memories could tarnish or distort them forever" (324).

The house stands as a *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989), or the site of memory. The French historian Pierre Nora has conducted thorough research on sites of memory. He argues that the sites of memory refer to physical or symbolic places where memory crystallises and is preserved. These can include monuments, memorials, museums, rituals, anniversaries, and other forms of commemoration that serve as anchors for collective memory. Nora's concept emphasizes how societies and cultures construct and preserve memories of significant events or experiences, thereby shaping their identities and historical narratives. His exploration of sites of memory illuminates how individuals and communities engage with the past and negotiate its meaning in the present with the realization that the "consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn" (8).

While discussing what they have lost, she directs the author towards what was left. Several objects managed to come "back to this side!" (329) from their houses in India. There was a brass vessel that belonged to her husband's mother, the set of silver bowls from Sitara's trousseau, a cup to serve dessert, the silk *salwar-kameez* with gold and silver embroidery, and the photo of the house that she presented to the author, all of which reminded her of her soil. Lastly, the narrator contemplates how, as time progresses, the past becomes enveloped by life, seamlessly merging into it over time.

It brings to mind the character Zakir from *Basti* by Intizar Husain, where he exists both in the present and in suspended time within ancient, sealed houses simultaneously. The trauma of the lost home still sticks with him. The reference to the "bunch of keys" (188) indicates the significance of the keys not only as the keys to their old house but also reminds him of the nurturing earth of Rupnagar, which has provided shelter and benevolence. The initial disturbance and unpredictable events during partition are not inherently traumatic but gain their traumatic nature through remembrance (Pathania 192).

Conclusion

The objects that surround us in our daily lives contribute significantly to our material, personal, and even spiritual well-being, extending beyond their practical uses. Objects serve as reflections that mirror individual and societal identities. Malhotra portrays these objects and artefacts as fundamental to serving as gateways to past cultures and behaviours. Therefore, the present study of material culture provides a valuable framework for understanding diverse cultures and societies during the time of partition. *Remnants of a Separation* occupies a noteworthy interdisciplinary realm that equally draws from history, given its focus, and anthropology, due to its exploration of people and their memories through material possessions (Dutta *Lekh Review*).

In her additional endeavour, *The Book of Everlasting Things* (2022), Malhotra goes

beyond the connection between tangibles and memory to delve deeper into the correlation between memory and intangible elements such as taste, colours, and scents. She posits that smell remains the most enigmatic and delicate among all our senses, possessing the unique power to encapsulate history and memory.

Memory has been a key focus for psychologists and cognitive scientists, serving as a form of counter-history that addresses the dynamics of forgetting and erasure, as noted by Marianne Hirsch (15-16). Aleida Assmann (2010) emphasizes that verbalized memories become part of a shared symbolic framework, making them subject to exchange, validation, revision, and “last not least, written down” (36). This framework suggests that the post-memory generation of Partition, now emerging from confusion and unawareness, is actively engaged in reevaluating and reimagining Partition's legacy. This third generation has the opportunity to revisit and reshape the memory of partition, understanding its significance for future generations (Kapila 29).

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Unimagined Communities: Understanding the Impact of Capitalist-driven Land Acquisition in Vishwas Patil's *A Dirge for the Dammed*

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Abstract

This study explores the complex dynamics of land acquisition for development purposes, with primary focus on Vishwas Patil's Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel, *A Dirge for the Dammed* (2014). It examines how capitalist frameworks and the concept of environmentalism of the poor illuminate the impacts of such land acquisitions on indigenous communities. By utilizing these frameworks, the paper delves into the consequences of land acquisition for dam construction on the Jambhlikars, as presented in the novel, highlighting the intertwined issues of environmental degradation and social inequality. It also emphasizes the novel's role as a critique of capitalist-driven development and a catalyst for change. Drawing on theoretical perspectives and textual evidence, this paper attempts to unravel the multifaceted influence of land acquisition for developmental projects on indigenous communities, their livelihoods, and ecology.

Keywords: Cheap nature, Developmental refugees, Globalization, Injustice, Unimagined communities

Introduction

The impact of globalization on our interconnected world is enormous. It has brought land acquisition for development purposes to the forefront, giving significant attention to it. The process of land acquisition for development purposes involves acquiring or purchasing land; where factors such as governments, private corporations, or individuals acquire massive lands for purposes like agriculture, infrastructure development, construction work etc. to name a few. Capitalism fuels globalization by turning land into assets, which often prioritizes monetary benefits over the lives and well-being of the environment and the indigenous communities. The practice of forcefully acquiring lands for development is not new. It goes back in history several hundred years and across diverse regions. Dr. Vandana Shiva in *The Great Indian Land Grab* (2011), suggests that globalization resembles a new form of colonization, leading to extensive land grabs in numerous regions. She writes, "Colonization was based on the violent take over of land. And now, globalization as recolonization is leading to a massive land grab in India, in Africa, in Latin America. Land is being grabbed for speculative investment, for speculative urban sprawl, for mines and factories, for highways and expressways" (Shiva vii). Such land takeovers happen without appropriate consultation or enough compensation for the affected communities. It causes problems like social unrest, conflicts, and environmental degradation. Those displaced not only lose their homes but also their source of livelihoods.

Land acquisition for development often happens in the global South, continuing historical patterns of exploitation and inequality. Though the perpetrators have

shifted from colonial powers to corporations, the power dynamics and impacts on the marginalized indigenous communities have remained consistent. Such situations can be described as a contemporary form of colonialism, commonly referred to as 'neocolonialism'. Neocolonialism represents a form of exploitation in the modern era, where dominant powers, often through economic and political means, maintain control and influence over economically vulnerable people. "New colonialisms' are even more dangerous than traditional colonial domination as they create new patterns of dependency that are difficult to resist" (Cuddon 466). To this end, this article effectively utilizes Vishwas Patil's 1992 text *Zadazadati*, translated into English from Marathi in 2014 by Keerti Ramachandra under the title *A Dirge for the Dammed*. It was bestowed with the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992. Vishwas Patil, in interviews, has talked about growing up in rural poverty in Maharashtra, showing his personal connection to the novel's themes. Drawing from his experiences as a District Resettlement Officer and observations of the Chanduli dam project, he blends factual insights with fictional storytelling. By skillfully combining real-life observations with imaginative storytelling, he succeeds in enriching the novel's illustration of the societal and environmental impacts of development projects. The text is of immense value as it acts as a tool for understanding the complex and multifaceted issue of land acquisition for development and its impacts on indigenous communities and the environment.

In *A Dirge for the Dammed*, the theme of land acquisition for dam construction emerges as a prominent and recurrent motif. Set in the Jambhli region of Maharashtra, the novel unfolds multiple layers of land ownership and land related disputes which are quite often debatable. For the indigenous community residing there, land serves as a symbol of prosperity and strife. The novel recounts the encounters of the Jambhlikars with the government officials who arrive in Jambhli to seize their lands for the construction of a megadam. The text captures in detail the emotions, sentiments, and difficulties faced by the Jambhlikars in the face of development. This paper, thus, seeks to analyze how dam construction affects the indigenous communities by drawing from both capitalist and 'environmentalism of the poor' perspectives. It demonstrates how capitalism prioritizes short-term gains, harming the environment and, at the same time, marginalizing the poor and the indigenous. Furthermore, this study draws upon the conceptual frameworks of 'cheap nature', 'developmental refugees', and 'unimagined communities' proposed by Jason Moore, Thayer Scudder, and Rob Nixon. By combining these perspectives, the paper aims to understand the connection between capitalism, environmental harm, and social inequality.

Reading Literature: Exploring Environmental and Social Implications of Development

Defining indigenous people is complex because it requires the recognition of their deep-rooted historical connection to specific territories, which can vary widely across regions. Jayantha Perera, in the essay "International Law and Indigenous

People's Rights,” cites a definition of indigenous peoples as proposed by Martinez Cobo. According to Cobo, “Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, have a historical continuity with preinvasion and precolonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems” (qtd. in Perera 16). In the novel, the Jambhlikars can be considered indigenous because they have lived on the land for many generations. This is poignantly expressed in their question, “Where should we go now after having lived here for generations?” (Patil 4). They are also deeply connected to its culture, traditions, and their ancestral heritage, reflecting a strong sense of belonging. Their long presence on this land has shaped their unique identity as the original inhabitants of the region. In the narrative, 'land' carries varied meanings and drives the story. It significantly impacts the lives and destinies of the people living on it. For the indigenous Jambhlikars, land is more than just a geographical area; it is a vital source of sustenance and livelihood. In the essay, “Sense of Place and Lieu de Memoire: A Cultural Memory Approach to Environmental Texts,” Axel Goodbody refers to the cultural memory approach introduced by scholars like Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Jan and Aleida Assmann. In accordance with this approach, places are not just physical spaces but also symbolic constructs that help to constitute people's identities (Goodbody 57). Goodbody's cultural memory approach highlights land's dual nature as both physical space and symbolic construct, shaping identities and narratives in Patil's novel through its multifaceted meanings. When discussions ensued concerning their likely removal from the land, in the course of his hut being demolished, Govinda, one of the central characters in the novel asks: “Where do I go now? What alien land will they send me to? If we had all gone together..” (Patil 29). Govinda's heartfelt question resonates with Goodbody's cultural memory concept that underscores the indigenous community's deep bond with their ancestral land and, at the same time, highlights the importance of communal relocation in shaping their cultural identity and narrative. Aligned with this notion, Patil also underscores the community's appeal for collective rehabilitation with the lines,

They had to live together on this soil. Now in the face of the impending disaster, they would all go, arm-in-arm, into exile. Rehabilitate us all in the same place, do not break up our community, they had urged from the beginning (Patil 126).

These lines from the text echo Goodbody's cultural memory framework emphasizing the significance of communal bonds not only among the people within the community but also with the land. The novel, thus, acknowledges that land plays a vital role in the lives of the indigenous people residing in Jambhli.

Under capitalism, land becomes a valuable asset when acquired for development. It gains economic value and serves as a resource for building infrastructure. In Patil's

story, turning land into an asset for dam construction causes negative effects, such as deforestation and the loss of livelihoods for the Jambhlikars. In a poignant portrayal of environmental upheaval in the novel, Patil writes how a bulldozer “headed straight for Govinda's fields. Inexorably it moved, breached the bund and attacked the fruit trees. In one fell scoop, some ten guava trees were uprooted and flung aside. The second stroke nudged the earth and scattered a shower of bright green guavas. The next to go were the bananas, tender young suckers and strong pale stems bent over with fruit, their broad shiny leaves ripped to shreds” (Patil 24). Following this, Patil mentions how “the heartless machine violated the land” (Patil 25) referring to it as the “rape of [Avadai's] land” (Patil 25). This vivid imagery of young and tender trees being destroyed is symbolic of a vulnerable pregnant woman, with the young fruits and trees representing the potential for a new life and growth. The image of the trees, laden with young fruits being bent over with the weight of the ripening produce, evokes the image of the nurturing aspect of pregnancy, where a woman's body shelters and nurtures new life. However, Patil intensifies this symbolism by using the metaphor of the bulldozer to highlight the brutal and destructive nature of the process, emphasizing the violation and loss experienced by the Jambhlikars. The bulldozer's destructive move through these fertile fields portrays a stark contrast to the nurturing aspects of pregnancy. Instead of fostering life, the bulldozer represents the brutal invasion of capitalism and development, quite indifferent to the delicate balance of nature. The metaphorical comparison of the land to a pregnant woman underscores the violation and exploitation inherent in the process of land acquisition for development. This imagery further emphasizes the injustice and brutality of the 'rape of the land'. Patil makes the scenes vividly graphic as the relentless march of progress continues in the form of government-sanctioned deforestation for dam construction, and the community of Jambhli stand witness to the harrowing spectacle of their source of livelihoods being felled. In this context, Jason W. Moore's concept of 'Cheap Nature' provides a lens through which we can understand the commodification and exploitation of land depicted in the narrative. Moore, in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (2016), describes how capitalism's way of making profit also makes nature 'cheap' in two ways. First, it tries to lower the cost of natural elements like land, labour, and resources by exploiting them without considering their long-term value. Second, capitalism aims to make nature seem less important ethically and politically, treating it as inferior or as disposable in order to justify using it for profit (Moore 2-3). In *A Dirge for the Dammed*, the bulldozer's ruthless destruction of the fields and the subsequent devastation of the fruit trees and crops illustrate Moore's concept of making nature 'cheap' in the capitalist system. The government's appropriation of land for dam construction exemplifies the reduction of the monetary cost of natural elements, as land is exploited for infrastructural progress without consideration for its long-term value or the livelihoods dependent on it. Moreover, the author's depiction of the bulldozer and the subsequent destruction of ecology captures the ethical and political devaluation of nature inherent in capitalism, as the community

of Jambhli witnesses the commodification and exploitation of their environment for the sake of progress. This also aligns with Moore's assertion in *Capitalism and the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (2015) that capitalism established a global mode of wealth production centered on commodities, facilitating rapid shifts in production across the globe. He writes that with every new wave of global expansion, societies and landscapes have been reshaped at unprecedented speed (Moore 68). Similarly, the vast transformation of Jambhli's landscape under the capitalist drive for infrastructure development exemplifies such globalizing force and its local impacts, highlighting the ethical and ecological costs of such progress.

When land is commodified and transformed into a mere asset in the novel, the people of Jambhli are forced into the status of 'developmental refugees.' Coined by the anthropologist Thayer Scudder, the term 'developmental refugees' encapsulates a paradoxical figure, representing both the promise of development and the threat of displacement and destitution, especially in the context of megadams where communities face the risk of being drowned (Nixon 152). Such communities not only lose their physical homes but also their cultural and temporal identities that they once relied upon for sustenance and continuity. The bulldozing of Govinda's fields and the destruction of fruit trees and crops belonging to others from the community, not only vividly depict the physical upheaval; they also signify the loss of cultural and temporal identities that the community once depended upon for survival. The destruction of fruit trees and crops, which are not just sources of food but also symbols of heritage and tradition, further underscores the profound impact of development on the fabric of community life. The community of Jambhli, like many others affected by big developmental projects, are also portrayed in the novel to be stuck between promises of progress and the reality of losing their homes. Despite promises of compensation, the people receive less land than they lost to the project, exacerbating their sense of injustice and loss. "Each individual was entitled to no more than seven acres, regardless of the size of their old holdings or even their families. Most would have to settle for a mere three acres" (Patil 54). This disparity highlights the unequal treatment faced by marginalized communities in the name of development. However, it is not just physical compensation that holds importance in the narrative; emotional compensation is equally important. The loss of cultural identities cannot be quantified or equated with monetary compensation alone. It is their sense of belonging, continuity, and connection to their heritage, that is irreplaceable. Goodbody's cultural memory approach also emphasizes the aspect that the people of Jambhli are not just physically attached to the land but emotionally and mentally as well. Hence, in order to truly overcome the trauma of loss of land, the Jambhlikars would require more than just tangible resources, they would require a restoration of their mental and emotional connections to the land.

In relation to the above discussion, the 'developmental refugees' from Patil's text also become 'unimagined' in the process, as their displacement, rehabilitation, and suffering often become invisible in the bigger narrative of progress. Drawing from

Benedict Anderson's idea of 'imagined communities', Rob Nixon in *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), introduces the idea of 'unimagined communities'. It refers to those marginalized communities whose existence and needs are overlooked or ignored by mainstream society or by those in power. These communities face problems such as social inequality, discrimination, or the prioritization of development projects that disregard their rights and well-being (Nixon 150). To quote from Patil's novel,

Guruji turned to look at the miserable, long-suffering Jambhli – broken, in body and spirit. It had been denied electricity, roads had not been laid. Only Kalubai knew how many Jambhlikars died for want of medical facilities and how many had perished in the floods. Yet, within two years of Indrapuri, the abode of the gods, seemed to have descended on this wilderness. A year ago a hospital was set up in the colony. Within three months a luxurious rest house had appeared, and about a hundred and twenty-five staff bungalows, big and small, for the sahebs (Patil 106).

The above lines illustrate the differences faced by those considered 'unimagined' by mainstream society. The discrimination faced by the Jambhlikars serve as a crucial example of how marginalized communities often bear the brunt of such developmental projects. The author also illustrates this harsh reality through the words, “But the irony of it all. The dam became operational, Koyna got electricity and Maharashtra poverty. But the local people on whose land it was built, were left in abject poverty” (Patil 8). This quote encapsulates the deprivation experienced by the local inhabitants of Jambhli. Through this critical observation, Vishwas Patil sheds light on the injustices embedded in such projects. He also compels the readers to reconsider how development is pursued and who actually benefits from it.

In direct opposition to capitalist views that prioritize profit and infrastructural progress at the expense of ecological and social well-being, Rob Nixon's concept of 'Environmentalism of the Poor' also provides a crucial lens to understand the plight of the community of Jambhli. As observed from the above discussion, capitalism's drive to commodify nature transforms land into mere capital, resulting in the exploitation and devaluation of nature and the Jambhlikars. Environmentalism of the poor, however, focuses on the struggles and resistance of marginalized communities who suffer the most from environmental destruction and economic exploitation. *A Dirge for the Dammed* vividly portrays such resistance through the determined efforts of the Jambhlikars to protect their land and heritage. In a poignant portrayal from the text, the Jambhlikars plan to “occupy the dam site early in the morning” (Patil 17) before the officials arrive. Carrying food for four days, they intend to block the officials from continuing work on the dam, demonstrating their resolve to protect their land and livelihoods. Throughout the novel, a significant character named Khairmode Guruji emerges as a steadfast advocate for the Jambhlikars, tirelessly championing their cause against the injustices inflicted upon them by the dominant forces of development and exploitation. He proposes a pragmatic alternative to the megadam project by advocating the construction of “three smaller dams instead of this one” (Patil 38). In questioning the necessity of displacing numerous villages and disrupting natural ecosystems, he highlights the

potential for mitigating environmental and social impacts while still meeting the region's energy needs. However, in response to such resistance, the officials label the dissenting voices, including Khairmode Guruji, as “trouble makers” (Patil 107), resorting to measures such as imprisonment to suppress their advocacy. They confront Guruji, questioning his stance on development with the words, “You continue to fight for them. Does it mean that you are opposed to development of any kind in this country?” (Patil 257), insinuating that opposing the megadam project equates to opposition against progress in the nation. Such a treatment highlights the disregard for meaningful participation of marginalized communities in decision-making, which is one of the key aspects of environmentalism of the poor. This exclusion also reinforces power imbalances inherent in capitalist-driven development, where people like the Jambhlikars, considered 'unimagined' by those in powerful positions, are silenced and their well-being overlooked in the pursuit of progress. The portrayal of resistance and suppression in Patil's novel emphasizes the need for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges and empowers marginalized communities to actively participate in shaping policies that impact their lives and environments. Nixon's concept, thus, serves as a counterpoint to capitalism by highlighting the struggles and resistance of marginalized communities against injustice. In the novel, this is vividly depicted through the efforts of the Jambhlikars to fight for their rights, as well as the advocacy of figures like Khairmode Guruji against the exploitative forces of development.

This narrative of resistance in Patil's novel can be discussed parallelly with the real-life Silent Valley Movement of the 1970s and 1980s in Kerala, India. The main motive behind the movement was to protect a tropical rainforest in Kerala from a proposed hydroelectric dam project. Somewhat similar to the incident in Jambhli, the dam project in Kerala threatened to uproot not just the ecology, but the livelihoods of the indigenous community residing there as well. In Patil's story, the outcome of the Jambhlikars' protest was failure to safeguard their ecology and livelihoods ultimately making them succumb to the powerful forces of capitalist-driven development. However, the Silent Valley Movement, on the other hand, was successfully able to stall the construction of the proposed dam. It becomes imperative to draw a relativity between the resistance by the Jambhlikars in Patil's novel and the real-life movement of Silent Valley because it depicts the strength of such movements against developmental projects. This relativity also brings to the forefront the importance of Environmentalism of the Poor and its great contribution towards the causes of the marginalised. While the Jambhlikars may have been unable to prevent the destruction of the ecology and their livelihoods, it becomes apparent that the novel serves as a powerful testimony to the strength and perseverance of marginalized indigenous communities in the face of capitalist-driven development.

Conclusion

A Dirge for the Dammed, thus, underscores the potential of literature or literary

narratives in challenging injustices and advocating social change. Through vivid imageries and symbols, Patil not only highlights the destructive power of development but also the resilience and determination of the community. Additionally, he critiques the systems of power that perpetuate exploitation, not just of the environment, but also of the marginalized indigenous communities. Patil's narrative is a reminder of the interconnections between capitalist-driven land acquisition for development purposes, environmental and social issues. This paper, ultimately, illustrates how the forceful appropriation of land for development leads to deforestation, turning the Jambhlikars into developmental refugees and rendering them part of unimagined communities.

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Understanding Interlocking Factors of Oppression, Intersectionality and Subjugation of Dalit Women: Analyzing Manju Bala's "Conflict"

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Abstract

Through a close textual analysis of Manju Bala's short story "Conflict" (2020), this research article intends to analyze the oppression imposed upon the Bengali Dalit women characters on the pretext of their caste-gender intersectional identity. The present paper also tries to decode the notions of Brahmanical patriarchy, traumatic realism, and physical violence imposed upon the doubly marginalized Dalit women characters and how these factors have shaped their lives and experiences. To develop this paper, the researcher has consulted theoretical formulations on caste stratification, caste-gender subjugation, Brahmanical patriarchy, intersectionality, and traumatic realism to understand the holistic scenario of oppression faced by the Dalit women strata.

Keywords: Caste, gender, Bengali Dalit women, oppression, Brahmanical patriarchy, intersectionality

Introduction

The arena of Dalit studies deals with the suffering, oppression, and subjugation faced by members of the Dalit strata in their day-to-day lives. But even inside the Dalit community, there is a section of the Dalit women populace who are exposed to dual subjugation on the pretext of their caste and gender identity. Caste is one of the most crucial as well as dominant factors of India's complex social structure, which becomes the foundation for discrimination and marginalization of those who belong to the bottom of this caste structure. Even within this entrenched hierarchical system, it is the Dalit women "who face compounded forms of oppression due to their caste and gender, spanning economic, physical, and mental aspects" (Cherches 1). To understand the dynamics of this oppression, it is necessary to recognize and decode Dalit women's experiential reality. This research article enquires about the experiential reality of Dalit female characters and explores the multi-dimensional subjugation associated with them, focusing on Manju Bala's notable short story "Conflict" (2020). In order to analyze the narrative, the researcher will employ the theoretical tenets related to caste-gender stratification, Brahmanical patriarchy, and the discourse of intersectionality, which will be pivotal in investigating the diverse factors influencing several aspects of subjugation encountered by Dalit women.

Following the Dalit Panthers movement of Maharashtra in the 1970s, a wide range of Dalit writings infused with Dalit consciousness came to the forefront. After this, a voluminous amount of Dalit literature from various regional domains started appearing in the Indian literary scenario. Bengali Dalit literature emerged almost twenty years after its Maharashtrian counterpart. In the case of Dalit literature, Dalit women writers from various regional provinces have also contributed vigorously

through their poems, short stories, novels, autobiographies, and historiography. In this regard, Varsha Ayyar comments, “through their narratives, they unapologetically and feistily brought out contradictions of Dalit patriarchy and wider Dalit movement” (22). The inception of Dalit women's writing has a profound connection to the fact that “the Indian feminists too do not truly recognise the pain and trauma of the women pertaining to the lower caste background” (Anowar 21). Unfortunately, even after having strong resistive Dalit women's voices in the literary realm, the writings from the Dalit women segment “are relatively less popular, underexplored in comparison to upper caste Hindu women and male Dalit autobiographies/poems that consigning them to the extreme peripheries, epistemically obscured and unclaimed” (Ayyar 23). Bengali Dalit literature is also no exception to this. Manju Bala, a notable Bengali Dalit feminist and writer, wrote the short story “Conflict” in Bengali vernacular as *Dwando*, translated into English by Laboni Chatterjee, and published in 2020. Bala's narratives work as testimonies regarding the issues of caste and gender stratification. The central subject matter of her writings “display many commonalities with Bama, Daya Pawar, and other Dalit women writers in other vernacular languages” (Anowar 22), situating the stratification of the Dalit women section at the centre.

Decoding Manju Bala's “Conflict”

“Conflict” centres on the romantic union of an impoverished orphan Bengali Dalit girl, Banani Mondal, and an affluent upper-caste Kalyan Kanjilal, who is a medical practitioner. Through her narrative technique, Bala portrayed the chain of events and suffering associated with Banani's life following the unequal relationship with Kalyan on the pretext of caste, class, and gender. The narrative began with the scene where the central lady protagonist, Banani, lies in bed with “tears flowing silently from the corners of her eyes” (Bala 12). At the beginning of the short story, from Banani's first-person narrative, the readers learn that Banani is proficient in singing and an ardent music lover. She met Kalyan while pursuing her singing classes, and Kalyan was a medical college student then. Soon, this meeting turned into friendship and eventually made way for love. In the initial stages of their relationship, they “would take the long-cut to the library, walking in silence underneath the Bakul trees” (Bala 13) to spend time with each other. During this time, Banani's close friend Swapna warned Banani not to be involved in this relationship due to the caste difference and contrasting social status, which could complicate the future situation for both. But Banani paid no heed to Swapna's concerns and told her that Kalyan is an educated, modern boy, so these age-old societal factors would not be able to affect their relationship. After some time of their romantic involvement, Kalyan proposed to Banani for marriage. He assured her about their happily ever after, and within no time, Banani gave him a positive response to this marital liaison.

From this juncture only, the problem started. Kalyan's mother, Renuka Kanjilal, a retired teacher at a higher secondary school, acutely protested against this unequal exogamous union. Even after being an educator for several years and hailing from a

modern, progressive metropolis, she could not imagine this socially unequal association between her upper-caste, medical practitioner, well-to-do son, and lower-caste, have-not colony girl Banani. But even after the vigorous opposition of his mother, Kalyan married Banani and brought her home. The real problem started when, after the marriage, Banani was exposed to Renuka Devi's coarse behaviour every now and then. The situation worsened when Banani's mother-in-law reprimanded her appallingly while she sat with her harmonium to practice music. Renuka Devi proclaimed, "you low-born girl, no singing here! It is not the tradition of the Kanjilal family to have its women break into song like that!" (Bala 15). Unexpectedly, without opposing his mother's behaviour against Banani, Kalyan outrightly supported his mother's standpoint. Kalyan said in an orderly tone,

Do you want to continue your singing lessons, Banani? But since mother doesn't approve of it, it's better you give up singing, you know. And you don't really need to continue with your M.A. either, do you? Why don't you concentrate on the household chores from now on? (Bala 15-16)

This is the point in "Conflict" where the feelings of affection took a backseat in Banani and Kalyan's lives, and Kalyan acted as an upper-caste patriarchal figure who will go to any extent to protect the age-old traditions of the Kanjilal family by exercising control over her Dalit wife. From the extract, we can understand that though Kalyan asked her wife what she wanted to do, he himself only answered the questions on her behalf to decide her future course of action. Here, Banani becomes the victim of Brahmanical patriarchy.

Decoding the Idea of Brahmanical Patriarchy in "Conflict"

Brahmanical patriarchy is a conceptualization that affects the lives of the marginalized women strata in a significant manner. Uma Chakravarti, in this regard, suggests, "Brahmanical patriarchy is structurally integrated into the caste system, the distinctive cultural codes for upper and lower caste women... it can be seen that Brahmanical patriarchy is a mechanism to preserve land, women, and ritual quality within it" (33). Kalyan's restriction on Banani's music practice and pursuit of higher education on the pretext of maintaining the age-old customs of his family is exemplary of his patriarchal mindset, due to which he wanted to restrict the activities of Banani according to his upper-caste mother's whims, wishes, and family customs. How Banani's caste identity works as a potential obstacle to her future aspirations became clear from the point that Kalyan's mother, an educated woman, and a retired teacher, stopped her from practicing music and pursuing an M.A. degree on the pretence of familial dictum. From this episode, it is clear how familial traditions and customs work dissimilarly in the case of Kalyan's upper-caste mother and lower-caste wife. While Renuka Devi worked all along her life and managed the indoors and outdoors singlehandedly, she restricted all these possibilities for Banani. She directed her to limit herself only to the household chores. In this venture, Renuka Devi got the complete support of her son. To understand the oppressive mechanism

of Brahmanical patriarchy, Sunaina Arya comments,

Brahmanical patriarchy is not patriarchy of, or by, the brahmins. It includes in its very conceptualisation that all individuals are allotted a particular position of privilege and deprivation, and the resultant violence and discrimination to the lower caste groups.... Rethinking through caste and gender only establishes that Dalit women face caste-based discrimination in the vertical structure of society and gender-based discrimination at the horizontal structure of society. (Arya 222-223)

The plot of the narrative gets even more complicated when Kalyan and her mother started torturing Banani physically. Female characters in the Indian familial structure epitomize familial honour, lineage, and associated customs. In this regard, Kannabiran and Kannabiran (1991) suggest

gender roles within caste-based societies are constructed in a way that links a caste's 'manhood' to men's control over women. Consequently, the female body has become a symbol of a community or household's honour, thus serving as a means of control: as well as asserting caste authority and superiority. (2131)

Here, Banani's caste-gender based intersectional identity became the sole reason for her subjugation in her in-law's house. Supporting his mother unquestioningly, Kalyan started to assert the upper-caste traditions of the Kanjilal family by crushing Banani's aspirations. Subsequently, when Banani informed them that she couldn't stop practicing music because music is the only medium through which she can recollect the memories of her deceased father, who taught her the first notes, situations became critical. She mentioned, "my whole body is marked with scars, black, blotchy, and innumerable. They are tokens of my husband's love and my mother-in-law's care for me" (Bala 16). Bala, through her narrative technique here, portrayed how exogamous marriage as a social institution brings serious consequences for a Dalit female girl, like physical abuse, mental trauma, and crushing her agency on the pretext of her caste and gender identity.

In a caste-stratified society, endogamous marriage unions or marrying within one's own caste works as a central means for maintaining caste purity. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, in his canonical treatise *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), suggests that "inter-caste marriages are the way through which India can get rid of its caste structure" (quoted in Mitra 47). But unfortunately, in the case of *anuloma* kind of exogamous marriages, "where an upper-caste man gets married with a lower caste woman" (Mitra 46), the lower caste women get exposed to several forms of discrimination, which most of the times go unattended. Here, through Bala's narrative, this fact became apparent that through the utilization of the Brahmanic patriarchal ideals, Kalyan tried to control the life of his wife, crushing her agency entirely on the very process itself. As the plot of the narrative advances, the reader gets to know that Banani is so traumatized by the abusive treatment and torture imposed upon her that she proclaims, "Kalyan is no longer the Kalyan I fell in love with . . . I would never have known how brutal people can be if I had not come so close to the Kalyan of today" (Bala 17). By this time, Banani also gave birth to a baby daughter named Tumpa. However, the worsening marital scenario, torture at the hands of her husband and mother-in-law, made her realise that if something happened to her, no

one would take the responsibility of her daughter. Due to this, she wrote to one of her closest friends, Swapna, and said, “I have a little girl called Tumpa. I want you to bring her up! See, if you can make Tumpa a doctor, even better doctor than her father” (Bala 17). Regarding the condition of the children in most of the cases born out of an exogamous wedlock, Mayurakshi Mitra suggests, “the woman from a Dalit caste is abandoned post marriage to fend for herself and her children” (6). In Banani's case, she was devastated as well as traumatized by the events that happened to her after her marriage, and that's why Banani has this thought that if something happens to her, maybe Kalyan won't agree to take responsibility for their child.

In the succeeding sections of the narrative, Bala carried forward the narrative for nearly twenty to twenty-five years, portraying grown-up Tumpa as the narrator. The scene began when Banani's daughter Tumpa, brought up by Swapna, has already become a doctor. From a pile of old books and discarded yellow papers, Tumpa found her mother's diary, from that diary, she learned about her mother's distressful life. Through the recollection of Tumpa, the readers learned that she has a dim memory of her mother because when Banani passed away, she was a toddler. Tumpa demonstrated that “a stove had exploded, and her mother had got burnt. She was gone before she could be taken to the hospital” (Bala 17). This is how the painful life of Banani came to an end.

Intersectionality, Exogamous Union, and its Consequences

Though Bala situated Banani at the centre of the narrative, she also portrayed how events take a turn in the life of a Bengali Dalit girl married to an upper-caste man, as well as provided an idea regarding the situation of a child born out of an exogamous marriage. The offspring born out of inter-caste wedlock also suffer from the discriminatory attitude perpetrated by their own families. Considering the suffering of such children, academicians suggest, “it is the child who bears the brunt of the seed and earth dichotomy of exogamous marriages, and he or she is oppressed as a social outcast” (Mitra 53). Here, the scenario is similar to Tumpa's case. After the demise of her mother, she was not even accepted by his father's family, and she grew up with her mother's friend, Swapna. Without parental support, it can be assumed that she has faced many hardships to be a medical practitioner.

“Conflict” points out that even a modern, so-called progressive family like Kalyan's is also influenced by the stigmatized lower caste identity of its daughter-in-law. Dalit women characters in the story state how the upper-caste characters physically, mentally, and psychologically harass them. According to Anupama Rao, in the case of the lived experiences of the Dalit women characters, “caste works as a factor of degradation” (quoted in Pan 132). To understand the plight of Banani and her daughter Tumpa, who suffered directly due to this atrocious marital union, it is necessary to analyze the narrative from the Dalit feminist outlook. Regarding the Dalit feminist standpoint, Anandita Pan suggests, “it analyses the limitations in mainstream Indian feminist and Dalit Politics' representation of Dalit women which subsume Dalit women under the generic rubric of caste” (129), neglecting the influential factor of their gender identity. Dalit feminism works as an

epistemological framework that puts 'Dalit women' at its center, whose main agenda is to observe, contextualize, and analyze several factors contributing to their subjugation. By analyzing the intersectional perspectives of one's identity, this article has tried to examine how diverse factors such as gender and caste contribute significantly to the marginalization of Dalit women characters like Banani. The emergence of intersectionality as a theoretical discourse started in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It grabs academic attention with the publication of Kimberle Crenshaw's celebrated article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." Through this article, Crenshaw wanted to develop a framework "for analysing power that encompasses and connects gender, class, and race-based subordination" (Pan 24). Regarding the emergence of intersectionality in the Indian sub-continent, academicians like "Paik (2014), Ghosh and Banerjee (2018) situate the beginning of an intersectional thinking, especially in relation to the categories of caste and gender, to Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule" (Kumar and Bakshi 53). In the case of Indian contextualisation using the intersectional framework, "Dalit Feminism highlights how Dalit women are erased/ignored by mainstream Indian Feminism and Dalit Politics" (Pan 29). Intersectional discourse puts Dalit women at the crossroads of caste and gender, providing an alternative representational design for them focusing on the multiple axes of oppression (caste, class, and gender) to which they are exposed. The intersectional framework helps us to understand the oppressive lived experience of the Dalit women characters, shifting from the stereotypical monolithic representation of Dalit women either as 'women' or as 'Dalits.' The usage of intersectionality as a framework in Bala's "Conflict" guides us to the difference that exists between the overarching binaries of rich/poor, where Kalyan's family comes from an affluent background, and Banani comes from an impoverished Dalit family, upper caste/Dalit identity, where Kalyan comes from an upper-caste family, but Banani comes from a Dalit family. By putting intersectionality at the centre of the Dalit feminist outlook, this article critically examines "how intersections function in relation to dominant power structures" (Pan 40) concerning this short story. Using intersectionality as a tool, we can understand that Banani was not only subjugated on the basis of her lower caste identity but also by her destitute societal position, economic vulnerability, and gender identity.

Concerning the oppressive outlook against the Dalits, the body becomes the principal site of oppression. Bodily violence becomes one of the notable and vividly used means of Dalit subjugation. In the case of physical violence, Dalit women suffer more than their male counterparts. Bala's narrative can also be read through Michael Rothberg's conceptualization of traumatic realism, which foregrounds bodily subjugation at its centre. The physical abuse meted out to Banani by her husband and her mother-in-law contributed immensely to Banani's becoming a victim of traumatic realism. Traumatic realism, as a theoretical tool, portrays the subjugated characters' individual, collective, and cultural injury "through which the reader is shocked into recognition of a world that violates all previous experiences"

(Nayar 240). Here, though Banani became the victim of the multi-axis oppressive structure of the Kanjilal family, in the process, her body becomes the site of the exercise of power by her husband and mother-in-law. Regarding the violence imposed upon the body, Moraga and Anzaldúa postulate the idea of “theory in flesh” (19). In this regard, Surya Simon suggests, “‘theory in flesh’ becomes an integral part of Dalit personal narratives, allowing Dalit women to express their embodied suffering and trauma. This is relevant and necessary, particularly since there is a shocking rise of violence against Dalit women due to their ‘socio-economic vulnerability’ (111). Here, the bodily violence imposed upon Banani not only portrays the suffering of the Dalit women characters at the hands of the upper caste characters but also demonstrates the experiential reality of the Dalit women characters inside the inter-caste marriages. Regarding the situation of Dalit women inside inter-caste marriage with an upper-caste man, D Sujatha (2014) suggests inter-caste marriages by Dalit women act as a crucial factor behind their exposure to domestic violence. Surprisingly, inter-caste marriages have differentiated repercussions in the case of Dalit men and Dalit women. D Sujatha’s study suggests, “If a Dalit man gets married to an upper-caste woman and brings her into his family home, she gets all the respect from his family as well as the community. But if a Dalit woman gets married to an upper-caste man she is subjected to the harassment from her in-laws and husband’s community (21).” This is exactly the predicament of Banani.

Conclusion

The initial attraction and the romantic union between Kalyan and Banani eventually paved the way for their marriage and brought severe suffering to her life. For Banani, verbal humiliation, losing her choices and agency after the marriage, physical abuse, and traumatic situations made her life so challenging and awful that at the end of the narrative, Banani lost her life, leaving her infant child behind. Manju Bala’s short story “Conflict” highlights the plight and suffering of the Dalit women characters caused by the intersectional working of their caste, class, and gender identity. The narrative mirrors how the institution of inter-caste marriages acts as a medium of graded inequality for Dalit women characters like Banani, who becomes an easy victim of caste-gender stratification, Brahmanical patriarchy, and physical abuse. This study also sheds light on the fact that, though many academicians believe that inter-caste marriage can be a strong means of reducing caste inequality in society, “Conflict,” to the contrary, shows the devastating effect of caste-gender dynamics in the case of exogamous marital union and how it has affected the life of a poor Dalit woman.

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Deconstructing Disposability: The Underbelly of Global Capitalism in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

In the era of global capitalism, vulnerable populations encounter economic disparity, social injustice, and systemic exclusion across the globe. Concepts like Zygmunt Bauman's 'wasted lives,' Agamben's 'bare life,' and Butler's 'precarity' help us understand how such capitalist modernization has produced 'disposable' economic outcasts. These philosophers critique the socio-economic structures of capitalism that devalue certain lives as surplus to market needs, collateral casualties in the pursuit of 'growth'. This paper explores the representation of these 'wasted lives' in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* (2008), analysing how marginalized individuals are made 'disposable' in modern India.

Keywords: Disposable lives, Violence, Global Capitalism, Wasted lives

I

In his book *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*, Zygmunt Bauman probes into the idea of 'wasted lives' as a consequence of modernity and the global capitalist system. Bauman contends that contemporary capitalist societies, driven by the narratives of unavoidable economic development, systematically produce 'human waste'—individuals and groups that are deemed redundant and disposable. He posits that in the globalized, deregulated, market-driven economy, an ever-growing number of populations are continuously being regarded as useless within the framework of modern, capitalist economic progress. Bauman classifies the unemployed, the poor, refugees, and other marginalized groups as the primary victims of this 'systemic disposability'. These individuals, he suggests, are denied the benefits of modernity:

The production of 'human waste', or more correctly wasted humans (the 'excessive' and 'redundant', that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay), is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity. It is an inescapable side-effect of *order-building* (each order casts some parts of the extant population as 'out of place', 'unfit' or 'undesirable') and of *economic progress* (that cannot proceed without degrading and devaluing the previously effective modes of 'making a living' and therefore cannot but deprive their practitioners of their livelihood. (5)

Bauman claims that the phenomenon of wasted lives is not an 'exception' but an essential byproduct of the capitalist economic and cultural order. His investigation exposes the dark underbelly of globalization, where the capitalist system, in its pursuit of profit, fashions a huge divide between the rich and the poor, leading to augmented social inequality and marginalization of those who cannot fit into the market economy. Bauman observes, "the new fullness of the planet means,

essentially, *an acute crisis of the human waste disposal industry*. While the production of human waste goes on unabated and rises to new heights, the planet is fast running short of refuse dumps and the tools of waste recycling” (5). Bauman's inquiry invites a critical re-examination of capitalist economic practices, urging society to reconsider how capitalist modernity casts off and dehumanizes individuals.

Similarly, Giorgio Agamben's idea of 'bare life', as expressed in his seminal work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, explores how 'sovereign' power deprives individuals of their legal and political rights, reducing them to 'bare life' without intrinsic human value. Agamben introduces the notion of the *homo sacer*, a figure in Roman law who could be killed with legal impunity, although a person considered unworthy of being sacrificed in a religious ritual. The *homo sacer*, therefore, can be understood as an individual who has been 'expelled' from society and stripped of 'rights' within civil and religious life. This figure, Agamben suggests, represents individuals who exist in 'a state of exception', excluded from the rights and protections provided to 'others.' Agamben too underscores how modern states often create conditions where certain lives are made 'disposable', foregrounding the precariousness of life under sovereign power, where the distinction between life and death, inclusion and exclusion, is often distorted and indistinct. He claims that contemporary states often employ emergency powers to create 'zones of indistinction', where people can be deprived of their rights and regarded as 'bare life'. This idea is mainly applicable to refugees, illegal immigrants, and those in detention camps, who live in perpetual limbo, without legal protections. Agamben elucidates this by stating,

If it is the sovereign who, insofar as he decides on the state of exception, has the power to decide which life may be killed without the commission of homicide, in the age of biopolitics this power becomes emancipated from the state of exception and transformed into the power to decide the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant. When life becomes the supreme political value, not only is the problem of life's nonvalue thereby posed, as Schmitt suggests but further, it is as if the ultimate ground of sovereign power were at stake in this decision. In modern biopolitics, sovereign is he who decides on the value or the nonvalue of life as such. Life – which, with the declarations of rights, had as such been invested with the principle of sovereignty – now itself becomes the place of a sovereign decision.
(83)

Agamben critically observes how the sovereign power operates in the modern age. Its power to determine whose life is politically relevant results in practices that marginalize and exclude vulnerable groups. Agamben calls for a re-evaluation of the legal and political structures that perpetuate this disposability, urging a reconceptualization of sovereignty that acknowledges and protects the inherent value of all human lives.

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler discusses the vulnerability and precariousness of human life, mostly in the contexts of war, violence, and social exclusion. Butler claims that the varying allocation of *grievability*—determining whose lives are considered valuable and whose are

not—reveals deep-seated inequities in the recognition of human worth. She writes, “Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?” (20). Butler designates this condition as 'precarity', a “politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death”. Butler emphasises the ethical responsibility to recognize the intrinsic value of all individuals, critiquing the way political and social systems often dehumanize vulnerable social groups, and treat their lives as disposable. By highlighting the politics of grievability, Butler claims how the lack of recognition and mourning for certain lives disseminates cycles of violence and exclusion. She elaborates,

I am referring not only to humans not regarded as humans, and thus to a restrictive conception of the human that is based upon their exclusion. It is not a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade? Those who are unreal have, in a sense, already suffered the violence of derealization. What, then, is the relation between violence and those lives considered as “unreal”? Does violence effect that unreality? Does violence take place on the condition of that unreality?

If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never “were,” and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness. Violence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object. (33)

This cyclic, recurrent violence underlines how excluded lives are insistently devalued. The violence against these 'unreal' lives, she contends, is not just physical but existential, as it recurrently negates their existence in an endless loop. Such lives, she argues, cannot be grieved because they have not been fully seen as human in the first place; they are deemed disposable in the dominant social, economic, and political order. This derealization, according to Butler, is a form of violence that reinforces their precarity

How do we understand this derealization? It is one thing to argue that first, on the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized, that they fit no dominant frame for the human, and that their dehumanization occurs first, at this level, and that this level then gives rise to a physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization that is already at work in the culture. (34)

Derealization, Butler argues, can be understood as the process where certain lives are excluded from the dominant discourse, rendering them unrecognizable as human. This exclusion means that these lives do not fit into the accepted frameworks of what it means to be human, making their dehumanization occur first at the level of discourse. This discursive dehumanization, where their existence is negated and their humanity denied, then gives rise to physical violence. The physical violence

serves to reinforce and actualize the dehumanization already present in the culture, effectively delivering the message that these lives are disposable and unworthy of recognition, protection, or mourning. This process highlights how deeply entrenched social, economic, and political structures perpetuate and legitimize the precarity of marginalized lives.

II

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), the winner of the 2008 Man Booker prize, offers a searing critique of the socio-economic disparities in modern India through the eyes of its narrator-protagonist Balram Halwai, a poor man from a village who later becomes a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. The novel is a forebodingly humorous and perceptive exploration of the underbelly of India's economic globalisation. In the novel, the theme of 'disposable lives' is forbiddingly represented through the experiences of Balram Halwai. The novel highlights the systemic abuse and dehumanization of the lower classes by the wealthy elite, who maltreat their servants as disposable entities for their convenience. This is graphically exemplified when Pinky Madam, Ashok's wife, runs over a poor child in a hit-and-run accident and the family frames Balram for the crime to protect themselves. Balram's later transformation into an entrepreneur involves espousing the ruthless methods of the rich, terminating in his murder of Ashok, which symbolizes a brutal utopian reversal of roles in an unequal society where the lives of the poor are routinely sacrificed for the benefit of the rich and powerful.

In "Can the Subaltern Right Wrongs?: Human Rights and Development in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*," Lena Khor, following theoretical insights from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak apropos human rights, discusses protagonist Balram Halwai's morally suspect actions as responses to systemic inequality. In "Neoliberal Disgust in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*," Alexander Adkins argues that the novel uses disgust as a metaphor to critique neoliberalism's self-interested and competitive values. The protagonist, Balram Halwai, an unsympathetic antihero, rationalizes extreme actions to achieve success, embodying neoliberal ideals and challenging traditional postcolonial narratives of sympathetic protagonists representing collective national issues. In "Breaking Out of the Rooster Coop: Violent Crime in Aravind Adiga's *White Tiger* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*," Sara D. Schotland examines how inequality leads to violent crime. She compares Adiga's protagonist, Balram Halwai, who murders his employer, to Wright's antihero, Bigger Thomas, who also commits murder. Both characters, influenced by oppressive environments, feel no remorse and see violence as their only escape and a way to achieve freedom and self-identity. In what follows, we examine Adiga's critique of economic inequalities in contemporary India, using perspectives from Bauman, Butler, and others and illustrates how globalization and progress can intensify social divides and create human waste, a concept that has received limited attention.

The novel is a gripping narrative of poverty, corruption, and stark socioeconomic disparities in modern India. It is framed as a series of letters written by the

protagonist, Balram Halwai, to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, who is visiting India to meet emerging entrepreneurs. Balram begins his story in a small, impoverished village called Laxmangarh, dominated by a ruthless landlord. His family struggles with debt and servitude to powerful landlords, described as the Four Animals. Despite his intelligence, Balram is forced to leave school early to support his family and starts working in a tea shop, learning about the harsh realities of life. His fortunes change when he learns to drive and becomes a chauffeur for Mr. Ashok, the son of the landlord. In Delhi, Balram witnesses the vast disparities between the rich and poor and the corruption of the wealthy elite. Although Mr. Ashok is somewhat caring, he is complicit in maintaining his wealth through corrupt practices. Balram becomes increasingly disillusioned with his servitude, especially after being forced to falsely confess to a crime. Desperate to escape, Balram devises a plan to murder Mr. Ashok and steal his money. He successfully carries out the plan and escapes to Bangalore, where he uses the stolen money to start a taxi service, reinventing himself as Ashok Sharma. Despite his success, Balram remains aware of the ethical compromises he made. His journey from a poor villager to a successful entrepreneur reflects the deep social and economic changes in India, challenging the notion of the great Indian Dream and critiquing the inequities and corruption in society. Balram's transformation into the 'White Tiger,' a rare and exceptional individual, symbolizes his ability to rise above his circumstances.

In the novel, Balram Halwai's metaphor of the 'Rooster Coop' distinctly portrays the pervasive social and economic subjugation in India. Balram describes how chickens are crammed into wire mesh cages, struggling for space, subjected to the terror of imminent death. This stark imagery serves as an analogy for the human condition in India, where individuals, much like the chickens, are trapped in cycles of poverty and subjugation without attempting to escape or rebel against their circumstances:

Nonsense. The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop. Go to Old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench—the stench of terrified, feathered flesh. On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped-up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop.

The very same thing is done with human beings in this country. (100)

Judith Butler's idea of precarity offers a thoughtful framework for understanding this metaphor. Following Butler, it can be aptly argued that in Balram's metaphor, the chickens' precarious existence mirrors that of India's marginalized populations, who suffer under systemic economic inequalities. The chickens' awareness of their fate, yet their inability to escape, echoes the precarious lives of the Indian poor who, despite recognizing their exploitation, remain incapable of changing their

conditions due to the overwhelming structures of power. These poor populations, compared to the chickens, embody the disposable lives, incarcerated to a life of suffering and slaughter. They are, what Bauman calls, 'human waste'. Balram's observation that "the very same thing is done with human beings in this country" underscores the dehumanizing effects of these systemic structures of oppression. It highlights how the socio-economic order in India produces and maintains a class of disposable individuals, whose lives are marked by precarity and a lack of agency. Balram Halwai's expose reflects the massive socio-economic disparities in India, where a small elite controls the majority who live in perpetual servitude:

Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many, Mr. Jiabao. A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent—as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way—to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse.

You'll have to come here and see it for yourself to believe it. Every day millions wake up at dawn—stand in dirty, crowded buses—get off at their masters' posh houses—and then clean the floors, wash the dishes, weed the garden, feed their children, press their feet—all for a pittance. I will never envy the rich of America or England, Mr. Jiabao: they have no servants there. They cannot even begin to understand what a good life is. (101)

This servitude of the majority poor is so deeply engrained that they refuse emancipation, demonstrating their internalized acceptance of their condition. This dynamic can be understood through Saskia Sassen's theoretical framework on expulsions and systemic inequality. Sassen argues that advanced capitalism creates new forms of social exclusion, marginalizing huge populations and pushing them to the periphery of economic and social life. This systemic inequality guarantees that the benefits of economic growth are concentrated in the hands of a few, while the majority remain trapped in roles that perpetuate their subjugation. Saskia Sassen, in her book *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (2014), deliberates how global economic processes bring about the systematic expulsion of individuals from social, economic, and political participation. Sassen contends that capitalism creates 'surplus' populations who are constantly pushed out. Sassen's analysis focuses on the brutal impacts of economic restructuring, financial crises, and neoliberal policies and reveals how the global capitalist system aggressively expels people from the formal economy and social order. She highlights the intersection of economic forces and social exclusion, where displaced workers, homeless individuals, and refugees become the 'unwanted' in society.

Sassen's concept of expulsions aligns with Balram's depiction of Indian society, where the masses are effectively expelled from mainstream economic and social participation, rendered invisible and powerless. The servitude of the 99.9 percent becomes normalized, preventing any significant challenge to the status quo. This invisibility is crucial for maintaining the existing power structures, as it ensures that the oppressed view their condition as unchangeable. Through Sassen's lens, Balram's critique highlights the global trend of growing inequality and

marginalization in contemporary capitalism, emphasizing the need to recognize and address these systemic issues to create more inclusive and just societies.

Balram Halwai's narrative is a powerful commentary on the struggle to break free from systemic oppression and social immobility, symbolized by the 'Rooster Coop'. His eventual success as an entrepreneur in New Bangalore represents a dramatic shift from his original standing as a servant, but this 'transformation' comes at a significant moral cost. Balram acknowledges this when he states, "There was the matter of murder—which is a wrong thing to do, no question about it. It has darkened my soul" (190). This admission underscores the ethical compromises and violence he was obligated to undertake to escape the limitations of his socio-economic status. His journey replicates the harsh reality that in an extremely unequal society, breaking free from precarity and disposability often involves navigating morally grey areas.

A broader systemic change is necessary to escape the 'Rooster Coop' and the conditions of precarity and disposability. Balram's narrative illustrates that while individual success is possible, it often comes at a high moral and psychological cost, and does not address the underlying inequalities that keep the majority in servitude. Collective action and policy reforms are essential to create a society where upward mobility does not require compromising one's morals. This involves addressing the root causes of inequality, such as inadequate access to education, and fair employment opportunities:

Anywhere there's an empty apartment, I take a look at it, I wonder, How much can I get from an American for this in 2010? If the place has a future as the home of an American, I put a down payment on it at once. The future of real estate is Bangalore, Mr. Jiabao. You can join in the killing if you want—I'll help you out!

After three or four years in real estate, I think I might sell everything, take the money, and start a school—an English-language school—for poor children in Bangalore. A school where you won't be allowed to corrupt anyone's head with prayers and stories about God or Gandhi—nothing but the facts of life for these kids. A school full of White Tigers, unleashed on Bangalore! We'd have this city at our knees, I tell you. I could become the Boss of Bangalore. I'd fix that assistant commissioner of police at once. I'd put him on a bicycle and have Asif knock him over with the Qualis.

All this dreaming I'm doing—it may well turn out to be nothing. (190-191)

By ensuring robust social and economic support networks, societies can reduce the precarity that marginalizes populations, allowing them to pursue success without resorting to violence or corruption. Balram's story, thus, serves as both a critique of the existing socio-economic order and a call to action for systemic change. It highlights the need to move beyond individual success stories and address the broader structural issues that create and perpetuate inequality. However, we must remember that 'the White Tiger' is an anomaly, a creature that defies the natural order—much like Balram defies the social order by refusing to accept his fate as a servant. Balram's metaphor becomes a poignant critique of the societal conditions that trap people in cycles of poverty and powerlessness, calling for a critical examination of the systems that sustain such profound human suffering. This

involves policy changes and a cultural shift towards recognizing and valuing the inherent dignity of every human being, ensuring that no one is rendered disposable in the pursuit of progress.

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Configuring Place and Nature: 'Everyday' in Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of the 'everyday' in Mamang Dai's short story collection, *The Legends of Pensam*, set in Arunachal Pradesh, India. By examining how Dai portrays the daily lives of the Adi tribe, this study challenges conventional notions of the everyday as mundane and unremarkable. Instead, it argues that Dai presents the everyday as a dynamic, multifaceted space where identities are forged, relationships navigated, and the complexities of existence grappled with. Drawing on critical theories of the everyday, as well as insights from human geography and ecocriticism, this article situates Dai's work within a broader understanding of the everyday as a site of potential transformation. It pays particular attention to the ways in which the everyday in *The Legends of Pensam* is deeply grounded in the specific landscapes and ecologies of Arunachal Pradesh, blurring the boundaries between the human and the non-human, the material and the spiritual. Ultimately, this study demonstrates how Dai's stories invite readers to reimagine the everyday as a space of ontological multiplicity and porosity, where the 'lived' interacts with the 'conceived' in unpredictable ways, shaping the contours of human subjectivity and our understanding of the world around us.

Keywords: everyday, Mamang Dai, The Legends of Pensam, Arunachal Pradesh, ecocriticism

Introduction

The term 'everyday' has gained significant attention in literary studies as a concept that encapsulates the ordinary, repetitive, and often overlooked aspects of daily life. It refers to the mundane experiences, routines, and spaces that shape our existence and form the backdrop against which our lives unfold. In literary studies, the 'everyday' is seen as a crucial site of investigation, as it provides a window into the lived experiences of individuals and communities, revealing the complex interplay between the personal and the social, the mundane and the extraordinary. However, when the word 'everyday' shifts from its function as an adjective to a noun, it takes on a new level of significance, inviting readers to reconsider the role of daily life in shaping human experiences and identities. This transformation prompts us to ask: what happens when we conceptualise the 'everyday' as a distinct entity rather than a mere descriptor? How does this shift influence our understanding of the relationship between the everyday and our spatio-temporal existence? Are we to view the everyday as a realm defined by its ordinariness, a space that must be interrupted by extraordinary events to gain meaning, or can we interpret it as a dynamic site where meaningful experiences unfold?

These questions lie at the heart of Mamang Dai's short story collection, *The Legends of Pensam*. Set in the lush, mountainous landscape of Arunachal Pradesh, India,

Dai's stories offer a rich exploration of the everyday lives of the Adi tribe, a community deeply rooted in the natural world and steeped in cultural traditions. Through her vivid, poetic prose, Dai invites readers to immerse themselves in the daily rhythms of village life, where the boundaries between the human and non-human, the material and the spiritual, the ordinary and the extraordinary, become blurred. In doing so, she challenges conventional notions of the everyday as a static, unremarkable backdrop against which life unfolds, instead presenting it as a vibrant, multifaceted space where individuals forge identities, navigate relationships, and grapple with the complexities of existence.

Analysis

To fully appreciate Dai's portrayal of the everyday, it is helpful to situate her work within the broader context of critical theories that have sought to redefine the concept. The transformation of the 'everyday' into a substantive concept, changes how we understand and approach it as an object of study. In *From Popular Culture to Everyday Life*, Storey “points to the enormous difficulties in trying to define something that is so taken for granted, not just in terms of how it is lived, but more importantly . . . how it is critically (or not critically) understood” (Storey 22). No longer just a taken-for-granted backdrop to supposedly more significant events and experiences, the everyday becomes a complex experiential realm worthy of investigation in its own right. As sociologist Adrian Franklin observes in *Nature and Social Theory*, the everyday in late modernity is a highly dynamic space characterized by hybrid intermingling of nature, society and person (Franklin 58). In fields like urban studies and environmental thought, increased attention to the everyday has highlighted the ways in which nature and culture interpenetrate in the mundane spaces of daily life, challenging rigid dualisms between the human and non-human, the built and the natural (Bennett and Watson 18). Across disciplines, the conceptual development of the everyday has opened new avenues for examining the intricacies of lived experience and the porous boundaries between public and private, labour and leisure, the ordinary and extraordinary.

This nominalized 'everyday' also takes on a paradoxical character as both a structure of experience and an idea or representation of that experience. The everyday points to the concrete actuality of day-to-day life as shaped by social relations, bodily practices, habits, and routines. Harootunian posits that the “space of everyday life permits us to negotiate relationships between the global and the local, between the rhythms and routines reproduced everywhere that capitalism spreads and the lived or local and contingent experiences mediating them” (Harootunian 56). At the same time, the everyday is also an ideological construct, a way of framing and assigning meaning to quotidian experience. In this sense, as Rita Felski notes, the everyday is “a reminder of the persistent rhythms of human embodiment and the recurring need to carve out patterns of stability and continuity within the maelstrom of change” (Felski 71). The everyday thus has a curious ontological status - it is at once a first-order reality and a second-order representation of that reality. This dual nature raises

questions about the relationship between the everyday as a spatio-temporal field of being and the everyday as a conceptual lens or mode of attention.

One of the key ways in which Dai evokes the everyday is through detailed attention to the objects, practices, and rhythms that structure daily life in the villages of Arunachal Pradesh. Domestic spaces and activities feature prominently in many of the stories, anchoring the characters in the concrete materiality of their lived environments. In “rites of love,” for instance, Dai describes the childhood home of Nenem's daughter Losi, in vivid sensory detail: “A unique extension to the house was a long room made of solid wood that Kao had designed for Nenem. The room even contained some wicker chairs, and a tin trunk draped with cloth had been turned into another seat” (Dai 123). This careful attention to the physical space of the home, with its distinctive furniture and layout, grounds the story in the textures of everyday domesticity, even as it also hints at the history and relationships embedded in these objects. In the “prologue,” for example, Dai describes the narrator's childhood memories of playing with her siblings on “warm stones” and gazing at the stars from the “bamboo veranda” (Dai 3-4). These simple, everyday spaces become sites of imagination and wonder, where the children's creativity is nourished by the “singing forest” that surrounds them (Dai 4).

Dai's attention to the material culture of Adi life is also evident in her frequent references to traditional crafts, clothing, and food. In “pinyar, the widow,” for example, Nenem's mother-in-law is described as wearing “all the beads, silver coins and amulets that she had first put on as a young bride” (Dai 29). These objects are not mere decorations, but powerful symbols of cultural identity and continuity, connecting Nenem to the generations of women who came before her. Similarly, in “river woman,” the narrator describes the “edible insects, jungle roots, herbs, ginger and local medicines” sold by women in the Pigo market, hinting at the rich, place-based knowledge that undergirds Adi cuisine and healing practices (Dai 92).

Oral traditions, including stories, songs, and legends, are another crucial element of the everyday in Dai's collection. In “travel the road,” for instance, the ponung dancers perform traditional songs that recount the history of the village through a “language that never ceases” (Dai 55). This moment highlights the ways in which the everyday is not just a matter of material practices, but also of shared narratives and meanings that are passed down through generations. As Dai writes, the ponung dancers “sing because the hills are old, older than all sin and desolation and man's fascination with blood. The journey is almost over now. They are returning like a silent flight of birds” (Dai 55). Here, the everyday is figured as a space of both cultural transmission and transformation, where ancient stories are continually reworked and revitalised in the present.

Henri Lefebvre, one of the most influential theorists of the everyday, argues in his influential work, *Critique of Everyday Life*, that the quotidian is a site of both alienation and potential transformation. For Lefebvre, the everyday under capitalism is characterised by a sense of repetition, boredom, and fragmentation, as individuals are caught up in the routines of work, consumption, and leisure that structure modern

life. He contends that this misery of the everyday is a product of the commodification and rationalisation of daily existence, “introducing negative elements such as dissatisfaction, disappointment, alienation” which leaves individuals feeling disconnected from their own lives and from the world around them (Lefebvre 49). Lefebvre also sees the everyday as a space of potential resistance and creativity. He argues that by studying the everyday in all its complexity and contradiction, we can begin to uncover the miracles – the “very essence of our everyday lives” that lies hidden within the mundane (Lefebvre 246). Lefebvre's understanding of the everyday as a dialectical space of misery and miracles resonates with Dai's depiction of life in the remote villages of Arunachal Pradesh. Her stories are filled with moments of hardship, loss, and struggle, as characters grapple with poverty, illness, and the challenges of subsistence living. The repetitive rhythms of agricultural labour, the constant threat of natural disasters, and the weight of social expectations all contribute to a sense of the everyday as a space of constraint and limitation. At the same time, however, Dai's characters also find moments of joy, beauty, and transcendence in the midst of their daily lives. The lush landscapes of the Siang Valley, the richness of Adi folklore and tradition, and the bonds of family and community all offer glimpses of the everyday lives that Lefebvre sees as the hidden potential of the everyday.

However, Dai's portrayal of the everyday is not simply a romanticised vision of rural harmony and stability. Rather, her stories are shot through with moments of disruption, conflict, and transformation, as the ordinary rhythms of Adi life are challenged by both internal and external forces. While much of *The Legends of Pensam* is focused on the routine textures of the everyday, Dai's stories also highlight the ways in which daily life is punctuated by moments of rupture and surprise. Hunting accidents are a recurring motif in the collection, revealing the precarity of life in the villages and the ever-present spectre of death. In “the strange case of kalen, the hunter,” for instance, Kalen is accidentally shot and killed by a fellow hunter who mistakes him for an animal in the dense jungle. Similarly, in “pinyar, the widow,” Pinyar's husband Lekon is “struck down one evening in a hunting accident” shortly after their marriage (Dai 27). Such moments of sudden violence disrupt the regular rhythms of village life, exposing the fragility of the social order and the tenuousness of human existence.

Strange illnesses and healings are another way in which Dai's stories unsettle the everyday, revealing it to be a space of both affliction and possibility. In “pinyar, the widow,” Pinyar's son Kamur suffers a sudden and inexplicable bout of madness in which he murders his own children and attacks his wife. This shocking act of violence is attributed to an “evil spirit” that has taken possession of Kamur, blurring the lines between the natural and the supernatural. At the same time, the story also gestures towards the healing power of traditional rituals and community support, as Pinyar calls on “all the great priests” to “exorcise the bad spirit” from her son (Dai 33). In this way, the everyday emerges as a space of both trauma and resilience, where the ruptures of violence and illness are met with the restorative forces of

culture and care.

One of the central tensions surrounding the idea of the everyday is whether it inherently privileges the ordinary over the extraordinary. Is the everyday simply a static ground of repetition and routine that must be punctuated by more exciting, disruptive events to have meaning and vitality? Or can the everyday itself be a dynamic space of happening and encounter? Henri Lefebvre argues against the trivialisation of everyday time as homogeneous and dominated by linear repetition (Lefebvre 882). For Lefebvre, the everyday is a site of potential transformation where the 'lived' interacts with the 'conceived' in unpredictable ways. Similarly, Kathleen Stewart suggests in *Ordinary Affects* that the everyday is “a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life” (Stewart 1). From this perspective, the everyday is not a static backdrop but a vibrant, open-ended field of action and affect.

This attention to the affective dimensions of the everyday is a central feature of Dai's storytelling. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau argues that the “everyday practices” of ordinary people - from walking and cooking to reading and storytelling - constitute a form of “tactical” resistance to the dominant structures of power and meaning that shape our lives (de Certeau xiv). Throughout *The Legends of Pensam*, Dai's stories are suffused with a rich, sensuous attention to the details of daily life, like the “roasting and burning” scents that “wafted up from every house” during the preparation of pork, “or Nenem's playful ritual and “performance” with the ducks that inspires in her a sense of joy and renewal (Dai 110, 112). These vivid, embodied descriptions capture the way that the everyday is experienced not simply as a series of tasks or routines, but as a flow of sensations, impressions, and intensities that shape the contours of human subjectivity. At the same time, Dai's stories also reveal how these ordinary affects are always embedded within larger networks of power, history, and social relations. The everyday in *The Legends of Pensam* is not a neutral space, but one that is structured by the complex interplay of gender, class, and cultural dynamics. Women's lives, in particular, are shaped by the demands of domestic labour, the expectations of marriage and motherhood, and the constant negotiation of male authority. The stories also hint at the ways in which the everyday rhythms of Adi life are being transformed by the forces of modernization, globalisation, and environmental change, as traditional ways of living are increasingly challenged by new technologies, economic pressures, and ecological disruptions.

To fully understand the significance of the everyday in Dai's work, it is also necessary to consider the ways in which her stories are grounded in the specific landscapes and ecologies of Arunachal Pradesh. Drawing on insights from the field of human geography, we can see how Dai's attention to place and nature is essential to her portrayal of the everyday lives of the Adi people. As geographer Yi-Fu Tuan argues in his classic work, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, “space” is an abstract, geometrical concept, while “place” is a centre of meaning and value,

created through the accumulation of human experiences, emotions, and memories (Tuan 6). For the Adis, the mountains, forests, and rivers of the Siang Valley are not simply a backdrop to their lives, but an integral part of their cultural identity and spiritual worldview. The landscapes of Arunachal Pradesh are imbued with layers of history, myth, sacred significance and the everyday practices of hunting, farming, and foraging are deeply intertwined with the rhythms and cycles of the natural world.

This understanding of the relationship between place, nature, and the everyday resonates with recent work in the field of ecocriticism, which has sought to challenge the binary opposition between nature and culture that has long structured Western thought. The concept of 'place-attachment,' developed by ecocritics such as Lawrence Buell and Scott Slovic, emphasizes the emotional and psychological bonds that individuals form with specific natural environments, and the ways in which these attachments shape their sense of identity, meaning, and purpose (Buell 64; Slovic 3). This idea is particularly relevant to Dai's portrayal of the Adi people, whose deep connection to the landscapes of Arunachal Pradesh is central to their cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, and everyday practices. Similarly, the notion of 'bioregionalism,' advanced by writers such as Gary Snyder and Kirkpatrick Sale, stresses the importance of understanding and inhabiting places in terms of their unique ecological and cultural characteristics, rather than arbitrary political or administrative boundaries (Snyder 25; Sale 54). Dai's stories, with their rich evocations of the flora, fauna, and topography of the Siang Valley, can be seen as a form of bioregional writing that invites readers to develop a deeper appreciation for the particularities of this specific place and its human and non-human communities.

A key aspect of the everyday in *The Legends of Pensam* is the deep intertwining of human and non-human worlds. Throughout the stories, animals, plants, and natural elements are presented not as mere backdrops or resources, but as active participants in the drama of daily life. In "travel the road," for instance, the river itself is figured as a living presence, shaping the contours of Nenem's life, and embodying the "jade heart of water" that sustains the village (Dai 54). This blurring of boundaries between the human and the non-human is also evident in the many stories that feature spirits, ghosts, and other supernatural beings. In "a homecoming," for instance, the ghost of a young woman who drowned in the river returns to haunt the living, "sobbing" and pleading for her life to be restored (Dai 85). These moments of ghostly encounter and spiritual possession suggest that the everyday is not a purely human domain, but rather a space of ontological multiplicity and porosity. In Dai's stories, the everyday is not a purely human drama, but rather an ongoing negotiation between multiple actors and agencies, both visible and invisible. As Dai writes in "a homecoming," "[p]aths cross, stars collide, and even though we whirl away we continue to look back over our shoulders, for the debris of that unexpected collision still holds us in thrall" (Dai 85). In this way, *The Legends of Pensam* invites us to reimagine the everyday as a space of profound entanglement and co-constitution, where the boundaries between self and other, human and non-human, are always

already blurred.

Conclusion

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* offers a rich and nuanced exploration of the everyday lives of the Adi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, India. Through her attention to the material, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of daily life, Dai challenges conventional notions of the everyday as a static, unremarkable backdrop against which life unfolds. Instead, she presents the everyday as a dynamic, multifaceted space where individuals forge identities, navigate relationships, and grapple with the complexities of existence. Dai's portrayal of the everyday is deeply grounded in the specific landscapes and ecologies of Arunachal Pradesh, highlighting the ways in which the lives of the Adi people are intimately intertwined with the natural world. By blurring the boundaries between the human and the non-human, the material and the spiritual, Dai invites readers to reimagine the everyday as a space of ontological multiplicity and porosity, where multiple actors and agencies are always already entangled.

Ultimately, *The Legends of Pensam* invites us to reconsider our understanding of the everyday, not as a mere descriptor of the mundane and the ordinary, but as a complex experiential realm worthy of investigation in its own right. Situating her work within the broader context of critical theories of the everyday, as well as insights from fields such as human geography and ecocriticism opens new avenues for examining the intricacies of lived experience and the porous boundaries between self and other, culture and nature, the ordinary and the extraordinary. In doing so, it affirms the everyday as a space of potential transformation, where the 'lived' interacts with the 'conceived' in unpredictable ways, capturing the way that daily life is experienced not simply as a series of tasks or routines, but as a flow of sensations, impressions, and intensities that shape the contours of human subjectivity. In this way, her stories serve as a powerful reminder of the enduring significance of the everyday, and the ways in which it shapes our understanding of ourselves, our communities, and the world around us.

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Bioregions, Development, Displacement: Reading Vishwas Patil's *A Dirge for the Dammed*

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Abstract

The present article is a critical response to the phenomenon of 'development' and destruction of bioregions as represented in Vishwas Patil's novel *A Dirge for the Dammed* (2014), the English translation of the Marathi novel *Jhadajhadati* (1992). The postcolonial nation-state emphasises development and its various modalities, such as infrastructure building and resource extraction. Unfortunately, capital-driven development displaces communities, destroys bioregion and creates precarity. The article studies its impact on the lives of the members of communities living in bioregions. Bioregions are geo-topographical regions that are cultural habitats and dwelling places for indigenous, non-mainstreamed communities which follow rooted, sustainable, ethical living. These hinterlands, away from visible, metropolitan centres are targeted by the nexus of politico-capitalist forces as sites for development, thereby resource-stripping the already marginalised people. The article traces these issues in Patil's novel.

Keywords: bioregions, development, displacement, life-world, sustainability.

In August of 1947 India officially became a politically independent nation amidst unrest and bloodshed. The newly formed government immediately focussed on projecting India as a welfare-state capable of self-governance, and to firmly establish India's position in the league of modern nation-states. In this unrelenting focus on nation-building, importance was attached to modernisation, development and projects of infrastructure building—such as constructing mega dams and power plants, some of which were instituted as early as the Nehruvian era.¹ By the 1980s, however, development in India had slowed down causing economic crisis. Multiple other factors compounded the situation, leading to economic liberalisation and opening of the markets in 1990. Elizabeth Chatterjee and Matthew McCartney describe the post-liberalisation decades as an era of “ultimately unsustainable growth based on extraction of raw materials, burgeoning infrastructure, dispossessing and amalgamating land for big construction...” (5). However, this aggressive development came at a cost—destruction of rich forest lands and bioregions, displacement of indigenous, bioregional people and threats to their age-old cultures. This article traces the trajectory of this destruction and displacement as represented in Vishwas Patil's novel *A Dirge for the Dammed* (2014).

Patil's Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel was originally published as *Jhadajhadati* (1992) in Marathi. A moving micro-narrative of pain and loss caused by various fallouts of the systemic framework of development, it portrays development induced displacement and destruction of existing, indigenous landscapes and cultural universes. As a literary representation, the text is located at the intersection of politics and literature and focuses mostly on the human

dimensions of dispossession. Patil's text depicts dispossession of self-sustaining farmlands and downgrading of lives of the poorest sections of society—all in the name of a development of which they are never the intended beneficiaries.² Patil represents the cultural life-worlds, identities, socio-political and economic dimensions of the people.

Understanding the worldviews and cultural matrices of the indigenous communities is pivotal to comprehending the nature and implications of external interventions threatening their culture. Processes of self-individuation is influenced at large by the respective life-worlds. Biswas and Suklabaidya frame life-world as “the repository bedrock of knowledge...that includes self-knowledge...a 'background' which can be conceptualised as a surrounding world, consisting of [the] objective, subjective and social...” (19). The narrative being local and issue-based, draws in the reader through the recreation of palpable life-worlds, eventually leading them towards the recognition and critical appreciation of the inherent violence behind the destruction, as portrayed in the narratives. Narration of life-worlds therefore, influences the affective dimensions of the experience of reading the text.

Bioregionalism and *Dwelling in A Dirge for the Dammed*

The selected text depicts cultures and life-worlds that are essentially bioregional. Bioregional thought was shaped into a philosophical-theoretical discourse in the 1970s in North America to redress contemporary ecological damage. Robert L. Thayer defines a 'bioregion' as a life-place...a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, ecological and hydrological character capable of supporting unique human and non-human communities...Bioregions can be variously defined by the geography of watersheds, similar plant and animal ecosystems and related, identifiable landforms...and *by the unique human cultures that grow from natural limits and potentials of the region* (3; emphasis added).

Bioregionalism therefore reads (a) unique geo-topographical regions and (b) the unique cultures located in and shaped by these regions. Foregrounding these twin foci—geo-topographic/scientific and cultural—the philosophy of Bioregionalism proposes an ecologically moored living. The selected text depicts communities that embody a “political and cultural practice that manifests itself as an environmental ethic in the day-to-day activities of ordinary residents” (Lynch 6). These societies are marked by their embedded living ethics that tie them to their ancestral places. Continuation of traditional ways of environment-oriented living characterises them as ecologically rooted 'bioregional' people. Emphasising on community-identity, belonging and rootedness, these societies live away from mainstream neoliberal economic/cultural spaces. While mobility is at the core of globalised city-culture, bioregional cultures are pivoted on 'rootedness,' Entire cultural universes comprising myths, legends, rituals, practices and beliefs are observed to grow around these life-places. Heideggerian 'dwelling' is analogous to the bioregional living ethics.³ Vishwas Patil portrays similar nuances in his depiction of the village

Jambhili, where the indigenous population lives an embedded existence complete with the surrounding forest and the village deity, Goddess Kalubai. Fear, myths and reverence surrounding the forest protect it from being targeted for resources. The belief that the area “Devban, around Laduba's shrine...fifteen acres of stately mango, jambhul and ain trees...if a man as much as touched a twig...with an axe, his entire family would be wiped out” (4). The name *Devban*, meaning divine forest, is itself suggestive of the presence of divinity co-existing as a tangible part of the human locale. These existing cultures therefore embody the bioregional living ethic through their life-worlds and living experiences. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha describe these people as “ecosystem people” who sustain themselves through non-exploitative exchanges with their living environment, “depend[ing] on the natural environments of their own locality to meet most of their material needs” (3).

Dams and Displacement in *A Dirge for the Dammed*

Patil's *A Dirge for the Dammed* deals with the tragic life of dam-displaced villagers of Jambhili, Maharashtra. It is mostly populated by the marginalised hunting tribes, untouchables and other lowly castes. It opens with scenes of village life and then delves into the main plot—the Jambhili Dam Project which is about to submerge “[e]ven thousand people, five entire villages and four partially...[are] to be swallowed by the dam” (33). Jambhili along with its surroundings is a unique bioregion, where people have been living a connected existence for generations. It is unique in its sustainable relationship with its surroundings, in its local culture, customs, myths and legends. Goddess Kalubai, supposedly founded the village and is now its protectress.

Patil narrativises the assault of development and progress on the village. Repeatedly using images of violation and rape, he reinforces the impact of capitalist assault on the region. One of the characters in the novel, Avadai, a woman farmer, is distraught at the sight of the bulldozer plundering her lands and trees. She considers it as “the mechanical monster” (25). Whenever “the blade plunged into the earth, Avadai's body felt lacerated...the heartless machine violated the land... The bulldozer resumed the rape of her land” (25). Clearly, the bulldozer here symbolises the collusion of myopic governmental policies, the law enforcement agencies and neoliberal capital, that has now reached Jambhili and threatens to upend the world of its inhabitants. Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan describe this nexus as the “neocolonialist Iron Triangle... [comprising] politicians, bureaucrats and corporations” (51). These three, “often with International Aid backing” exploit “the progressivist ideologies of Third World economic development for its own immediate purposes” (51).

Patil weaves in elements of subaltern social activism in the narrative through the figure of Guruji, a village primary school teacher from the lowly *Mahar* caste—a *Harijan*. The figure of the activist is a direct outcome of policies of the neoliberal, capitalist, modern nation, that wields 'development' as an excuse to erase bioregional communities and cultures. Though quite common in the context of actual

displacements, activism has remained largely unrepresented in literary texts. Patil's activist figure, Guruji, is pragmatic in his approach, he realises quite early in the narrative that attempting to stop the dam project will prove to be “a losing battle” (34), and that it would be a more realistic approach to ensure that the displaced are given their rightful compensation, job opportunities and proper rehabilitation in their new living locations of Khairapur and Kelapur.

Bioregional, embedded living de-privileges the autonomous, political self in favour of traditional community living and understanding the self as extension of the community. The figure of Guruji in the novel is an exception, an intermediary figure. Though he is part of the bioregional culture, he is educated and has exposure to the external world and its nuanced politics. He is one among the displaced, yet he is educated and probably the only character in the village fit for leadership and informed activism. He is a teacher and is familiar with the rules and regulations pertaining to the Project Affected People, making him an effective negotiator.⁴ Suroopa Mukherjee and others argue that to be truly effective in the context of voicing and demanding justice, it is imperative that the activist must know “along with the oppressed, their thematic universe—the interconnected web of knowledge, experience, meaning, symbols and priorities. Themes which emerge through this investigation... can be interrogated to reveal a deeper understanding of their social context, with a view to changing it” (154). Familiarity of the activist figure with the people and their life-worlds is therefore important. Emotionally invested in his cause, Guruji and his strategies of activism involving negotiations with the local authorities to ensure that Jambhili villagers receive their allotted displaced people, is unique to subaltern activism. His activism has two unique features. It is a local-level protest that fails to garner national/international attention from media houses. His approach, too, is not 'oppositional', but rather 'integrative.' Historically, India has witnessed many resistance movements that have garnered wide-spread international media coverage, including the internationally acknowledged 'Chipko' movement in 1970s.⁵ Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is a more recent 'oppositional' protest movement. It was a response to the damming of the Narmada river through the Sardar Sarovar Project and is a classic case-study of the 'oppositional' model. The movement demanded a complete halt of the dam project based on questioning of apparently 'faulty' and myopic developmental policies.

While in the text Guruji could not redress all injustices that Jambhili villagers faced after their dislocation, his figure is a strong presence in the text and the local authorities are forced to take notice of him. For the power mongers who have vested interests in the dam, he is an obstacle that needs to be removed. They try to placate, bribe and even physically attack him. This is an established strategy where government agencies persecute activist figures by adopting various repressive strategies.⁶ Patil weaves this empirical reality into the narrative. In the novel, Guruji's life ends before his struggle for the Jambhili people does. The novel ends with the displaced still struggling to find a permanent location for settlement.

Conclusion

Graham Huggan asks some relevant questions about development: “what is development? ... whose interests does it serve? Is development sustainable, and what is its connection to the environment?” (emphasis original, 29). Patil's narrative, through the depiction of individual lives which are devastated by a violent, non-participatory development problematises government's policies and projects of development. Capital-driven, dispossession-inducing development is the reality in post-colonial India. This disproportionate loss caused by myopic implementation of development is usually borne by the communities and people of the hinterlands, while benefitting the already privileged elites that reside in the urban metropolitan centres, far from the sites of destruction. Marxist economist David Harvey has analysed this 'unevenness' as the precondition of capitalistic development. He states that “accumulation through dispossession ... must be maintained if the capitalist system is to achieve any semblance of stability. Uneven geographical development through dispossession... is a corollary of capitalist stability” (72). The dispossessed, termed “developmental refugees” (Thayer Scudder, qtd. in Nixon, 152) and “surplus people” (Nixon, 151) are displaced from the site of 'development' and resettled in inhuman conditions.⁷ Nixon offers an effective analysis of the term “developmental refugees” (151). Highlighting the paradox inherent in the nomenclature, he observes that the term 'development' indicates growth and progress which benefits a small coterie of privileged people based in urban centres. 'Refugee' on the other hand, has negative connotations, one that “implies flight from a grave threat—in this case, the threat of development-induced destitution...” (152). This systemic destitution of a select class of its citizens thus, throws light on the state of democracy in postcolonial India—which systematically asset-strips and exploits its indigenous tribes, forest people and other original inhabitants. A plausible approach is to search for a discourse of alternative development. The three founding principles of such a discourse, as Alf Gunvald Nilsen points out, are “participatory democracy, environmental sustainability, social justice” (179). Patil's text foregrounds the need for re-orienting policy making along the principles of alternative development.

Notes

1. For details of Nehruvian policies in this respect, see Pranab Bardhan's *The Political Economy of Development in India* (1984), O. P. Misra's *Economic Thought of Gandhi and Nehru* (1995), and Sunil Khilnani's *The Idea of India* (2003).
2. Rob Nixon takes up the issue of displacement inherent in all discourses of 'development.' The altering and ravaging of a pre-existing landscape, or what he calls the “vernacular landscape” by an “official landscape” (17), involves effacing of the historical, affective, ecological connections and interactions that indigenous communities have nurtured over generations. He states that

A vernacular landscape... is integral to the socioenvironmental dynamics of community... By contrast, an official landscape—whether governmental, NGO, corporate, or some combination of those—is

typically oblivious to such earlier maps; instead, it writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalising... manner that is often pitilessly instrumental.
(17)

External interventions permanently alter the nature of these lands that originally belonged to the indigenous populations. They are either physically displaced, or their immediate environment is altered to such an extent that voluntary displacement is the only option available to these original inhabitants.

3. Martin Heidegger discusses 'dwelling' in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, 1954). Written in the wake of housing shortage after the World War II, he ponders what it means to 'dwell'. He traces the old German words for both building and dwelling, which are incidentally the same—*bauen*. The word *bauen* not only denotes dwelling but also provides a framework of how to dwell. To dwell, he says, "is to be set at peace...to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving" (n.pag). He also discusses the idea of the "fourfold" which is a significant component of dwelling—the interconnection of the earth, sky, divinities and mortals. Authentic dwelling occurs when man dwells in connection with the other elements. Heidegger says that men are situated "in the fourfold by dwelling...the basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve. Mortals dwell in the way they preserve the fourfold in its essential being, its presencing" (n.pag). Here, Heideggerian dwelling intersects with the concept of Bioregional living—they are similar in their emphasis on a relationship based on nurturing, preserving and connectivity of man with his "place" of living. However, there are obvious differences between the two theorisations. Unlike Heideggerian dwelling, the key concerns of Bioregionalism are the study of geo-topography, landforms and resource use. Heideggerian 'dwelling' is limited to analysing human interaction and interconnectedness with other elements of the physical environment.
4. Project Affected Persons/ People' or 'PAP' is a term used in the field of theory and practice of Resettlement and Rehabilitation. World Bank defines a 'PAP' as "persons affected by land acquisitions, relocations or loss of incomes associated with change in land use due to the project" ("Identification of Project Affected Persons," n.pag). "Displaced persons" is a separately defined category which includes "persons who are affected by the involuntary taking of land resulting in (i) relocation or loss of shelter; (ii) loss of assets or access to assets; (iii) loss of income sources or means of livelihood, whether or not the affected persons must move to another location; or (iv) the involuntary restriction of access to legally designated parks and protected areas resulting in adverse impacts on the livelihoods of the displaced persons". In India, land acquisition and rehabilitation and resettlement of the PAP was until recently undertaken through the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (LAA). Instituted during the colonial times, the LAA indeed failed to cover a nuanced view of the manifold categories of the development-displaced people of the postcolonial times. For instance, it allowed for only cash compensation rather than adopting a holistic assistance approach towards rehabilitating and resettling the displaced. Towards adopting a comprehensive redressal of the multiple issues associated with displacement, the Government of India has replaced the LAA with National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation in 2004. For details, see, "Identification of

Project Affected Persons,” Unit 25.

5. Chipko was a popular grassroot-level indigenous ecological movement, mobilised by peasants, villagers and women in 1970s in Himachal Pradesh (now Uttarakhand), India. This local-level movement resisted the aggressive, exploitative government policies of habitat destruction through commercial logging and forestry in the Himachal region. Ramachandra Guha studied the Chipko movement in his book *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance*. For more details, see: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chipko-movement>
6. Repression and persecution of activists resisting oppressive and exploitative projects undertaken by governments in the Global South is a standard practice. The trial and murder of the Nigerian activist Ken Saro Wiwa who resisted the exploitation of the Ogoni land by oil giants Shell and Chevron is historically recorded. Perceived as a serious threat, Saro Wiwa was finally executed on trumped up charges, framed by the government. In literary texts, this issue is underrepresented. The showcasing of Guruji's repression in the narrative is therefore unique. Ambikasuthan Mangad's novel *Swarga* (2017) also narrativises the issue through depiction of physical assault on the two activist characters, Neelkantan and Devyani.
7. While modern nation-states are defined and produced by 'imagined' communities, Nixon proposes that these nation-states also frequently produce those “unimagined communities... whose vigorously unimagined condition becomes indispensable to maintaining a highly selective discourse of national development” (150). During apartheid, he explains, these sections of people were termed “surplus people”, comprising largely women and children, who were considered useless in the labour market and were consequently barred from the cities. They were carted off to remote, rural “dumping grounds,” and were “resettled in overcrowded conditions, with no viable means of sustenance” (151). Nixon considers the condition of these people as analogous to the development-induced displaced. For more information on the “surplus people,” Nixon refers to *The Surplus People; Forced Removals in South Africa* (1998) by Larine Platzky and Cheryl Walker.

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Gender Performance: Reframing Velutha's Experiences

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Abstract

The condition of men as they work under the constraints of patriarchy has received less attention from South Asian feminist literature so far. This lack of study has further fueled gender discrimination, and thus has called gender identity into question. This study analyses Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (2002) in which Roy has nurtured gender debate with Velutha, a lower-caste male worker struggling amidst the prejudiced assumptions about gender roles and expectations, and demonstrated that he transgresses gender-specific role. Therefore, using Butler's theory of gender performance, this study aims to argue that Velutha's response to the challenges and inherent practices does not conform to the general assumptions about patriarchal (masculine) norms and expectations, and so his gender identity is uncertain, varied and contestable. This study examines the complex interplay of gender norms and expectations, and thus makes a new and valuable contribution to South Asian feminist studies.

Keywords: Gender performance, Patriarchal norms, Subversion of identity, The God of Small Things, Velutha

Introduction

In the introduction of her monumental work *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, Bell Hooks focuses on the inclusion of both men and women to end gender discrimination, patriarchal domination and most importantly, negative ideas about feminism or feminist movement as something being anti-male. Nevertheless, so far South Asian (Indian) women writers have made the female characters the protagonists in their fiction and primarily focused on their struggle through the prism of patriarchy, their subordination to men, their attempt at reclaiming their agency and many more (Jia). However, discussion on men remains prominently underrepresented in their writings, except for Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and Meera Nair's *Video and Other Other Stories* (2002), though Lahiri and Nair's middle class men householders' struggle is directed against the Western consumerist assumptions. So, there is a strong apathy and neglective attitude towards the portrayal of men in mainstream literary discourse (Dhingra; Zare). Among the few who have received critical attention, Arundhati Roy is a forerunner.

In most of Roy's works, the key feminist concern is not only to show how both men and women are oppressed within patriarchy and suggest ways to liberate them, but also to explain why gender discrimination remains a dominant ideology in the social setting. In this regard, this study has chosen Roy's *The God of Small Things*, arguing that this is a spectacular inclusion in Roy's quest to wrestle an individual's condition out of the grip of patriarchy and give him new ways to communicate about the

identity as he acts. As Hooks succinctly discusses that inclusion of men's experiences is an essential part of feminism since men are equally harmed by gender role expectations and sexism. However, Ayemenem has registered gender norms as a set of rules appropriate for masculine and feminine behaviour in its culture affirming gender as “a socially constructed category” (Beauvoir 267). Roy points out in the novel that the patriarchal system essentially classifies and subjugates the characters in two particular categories, men and women, on the basis of their biological determinism. However, this study focuses on how this depiction stems from a critique of gender and how it is constructed and employed to oppress, and argues that no identity exists behind the acts that supposedly manifest gender, and these acts constitute, rather than manifest, the illusion of the stable gender identity. The identity is, thus, explored here as a “[...] a *phenomenon* that is being *produced* all the time [...]” (Big Think). In order to establish this argument, this is important to identify socially constructed gender-specific norms or behaviours. Masculine norms come in the form of manliness, power, strength, and a strong sex drive, characteristics that every man should possess (Haywood & Mac an Ghail). These norms and identity have become instrumental in operating gender discrimination or in other words, means for exercising power and tyranny over women primarily, and men (here weaker and under privileged) both in families and communities. Both men and women get miserably exposed to these violations since they are directly intertwined with economic, social, political and cultural disadvantages in India. This study investigates how exaggerated gendered act not only unveils the social and cultural reality but also questions feminine/masculine norms in accordance with Connell, “Gender was defined by social norms, children were socialized into those norms, grown men and women performed the male role or the female role accordingly, and they transmitted the norms to the next generation.” (333). However, there are some men who, although share heterosexual masculinity with the hegemonic men, neither promote it nor surrender to the hegemonic practices. Therefore, they considerably exert Connell's marginalized masculinity as it entails how they in their precarious positions in different countries and different social contexts understand and experience their masculinities (Bhatti).

Velutha, however, is not chosen randomly, for, although there are other male characters, his varied and unstable performances undermine the limited boundaries of repressive traditions and social norms which incite male supremacy and fail women and weaker men of their rights over their lives and choices. In the narrative, Velutha is an ordinary man from a marginalised background. Evidently, his marginality is two-fold, first, he is a Paravan/an Untouchable, and second, he transgresses the ritual subordination of the untouchables. Unlike hegemonic men who are often associated with power, Velutha's masculinity informs us of a rather compassionate and sensitive character who is gentle towards the smallest and most unappreciated of creations. Hence, it is intriguing to see how this simple man is deified for showcasing a power which lies beyond the realm of the earthly definition of power. Roy has depicted this character more humanistically to show how this type

of character can play a vital role in bringing real change in the gender stereotype concept: “an artistic process of forging meanings and tracing the reach of power that has, at its heart, the creative potentials of 'dissent'” (Tickell 10).

However, a lot of researches have been conducted on the traumatic experiences of the untouchables, a social ignored group, through the patriarchy practices but a few has discussed the victimised experiences of men from a gender performance perspective. This article demonstrates that this kind of exclusion not only limits scientific knowledge but also limits the understanding of other minority groups. Hence, this study is significant because it shows that there are some individuals who seek to align their choices of action with the core elements of humanity, and thus can teach the perpetrators from 'othering' some of them in dehumanizing ways. As Idriss claims,

By ascribing men as perpetrators, the theoretical connections between patriarchy, male perpetrators, and masculinity have become so well established that any conceptualization of men as “victims” (or women as perpetrators) requires one to move outside the traditional boundaries of thinking, all within a climate that has been slow to acknowledge other paradigms. (NPI 1908)

South Asian debate on gender roles which isn't as simple as a mere power struggle between the sexes. Rather, the oppression is a shared experience which is fundamental to our understanding of the hegemonic gender norms imposed upon both men and women. The contribution of this study lies in the fact that the experiences of Velutha are crucial for subverting the anti-feminist narrative in which the societal tasks to be performed are pre-assigned. The man is important to the equation and emphasises the argument that performance isn't an innate attribute, but rather an acquired one based on various factors, social upbringing being the most obvious.

Velutha is What Velutha Does

Roy's keen observation of reality unveils the social evil of caste system which is a very shameful drawback of India, a seemingly secular and modern society. Velutha, who is a Paravan or Untouchable, is subject to various caste-induced hardships even before his ultimate fate in the hands of the policemen towards the end of the novel. His caste is a major reason he is oppressed by the patriarchal society which he is a part of. It should be noted that the laws being propagated in the village of Ayemenem work in favour of the upper caste patriarchy. Any attempt to create equality is futile because men like Velutha, who are from the scheduled castes, hardly possess the power required to bring about changes. They are unable to attain what is rightfully theirs as being stamped as marginalized entity in the society. They are socially, politically, economically and legally deprived of their rights as human beings in every sphere of life and society. This further shows how Velutha's survival in his own society is a lost cause, especially when his relationship with Ammu is considered. Belonging to the socially weaker caste and gender, their relationship is a threat to the overall foundation responsible for the divisions. Hence, Velutha's journey begins

with the socio-cultural attribution of different characteristics on the basis of his physical appearance, profession, sex, economic status etc. However, this is interesting to see that Velutha's rejection of harsh societal impositions and his refusal to submit to the patriarchal upper caste are what make him vulnerable to its abuse, and at the same time, have drawn in the ambivalences of 'identifying' to a very dynamic process.

In the novel, Velutha showcases exceptional skills as a carpenter and worker in the family's pickle factory, "Paradise Pickles and Preserve", literally preserving tradition even as he rejects it. This makes him an anomaly. Despite the fact that he's a Paravan or an Untouchable, his labour is a valuable asset even the Ipe family recognises. Hence, he is allowed to cross certain boundaries. As Hera Culda puts it, "these transgressions are forgiven and accepted because he is capable" (16). This does not, however, limit him to a traditional role of masculinity. In spite of being a responsible man, Velutha embodies traits which are stereotypically considered feminine. His nurturing aspect, in correlation with his social status as an Untouchable, makes his role a subservient one in Ayemenem that is "... a patriarchal society and male dominance is displayed in all the domains of the society... at home, workplace and politics" (Tahreem et al. 106). Velutha is an exception as he is involved at home, work and also in politics, all the while remaining compliant, possessing little to no power. It is evident that Velutha treats Rahel and Estha as his own, providing them with the security he himself lacks. Although he exhibits heterosexual masculinity which is required of a father figure, his gentle demeanor represents a maternal instinct which is rarely present in Ammu. His role as a caregiver is not highlighted only in his affection for the twins but also in the way he cares for his father, Vellya Paapen, and his paralyzed brother. Additionally, with Mammachi's permission, he performs chores in the Ipe household, exemplifying his capability to go beyond societal norms and perform tasks which are associated with both genders. The displeasure of the other workers towards the family's acceptance of Velutha is a reminder that undistinguished and unconventional men fall prey to societal standards that the patriarchal society registers men like Velutha in as "the insulted and the injured" (Prasad 5) and thus justify its brutal and condescending behavior.

Challenging Social Categorisation

Ammu's role is indispensable when the question of Velutha's identity is raised. While Velutha reveals a softer side of his gender, his lover, Ammu, assumes a more dominant position which is typically assigned to men in society. This, nevertheless, makes her subject to the repercussions. The impact of Ammu's transgression on Mammachi reveals how societal rules are "deeply ingrained" in the latter's "conscience", and how she accepts Chacko's involvement with "low caste women but when her daughter (Ammu) does it she shows no understanding and no mercy" (Hera Culda 16). Velutha's monogamous relationship in connection with Chacko's carnal affairs is an offence to those who are unable to perceive beyond the patriarchal

power of Chacko, an individual who falsely considers himself a Marxist while men like Velutha get their hands dirty and do the actual work. Hera Culda scrupulously observes Mammachi as “policing gender norms” because “Ammu defiled not just generations of breeding but also caste and gender norms” (16). Mammachi shares and propagates the values of the world she occupies. So, the patriarchal view is not limited to patriarchy.

The "god" in the title of the novel is in fact Velutha and his power does not serve to dominate but to unite. Since he is a god of small things, his active participation in the communist march is a small part in the collective act of creation. His power, although considered trivial, heralds large changes in the novel. The operating of the factory, "Paradise Pickles and Preserves", depends on his divine powers. His creative powers help the family's business function, preserving years of tradition. This power is docile, and unlike the male-dominated power structure in which he is a victim. Furthermore, his deification is heightened by the fact that he effortlessly connects with children and nature, both being untainted and unseen by the corrupt world of law and order. Velutha's order is a divine one, an appreciation of the trivial, where the larger world is beheld in smaller light and given new meaning. Pranav Jani asserts that Velutha is “rewritten as a storyteller and a nurturer of Small tales whose task of recovery mirrors and completes the novel's own” (54-55).

Undoing Gender

Gender performance is further challenged when Ammu's voyeuristic tendency towards Velutha becomes apparent. In Roy's words, “She wondered at how his (Velutha) body had changed – so quietly, from a flat-muscled boy's body into a man's body. Contoured and hard. A swimmer's body” (Roy 175). Though the description blatantly provides a tough, masculine image of Velutha, there is a certain level of vulnerability in the description. In works of literature, females are typically the ones who become objects of desire, catering to the male gaze. In this instance the roles are reversed. The meekness in the portrayal of his body is heightened by the fact that it gets badly beaten towards the end of the novel. Although not sexual in nature, it is a violation of a man by other men. The altering performances thus reinforce Butler's concept that an individual's (gender) identity can be established through behaviour, because gender is what people do in various social contexts (2020).

Velutha's affair with Ammu is also seemingly trivial but does not fail to lead to major shifts by challenging the Love Laws. Velutha's soft power is nothing short of destructive. In spite of it being a societal taboo, this power is exercised as love for Ammu which she feels compelled by. Ammu has no honest chance to escape these rules. Hera Culda claims, “They both know the danger they are in from the beginning of the affair, yet neither of them is ready to let the other go” (16). This ultimately leads to their downfall, proving that even soft power has consequences when exercised without caution. The result is even more deadly in the face of an oppressive hard power like the one Velutha struggles to overcome throughout the novel.

The marginalized masculinity of Velutha becomes more apparent and significant when the other male characters appear as a sharp contrast to him. The betrayal,

although unintentional, comes from Velutha's own father, Vellya Paapen, who exposes his affair to Mammachi, claiming he will kill his son for defying the Love Laws. If drunken words are sober feelings as the saying goes, it is possible that Vellya, being under the influence, fails to conceal his support of a male-dominated society with a persistent thirst for power. This idea is strengthened by Ammu's alcoholic husband, Baba, whose influence on the twins is a stark contrast to the fatherly affection Velutha provides. In addition, Pappachi, Ammu's father, is yet another patriarchal archetype, incapable of the fatherly qualities reflected by Velutha and responsible for Ammu's lack of motherly tenderness. However, following the discovery of Velutha's affair with Ammu, Velutha seeks protection from Comrade Pillai, the leader of the Communist Party in Ayemenem. He refuses to give refuge to Velutha which is a stark reminder that men without a fixed identity are often neglected by those whose action is "a display of exaggerated masculinity" (Connell 332). Such men wish to gain massive power to serve themselves. Their desire for it has no actual basis in the real world. While the power someone like Velutha employs is benevolent and rooted in concrete reality, revealed in the simple act of repairing a boat for the twins towards the end of the novel, in the harmless joy of creating wooden toys for Ammu during childhood. However, hegemonic masculinity thus "... serves as 'an analytical instrument to identify those attitudes and practices' among men that perpetuate gender inequality, involving both men's domination over women and 'the power of some men over other (often minority groups of) men'" (Jewkes S113).

Velutha possesses the natural ability to be gentle in a world fraught with peril and apathy, a softness which poses a threat to people in positions of authoritative power: "They loved the way wood, in Velutha's hands, seemed to soften and become as pliable as Plasticine" (Roy 79). This fear turns dangerous, evident by the police hostility towards Velutha right before the twins' innocent eyes, without proper evidence of the accusations against him: "Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear...civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness. Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify" (308-309). The policemen, whose duty is to preserve justice and order, defend the rights of those who have a voice in society and not that of underlings such as Velutha. Their aggression towards a man against whom they have no personal grievances is evidence that to a degree, every man in this novel has a desire to exercise power and dominate, even if they are merely puppets attached to strings controlled by bigger hands, enjoying snippets of status. These men "woke Velutha with their boots" (308) suggesting the extent to which he has been dehumanised by the law enforcement, being treated as nothing more than an object not even worth touching with their hands. Whereas Ammu gives in to her lover's non-coercive capacity to provide affection by allowing him to touch her, thus violating the laws. In this respect, Ozyegin's proposition for the inclusion of an individual's experiences who intrinsically link "their struggles through a prism of patriarchy" (234) appears out to be a fundamental change in ideological

foregrounding of gender as performance.

The benevolence that Velutha promises in a society revolving around corrupt power leaves a deep impact on Estha. In spite of being Rahel's twin, he acts significantly older and appears to be protective of her. This happens as a result of Velutha's influence. Finally, Velutha's death affects him more than Rahel. His betrayal of the man tributes to the silence and melancholic disposition which he maintains as an adult. However, his transformational masculinity is seen and felt as he uses Velutha's fictitious twin as a form of escapism. This draws attention to the idea that the patriarchal society expects men to repress their true emotions, so that the conventional idea of masculinity can keep persisting.

Conclusion

The study examines the experiences of Velutha who grapples with himself, and his gender identification through a prism of patriarchy. This is appalling that even when men and women fill their identical roles, gender discrimination does not vanish. Hence, simply social and structural variables cannot diminish the power of patriarchy. We need to have an ideological perception of gender as performance. Here, the attention is narrowed to the performances of Velutha, who gives less attention to stately and social structural assumptions for social life. The narrative in *The God of Small Things* has a tangible capacity to amaze the world by throwing disputed or questionable aspects of patriarchy into relief (Ramadhan). Moreover, this differing expression in the novel enables the reader to find a connection and a strategy that emphasizes the dignity of the values considered to be divine and more human and disapproves those in power the exclusive right to define and justify their actions as standard. In this process, Velutha becomes a symbol of future change, “a worthy comrade” in the progression of feminist movement as well (Hooks 12). Keeping in mind the controversial issues relating gender, this study does not discuss sexual orientation and the possibility of multiple genders, rather, it focuses on discussions which free people from gendered distinctions and norms.

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Speaking the 'Unspeakable': The Radical Potential of Hijra Lingo

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Abstract

The lavender or queer lexicon is still a largely neglected area. However with the publication of Leap's *Lavender Lexicon* in 1990, there is a significant rise in the academic researches concerning this area but even within the LGBTQ studies the transgender lexicon is a hugely marginalised area. Precisely for this reason, it is important to study and critique the hijra argot as it not only creates radical slippages in the global trans language but also refuses to be subsumed within the larger ambit of white gay lingo. This paper aims to illustrate the explosive potential of the secret and coded hijra language that has primarily two varieties; Hijra *Farsi* and *Gupti Bhasha*. It also highlights the fact as how the hijra lingo---with its peculiar vocabulary, revolutionary usage of invectives, words and phrases emanating from hijras' initiation ceremonies, *reets* and rituals, and reappropriation and rearticulation of certain spiritually surcharged words---has the potential to displace the white gay lingo as the primary prototype of the queer language.

Keywords: Hijra, Queer Argot, *Gupti Bhasha*, *Hijra Farsi*, Transgender Lexicon.

Introduction

There is a spurt in the research pertaining to the queer lexicon in the last two decades and it cuts across various disciplines such as gender studies, linguistic anthropology and speech communication. The first significant signature on LGBTQ+ language was Gerson Legman's "The Language of Homosexuality: An American Glossary" (1941), but it is William Leap's *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon: Authenticity, Imagination and Appropriation in Lesbian and Gay Languages* published in 1990 that has opened the flood gates for the academic research on queer linguistics and no wonder the next decade witnessed the publication of the works like Kira Hall's *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self* (1996), Anna Livia and Kira Hall's *Queerly Phrased* (1997), Leap's *Word's Out: Gay Men's English* (1996) and many others.

There is a symbiotic relationship between language and identity and it becomes specially convoluted and multilayered when it concerns minorities, especially sexual minorities as they employ careful exclusions and inclusions while negotiating their queer identity. A queer person, as Butler has extolled, is silenced by the language they speak because queer people "cannot assume the position of the speaking subject within the linguistic system of compulsory heterosexuality. To speak within the system is to be deprived of the possibility of speech; hence, to speak at all in that context is a performative contradiction, the linguistic assertion of a self that cannot 'be' within the language that asserts it" (Butler 116). This holds especially true for the Indian queer subaltern subjects on account of Eurocentricism as the queer language is largely subsumed by the white gay language that further legitimises a certain kind of imperialist control. No wonder other than Kira Hall's "Go Suck Your

Husband's Sugarcane! Hijras and the Use of Sexual Insult”, “‘It's a Hijra!’ Queer Linguistics Revisited”, Kaustav Chakraborty's *The Queer and the Vernacular Languages in India* and Ruth Vanita's “Rose by any Other Name”, there are only few sketchy articles that cater to specific Indian queer language and aesthetics. In fact, this term was first of all used by Raj Rao in an interview given to me where he states that “...you take something as you know it, as it actually exists, and turn it on its head. This is achieved through the use of literary technique. It's what one may call a queer or transgressive aesthetics, which is radical and only has legitimate place in the world of representation” (Chanana 134).

However, this article primarily centers around the major intervention in the sphere of global trans language produced by the secret hijra lingo as illustrated through the coinages used for their specific *reet* and rituals, alternative family structure; rearticulation and reappropriation of certain spiritually surcharged words; phrases percolating into hijra lingo through their interaction with medical fraternity due to SRS (sex-reassignment surgery) and usage of peculiar invectives. Hijras, despite having lot of overlapping with the western notion of transgenders, are still significantly different from them as they are not only trans entities but also have cultural identity. In this way through their culturally loaded coinages and specific hijra lingo, they give impetus to the idea of 'speech community' and create significant ruptures not only in transgender aesthetics but also add a potent tangent in the larger framework of lavender lexicon.

The Secret and Coded Language of Hijras

In order to mitigate subjugation and social opprobrium, specially in public places and also to forge bonds, hijras use coded language which can be primarily understood only by hijras and is unintelligible to a cis normative culture. “Unlike the accepted notion of a subaltern who cannot speak or is not heard of, the queer vernacularization of hijra community through which the codified language is prohibited from being accessed by the 'mainstream', may be seen as a rejoinder to the otherization that the hijras face from the hands of the 'mainstream’” (Chakraborty 9-10).

Hijras' coded language is primarily of two varieties: *Gupti* or *Uti Bhasha* and Hijra *Farsi*. This coded language is only in oral form and the source of the vocabulary is unknown. The secret *Farsi* language is a combination of Persian, Urdu and Punjabi (Awan & Sheeraz, 2011); It is a secret language or cryptolect which has been invented to confound and exclude others—people who do not belong to their communities (Hall, 1997, Nagar, 2008; Sheeraz & Afsar, 2011; Mal, 2018, 2024). Hijra *Farsi* is mainly used by Muslim hijras; whereas, *Uti* or *Gupti Bhasha* is a slightly altered variety of Hijra *Farsi* imbued with various regional dialects and is spoken by Hindu hijras (Kundalia, 2013; Mal, 2015, 2018). Also, *Uti* is loaded with sexually surcharged lexemes and gives expression to hijras' specific and unique desire which has no equivalent in largely heterosexual vocabulary of desire. Referring to the particular hijra desire, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi uses the term 'hijrotic' (as explained by her in her autobiography, *Red Lipstick*) to give expression

to the unique erotic desire of hijras.

Politics of Inversion and Invectives

Another significant aspect of the language of hijras is their usage of specific hijra invectives which are also instrumental in the reversal of paradigm and self-assertion. Kira Hall gives a detailed analysis as how hijras use invectives and insulting language to benefit monetarily (by inducing transphobia) and also to give expression to their own frustration. They use sexually surcharged abuses that have many layered meanings. Quoting from Kira Hall, I am citing few:

“Khasam ka ganna chus: Go suck the sugar cane of your husband.

Khasam ke yaar sare bazaar ke kele chat le, peat bhar jayega: Husband's lover go and lick all the bananas at the market, then you will be full.

Lakri bech le lakri: Sell the stick.

Kutte ka pattal chat le tera bhai hai: The dog who licks the leaf plate is your brother (in other words you are just like the dog who eats other people's leftover)” (Hall 1997, 449).

All these abuses are sexually surcharged and also refer to *danda* (sex work in hijra lingo).

Using invectives and abusive language as a tool for breaking the hierarchy by creating fissures in linguistic purity is a rampant practice among many minority identities including hijras. Examples can be cited from female singers of Uttar Pradesh who sing *gali* songs as not only means of twisted humour and entertainment but also as a way of expressing suppression (Henry 1976). Kira Hall gives a detailed description of it. She cites examples of “Oriya speaking male 'charioteers' in the Bhubaneshwar Chariot Festival who chant sexually obscene limericks and songs to the devotees of Lord Lingaraj (Freeman 1978); and Rajasthani village women who at annual festivals and life cycle celebrations sing of sexual engagement with spouses and lovers (Raheja and Gold 1994)” (Hall 1997, 442). As Foucault has asserted that power illicit its own origin, hijras have been abused with sexually surcharged derogatory words and by employing the politics of inversion, they use the same kind of invectives and twist them to their advantage to assert their identity. By dismantling the so-called linguistic propriety and by employing politics of subversion, they are able to use abusive language (that was meant to denigrate them) as a means of empowerment to push back their oppressors. As mentioned by Serena Nanda “...the hijra's verbal play functions as a kind of 'ritual of reversal,' a phenomenon in many cultures in which those who are in high and mighty positions are brought lower and humbled” (Nanda 5).

Kira Hall draws attention to yet another feature of seamless amalgamation of invectives in Hijra lingo that highlights various other aspects. For instance, “even in the structure of their curses...the hijras assert their identity as feminine employing 'softer' curses that focus on either physical defect or sexual immorality, such as *chinri* 'loose one,' *bueri* 'earless one' *gangi* 'hairless one,' and *kanjri* 'low-caste loose woman” (Hall 1997, 450). However, as Hall suggests that by using metaphors like

kela, *ganna* and *lakri* to denote male genital organs and the constant use of the word *bazaar* in their invectives, hijras obliquely refer to hijra prostitution. In this manner “hijras embarrass their male listeners and shamelessly collapse traditional divisions of the secret and the known, private and the public, home and market, feminine and masculine” (449). This is their way of appropriating spaces that are denied to them through verbal insolence. Apropos of this, it is pertinent to quote Mal: “Thus their secret language of counter-culture may be considered as a powerful anti-language of resistance . . . distinguished by the juxtaposition of contradicting characteristics such as native/regional phrases mixed with obscenities, causing deliberate disturbance of its cultural and linguistic standards” (2024, 80).

Another pertinent aspect of the language is their complex way of amalgamating feminine and masculine way of addressing. For instance, Serena Nanda talks as how there is largely a feminisation of hijra language but according to Mal for addressing their superiors like *Guru* or other seniors, they use masculine pronouns for them to exhibit respect. However generally they use masculine and feminine pronouns in accordance with the sexual roles assigned to a hijra within their groups.

'Code Switching' and Formation of 'Speech Community' in Hijra Lingua Franca

All over the world there is a tendency in the more marginalised groups, within the sexual minorities, to break away from the dominant queer language and coin their own vocabulary for the assertion of their unique self. This is also a conspicuous aspect of hijra *Lingua Franca* where through their unique secret language, hijras unwittingly form 'speech community' and exercise 'code switching.' Rusty Barrett propagates the concept of 'speech community,' according to which the queer community can form special bond by sharing unique queer language which serves as a common denominator across queer community. But on account of various sorts of hegemonic hierarchies that are prevalent within the queer community, there is a need for developing 'anti language' and also of rearticulation of popular linguistic codes so that the marginalised communities within queer communities can also assert their individuality. That is why, the percolation of hijra lingo in the larger queer language is a significant intervention. Inventing their own distinctive variety of language is one of the ways through which these marginalised identities reclaim their space. The concept of 'swardspeak' (Pascual 2016) is a very fine example of it. Swardspeak refers to a peculiar gay lingo of gays in Philippines. It is a unique mixture of Tagalog, English, Spanish and Japanese along with the amalgam of trademark brands and celebrities' names and this variety of distinct gay lingua franca helps them to not get subsumed within the larger ambit of white gay lingo. This language community formation can also be seen in Indian context in the specific hijra terminology used by hijras.

Another pertinent feature of the lavender lexicon is 'code switching' which is employed to create slippages in the dominant oppressive culture. Rusty Barrett postulates the idea of 'code switching'. He cites the example of Black drag

performers who intentionally use 'female white English' as a means of inversion and try to mitigate prejudices pertaining to ethnicity and gender. In the similar fashion, the feminisation of hijra lingo coupled with indiscreet masculine nouns creates ruptures in the fallacious division between the so-called 'masculine' and 'feminine' language and creates a constant flux of 'code switching'. Also, because of their alternative family structure which is primarily matrilineal, hijras have particular feminine terminology to address the various members of their clan. They resist the cultural assimilation through these practices and establish ethnographic authority.

Rearticulation and Reappropriation of Phrases and Words in Hijras' Language

When it concerns reversing the paradigm, another example can be cited from 'the dykes on bikes' phenomenon. The word 'dyke' has been used for lesbians in a pejorative sense. However, there is reappropriation of the negative connotations associated with the word 'dyke' for lesbians by completely reinventing the meaning of the term. For instance, the reorientation of the word 'dyke' is visible in the manner in which it has been linked with the accepted and revered identity of motherhood by coining of the terms like 'dykes with tykes' (tykes mean children of lesbian mothers) which refers to lesbian motherhood. In the similar fashion, the terms like *nirvanam* and *sannyasi* or ascetic have been appropriated by hijras in such a way that they have completely transformed the meaning of these words. *Nirvanam* in hijra terminology refers to castration and transformation from male to female. There has been huge critique pertaining to the trans-insensitive language regarding SRS (Sex Reassignment Surgery) and how the use of queer sensitive and transpositive language is absolutely imperative for counsellors. Apropos of this Blanchard cogitates that phrases like 'comorbid psychopathology', 'gender identity disorder' and 'clinical management' be replaced with patient-friendly ones like 'multiple mental health issues', 'gender distress/discomfort' 'gender variance/diversity' and 'transgender care'. Indeed, how beautifully transcending all pejorative connotations of terms like GID (Gender Identity Disorder) and gender dysphoria, hijras simply invented a spiritually surcharged word, *nirvanam* (salvation) for the entire process of gender transformation.

Similarly, Gayatri Reddy in her seminal work on Hyderabad Hijras, *With Respect to Sex* has given an overarching and transformative definition of the term, *sannyasi* and cogitates as how hijras consider themselves as *sannyasis*. The process of emasculation or *nirvanam* in a way metaphorically refers to celibacy. Also, not having a family (that is supposed to be the primary reason for materialistic creeds) along with their social activism which caters to egalitarian ethics (the well-known hijra activists like Revathi, Vidya, Laxmi, Manobi and Kalki have worked extensively for the uplift of the trans community), makes hijras fit candidates for the unique and individualised form of asceticism in an oblique and suggestive fashion. There is a mention of '*sannyasi* rock' in Revathi's book, and interestingly enough Gayatri Reddy gives an entirely different connotation to the term *sannyasi* with reference to hijras in her seminal work, *With Respect to Sex*. Citing examples from

the interpretations of Ashis Nandy she contends: "...posited the ability to transcend the man-woman dichotomy through a self-conscious aspiration for androgyny. The desire to become 'God's eunuch', as he puts it, was superior to both the essences of masculinity and femininity" (Nanda 29). She further contends that hijras seem to comprehend a uniquely subjective model of *sannyas* on account of the corporeal reality of their asexual identity because of emasculation and emotional detachment (no progeny and blood ties and thus symbolically no obvious reasons for 'worldly concerns'). She affirms as how some of the hijras told her that "not only is the 'male body [penis]...useless' for hijras, its excision merely underscored their (ontologically prior) asexuality rather than delineating the centrality of semen retention and power stemming from such control" (Nanda 40).

This indubitably also helps in reinventing the idea of masculinity when seen from the perspective of androgyny. In her second autobiography, *Red Lipstick*, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi uses the same tool of androgyny to question the stringent idea of masculinity. She gives constant references of *ardhnarishvar* throughout the text. She also cites the example of king Bhangashvana (as narrated in the *Mahabharata*) who lived his life both as a man and woman and then finally chose to be a woman. Thus, the marginalised identities within the sexual minorities group tend to reinvent and reclaim certain terms, linguistic patterns, popular myths and coin their own language to cement their place in the dominant queer culture.

Apropos of this Rani Kawale highlights the fact that the South Asian lesbians intentionally use to speak in broken English to reterritorialise white spaces with their unique Asian identity so that they are not consumed and invisibilised by the all-pervasive whiteness of the space. And this reinventing of queer language is visible even in the nineteenth-century *rekhti* poetry. Since homoeroticism was prevalent in both the respectable *grahastha* (domesticated) woman and courtesan---both had very different linguistic patterns---there was an unusual juxtaposition of the language of both these types of women which further gave impetus to the emergence of a unique queer language. Ruth, by quoting Rangin, highlights this aspect of *rekhti* in *Gender, Sex and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry, 1780-1870*: "I do not restrict this to prostitutes (*kasbi*) or to domestic (*gharelu*) women/ I am interested here only in women's speech (*zanani boli*)" (Vanita 2012, 28). In fact, the merging of these two varieties of language can be found in the language of *khangis*. *Khangis* were married women who were also indulged in sex-work with both men and women, and therefore not only their lesbian encounters but also the articulation of it had a unique hybrid flavour.

Indeed, all over the world there is a tendency in the more marginalised groups, within the sexual minorities, to break away from the dominant queer language and coin their own vocabulary for the assertion of their unique self. The hijra terminology is also an extension in this line of thought. Words like *badhai*, *kandra*, *nirvanam* and *danda* are part of the unique hijra language. Similarly, there is a percolation of words like *ghashl* (emerging out of their death ceremonies) and *chatla* (emanating from *nirvanam* ceremonies). I hereby quote few examples from

Mal' glossary of hijra *Farsi* and *Gupti Bhasha* to document their peculiar vocabulary and some of these words have no equivalent in any other language. Unique words such as “*Moorath*: A hijra who is willing to be castrated. *Akwa Moorath*: A non-castrated hijra. *Nirwan Moorath*: A castrated hijra. *Chapti*: The orifice of a hijra left behind after castration at the place of penis similar to a vaginal aperture (Mal 2024, 74).

Yet another interesting aspect of hijra *Farsi* and *Gupti Bhasha* is that unlike English (where we construct a sentence by using first subject, then verb and lastly object), *Farsi* language follows the syntactic pattern of subject, object and then verb. Mal gives few examples such as:

“*Humsi Ratna Machhia* = I am Ratna.

Humsi Chhakka Machhia = I am hijra.

Tumsike Khol Jis? = How is your family?

Tumsi Ehan Nei Vogna = You don't come here” (Mal 2024, 79).

Conclusion

Thus, hijras' coded language throws a theoretical challenge because of formation of peculiar 'speech community', 'code switching', revolutionary usage of invectives and also on account of three specific reasons. Firstly, their linguistic gender blending and their non-normative syntax (subject, object and then verb) create ruptures in the bipolar linguistic gender system. They can traverse seamlessly at any side of the dichotomous gender divide and can take advantage of the subversive potential of their liminality, whereas such privilege is not available to a cisgender and monosexed person. Secondly, their reappropriation of spiritually surcharged words such as *nirvanam*, *sannyasi* and *ardhnarishvar* ---as postulated by hijras, such as Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, Revathi and Smiling Vidya in their autobiographies and trans-scholars like Serena Nanda and Gayatri Reddy in their scholarly works--- further gives radical edge to hijra lingo. Thirdly, on account of SRS (sex reassignment surgery) and hormone therapy, the phrases from medical fraternity (and at times the transphobic words are replaced with transfriendly phrases) percolate into their vocabulary. Hence unlike gay, lesbian and global trans language, the hijra lingo creates radical ruptures not only in global trans language but also in the larger framework of lavender lexicon. It has a potential to not only create mutations at the boundaries but also to push aside the Eurocentric white gay lingo from its position of the primary prototype of lavender lexicon, provided enough research and studies are being conducted pertaining to the explosive potential of the hijra language. It is fit to conclude the article with Kira Hall's observation on hijras' existence as linguistically troubling agents. To quote her words: “Hijra rebels against cultural ideologies of gendered language, assuming a linguistic position that is neither fully feminine nor fully masculine. ... The hijra ... is a kind of linguistic maverick, and her refusal to adhere to hegemonic notions of either feminine or masculine speech becomes almost an instantiation of her refusal to adhere to a particular gender” (Hall 1997, 438).

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Consciousness and Culture: Thoughts of S. Radhakrishnan, a Writer Savant of India

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Abstract

S. Radhakrishnan, former President of India, was a philosopher savant whose writings, lectures and teaching drove several in India to fight for independence. He rose to the ranks of a scholar freedom fighter who discovered the wisdom of India in her spirituality, religions, culture and literature. His research on consciousness and culture shows how the caste system in its pristine form, was a terrific engineering model to enhance consciousness while keeping free from discriminations and atrocities that it later got identified with. In his works he shows the other elements that develop consciousness and culture are cultural relativity, multiculturalism, company of women and reading literature. He believes in India that is secular, multicultural, globalized world helping in the salvation of all. Classical Transcendentalism of India which he propagated hailed that the purpose of human life was to build the world as a 'Home to All.'

Keywords: Consciousness, Culture, Multiculturalism, Classical Transcendentalism, Literature

Introduction - Radhakrishnan a Writer Savant

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born and grew up at a time of intense cultural confrontations in India. Born in 1888, he saw from childhood, the British ruled over India and sought to convert Indians to their faith leading to the politicization of Christianity. A veteran scholar S Gopal has written in his book, *Radhakrishnan a Biography*,

To know more about Hinduism was part of the missionary's equipment; to show its inadequacy in face of what Christ had to offer was the missionary business. India had to be made hungry for Christ before she received Christ. But until she accepted Christ there was no hope for her. (Gopal 5)

The way Hinduism was condemned by the British as an ancient religion, a worn-out garment better to be discarded, gave birth to the scholar revolutionary in Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. All his essays are a sort of cultural battle fought to save the religion and culture of India. Swami Vivekananda, the father of Indian Nationalism and Rabindranath Tagore, hailed as Gurudev were his mentors. He adopted the strategy of his mentors of scholarly retaliation to counter the British attack on Indian religions, spirituality and culture.

Radhakrishnan knew only a select class of intellectuals in the world appreciated India's wisdom at that time. Yet there was a time when India enjoyed the status of a major cultural power in the world and was a relaying center for spirituality. This reality set him on to discover in his literature how 'spirituality and consciousness' were the central concerns of the Indian culture. Balmiki Prasad Singh, a renowned scholar diplomat, also holds the same view in his book, *India's Culture*,

It is thus not surprising that during the period of recorded global history of the past 2500 years India was a major power for 1300 years (almost up to eighth century) and became again a major power for over a period of 100 years during Mughal rule. (1ii) Radhakrishnan fought slavery of India under foreign rule which had robbed its glory. His vast powerful literature is an attempt to reinstate India to the position of pride in the world community through her scholarship and wisdom.

Methodology

This study is based on the textual analysis of the primary source, i.e., the writings and speeches of S. Radhakrishnan. Secondary sources like books, journals and articles on S. Radhakrishnan have been consulted. Some recent research in consciousness has been studied.

Radhakrishnan builds a nation on culture

As an astute scholar, Radhakrishnan knew that the nation could not be built without its roots in the rich soil of culture and religion. He felt strongly how values and beliefs make the mind and character of the nation. The fiery spirit of Radhakrishnan was put to blaze when in his classroom in MA course they were taught that the Vedanta did not have any ethics. (Anand, 5) He was reading Swami Vivekananda at this time. Jawaharlal Nehru explains in *The Discovery of India*, the impact of Swami's words, "He came as a tonic to depressed and demoralized Hindu mind." (Nehru, 339). Swami Vivekananda's words were now the light of Radhakrishnan.

Thus, at the age of nineteen, Radhakrishnan answered the criticism levied on the Vedanta by the British. In his M.A. Thesis, *The Ethics of the Vedanta*, he refuted the claims made by the British critics as false, maligning the Indian faith for not having ethics. The book was, to his great surprise, adjudged by his English Professor, Mr Hogg, as successful and agreeable. (Anand, 8) This was just the beginning for Radhakrishnan, for he had decided to bring the wisdom in Indian Philosophy and Literature to the notice of the world. He did not adopt a narrow-minded approach to his work on Hinduism, Indian religions, culture and Philosophy. He carefully read the best volumes on world philosophy and devised a protective shield of scholarly repertoire to defend the religion and culture of India against unjust attacks from the British.

For the fight against the British, he felt, it was necessary to ensure that India should fight as one mind. It was not possible to create such a mind on borrowed ideas from the West. As a visionary leader, Radhakrishnan ensured that Indians were firmly and authentically rooted in their own accounts of spirituality. His study aimed at the remedies to cure the Indian mind of the caprice and cupidity that created numerous social evils leading to political enslavement. To achieve this goal, Radhakrishnan pursued a comparative religious and cultural study, comparing the Eastern religions with Western thought. This way, he avoided being ethnocentric. This cross-cultural study was progressive and led India boldly on the spiritual path re-emphasizing its spiritual motive as declared in the *Rig Veda*, 'let the best be received from anywhere

in the world.' (Sayana, Mandala 5)

It is because of this attitude that he could establish a spirit of unity through cultural relativity among Indians. His literature helped in making Indians understand themselves better. His works are sympathetic reliable accounts of how the beliefs and values systems emerged in India. This brought him eternal fame, making him the first Indian to teach Indian Philosophy at the prestigious Oxford University. His readers and audience from the West got inspired to know about the Indian virtues. His works are famously called the bridge between the East and the West. His learned erudition gave him success and respect, helping him to forge unity among the people of the world on his thoughts and ideas. As a noble teacher to his countrymen, it was only natural for Radhakrishnan to treat the weaknesses of the Indian mind, which followed superstition and inflicted atrocities on their own brethren.

Radhakrishnan on Consciousness, Culture and Creativity

As a master of Indian Philosophy, he left no opportunity to educate the Indian masses on how the caste system helped in a superior organization of the Indian social fabric. It was a system based on choice of the spirit rather than economics. He writes in his great work, *The Hindu View of Life*,

The institution of caste illustrates the spirit of comprehensive synthesis characteristic of the Hindu mind with its faith in collaboration of races and the collaboration of cultures. Paradoxically as it may seem, the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust. Though it has now degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance, though it tends to perpetuate inequality and develop the spirit of exclusiveness, these unfortunate effects are not the central motives of the system. (Radhakrishnan 66)

This caste system was creative, decided by aptitude, interests and talents. Castes were seen as the parts of the body. (Anand 210) Eventually, during the degradation of the Hindu Society due to foreign invasions, lack of education and the oppression of women, castes began to be fixed by birth. Certain castes started enjoying powers and privileges over others. Such an arrangement over the centuries proved to be a scandal as many talented people were forbidden from taking special responsibilities in society because of their birth in a specific caste. Talent lay waste in such an arrangement. Weaker families were exploited. However, that was not the motive of the system that aimed at allowing the spiritual consciousness in a person to decide their occupation or service. Everyone was supposed to be serving as a body and enjoying collective benefits from the society. No service was priced as ultimate each being contributory to the other like the parts of the body. Radhakrishnan quotes from *the Gita* on castes in its original form, "The divisions of caste must be in accordance with each man's character and aptitude." (Anand, 94). He explores this idea in his book *Religion and Society* thus,

The functions of the different castes were regarded as equally important to the well being of the whole. The serenity of Brahmin as a teacher, the heroism of Kshatriya as the warrior, the honesty of Vaishya as the businessman, and the patience and energy of Shudra as worker all contributed to the social growth. Each had its own

perfection. (Radhakrishnan 85)

Radhakrishnan held corruption of the caste system was the chief folly of the Indians leading to downfall of the nation. He said, 'the corruption of centuries has resulted in the loss of freedom for the Indians.' By this corruption he also meant corruption of human values which changed the aims of the castes. Dalai Lama warns us of the same corruption today. In his foreword to *India's Culture* he writes,

I have also observed that when we place too great an emphasis on external development and physical comfort, there is a corresponding decline in our sense of basic human values. Therefore, I believe, it is very important that technological and economic development is accompanied by a corresponding inner development. (Singh, xii)

This remark of Dalai Lama is supported by the history of India. It was lost to the foreign invaders at a time when it was at the height of its material prosperity but was spiritually poor. Caste system decided by the birth did not allow the people to serve through a particular caste out of devotion and dedication. Functioning within a caste was a compulsion, such as paying for the sins of the previous birth or it was destiny. Thus, the entire nation suffered by languishing the inner development of choosing a caste by inner purpose, which is creativity.

Love for the motherland in Radhakrishnan was intense. He explored in his literature the reasons for the glory of the Indians in the past. He wanted to awaken in his writings the special aptitude of the Indians, which made them enthusiastically learn the truth from every culture while remaining steadfast in their beliefs. Indians knew that it was classification which failed comprehensive view and any form of discrimination only leads to the loss of spiritual wisdom. Primary motivation of the Indian mind was essentially to build a civilization that witnessed the one glorious eternal spirit in all its creation. It is this knowledge of the spiritual might that made Indians flourish and establish glory in the past. (Gopal, 6) Radhakrishnan could clearly understand that this was the reason that Indians could keep pure in their intention and expand in their consciousness. This state was denoted by the word 'Brahman', in Sanskrit, meaning expanding one's mind to the extent that the significance of the existence of all could be realized. Thus, they could reach to the state of 'Shanti', in Sanskrit, meaning union with God.

He led the Indian masses to revive their creativity by expanding their consciousness by going back to the spiritual recesses and learning the significance of the cosmos. In his books, speeches, and teaching at universities, he emphasized reading inspiring literature, listening to the discourse of the learned, and being in the company of gentle and noble to spark one's creativity. He writes prophetically on consciousness in his magnum opus *An Idealist View of Life*,

There is a mode of consciousness which is distinct from the perceptual, imaginative or intellectual, and this carries with it self-evidence and completeness. Religious men of all ages have won their certainty of God through this direct approach to the apprehension of reality. (Radhakrishnan 118)

Radhakrishnan on Women and Consciousness

In his book *True Knowledge*, he writes about the condition of women and the numerous disabilities levied on them in the name of customs. This was one of the most horrendous mistakes India made, he felt, by robbing its women of their self-worth due to lack of education and opportunities for growth. His words are capable of delivering a vision when he says in *True Knowledge* that woman has to come into her own. He writes,

In ancient times, our women had the ceremony of upanayana (a rite demarcating one's venture into the world of knowledge) performed for them. They were entitled to the study of Vedas. They were also entitled to the chanting of the Gayatri japa. All these things were open to our women. But our civilization became arrested and one of the main signs of that decay of our civilization is the subjection of women. (Radhakrishnan 89)

He was a staunch supporter of women's rights. Gopal mentions this in his *Biography on Radhakrishnan*. He believed them to be a receptacle of the family where the invaluable and precious of the family is treasured. Radhakrishnan poetically puts in *True Knowledge*,

Give us good women, we will have a great civilization.

Give us good mothers, we will have a great nation. (Radhakrishnan 88)

He did not stress that women were spiritually superior people but did say being soft hearted they had greater spiritual consciousness. He wrote that Indian culture for this reason puts her on higher pedestal than men. Her life, he remarks in his signature work, *The Hindu View of Life*, is 'Tapahpradhanya', which in Sanskrit means, a life of spiritual propensity through self-control and self-denial. (Radhakrishnan 63)

He says they are idealists by choice and, in so doing, serve the values of cultural life better than men. They are the beings of social wisdom. Modern research in Brain Science would only second the opinion of Radhakrishnan. It is a proven fact in science today that women have a greater emotional quotient, and their power to philosophize wisely is empowered due to a greater Pre- Frontal Cortex- the Chief Executive Officer of the brain. Pre-Frontal Cortex puts a brake on the reptilian brain, helping women to be civilizing agents. (Amen, 31) Women, if properly brought up, can serve to civilize the entire society. Through their intuitive power, they have a nurturing role to play in society. The greater presence of the love hormone Oxytocin, as was found in research by Dr Paul Zak, revealed it further enhanced a woman's power to lead the team through love, devotion and dedication. It is in living such a life she influences the character of the people around her and is the teacher and companion of man often hailed by the Indian culture as 'Devi (Goddess) and Sahadharmini', in Sanskrit meaning, companion on the path to religion or righteousness. (Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* 63)

Radhakrishnan strongly urged Indians to allow women to pursue their dreams and ambitions. This would make her grow from her innermost depths. He believed her growth in spiritual consciousness had an important role to play in society and culture because such a woman would galvanize people in faith. Love begets faith. Be it her family or her office, such women would be able to bring spiritual vitality owing to

functioning from her soul. He, however, cautioned that women mimicking men out of inferiority complex cannot exert the same power as a spiritually mature woman.

Radhakrishnan on Darwin and Consciousness

Literature of Radhakrishnan bore fruits in raising the voice of India. He is said to be the soul force behind the excellence many leaders achieved during his time. His writings were always respectfully quoted by them. Gandhi even treated him as his Lord Krishna, a guru, while referring to himself as Arjun, his pupil. His writings became channels for the wisdom he discovered in the religion, culture and philosophy of India. In living such a life, Radhakrishnan proved the ideal set in the *Rigveda* for teachers, it hails teachers as the protectors of knowledge. (Sayana 10.071.06) The people of India started living the dreams of Radhakrishnan, who envisaged the coming together of the people in brotherhood- all humanity, one family. This brought a new spirit of nationalism to India. Its universal appeal also won in bringing reconciliation of humankind through growth in consciousness achieved by a life centered on spirit. It was in this context, Radhakrishnan found Darwin's evolution theory contrary to the spiritual reality.

It was in his magnum opus, *An Idealist View of Life*, that he challenged the Darwinian theory of the evolution of human beings. He proposed the evolution of human beings cannot be ascribed to the survival of the fittest. The evolution of human beings is a sentient feature which operates in cooperation and coming together. It is a growth in consciousness. It is the awareness that helps people to formulate their actions. Life for people is not based on power. It is based on understanding. Meanings give significance to life, not the brutality of power. He developed his own theory and stressed that human beings attain real evolution at the spiritual level bringing social amalgamation in cooperation rather than fateful competition. He believed it should be ever realized that human beings primarily are cosmic beings living to attain a cosmic destiny of union with the ultimate spirit (Anand, 170). He was of the opinion that physics and biology account for the patterns of life but do not account for the creative changes in life (Radhakrishnan 255). He writes emphatically in *An Idealist View of Life*,

Darwin's theory was confined to the biological field. He noted the changes within the different forms of life, but he assumed that life always came from life. He broke down only the lines between species, between lower and higher forms of life. Herbert Spencer made a philosophy out of Darwin's observations, and seemed to account for the rise of living from the non-living, mental from the non-mental. The difference between these is reduced to degree of complexity of the organization. Evolution is no explanation. It does not say why the process should have occurred, why life should occur at all. Survival of the fittest does not carry us far. (Radhakrishnan 254)

Dr. Govind Bhattacharjee writes in his book, *Story of Consciousness*, quoting S. Radhakrishnan on the self. He asserts, 'the self is the inmost and deepest reality.' Further he explores his observation through the words of S. Radhakrishnan,

The Upanishads refuse to identify the self with the body, or the series of

mental states or the presentation of continuum or the stream of consciousness. The self cannot be a relation which requires a ground of relations, nor a connexion of contents, which is unintelligible without an agent who connects. We are obliged to accept the reality of a universal consciousness which ever accompanies the contents of consciousness and persists even when there are no contents. This fundamental identity, which is the presupposition of both self and not self, is called the Atman (the spirit). None can doubt this reality (Bhattacharjee 331).

Radhakrishnan on Multiculturalism for Consciousness

Radhakrishnan knew a nation like India was to be raised not on the foundations of vanquishing others, which leaves humanity impoverished. Through his writings he laid foundation for fellowship, wisdom, love and peace. He was a votary of multiculturalism, which has been a key feature of Indian culture for ages. He advocated interdependence begotten through the fusion of cultures. He appreciated the assimilative tendency of Indian culture that facilitated the people with the best sustainable values in the world.

Culture for Radhakrishnan was a kind of celebration of cherished values and beliefs formed by ideas and ideals. He sees caste system as instrument for multiculturalism. He saw it as capable of giving cohesion and integration to human society. It was a genius social engineering model of India. In the world, it was the earliest attempt to keep society multicultural.

It is indeed the multiculturalism of the caste system that brought transculturation through adaptation because of the fusion of agreeable elements in different cultures. He wrote in *The Hindu View of Life*,

Caste was the answer of Hinduism to the forces pressing on it from outside, it was the instrument by which Hinduism civilized the different tribes it took in. Any group of people appearing exclusive in any sense is a caste. (Radhakrishnan, 75)

This feature always kept the culture new, resulting in neo-culturation. It helped the religious groups in Indian society to modernize. Adoption of new thinking patterns and assimilation of varied experiences kept culture dynamic and creative. In his writings, Radhakrishnan has always treated the individual spirit as capable of reaching the universal. He felt the proper place for the human spirit was the universal. He praised Hinduism for believing salvation could be attained by everyone. Whatever God they may be worshipping, in the end, it was known to every Hindu that the God was one, it was the same universal spirit. It is out of one's emotions and perceiving capacities that the individual adopts a preference for a personal God. Hence, among Hindus, everybody has a personal God known by different names. The spiritual objective Hindus were to attain was developing relations with the universe to the extent that there are no strangers in life and nothing was left unexplored by their mind.

Radhakrishnan advocated this kind of multiculturalism in India was supported by classical transcendentalism of the Vedanta. A spirit he believed must transcend the

physical in order to attain the universal. Once transcendentalism has been attained, a person gets prompted by the self to work towards universality from the provincial level of spiritual development they have attained. T.S. Eliot was so astonished by the marvellous interpretation of the Indian philosophical approach that he said; it looked as if other philosophers were schoolchildren in comparison to the depths and subtleties of Indian Philosophy. Gopal states Eliot's opinion in his *Biography on S. Radhakrishnan*,

Their subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys. (Gopal, 64)

This faith in universalism made his occupation such that he cared as a teacher for the students of the world. He held a universalist believed in doing a service that helps in the redemption of all. He also suggested that reason employed to intuition brings people together in spiritual experience. This could best be served by the world of Art, especially literature. He wrote on the art as crystallization of ideas and ideals as life processors in *An Idealist View of Life*,

The creative spirit and its activity are so unlike the conscious mind that the latter feels itself to be inspired and raised above its normal power by the breath of spirit. The inspired soul speaks from a centre of consciousness that has transcended the limits of its finitude and so claim the authoritativeness which is not within the power of the normal individual to bestow. (Radhakrishnan 180)

S. Gopal in his book *S. Radhakrishnan – A Biography* has quoted Radhakrishnan highlighting his observation on importance of Literature to every citizen of a country, he writes,

The supreme aim of literature was, like that of philosophy and religion, to kindle the human spirit. It was the distillation of personal experience, linking the transcendent and the empirical, the universal and the individual. (Gopal 186)

Going global by sharing literature and art accomplishes the evolution of the spirit was a firm faith of Radhakrishnan. (Anand, 158) Instead of nations covetous of superiority and dominance, he recommended people could be brought together by non-governmental cultural organizations like the UN etc.

The world of art and literature fulfilled the deep spiritual needs of people. (Anand, 9) It is literature he wrote that makes a person 'sahrydaya', in Sanskrit, meaning pure at heart. He writes in his book, *The Present Crisis of Faith*,

The aim of Literature is the good of the world. Its purpose is not to reflect the world but redeem the world. Literature is the channel between spiritual vision and human beings. (Anand, 9)

This pure heart cleans the mind of the person to become clear in ethics and values. By the appeal it makes and the treatment it receives from the world, literature does go global. This globalization of values could be saved only by democracy was a faith of Radhakrishnan. Democracy is preserved by manners. A failure to guard manners makes the person bleed in self-consciousness and miss the zeal of life.

Conclusion

Spiritual and religious experiences bring integration at the global level. It is this unity that supports diversity indicating progress with mature minds and higher

values.

This is why India adopted a secular approach to religions in order to ensure every religion could be carefully studied and adopted for the love of values making human beings compassionate souls. Radhakrishnan writes prophetically, Human beings are born to love and be loved. Errors are not sins. Man is weak and not vicious when he does wrong things. (Anand, 19)

Radhakrishnan said the polarization of human society should be resisted. If at all the caste system returns to its original form, the human being shall blossom in the consciousness. Current system in the world is just the economic. Economic considerations must not dominate the choices we make in life. Spirituality, instead, must be the determining factor.

This is how Radhakrishnan believed we were one family on earth. The *Rigveda* propagated this concept. Unity at the level of thought begets comprehending power which works on universal wisdom. This is how *the Gita* sets the purpose of human life, which it says is in establishing the world as a 'Home to All', put in Sanskrit, 'Lokasamgrahitam' (Anand 28).

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Subaltern Voice of the Migrants in Assam: A Study of Select Miyah Poetry

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Abstract

The paper seeks to study select Miyah poetry written in the Assamese language in light of the ongoing discussions on issues of identity and citizenship in India. This Bengali-origin Muslim migrant community settled in Assam has always been othered by society. Their voice, thus, emerges from the margins of the nation-state and is powerful enough to challenge the centrality asserted by the dominant groups. The Miyah poets speak of their culture, poverty, social and political oppression, identity crisis, and the struggles they have gone through. The select poems were written in 2016 in the wake of the proposition of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. The paper also looks into the space occupied by the migrants within the constitutional and social framework of the nation. By writing their poems in the dominant language of Assam, the poets have sought to place themselves within the landscape of Assam while also claiming their 'Miyanness.'

Keywords: Miyah, identity, margin, Assam, migrants

Introduction

Miya/Miyah poetry is a term given to various poems written by the Miyah community of Assam. While some poems are written in vernacular languages—Assamese and the local dialect of Miyah—and later translated into English, a few others are written in English itself. Though the community's contribution to poetry is not recent, it has now gained more attention. The poets have earned both attention and criticism from the reading public in Assam and beyond; for some, their protest poetry is a threat to the harmony of the state, while for others, it has positively challenged the homogenous identity exhibited by the dominant community. Earlier, they referred to themselves as *Char-Chapori* poets and the poets composing at the current time have taken up the term 'Miyah poets.' Their poetry is a firm assertion of their identity as Miyah, a term that now carries negative connotations. This paper focusses on the two poetry pieces written in the wake of the Citizen (Amendment) Bill 2016, - “Write Down 'I am A Miyah’” by Hafiz Ahmed and “Nana I Have Written” by Salim M Hussain - which initiated the entire genre of Miyah poetry. The poems were posted on Facebook and later included in *The Sunflower Collective*, an online blog that publishes prose and poetry pieces by writers without any formal training.

Subaltern Voice of the Migrants

The shift from colonial and elitist history and historiography to the 'history from below' was an endeavour of a group of intellectuals associated with the Subaltern Studies. Historians like Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak noted how narratives of history always follow the consciousness of the elite section of society. Spivak is of utmost importance in this field, for she also examines

the precarious state that arises when others attempt to represent the subalterns. A key argument of her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) is that the subaltern—the ones who remain at the margin of any society—should be allowed to speak for themselves. For Spivak, the notion that intellectuals concerned for marginalized groups can suitably represent or speak for them is unfitting.

Moreover, the collective dissemination of knowledge by powerful groups has always worked towards rendering the subaltern voiceless. In the context of the colonial production of knowledge, Spivak states, “the subaltern has no history and cannot speak” (287). Even if they speak, their voices often go unheard. Drawing on Foucault, Spivak talks about “epistemic violence” (281), whereby the subaltern is subjugated to violence through the circulation of a particular discourse. Their erasure from history and public dialogue is one form of violence. The essay was produced at a time when postcolonial discourse and knowledge systems were gaining popularity in academia. Spivak sees the subaltern as a fluid category that is dependent on specific contexts. In the current scenario, amidst the constant battle for belonging and deliberations on who is an insider or an outsider, one such subaltern position is held by the poor Miyah community of Assam. Its subaltern position must be understood vis-à-vis the question of national and ethnic identity.

The discourse of the nation is as much about exclusion as it is about inclusion. The question of who is indigenous and who is not has occupied a central stage in the consideration of nationality. There is always an 'other,' against which the identity of the nation is circulated and kept alive. In their work *Who Sings the Nation-State*, Butler and Spivak observe:

[I]f the state is what 'binds,' it is also clearly what can and does unbind. And if the state binds in the name of the nation, conjuring a certain version of the nation forcibly, if not powerfully, then it also unbinds, releases, expels, banishes. (4–5)

This illustrates how the concepts of belonging and unbelonging are intertwined (Christensen 26). While citizenship and nationality invoke a sense of belonging, it is, however, the meso- and micro-level social groups that strongly dwell on the aspect of belonging/unbelonging in day-to-day life. Nevertheless, the line between belonging and unbelonging can always be questioned. Yuval-Davis writes, “Exclusionary national boundaries...even within the same nation, can be constructed and imagined in different ways and according to different organizing and categorical principles” (90). Commenting on Anderson's definition of the nation, Yuval-Davis says that the project of demarcating the boundaries of the nation and its people involves “active imagination” (90). This imagination of the community is not homogenous; the nation's boundaries are viewed in different ways by differentially located people (90).

The question of inclusion/exclusion of Miyah, Bengal-origin Muslim migrants, as national subjects or citizens goes along the lines of Indian nationality and Assamese sub-nationality. This sub-national identity consolidates with much force when a *bideshi* or foreigner is in the picture. Thus, the Miyah becomes the 'other' because of their Bengal origin. The history of the migration of Miyah started from the early

colonial regime when they were brought for agricultural work, and since then, they have been a part of the land. Pathan and Jha point out the two phases of their migration, “first, from the beginning of British colonization until 1937...and second, from 1937 to 1946” (152). Initially, they resided in the *char-chapori* or the riverine areas, but they began migrating to towns and cities due to natural disasters. With this, the Miyah became more visible to the conscious public, and the narrative of the possibility of illegal migrants outnumbering the native Assamese started disseminating. The image of the community is constructed and directed towards serving the rhetoric of the nation and, as seen in this case, also towards strengthening the native identity of Assamese. Sujata Ramachandra very appropriately states, “Muslim citizens of India and Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants are positioned at the margins, and often outside the imagined nation” (245).

However, according to Bhabha, there are “counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities” (300). The existence of counter-narratives itself hints towards the disparity and differences within the nation-state. The idea of the margin is fascinating in this context. It becomes the site of resistance, discursive practices, and re-enquiry of the national discourse that has existed till now.

The counter-narratives by the Miyah community have largely been voiced in the form of protest poetry. The protest poetry serves as a “personal response to oppression based on assumptions of justice, rights, and human dignity” (Knipp 131). It is mostly associated with writings by the Black questioning the dominance of the White. However, the element of protest against social ills and the oppressive system is found in the writings of almost every marginalized section of people. Such poetry forms part and parcel of the protest movements in society (Miller 2). For example, movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter gave rise to many activist poets and their poetry. In the context of India, oppressed groups like Dalits, Muslims, and women have often articulated their issues through poetry of protest. As far as the Northeast is concerned, most of the writings are by the 'native' ethnic groups whose primary concerns are the militant culture that slowly grew in their lands, the influx of 'outsiders' and the othering of the Northeast people by the 'mainland.' In the verses of writers like Easterine Kire and Temsula Ao from Nagaland, Robin Singh Ngangom from Manipur, and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih from Meghalaya, one finds that their poetry is a response to the drastic change in their homeland. Their narratives attempt to counter the portrayal of the people as savage and unworldly by citing their rich heritage and how the authorities from outside their land, during the colonial and post-Independence eras, have invaded their peaceful lives. As opposed to the 'natives,' the poetry of 'migrant' Bengali Muslims emerges as a response against the label of 'other' or 'outsider' by the group claiming indigeneity to Assam. Thus, their poetry is rooted in the geography of Assam.

Assertion of their Identity

The poems' political context is primarily that of the NRC (National Register of Citizens) and Citizenship (Amendment) Bill of 2016. Ahmed's poem begins with the assertion, "Write Down / I am a Miya" (lines 2–3), to which Shalim Hussain replies in his poem, "Nana I have written attested countersigned / And been verified by a public notary / That I am a Miyah" (1–3). Ahmed further declares that his "serial number in the NRC is 200543" (4), implying the need for people belonging to the community to constantly provide testimonies of being part of the nation. At the same time, the line is also powerful dissension against the suspicion of the masses towards every individual from the Miyah community being an illegal immigrant from Bangladesh. The poet also associates his identity with the Brahmaputra, a river that is an integral part of Assam. By identifying with the river Brahmaputra, the poet asserts his belongingness and his place within the landscape of Assam.

A common term used is 'Miya' or 'Miyah,' which is mentioned four times in both poems. In his essay, Sanjib Sahoo remarks that such use of the term is one of the features of protest poetry. He writes:

By repeating what the Other or dominant group has termed as abusive term to denote this community/group, the latter has managed to turn the word upside down and use it as a badge of courage and honour. (Sahoo 94)

Similarly, Shalim M. Hussain declares that the use of the word is "confrontational" ("Pitting Irony" 103). The word here stands on similar ground to Langston Hughes' usage of 'Negro' in his works. For instance, the line "I am a Negro / Black as the night is black, / Black like the depths of my Africa" (Hughes 1–3) highlights their resistance against the negative connotations and their self-appreciation of their identity. Likewise, the attributes given to the Miyah place the community at the bottom of the social hierarchy within Assam. It is associated with undesirable qualities like filthy, poor, and illiterate. Along with these, the word is ingrained in xenophobia and detrimental politics. In another essay, Hussain remarks, "In Assam, the words Miyah and Bangladeshi are used interchangeably for 'illegal immigrants' from Bangladesh. More often than not, 'Bangladeshi' and 'Miyah' are words spat at Assamese Muslims of Bengal origin" ("Growing Up Miyah"). Moreover, they are often speculated as being associated with terrorism and terrorist groups. One can note how the history of their migration is overlooked. Almost everyone from the community is suitably seen as an infiltrator.

Their efforts to assimilate and become a part of the Assamese culture and community have failed miserably. The people had even opted for Assamese as their mother tongue and supported the Assamese struggle against the Bengali language during the early years of Independence. Maulana Bande Ali and Khabir Ahmed, two pioneer poets belonging to the community, in their poems "A Charuwa's Proposition" (1939) and "I Beg to State That" (1985), respectively, have professed their love for Assam and its people. Their poems speak of their strive for identification as an Assamese.

However, a major shift is seen in the Miyah poets, writing in the 21st century. Their poetry is a protest against the discrimination they have faced throughout history

despite being part of the land. The poets and writers have now realised that they should take recourse back to their own culture, and that too with a sense of pride. Their attempt is to contextualize the term 'Miyah,' which was earlier decontextualized by the masses to feed their fantasy. Thus, its usage is an open confrontation, showing that they do not need to be a part of any other culture. The reclaiming of their identity as Miyah and forsaking of their effort to be identified as an Assamese becomes an act of protest.

Almost all the stanzas of the two poems are filled with accusations. The outlet of anger is also towards the “democratic, secular, Republic” (Ahmed line 27) for not giving them their rights as citizens. Yuval-Davis remarks that citizenship often gets structured hierarchically, and the accessibility or exercise of rights is not linear or equal for everyone. The state places people under different categories as part of the regulatory mechanism, and this also informs the “boundaries of belonging” (Yuval-Davis 72). The poet here laments that his “mother [is] a D voter, / Though her parents are Indian.” (29–30). D voters or 'doubtful voters' are those voters in Assam who are not issued elector's identity cards because of their failure to produce proper evidence of their citizenship. The work of adding to and removing names from the list is carried out by the Registration Officer at the decision of the Foreigners Tribunal, a body set up under the Foreigners Act (1946). The community mostly had settled on the banks of the river Brahmaputra. With constant changes in the direction of its flow and floods occurring every year, the inhabitants are being uprooted in large numbers. In such situations, when they are left with nothing, one can only wonder if it is possible for them to save their identity documents. With the birth of the modern nation and the strict marking of borders, it has become imperative for the state to affirm one's identity with some document. This legal procedure calls for a humanitarian crisis as most of them are poor peasants without valid documents to prove their identity, though they have been living here for decades. Hussain expresses in his poem that the people have only “a 10% literacy rate” (line 10), and thus, many remain ignorant of the concepts of nationality and citizenship. Their existence on the land becomes subject to some mere papers.

From Suffering to Hope and Determination

Through their writings, the poets have captured every aspect of the community. From the early times to the present, the community has been trapped in performing menial labour. Ahmed talks about the different works that these people carry out, like turning “waste, marshy lands/ To green paddy fields” (12–13), carrying “bricks/ To build your [their] buildings” (15–16) and cleaning their drains. Through their labour, they have contributed to the economy of Assam but are never given due credit. Contrarily, they are seen as a burden to the society. Ahmed also raises concerns for the next generation, asking if they would face similar hatred and humiliation.

On the other hand, Hussain's poem wittily illustrates his people's achievements in the face of several hurdles and prejudices. The tone of his poem is optimistic and encouraging, and he tries to tell Nana that they can “rise/ From flood waters” (4–5)

and “March through sand and marsh and snakes” (7) to reach a higher place, even to space. This line adheres to the feature of protest poetry—the “unsettling [of] the patterns of status quo” (Miller 4)—for it implies the potential to dismantle the social hierarchy by coming out of their deprived condition. The population is now quite scattered; many have moved to towns and cities and climbed the economic ladder. However, while Hussain gives a glimpse of his endeavours and triumphs, he simultaneously resents the brutality shown by others.

Throughout the poem, in consecutive lines, the poet shows the contrasting sides of their positions and conditions. For instance, the line, “See me suited in Silicon Valley suited at McDonalds” (23) is followed by “Enslaved in Beerwa bride-trafficked in Mewat” (24). Again, in the following two lines, he says, “See the stains on my childhood/ The gold medals on my PhD certificate” (25–26). Thus, one notices the paradox that emerges throughout the poem. The contradiction and irony are at their peak towards the end of the poem when he calls everyone to see him catching a rocket and wearing “a lungi to space” (33). The *lungi* is a garment worn by the male members of the Miyah community and is often disdained by the educated public. Some self-appointed bodies often take the law into their hands and interrogate people with suspicious attires. The *lungi* is not a part of the Assamese “dominant cultural symbol,” and thus, those wearing them are suspected as illegal immigrants (Pathan and Jha 151). Through the poem, Hussain subverts this stereotype and, in addition, conveys several other meanings. The *lungi* becomes a mark of protest, an advocacy of one's culture, and a condemnation of unequal modernity and development.

From establishing their identity to expressing their sorrows, the poems end with a note of determination and challenge. The last stanza of Ahmed's poem brings out their fury. He writes:

Your torture
 Has burnt my body black
 Reddened my eyes with fire.
 Beware!
 I have nothing but anger in shock.
 Keep away!
 Or
 Turn to Ashes. (41–48)

They have been victims of systematic and routine violence for a long time. The Nellie Massacre of 1983 is one instance where about two thousand Muslim peasants were killed. Uprooting the population is being carried out in different ways. These horrible experiences have left them with deep anger in their hearts. The poet warns everyone against tormenting them, as they will no longer remain submissive.

The provocation is also seen in Hussain's lines but in a different manner. They are an invitation to the community members to scream, and as the entire poem is filled with irony, the last part is no exception. Everyone has failed to treat them fairly and acknowledge their identity and existence. The poet's choice of the space “where no one can hear [them] scream” (Hussain 34) as a place to “Thunder/ I am Miyah/ I am

Proud” (35–37) tells how their identity as Miyah has always been a source of ridicule. It also speaks of the harsh reality of today, where claiming one's identity can sometimes lead to trouble and raise the eyes of the public.

Channelizing Narratives through Digital Platforms

Miyah poetry first made its appearance on Facebook in 2016, and since then, the poets have constantly engaged in modes of (re)presentation and enquiry towards domination and hierarchy. Hafiz Ahmed posted his poem on Facebook on 29th April 2016, and Shalim M Hussain replied with his verse on 1st May. These posts led to a large outpouring of poems by several others from the community, each speaking about their experiences. Sanjib Sahoo sees this mode of writing as “an attempt to counter the hegemonic mainstream Assamese literature published in prestigious periodicals” (99).

It has been decades since Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asked the question, 'Can the subaltern speak?' In the age of globalization and liberalization, accessibility to education and other resources has increased. People from the margin have started coming out and articulating their needs and concerns. This practice can be examined by bringing in Nancy Fraser's idea of the 'subaltern counterpublics' (“Rethinking the Public Sphere”). It is a further deliberation of Habermas' idea of the 'public sphere,' which, according to Fraser, is instituted in power politics and hierarchy. Habermas sees the public sphere as “a body of 'private persons' assembled to discuss matters of 'public concern' or 'common interest'” (qtd in Fraser 58). The subaltern counterpublics work as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 67). The meaning of the sphere has transcended beyond the physical place; the virtual platform is equally a public space or domain for discussions and arguments. The community has found its way to negotiate a space with the authoritative voices of Assam. The poetry subsequently made its way from Facebook to being published in several magazines.

Conclusion

The Miyah community have been the victim of epistemic violence and injustice, and their identity has always been positioned at the brink of any narrative. This emerging poetry has brought a new dawn for the community. Since 2016, there has been ongoing dialogue and engagement among the Miyah concerning their issues. Rezwana Hussain, Rehna Sultana, Abdur Rahim, Kazi Neel, Chan Miyah, Haz Ahmed, Shahjahan Ali Ahmed, and Siraj Khan are a few names who have taken the dissent forward through their written words. The poets have gained a wide range of readers by translating their works into English. Besides poetry, the counter-narration and storytelling by this marginalized community are also presented through documentaries and songs. Platforms and organizations like Miya Community Research Collective, *Ango Khabar* (Our News) and *Itamugur* are devoted to uplifting the community. All these contribute to the ongoing efforts of other religious

and ethnic minority communities and subaltern groups to speak out and bring their experiences to the forefront.

Notes

Foucault, in his work *The Order of Things*, gives the concept of episteme. He says, “In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice” (183).

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The Word of the Water: Addressing the Agency of a More-than-human Khasi World in "A Waterfall of Horses" from Janice Pariat's *Boats on Land*

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Abstract

This study looks at how colonization and the resulting normalization of anthropocentrism portrayed in Janice Pariat's short story "A Waterfall of Horses" from her book *Boats on Land* (2012) foreshadow the inevitable trauma and neglect of environmental destruction. The text will be analyzed from an ecocritical perspective to establish the underlying relationship between human beings and the environment. The narrative will also be studied to explicate elements of the hybrid text defined by Mary Snell-Hornby. Pariat's plotline of imperialism-inflicted human tragedy against the background of an ecosystem that nurses the spirits of rebellion and healing from the subsequent wounds in human and non-human souls alike offers a glimpse into the neat pattern of Indigenous living differently misinterpreted as uncouth in the colonial representation of History. Pariat, like in all of her works, reintroduces the North-East of India as a unique topology in the Global South, partaking in a distinctive representation of eco-cosmopolitanism. She also successfully addresses the colonial class hierarchy which persistently obliterates the potential natural course of relationships, and addresses the animistic worldview of the Indigenous community that is subjected to decades of imperialist atrocities. Such representation also compels a decolonizing reading of this ecological fiction set in a marginalized geographical territory.

Keywords: Eco-cosmopolitanism, Indigenous identity, marginalization, hybrid text, animism.

Introduction

Janice Pariat's writing revives the literature from North-East India for the Indian and the global reader alike. Her work carries a distinct storytelling of the Indigenous identity that has evolved constantly yet remained a constant. Pariat's narratives are also recognized for her equally rare philosophy of life that they deliver. Her book *Boats on Land* (2012) is a collection of short stories that unfold over three centuries, highlighting historical, political, and socio-cultural developments from the time. Pariat, representing the geographically and ethnically marginalized section, lends her unique voice to the storytelling she fashions in her work comprising literary prose and poetry. *Boats on Land* presents a distinct narrative style that navigates the lives of individuals living in different eras yet striving towards the same goal—protecting their environment and their rare identity as people who cherish human and non-human life. The study focuses on the story "A Waterfall of Horses" from the book, set in the mid-nineteenth century at Pomreng village (in present Shillong).

The narrative sketches the action leading to the ousting of the colonial British from

the town. Curiously enough, the villagers seem to become the colonial space constructed by the imperialists and the principal catalyst of the unfolding events over time. Pariat speaks through a thirteen-year-old native child who helps his mother with chores at a bungalow teeming with white soldiers. Not only are the native labourers and domestic help abused by these men, but they are also subjected to a rather speciesist treatment at the slightest slips. The author builds the seething discontent of the villagers to a deafening crescendo before the final blow is delivered, causing the imperialists to flee the village. The story marks a dichotomy of the treatment of nature at the hands of the colonizers and how the Indigenous people perceive it. The author also seems to comment on the human tendency to equate immediate problems with universal ones, echoing Ursula Heise's concept of eco-cosmopolitanism (Heise 208). The narrative also lends itself to how narratives, language, or 'the word' at times become powerful weapons, lethal enough to wipe out populations or civilizations. Such annihilation is carried out with little care of the damage inflicted and the several kinds of waste generated as a result. Also addressed in the narrative under study is the human propensity to exhibit animalistic traits and vice versa.

Pariat projects an ancient green village and its people occupied with farming, sowing and harvesting, offering a visualization of the village world and worldview of the Khasi people. The writer presents a complete juxtaposition of the village is presented with the invasion of British Plantation settlers. Revoking the power of orality and oral narratives in Indigenous societies, the power of the word assumes authority when the chanting of mantras of the Khasi animism unleashes fear in the minds of the Bilati men, driving them away from the village. The story reverberates to the tea plantations in and around Assam and Meghalaya. Also highlighted is the soaring interest of British officers in colonizing and taking control of the dealings in the raw materials, especially tea.

The Dichotomy of Relationships with the Environment

Pariat's narrative distinguishes between the colonizers' perception of the environment and the Indigenous peoples. While the colonizers view human and non-human life from a utilitarian perspective, the Indigenous people are more mindful of the environment that shelters them. For example, the stationed soldiers whipping the villagers who work on the tea plantation and calling them animalistic names such as "dog" and "swine" can be understood as the colonial tendency to ascribe zoomorphic attributes to the Indigenous populace who they see as barbaric or uncouth. The speciesist treatment meted out to the Indigenous folk also comes through in the words of the soldiers who intimidate the village dwellers with threats such as "[g]et back to work before we peel the flesh off your bones" (Pariat 6). The British soldiers see the village as a mere site of construction that they need to guard (4), its life as a source of entertainment (8, 9), and the villagers as nothing but labourers (4, 6, 7). However, the Indigenous people see things differently.

Pariat depicts the Indigenous people as deeply conscious and mindful of their environment. The villagers appear to share a deep connection with their ecology and respect human and non-human life (12). They turn to nature for guidance even in the most challenging times, never undermining the power of human and non-human solidarity (12, 13). However, even respecting and acknowledging their natural resources, the villagers seem to manipulate the environmental elements. For example, when the villagers huddle together debating the best means to exact revenge for the brutal killing of a villager by a white soldier (10), a village elder, referred to as the Nong Knia, suggests an alternative. He proposes that the villagers not strike the colonial occupiers of the village, instead render them “powerless” (12) by dominating the will of their men and horses.

Though the colonizers, as well as the Indigenous people, appear to act in favour of self-preservation, their means differ significantly from one another. While the colonizer exercises authority over the submissive native population and its natural resources, the villagers respectfully evoke the forces of nature to come to their aid in a just cause. Both parties understand and acknowledge that the environment plays a significant part in the sustenance of any species. However, the utilization of this knowledge is reflected differently in their actions. While prioritizing ecological interests seems to be a rather primitive way of living in the eyes of the colonizer, it is as easy and as essential as breathing for the native. Edward Said, in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), speaks of the imperial view of the life of the colonized as inferior because of the latter's reverence for their environment more than the “masters” who court their reverence by offering them “tutelage” (Said 166).

Pariat's “A Waterfall of Horses” revises Indigenous cosmivision, situating positionality for the Khasi worldviews and epistemologies. For many Indigenous communities in the Northeast region of India, orality has been one of the most critical aspects of their identity. The powerful forces of the word and nature simultaneously reflect the fluid relationship between the Khasi people and the non-human world, rendering the belief in the spirit world to come to aid the humans. Colonization and the forces of Christianization were intended mainly to counter the Indigenous animist belief system and the typical ideology to bring them to light and salvation. The animist belief, which the white men detest and consider demonic, is collocated where the same belief is used in driving away and creating fear among the Bilatis. Such collocation reflects the decolonial approach of Indigenous writers who use the same weapon to challenge colonial ideologies.

Eco-Cosmopolitanism and the Power of Word in the Indigenous Way of Life

While discussing authority in imperialistic modus operandi, it is equally vital to address the perspective of those who exploit versus those who are exploited. As discussed before, the colonial identification of the environment as a common expendable collective may be understood as an eco-cosmopolitan approach of the colonizer to the Indigenous culture. Eco-cosmopolitanism is a term coined by Ursula

Heise in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), equating local ecology with global ecology. According to eco-cosmopolitan thought, what happens to be the matter with the local ecology could also be a global crisis (Heise 210). In the story's context, the abuse of the Pomreng environment led to the village retaliating, affecting the global ecological composition as well. This is found in light of human beings being vital to ecology.

Similarly, what is seen as a part of the world may also be understood as a world that has not been seen and has only been imagined. Pariat's description of Pomreng can also be viewed as an extension of the colonial perception of the ecologies of all colonies. Just as Pomreng village is an environmental harmony that can never be disrupted regardless of the blows suffered, the anthropocentric view regards the planet as perpetual regardless of resource depletion. This view is reinstated by Pariat describing a place that no longer remains as portrayed in the story and has undergone significant changes and development, making it unrecognizable today. Thus, the study posits that eco-cosmopolitanism exists due to the power of words that stir up a reader's imagination. This power also empowers them to exercise imagination spatially and temporally to attain a sense of the place described. This application of eco-cosmopolitanism finds resonance in Said's opinion of Rudyard Kipling's portrayal of countries such as India and South Africa. Said writes that “[i]f Kipling's India has essential and unchanging qualities; this was because he deliberately saw India that way...we surmise correctly that Kipling was responding to and in effect imaginatively reformulating his sense of these places at particular moments in their histories” (Said 134). The fact that a place is seen in its depicted image can be understood by a reader imagining a place as it is described. Thus, the power of words is undeniable in the representation of a place. Words bring imagination to life and render the attributes of a living, breathing space to a mere map. The argument in the context of the story is supported by Anshuman Bora's appraisal of Pariat's work that “Pariat's fiction is replete with agencies of varied capacities debunking enclosed or bordered habitats, moving beyond the conventional ways of being subjects and inhabiting uncanny folkscapes, they are part of entangled and affective ecosystems” (Bora 212). The community's strong belief in the power of the word and the intervention of the non-humans instils an impending fear and doom among the colonial troops. “The colonial troops' baffled and frenzied response to the shamanic ritual in the narrative is symbolic of the broader European colonisers' inability to comprehend the sophisticated co-existential and co-relational dimensions of Khasi shamanistic practices” (Swaraj and Mishra 147). The community's belief in the power of the word and the Shaman's mantras drives away the Bilati men from the village. It creates an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty with the intervention of the horses. Through his interconnectedness, Nong Knia establishes communication with the horses, followed by the horses' sacrifice to avenge the villagers' killing. However, the death of the horses and the red pool of blood also symbolize the violence of colonialism and the deteriorating human-non-human relationships. Therefore, the abandonment of Pomreng is symbolic of “a breach of reciprocity in

shamanistic interrelationship with the other-than-human kin” (Swaraj and Mishra 147). The oral carries the essence of environmental consciousness where the power of the word is repeatedly expressed as if to embed it into people's memory. Through the mantras and their knowledge of the magic, the word is used against their oppressors. Thus, the knowledge of the spirit world in the form of the word is used against their enemies. While colonisers associate Indigenous communities with demonic and savage imageries, in a satirical turn of events, the same imageries and spirit knowledge of the villagers frighten the colonisers away from the Indigenous people's land. Pariat critiques the hierarchy of the written against the oral or spoken word; articulating the power of the spoken word in communicating the essence of the culture and wisdom. Thus, this hierarchy can create a certain hybridity of text even in the context of Indigenous representation. The argument is justified by Mary Snell-Hornby's comment on the inevitable hybridity of texts written by non-English-speaking communities. She opines that hybridity arises out of the attempt to reduce the “space 'in between' the worlds of... the past and the living reality” (Snell-Hornby 215). The spoken word, thus, appears as a mantra and is a weapon to dismantle the colonial hierarchy of language. Hence, *Ka Ktein* subverts the power relations between the written and the oral by reconstituting the significance of orality in Indigenous communities. Equivalently, words can be understood to possess the power of life itself. Translated from the Khasi language, *Ka-Ktien* means 'word' or 'language'. The narrator's mother describes the village elder Nong Knia as “the bearer of the word. The one who performs our rituals and communicates with the gods” (Pariat 12). The mother also explains the self-sufficiency of a Khasi individual equipped with the knowledge of the word. She tells her child that upon being offered tutorage of English by a white woman, she “explained to her that we [the Khasi individuals] have no need for these things—books, and letters, and writing—and that everything we know about the world is in the sound of our words, *ki ktien*” (12). The novel also endows the word with life-like attributes by suggesting that it empowers individuals who believe in and use it. Describing the potent word, the mother recounts her father educating her on the power it possesses:

He could heal a person by uttering a mantra. Once, I remember I had cut my hand while splitting bamboo...and he held it, and spoke into it, and the bleeding stopped. People would come to him if they had fish bones stuck in their throat—he'd chant the words and rub their neck with oil and ash, and the bone would be gone. He told me there are mantras that hungry travellers can chant for an animal to appear before them so they can feed, and to bring clean water from a river, or fruit from a tree. (Pariat, 12-13)

The mother, here, seems to represent all those who believe in the sanctity of the word. Right from their childhood, the power of the word and all the miracles it can accomplish are instilled as revered knowledge into the Khasi people. The narrator, too, receives this miraculous information from his mother, who tries to instill the same faith in her child. The narrator then reveals the unimaginable and fatal accomplishments of the Word. As it is words that cause the ultimate doom of the

colonial power in Pariat's Pomreng, *Ka-Ktien* can be equated to the Word in the Holy Bible, which reads thus: “[i]n the beginning was The Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Holy Bible John 1: 1). In Pariat's story, the elders of the village take it upon themselves to evoke the spirits that would avenge the brutal man-slaughter of a fellow-villager who refused to be underpaid by a white soldier and who is then tied to a horse and dragged around all day killing him. Not giving in to the white superiority of arms, the village elders urge the others to consider employing the quiet weapon of the word to incapacitate the white soldiers. Thus, Word helps summon the spirits of nature to carry out an intended and impending act of vengeance.

Animism and the Decolonial Thought in the Narrative

Set in the 1850s, Pariat's short story strongly summons a pastoral or green village in the hills of Meghalaya. With its taboo narratives, especially of the black magic practices, Pariat revives the animist worldview of the Khasi people and their relationship with the non-human world. A case in point is that the village elders seek the help of the spiritual essences surrounding them in retaliation for the animosity they are met with. They summon spirits of nature who take over the horses, making them run and plunge into a waterfall, turning it red for several days to come (Pariat 16). The reference to animism also hints at the cultural nuance of the North East of India in which man and nature become one in spirit and body. Becoming a part of the water, the horses seem to become water itself by combining their blood with the waterfall. The oneness is symbolized by the colour red in the water, which denotes the unison of the water body and the bodies of the horses. Pariat also hints at an anthropomorphic portrayal of the horses, who appear almost human in choosing their own end. Though possessed by the invoked spirits, the horses appear to decide how to act and are willing to choose.

Furthermore, Nong Knia's chanting of mantras possesses the ability to communicate the Khasi people's sorrow to the spirit entities, and the mantras are revered towards the non-humans. The following incident of the intervention of the non-humans described in the story represents the reciprocal nature of the spirit coming in to rescue the villagers. The shamanic mantra produces an anti-colonial resistance against the Bilatis and a decoloniality of the Khasi animistic worldview. The argument is posited in light of Adrian Harris' view of animism being “not about material objects being possessed by spirits” but “about constructing a culture on principles that enable reciprocity, building on a cosmology, which integrates the experience of being part of a fecund collective” (Harris 91). The horses' act of sacrificing their lives reflects the existence of animal agency in the Khasi ethos. Where humans fail to fight against the enemy, the spiritual world's knowledge comes to the rescue through the communication and intervention of animals. The agency of the non-human symbolises the relational and co-subjectivity between them. This also evokes the need to study the narrative through the lens of animism.

The animist worldview of the Khasi community, undermined by colonial ambitions, demonize the Khasi animist rites and rituals as supernatural and barbaric. While the Western post-humanist and new materialist investigation of non-human agency falls into an abstract and objective epistemic relationality between human and non-human, Khasi animist culture prioritizes lively, onto-ethical participant relations with non-human agents. Furthermore, the relational ethics of Khasi animist discourse align with Chao and Enari's (2021) framing of "beyond-human imagination" as "a practice of humility – a recognition that other beings, too, have rich and meaningful lifeworlds" (Swaraj and Mishra 133). Pariat conjures a more-than-human Khasi world by implementing Khasi animism through decolonizing Western posthuman worldview, the co-existence of humans and spirits as partners, a reflection of deep ecology. Hence, the engagement with the Khasi spirit world illuminates the powerful forces of nature and the Indigenous people's understanding of the power of nature. The engagement with the spirit world and the presence and significance of the spirit are illustrated through the mantras of Nong Knia. The mantras symbolize Nong Knia's ability to transcend into the spirit world, presenting an alternative reality.

Animistic worldview intersects society and culture as one: a world where Indigenous thought deems humans, plants, animals, rivers, rocks, rains, and spirits as a society of "persons which are in constant becoming together" (Harvey 92). Animist worldview foregrounds a respectful and shared world of humans with non-human cohabitants in the social cosmos. Lyndoh (2016) uses the term "Shaman" in the Khasi community, who are "believed to be endowed with healing powers, soul flight ability, and intrinsic connection with ancestors" (Swaraj and Mishra, 146). In "A Waterfall of Horses", Nong Knia is symbolic of the Khasi shaman and his intrinsic interconnection with the spirit world of the community. The shaman is important in mediating between the human and the non-human world, including spirits, ancestors, and the inanimate. Nong Knia establishes a reciprocal interconnection and etiquette between human and non-human entities. Apart from decoloniality, the story emphasises the significance of interconnectedness in the Khasi animist wisdom and the symbiotic relationships.

Like many Indigenous animistic worldviews, the Khasi worldview is also embedded in the philosophy of a more-than-human world. The Khasi worldview demonstrates a liminal coexistence of space with the non-human spirit and nature. While colonialism engages in an act of epistemic violence by disrupting Indigenous beliefs and practices; the reassertion and repositioning of the Indigene and episteme remains a constant reminder of the need for narratives that portray harmony even against disharmony. According to Varova, "shamanic healing as a spiritual act of creative and dialogic interaction between human and non-human forces only resonates strongly with Khasi shamanism" (Swaraj and Mishra 147). This is because the practice involves healing by engaging with the interconnected aspects of the material and spiritual world. Similarly, the colonial refusal to leave interpersonal relationships untouched by entrepreneurial policies also dents how things stand

between the villagers and the empathetic officials such as Sahib Sam. The death of the innocent and unaware villagers like Haphida, who the horses trample, can thus be perceived as the manifestation of the persisting animosity. These deaths can also be seen as 'collateral damage' in an extractive economy, reducing their stature to that of metaphoric waste (Morrison 152).

Conclusion

Pariat's works always end satisfactorily, demonstrating that ecology manages to thrive no matter the adversities endured through time. The point driven home is that nature stands neutral but remains powerful scientifically and in art and literature through the power of language. Tradition and empiricism can pit against each other to explain the need for a dichotomy of understanding; an understanding of the local ecology against the bigger backdrop of global ecology. However, language and literature demonstrate the continuance of the ecology beyond power, resilience and a crossover of culture and geography. Thus, in Pariat's narrative, magic and reality coexist in the ancient Khasi village. Here, the Khasi people coexist with their traditional worldview of magic and shamans, along with the terror of colonization and proselytization. In Indigenous communities, animist beliefs amalgamate the world of humans, non-human animals, and spirits. Also, co-existence and interdependence have been fundamental aspects of the Khasi worldview. The Khasi animist worldview represents a world that highlights a more-than-human world embedded in respect, reciprocity, co-existence, and mutual existence. Pariat is among the few contemporary writers who offer a truthful portrayal of the Indigenous way of life through the several compulsions to accept unwarranted change. The short story also reiterates that in the grand scheme of things, nature favours those who treat the environment not as a means to acquire power but as the end to preserve.

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Breaking Boundaries: Remapping Gendered Spaces through Resistance and Subversion in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*

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Abstract

This paper examines how the gendered condition of social space unambiguously forms the foundation of feminine identity, and describes how protagonists in Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* resist slanted gender hierarchies and thus carve out their identity as a new woman. The counterhegemonic stance primarily aims to challenge the dominant hegemonic masculinity in the pre-existing gendered space. They also exhibit the constructedness of gender norms, with due emphasis on the discontinuous and fluid nature of identity. Consequently, they delve into the potential for resistance, thereby creating a challenging environment for individuals to challenge gender norms through their performance. Drawing upon the postulates of eminent theorists such as Judith Butler, R.W. Connell, Toril Moi, and Julia Kristeva, this research paper examines the way Kalyani, Sumi, and Aru provide an opening for subversive action in the novel. This paper focuses on the specific identitarian actions of the main characters, which have the potential to shift marginal gender identities and engage in counterhegemony. Accordingly, this paper explores the possibility of reversing gender roles while dealing with contemporary women's identities and their conflicting relationships with hegemonic hierarchies.

Keywords: Gender, Hegemony, Counterhegemony, Transgression, Subversion.

The paper delves into the subtle exploration of hegemonically slanted gendered spaces and the resulting strategies of resistance in Shashi Deshpande's novel *A Matter of Time* (1996). The mapping of man-woman relationships, encompassing three generations of characters like Kalyani and Shripati, Sumi and Gopal, and their influence on the three daughters, Charu, Seema, and Aru, achieves this. Thus, this paper aspires to reinterpret the finer nuances of women as gendered subjectivityⁱ and, in doing so, attempts to bring out a subversive undercurrent, refracting the complex web of hegemonic inscriptions. The analysis also highlights where and how women create spaces to resist hegemonic masculinity and how they assert their agency, thus raising pertinent questions regarding their representation and identity. To explore the trajectory of hegemonic gendered spaces and the strategies of resistance in Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*, the conceptual framework brings together the following positions: a) the concept of gender as a fluid and heterogeneous phenomenon, suggesting that both masculinity and femininity are subject to re-inscription; b) R.W. Connell's interpretation of gender, which signifies the clandestine, contest-oriented dynamics of hegemonic and counter-hegemonicⁱⁱ power structures, which aim to unsettle or deconstruct the apparent power paradigms in the novel; c) the Foucauldian understanding of power/resistance as a constitutive element of the dynamics of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic power

paradigms; and d) the insightsⁱⁱⁱ of Judith Butler, Toril Moi, and Julia Kristeva, which provide a comprehensive understanding of identity and power dynamics, wherever necessary.

The opening of *A Matter of Time* is extremely significant because it is perhaps the most momentous event in the narrative. Gopal, the head of the family, makes an unexpected and inexplicable decision to leave the house without providing any reason. Hence, Gopal exercises "...the male prerogative of desertion" (Jasbir Jain 64) and "...without any preamble says what he has to" (K. Ramachandra 21). The intimation of such a significant impact on the entire family, and Sumi in particular, occurs abruptly. This event exposes the fragile nature of 'The House,' which desolidifies the family composite. Abandoned, she struggles to comprehend her immediate reality and becomes enmeshed in her distressing circumstances, resulting in a "lapse into complete silence" (Siddhartha Sharma 56). Gopal's desertion forces Sumi and her three homeless daughters—Aru, Charu, and Seema—to return to their parents' houses.

However, this desertion also opens up Sumi's subversive agency. She creates her own rebellious structures, asserting an aesthetic of resistance. She comes to terms with her de-spaced existence and thus moves towards new forms of identity with the intent of reconfiguring the hegemonic order. Take a look at the following textual extract: "Sumi's behavior makes it difficult for them [the daughters] to understand the enormity of what has happened. She answers all their questions with infinite patience; there are no signs of irritation or annoyance" (Shashi Deshpande 10). The response is counterhegemonic, aiming to reinterpret her gendered existence by reconfiguring the sociocultural significations and practices associated with the institution of marriage.

Importantly, Sumi doesn't want self-pity or peevish sentimentality. She is of the opinion that "...tying a lacerated heart to one's wrist and showing it to the world is meaningless" (R.S. Pathak 159). Therefore, she declares her commitment to embracing a new form of self-expression, or self-fashioning, which includes securing employment, mastering the art of scooter riding, and engaging in literary writing as her new vocations. This stance highlights the phenomenon in which Sumi, by stepping outside the boundaries of domesticity, motherhood, and marriage, encroaches upon the privileged realm of men's profession, occupation, and adventure, thereby assuming the subject position in her discourse. Sumi's empowered stance may be considered to highlight a quality dimension, as it enables her to foster change. Thus, she starts to exert agency over the Other (Gopal). Speaking in Foucauldian parlance, Sumi's use of power produces subjecthood, which is the medium by which she attempts to induce alternation in gendered hierarchies. Michael Foucault puts it, "...if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others" ("Afterword: The Subject and Power" 217).

In this context, Sumi desires to confront Gopal's ideas of masculinity. However, she does not want to probe the recesses of Gopal's desertion as it may swallow her

creative or resistive energies or pursuits. In this sense, it is her choice to remain insulated, and, as a result, she uses it as a strategy to unsettle the hegemonic order. This type of femininity is marked by the ethos of transgression, an emergent discourse, which aims to reinscribe the sociocultural signification of gender. Placing transgressions in Sumi's context challenges the ontology of the subjects. Foucault believes that it is a violent movement, not because it destroys but because it reveals. Sumi encounters this revealing element by witnessing contrasting realities while experiencing a downward spiral following her surprise at Gopal's abandonment.

Sumi, a forty-year-old deserted woman, stands alone with her three daughters; multi-layered sociocultural, economic, psychological, and existential challenges also confront her. Visitors and relatives visit Sumi, who puzzles them with her mysterious demeanor. She feels that any expression of intensity or involvement towards him would disable or blunt her resistance strategies against Gopal's desertion. Hence, Sumi "...turns inward, gaining perspective on the past and preparing herself to meet a new stage in her life" (Josna E. Rege 463). Deshpande holds: "Sumi's acceptance is not passive, [and] she does not want pity" (13). Hence, she prefers a new form of femininity, resistance, or transgression, which is difficult for those who surround her. Such a counterhegemonic subject position facilitates the dynamics of social formation by way of a 'reverse discourse.' This stance brings us closer to Foucauldian's notion of resistance. Power has the definitive opposite effect: resistance. The marginalized individuals creatively exercise resistance as a lesser form of power. In this context, Sumi yearns to rupture the essentialized sense of gender identity, and she does not want to exist as a credible gendered subject.

Sumi's allusion to the new 'age' implies that the empowered male should no longer adhere to the essentialized conceptualization of gender hierarchies. This is why she subverts Yajnavalkya-Gopal parallelism by contrasting Gopal's renunciation with the mythical Yajnavalkya. Gopal's "...is a withdrawal rather than renunciation due to contentment. Moreover, Gopal's life has nothing to offer in lines corresponding to the older Vedic stages of a man's life" (N. Poovalingam 174). Importantly, his actions underscore the influence of institutionalized discourse in shaping conventional gender roles. However, Sumi strives to challenge the institutionalised discourses and practices that favour males over females, using the technique of revisionist mythmaking. Usha Bande opines, "Revisionist mythmaking as a potent instrument of resistance and creative self-assertion represents the feminine angst to redefine the traditional myths and to re-conceptualize women's relation to and place in the culture" (193). In context, Sumi asserts that she wants to question Gopal about how he can neglect his family and responsibilities, thereby ignoring the challenges of today's world and society. Gopal's decision opens new vistas of self-fashioning for Sumi. A positive stimulus rewards her potential and prepares her to leave the confines of her home. Accordingly, silence has become a new weapon because it bestows her with the power of deep reflection. Under these circumstances, Sumi expresses a surprising sense of ease and sustains a counterhegemonic silence. Thus, she wants to assert a new form of femininity, and her approach aims to eradicate

traditional hegemonic biases, highlighting “...a slow but insistent, invisible but enduring behavioural strategy having the potential to dislodge the dominant structure” (Bande 1).

The narrative clarifies that he indiscriminately operates the dynamics of attachment and detachment vis-à-vis his wife Sumi, further problematizing Gopal. Such love-and-not-love dynamics, directed towards Sumi, reveal a degree of wishful and hegemonic thinking on his part. It also describes how his decisions convey a certain degree of arbitrariness, which has far-reaching implications for the family. In addition, his decisions are inherently inconsistent and disjointed. Jasbir Jain opines,

Men can abandon their wives and children with impunity, leaving the dependents to cope as best they can.... [they may] turn ascetics and free themselves from the bondage of the family. These acts project marriage as a tie of limited concern, one which is a limiting of the individual, whether male or female, and is in its objectives a closed world that keeps larger concerns out. (111)

It is crucial to note that Sumi remains unimpressed by Gopal's partial truth. This is one of the reasons she resists Gopal's attempts to explain the earth-shattering act of desertion, which symbolises a life-long loneliness, social humiliation, and a jeopardised future for her daughters. This resistance not only targets Gopal, but also challenges the patriarchal hegemonic system. Sumi's silent reverse discourse is extremely inflammable and volcanic as it subtly challenges the self-centeredness of the masculine hegemonic order.

It is also important to map another aspect of Gopal's self-centeredness that signifies the total denial of Sumi's physical and sexual needs. His desertion also implies hegemonic erasure of Sumi's physical requirements, which is significant. In this way, his hegemonic decision also manifests that “...the male sexuality is naturalised, and the woman's sexuality is suppressed in the sphere of relationships and symbolic values...because recognition of [her] sexuality would prove dangerous to the patriarchal system. Therefore, a woman needs to deny her emotional and physical needs” (Singh, 84). It reveals how Gopal transforms into a typical representative of the hegemonic order, having mastered its multilayered and covert workings. In this sense, it is a “...rejection of [Sumi's] femininity” (Jain, 97). Such hegemonic injunctions falsify Sumi's sexuality, subjecting her to a subtle degree of Otherization. In her influential essay, “Laugh of Medusa,” Hélène Cixous argues: “We've been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them” (355). In context, Judith Butler also substantiates: “A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic identity” (xxxix), signifying one can performatively reinscribe gender—such reconstructive possibilities constitute Sumi's agency. This is how the narrative subversively interprets female sexuality in this broader context. Accordingly, Sumi seeks to subvert such oppressive silencing of femininity, particularly female sexuality, by way of a revisionist understanding of the mythical figure Surpanakha. For her, Surpanakha was not ashamed of her sexuality, and thus “...she spoke of her desires; she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they perceive her as threatening? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality”

(Deshpande 191). Thus, she subverts a mythological stereotype and impregnates it with new connotations, questioning the discourse fixture(s) that determine the relationship between hegemonic order and oppressed femininity.

To create an overarching framework for Sumi's subversive stance, it is important to evaluate the representation of other protagonists belonging to wide-ranging generations in the novel. For this, it is necessary to assess the Shripati-Kalyani relationship. The Big House is a problematic zone for fairer sex because it symbolises desolation and despondency. It hosts an unusual kind of silence, which is almost a character in the novel. Shripati and Kalyani have had no communication for more than thirty-five long years. The lawyer, Shripati, has sentenced his wife to a lifelong punishment for losing her mentally retarded son at the railway station. Hence, Shripati has chosen a different space (the first floor) for himself, which has no room for Kalyani. They live as strangers and communicate only through silence. Apparently, Kalyani appears to have surrendered unconditionally to Shripati's grave punishment. However, this sentence also has a different meaning because Kalyani never sees her husband as pleading for forgiveness. In this sense, her silence has a broader dimension. Thus, her subtle resistance to the stony silence of the house evokes multifarious significations. Kalyani also experiences a denial of physical love. It is crucial to consider Sumi's viewpoint on this matter, as she observes: "Sometimes, I think he turned his back on his wife because he was afraid of himself" (Deshpande 168). In context, Kalyani's survival in the Big House reveals her generosity and resistance, which, when confronted with her husband Shripati's hegemonic and tormenting attitude, blunt its sharpness and acuity. Manpreet J. Singh opines that it highlights "...the female's capacity for resurgence, which provides her with fresh beginnings in the cycles of growth and renewal" (85).

In this context, Sumi is the one who expresses her subversive understanding of Kalyani's agency, aiming to deconstruct and deflate Shripati's oppression while taking into account the dynamics of hegemony privilege, the tendency to participate, and the uncritical absorption of passivity among the subaltern. Therefore, she opines, "It is enough to have a husband; never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades?" (Deshpande 167). She subverts the masculine stronghold by delving into her father's oppressive mechanisms. The idea is to rupture the consent-forming hegemonic apparatus with the assistance of a counterhegemonic feminist stance to ensure fluid contestation between the participants. Thus, Sumi's stance serves as a catalyst for fostering social transformations based on the notion that a persistent and interactive struggle is more suitable for reshaping gendered environments to mitigate the dominant-subaltern dichotomy. In Connellian sense, she weaves a complex web of compliance and resistance so as to signify an interactive dynamic of counter-hegemonic fertilisation to assert a social ascendancy through the "...play of social forces that extend beyond contests of brute power into the organisation of private life and cultural processes" (R.W. Connel 184). Consequently, she deconstructs the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity and creates her own space beyond typical gender performance(s).

Sumi, like Kalyani, leads a far more authentic life than Gopal. She is a dedicated

daughter and mother. She now oozes with energy for life, and we can interpret this as her ongoing resurgence. She advances to the next level of existence by breaking down the normative structure of the patriarchal hegemonic order. She has learned about the art of driving and achieved financial independence by starting her job. She also composed a play named 'The Gardner's Son', which brings her immense joy. On the contrary, Gopal appears to be existentially saturated, leading to a dull life. He does not appear to be thrilled by Sumi's avatar. Singh confirms: "The changing identity of women elicits a change of response from men" (87). During her last visit to Gopal, his subdued responses described his vague and confused attitude towards the new Sumi. However, a tragedy again falls on Sumi. It is towards the end of the novel that Sumi and her father, Shripati, die in a road accident all of a sudden. She meets with an accident while being on a scooter with her father as she "... sees the bus hurtling towards them... there is a tremendous sound and then darkness and silence" (Deshpande 231). Sumi, after achieving a new version of her life, proves to be ill-fated and succumbs to a disastrous death. Thus, Sumi had an abrupt end.

Moving forward, the narrative introduces a higher level of counterhegemonic resistance by describing the rebellion of Arundhati, Sumi's eldest daughter. She transforms Sumi's subtle resistance into a direct rebellion against the normative order. Aru, a bold and sharp-tongued girl, does not want to blunt her counterhegemonic attitude by becoming subservient to the sociocultural denominations of gender. Thus, she quickly manifests the poetics of transgression in the narrative. It is interesting to interpret Aru's transgression in terms of Toril Moi's idea of the monster woman, by which she means: "The monster woman is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, and has a story to tell—in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (58). In this sense, Aru is Joan of Arc, who listens to voices that are clear and just, especially the subaltern. The experience of shame, disgrace, and misery troubles her subjectivity, which requires an apt expression. This is why she perceives Gopal's desertion as more than just a tragedy but rather as a source of disgrace and shame for her entire family. Thus, she is also not satisfied with her mother's silence. She does not want her father to get away from scot-free. During her meeting with Gopal, she loses her patience and "... calls him a callous father, a cruel husband, and an unfeeling man" (Deshpande 62). Thus, she exerts feminist agency to reconstruct the gendered space, which privileges masculinity in an unjust manner. She does not stop here as she wants legal action against Gopal for deserting his family. She is distressed by the unjust gendered order in which she loses faith in the institution of marriage. As a result, she displays an ethos of dissent and transgression, subverting hegemonic masculinity. To assert her counterhegemonic stance, she decides to move beyond the loaded sociocultural inscription, that is, marriage. Her disillusionment with traditional notions, such as wifehood, daughterhood, and marriage underscores her unconventional approach. Therefore, she is far removed from the strategy of silence (Sumi's weapons) and prefers a strong articulation of her counterhegemonic standpoint.

After the sudden deaths of Sumi and Shripati, Aru displays a distinct inner strength to come to terms with this grave tragedy. Now, she is uniquely responsible for herself,

Seema, Charu, and Kalyani. Her thought-provoking support and self-assurance surprise Kalyani, who expresses her admiration for Aru in the following manner: “Now when I look at you, my three granddaughters, especially at you [Aru], I think—I am luckier than my mother” (Deshpande 226-227). Despite the grave tragedy, neither Aru nor Kalyani shows any sign of having a need for or support from Gopal. In this way, Aru becomes the novel's new woman. She demonstrates her agency to others by standing tall and resolute during this most tragic time for herself and the entire family, de-essentializing her gender performance. Through the reconstruction of this slanted gendered order, Kalyani and Aru find their own existential spaces to live with authenticity. The Aru-Kalyani duo represents “...the past and the future, two women signifying the bonds of mother and daughter, tradition and modernity, and yet continuity” (Amrita Bhalla 64–65).

In conclusion, the preceding analysis establishes the nuances of defiance, resistance, and subversion in the novel, highlighting that the notion of gender happens to be a fluid phenomenon, and hence, it is open to re-inscription. The analysis also integrates the muted forms of counterhegemonic responses into the various layers of the narrative, signifying the dialectics of power and resistance. The analysis emphasises the subversion of pervasive hegemonic inscriptions with the aim of breaking down the blocked female identity, while also clarifying the matrix of hegemonic masculinity and its alternative feminist resistance strategies. The focus remains on establishing that the ground is equally slippery for all the novel's participants, and as a result, there is a productive contestation between Shripati/Gopal and Kalyani/Sumi/Aru. Such a contest questions the natural, imposed, and inevitable by way of de-mystifying the living corollaries of the lived gender. It is in this larger context that Kalyani, Sumi, and Aru are able to move beyond their interpellation and thus re-define their subjecthood vis-à-vis the sociocultural hegemonic realm in the narrative.

Notes

ⁱ Subjectivity is usually understood as a process of being and becoming for any person. We use the term 'being' in the sense that though one *is* a person, the fact that one is a person is not a simple given. And as far as 'becoming' is concerned, there are certain processes of making one a 'person'.

ⁱⁱ Counter-hegemonic representations of the subaltern act like a catalyst for facilitating social change(s). Therefore, a sustained dialogic contest is more apt to corroborate, maintain and reconstruct the hegemonic spaces for exerting power and alleviating the dominant-subaltern binary in a society.

ⁱⁱⁱ Butler's idea that gender is a performance formed by society and power undermines fixed identities. Toril Moi's feminist criticism and literary theory help analyse gender and identity in culture. Moi's focus on gender, language, and power helps dissect how literature and society reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes. Kristeva's work highlights the importance of understanding the subconscious elements of identity formation and the role of the 'other' in the construction of selfhood. Therefore, Butler's performativity, Connell's hegemonic masculinity, Moi's feminist criticism, and the Kristevaian conceptualization of identity formation provide a complex framework that adds layers to

the critical evaluation of this novel.

^{iv} In his famous methodological treatise, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Michel Foucault contends that using discourses, we can understand transgression as a counter-discourse of femininity, striving to challenge the dominant masculinity.

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Madonna and the Whore: Women's Agency in Contemporary Crime Fiction from Northeast India

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Abstract

The alleged formulaic nature of crime fiction often relies on character stereotypes to structure the narrative and maintain the framework in strategic places. Women depicted in crime fiction frequently adhere to these pre-structured roles, with two of the most significant being the Madonna and the whore. This complex suggests that certain men can perceive women only through the dichotomous lenses of a virgin or a sexually promiscuous seductress. In literature and other audio-visual media, this dichotomy has been repeatedly utilised to establish and anchor narratives. Crime fiction's empowered female detectives, sultry *femmes fatales*, innocent virginal victims, and sexually uninhibited women characters are often portrayed within this dichotomous framework.

Within the critical-theoretical framework of crime fiction, gender studies, popular literature, and postcolonial studies, the present paper attempts to interpret these character archetypes in Ankush Saikia's *The Girl from Nongrim Hills* (2013) and Siddhartha Deb's *Surface* (2005). Both the novels are set in Northeast India, a region with a unique history in the national imagination of India. Literature from Northeast India, written both in English and regional languages, is now being studied as a distinct form, separate from the established category of Indian Writing in English, due to its unique characteristics. This paper aims to delve deeper into these myriad concerns and examine how they inform the representation of women in the texts under discussion.

Keywords: Crime fiction, Northeast India, Women, Popular Literature, Archetype

Introduction: The Madonna and the Whore Dichotomy

Gender roles and sexuality have been at the core of societal structures, which traditionally privilege the cis-gendered and heteronormative way of life. Within these established and predetermined societal frameworks, transgressions of any accepted sexual or gender roles are deemed deviant behaviour. In the Judeo-Christian belief system and mythology, the ideal woman is equated with virgin Mary and her foil is imagined as the sexually provocative whore Madonna. There are many other qualities associated with these two opposing archetypes of women, such as virtue vs evil, domesticity vs wildness, nurturer vs destroyer and love vs lust. These archetypes of women continue to influence culture and literature. The women who are attributed the qualities associated with Madonna are imagined sans the human follies of earthly, especially physical desires. In psychoanalysis, this concept is adopted by Sigmund Freud to refer to a psychological condition, where certain men can perceive women in the binary roles of the virginal Madonna or the sinful but sexually desirable whore. Freud states that men's inability to reconcile these two facets of a woman's personality leads to their inability to have long-term physical relationships with women. In her essay "The Feminine Continuum" Harmony Moura Burk writes about the ways this complex is creating an environment that

breeds toxic masculinity, “As fear of women's sexuality and desire for control reinforce the Complex, men generate layers of resentment and disdain that they then direct towards women who step outside these polarizing standards.” Although many of Freud's ideas are now scrutinised for being misogynist, his formulations of the Madonna and the whore complex are still studied in the field of human interpersonal intimacy. It would be worthwhile to mention here that apart from affecting the psycho-sexual health of men, the Madonna and the whore complex aids in perpetuating rigid gender norms for women, which potentially affect their identity formation and agency.

The Madonna and the whore dichotomy stemming out from these ideas has further influenced socio-literary discourse. Whitney Greer writes “The Madonna/Whore binary is a product of mind/body dualism, specifically the Judeo-Christian version of mind/body dualism” (*The Madonna, The Whore, The Myth*, 2). The gendered concept of this dualism further intensifies the hierarchy between the two sexes. Men are traditionally associated with the mind, hence having a higher position and purpose in life. Whereas the physiological disadvantages of women symbolise inferiority and weakness, these ideas have effectively influenced the understanding of gender in Western civilisation. However, these ideas have travelled through time and cultural progression and have attained multifaceted meanings and interpretations. Commenting on the ways this binary has contributed to the way the cultural constructs of women are imagined Greer writes, “Madonna/Whore dichotomy serves as a nesting doll of archetypes, as it is a binary structure that upon deconstruction contains many smaller and alternate versions of the original outer doll” (2). Based on the variations of expression in women's sexuality myriad categories of the two archetypes have emerged such as the femme fatale, the seductress, the prude and of course the virgin and the whore.

In literature, and specifically in crime fiction, the Madonna and the whore dichotomy and the psychological complex stemming from it, are reflected in the hypermasculine male characters and the sexually promiscuous and allusive female characters. Within the larger umbrella of crime fiction, there are several sub-genres such as detective fiction, mystery, thriller, police procedural, hardboiled, noir etc. The hardboiled genre first came into existence in the 1920s and portrayed a hyper-masculine world of male detectives and crusaders, corruption and politics. Commenting on the foundation of the genre Catherine Avery comments, “The hard-boiled format is broader in its social representation and relies on strong realistic characterisation and urban settings” (*Talking Back to Chandler and Spillane* 2-3). If the protagonists or detectives of the hardboiled fiction were ethically questionable antiheroes, noir fiction and film presented a world which was far darker and more nihilistic. One of the key aspects of the early iterations of these genres was the objectification of women as well as the portrayal of violence. That is why, in this masculine world of hardboiled fiction, the sexually liberated figure of the femme fatale became integral. The literal meaning of the French term 'femme fatale', is a 'disastrous or deadly woman' and the term refers to a woman “who uses her sexuality

as a means to gain power over men, often destroying them in the process” (Martin, “The Mystique of the Femme Fatale”). The two primary texts discussed in this paper play with the dichotomy of the Madonna and the whore and examine how people's perceptions are shaped by these two constructs. Ankush Saikia's 2013 novel *The Girl from Nongrim Hills*, is firmly located in the quaint but commercialised town of Shillong and is a fast-paced narrative of local politics, crime and insurgency. The text has familiar motifs of crime noir, with the amateur detective and the hypersexualised and morally ambiguous femme fatale. Siddhartha Deb's *Surface* (2005) is also set on the hilly terrains of Northeast India and portrays a journalist's journey through his investigation of an alleged female adult film actor and her ordeal in the hands of militants. Both texts have experimented with the nuances of the stereotypical binary portrayal of women, while firmly grounding the narrative in the region's socio-political environment. Before diving into the textual interpretations, it would be worthwhile to discuss the emerging genre they belong to.

Crime Fiction Situated in Northeast India

The 21st century has witnessed the rise of Northeastern Indian writing in English as a distinct literary-academic discipline, highlighting the region's unique socio-political and cultural experiences. Geographically peripheral to the Indian mainland, the Northeastern states have a complex history marked by significant political upheavals, especially since India's independence. Central to these upheavals are struggles over identity assertion, ethnic individuality, land rights, citizenship rights, and political autonomy, often leading to armed insurgencies by various groups advocating for these causes. In the 1990s, many of these insurgent groups were legally designated as terrorist organizations, prompting the Indian government to intensify military control in the region. This control has included the implementation of draconian laws such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), enacted in 1958, which grants the military extensive powers, including conducting operations and detaining individuals without warrants. AFSPA has been widely criticized for facilitating human rights violations, including extra-judicial killings, rape, and unlawful detention, under the guise of maintaining national security. Literature from the Northeast often mirrors these harsh realities, with authors depicting their personal and collective experiences of living in a militarized zone. Their works explore themes of identity, resistance, and survival, challenging dominant national narratives and highlighting the cultural and political significance of the region. By documenting the strife and asserting their perspectives, these writers contribute to a deeper understanding of the Northeast's place within the broader Indian context. Commenting on the nature of contemporary literature emerging from the region Amit R. Baishya writes how it “marks a new turn in studies of literatures from Northeast India through its focus on necropolitics, the everyday and survival” (“Necropolitical Literature” 7). Naturally crime fiction spatially set in the region incorporates these elements in the narratives, thereby situating the subject and characters of such texts in the contemporary socio-political milieu.

The narrative style and subject matter of crime fiction are inevitably influenced and informed by the socio-spatial conditions. Therefore, it is imperative to read and examine these novels in the intersection of space, politics and gender. The genre of crime fiction based on the region of Northeast India has been shown to experiment and go beyond the formulaic expectations of the genre. Shillong, the erstwhile colonial capital of undivided Assam has been a fertile ground for literary fiction and as new and promising voices have come up to embrace the place for rooted and informed story-telling, writer/film-maker Avner Pariat has gone on to term these texts as belonging to the “Shillong Canon” (“Shillong Shining”, 99). Ankush Saikia writes how “Shillong has a unique mix of elements – old colonial, plains Indian, tribal, people from the rest of the Northeast, a love of music and football, a bit of xenophobia – that make it a very interesting city for a writer...” (“Ankush Saikia tells”).

The plot of Saikia's novel involves the world of corruption, insurgency, mining mafia and extortionists. The protagonist of the novel, Bok, is a lead guitarist in a band, leading a quaint life manning the family business of a small departmental store, until suddenly he was forced to enter the world of gun smuggling and extortion when his brother was swindled out of the money in a failed arms deal. To save his brother's life from the revengeful insurgents Bok had to somehow collect 50 lakhs, within a week. Although a nearly impossible feat, Bok gets roped into the mission of stealing money from a couple of corrupt politicians by the enigmatic Christine. The ethnicity and identity of Christine is shrouded in mystery. When they are physically intimate Bok notices marks of an old wound on one of her thighs and wonders where she got it from and she replies with a vague “Some men did it to me” (*The Girl*, 72). This strangely draws Bok more in as it suggests some unknown violence that has befallen her. Characteristic of the noir genre, the novel depicts the all-pervading corruption engulfing the region such as –the politician-industrialist-militant nexus, police corruption, military atrocities, compromised rebel outfits etc. Money, lust and all other hedonistic pursuits guide the impulses of the characters involved in noir and the setting is often bleak and nihilistic. Author and academic Megan Abbot writes how “In noir, everyone is fallen, and right and wrong are not clearly defined and maybe not even attainable” (“Megan Abbott on”). The rainy, cold Shillong with its trendy cafes, rock music and scenic resorts on the surface and the corrupt and dark underbelly of the coal mafia and armed insurgency becomes the perfect setting for Ankush Saikia's spatially located novel. Most of the pivotal characters are grey with their motives and intentions, the question of their redemption is left for the reader's judgment.

The Evolution of the Femme Fatale Archetype in Crime Fiction

Bok's seemingly quiet life is tossed into disruption the moment he is approached by Christine. There are multiple narratives suggested regarding her past. She tells Bok how she followed her lover, “I was a revolutionary...or at least I thought I was a revolutionary... We were in love, he joined the movement, and I followed” (*The Girl*

145). However, Christine is an unreliable narrator of her life chronicles. Bok's initial infatuation and desire for her turn into hatred as she dupes him and attempts to kill him. However, he cannot detach himself emotionally from her physical allure and has to rationally remain stoic every time he feels drawn towards her. Patrick Bade in his 1979 book *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* traces the trope of the sexually vivacious women who were considered fatales in ancient Christian and Greek mythology with characters like Eve, Pandora Salome etc. He opines that in 19th-century art and literature, there was a revival of these figures and these representations were stemming from a deep-rooted misogyny- a fear and vilification of women who asserted their sexuality and were fantasized about. In the novel Christine is depicted as this sexually deviant woman out to corrupt the morality of the men and whereas, her foil Daisy, Bok's socially accepted love interest portrayed as a virginal angel of the house character, Bok himself contrasts these two women as "The Madonna and the whore, the two primal archetypes of woman" (*The Girl*, 159).

It is no wonder that the late 19th century preoccupation with the figure of the mysterious femme fatale coincided with that of the solidification or canonization of crime fiction as a genre. Stevie Simkin's book *Cultural Constructions of the Femme Fatale From Pandora's Box to Amanda Knox* (2014) charts out the various literary and historical references to the idea of the femme fatale and goes on to relate it to female criminality with specific case studies in the real world. Simkin too critiques the undertones of misogyny embedded in the trope and attributes it to the male writer's fantasy and fear of female sexuality. With the intervention of female writers, the portrayal of the femme fatale has started becoming more nuanced. As John Copenhaver puts it, "A new type of story is being told about the femme fatale, a story that explores why she commits violent crime and exposes the source of her anger that often fuels her crime" ("The Femme Fatale").

The critical lenses have moved towards the question of why a character is moved to commit such acts rather than the voyeuristic and titillating process of seduction and subjugation. In *The Girl from Nongrim Hills*, the reader can see how Christine dreams of escaping the drudgery of her existence as well as the place which made her into a criminal pariah feeding on death and extortion. She dangles these dreams of escaping to Bangkok or Goa to different men like Bok and Tenzing, and apart from serving as baits these conversations give a peek into her desire to escape her lived reality. Here the intention of the figure of the femme fatale is driven by motives of forced circumstances rather than intentionality. However, Christine retains her agency through self-assertion and breaking into the male-dominated world of corruption and criminality. Maybe this shift in the critical gaze as well as the fictional portrayal of female criminality has heralded an era where the trope of the femme fatale has gained a more nuanced portrayal rather than being just a sexualized object used by artists in their work to titillate and scandalize the audience.

Siddhartha Deb's *Surface* (2005) exploits the methodology of investigative journalism to weave together a compelling narrative of crime fiction. The novel is

informed by Deb's experience as a journalist as well as his awareness of the socio-political scenario of the land of Northeast India. The narrative follows the journey of journalist Amrit Singh who is assigned to investigate and prepare a report on the story of a supposed adult film actress and the public humiliation and punishment meted out to her by one of the insurgent groups for bringing shame to the community. As Amrit travels across the lesser-known parts of Northeast India termed the 'region' in the novel, in search of his prime story, through different informants and locals he pieces together a much larger plan afoot, involving corruption, politics, militant hegemony etc. Mostly set in the early 90s Manipur, *Surface*, explores the capitalist-politician nexus and effects it has on the indigenous people and their ecosystem. Even though all Amrit had with him to go on his discovery, was a tattered photograph, he eventually unearths several layered narratives of corruption and insurgency in the region and figures out their points of connection.

Surface's portrayal of the absent-present female protagonist Leela (of the photograph) is quite interesting, as there are multiple perspectives through which her story is told. The story had all the potential to be headline-grabbing news, in a national English daily, because it was about pornography, guns and militants of the national periphery. The self-proclaimed vanguards of the indigenous people, and the armed militants, also assumed the role of the conscience keeper and the moral compass of the community. As convention dictated the burden of keeping the traditional values intact fell on the women of the community. The intention behind the abduction and media photo-op of the woman at gunpoint by the militants was a tactic to alert and coerce the other women of the community to toe the line of decency dictated by them. From one point of view, the militant's desire to control the sexuality of the women member of the community and by putting her through exemplary punishment exhibits moral policing. However, Amrit's discovery about the actual reason behind Leela's infamous guerilla trial reveals that Leela's involvement with pornography was a carefully constructed narrative to hide what she was capable of exposing, "Discredit the woman, and everything else falls into place..." (*Surface*, 243). Here we can see the Madonna and the whore binary at work again, but this time to alter people's perception. When a well-educated, informed woman like Leela stumbles on to the evil secrets of the businessman-militant connection, her credibility has to be destroyed to keep peace. That's why an image of the unreliable 'whore' was created, thereby alienating her from the common people's good grace, "Expectation dictates that women may either be desirable and sexless or sexual and repulsive—objects of love or objects of desire, never both" (Burk, "The Feminine"). This repulsion of the people deviated from bigger issues of exploitation and corruption and effectively stripped her of her agency as a change-maker for her land and people.

Conclusion

The violence meted out to both female characters in, *The Girl from Nongrim Hills* and *Surface*, shows how women's sexual character, whether self-fashioned or

constructed, always dictates their perception, fate and eventual agency. Wojciech Boryszewski formulates how men's inability to reconcile the image of women as mothers or Madonna and women as a sexual being propagates undue ethical standards and in turn moral policing of women's character and actions. The feminist writers of hardboiled detective fiction are now actively creating characters that are beyond these rigid stereotypes. Crime fiction emerging out of Northeast India, has started experimenting with these pre-determined tropes to produce narratives and characters beyond their formulaic frameworks. As time has come where evolving out of the gender norms of character definition, has become the need of the hour. The reductive quality of the Madonna and the whore binary restricts women's characters to reach their full potential. As Harmony Burk writes, "If both the Madonna and the Whore are viewed as unhuman, be that superhuman or subhuman, then there is no winning for women under the Madonna-Whore Complex" ("The Feminine"). There needs to be room in the narrative technique and character imagination where these characters can grow out of their limitations.

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Waterscapes in Sarnath Banerjee's *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*

K. Renuka*

Abstract

Water is an integral element for the “very sustainability of cities and the practices of everyday life” (Swyngedouw 2004). Since cities sustain themselves by harnessing the water via centralised and hierarchical systems of water circulation, the concept of waterscapes takes the center stage. By analysing the questions of power and inequality, I try to unravel the power/money/water nexus by scrutinising Sarnath Banerjee's graphic novel, *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*. To this extent, I employ the concept of waterscape within a particular socio-spatial context to examine the different forms of water violence, all while engaging with the flows of power.

Keywords: Graphic Narrative, Waterscape, Swyngedouw, Every day, Power

Graphic narratives in India have become a prominent part of Indian English Literature and have grown to become a severe critique of South Asian urbanisation through the visual medium. The visual-verbal interplay is a vivid exploration, especially in the case of Indian urbanisation and the ecological destruction of recent times. Indian cities undergoing a massive spatial, economic, and environmental reorganisation post-liberalisation, witness the weight of human presence. Sarnath Banerjee's oeuvre charts these big Indian cities as sites of crisis with elaborate sketches detailing the ecological degradation. This paper discusses Banerjee's fourth graphic novel, *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*, published in 2015, where he pictures a dystopic future/present of water scarcity in Delhi leading to a water war. His creative redrawing of “a story of flows of liquid power” (Swyngedouw x) can be visibly traced using the concept of waterscape.

Ashokmitran's *Thaneer* (1973) is one of the earliest novels to have water as its backdrop. The fictional narrative “recounts the water crisis experienced by upper-caste, middle-class residents from a street in a semi-urban Madras neighbourhood”(Shekar). Prayaag Akbar's dystopian novel *Leila* (2017) recounts the story of Shalini, who tries to find her missing daughter Leila in a totalitarian regime where drinking water and fresh air are extravagances. *River of Stories* (1994) by Orijit Sen is India's first graphic novel that covered the environmental, social and political issues surrounding the construction of the controversial Narmada Dam. Post-1990s, India implemented various urban reforms and neoliberal policies that changed the water dynamics. With a wide range of scholarship available on the Liberalization-Privatization-Globalization extent, waterscape as a dimension has found little presence among them, especially in India, compared to studies abroad. Bijker(2012) and Bakker(2012) observe human societies as “water cultures”, while *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water* describes one of its key interests as “those interpretations that we, as a society, have brought to water through art, religion, history and which in turn shapes how we come to understand it.” With this in mind,

the paper attempts to read *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* by employing the concept of waterscape within a particular socio-spatial context to examine the different forms of water violence, all while engaging with the flows of power.

Water is an integral element for the “very sustainability of cities and the practices of everyday life” (Swyngedouw 1). Because of its centrality, it is also a place of intense social and political action. Due to its innate ability to invade anything, it becomes a highly contested terrain affecting the socio-spatial fabric of any urban city. Since cities sustain themselves by harnessing the water via centralised and hierarchical systems of water circulation, the concept of waterscapes takes centre stage. Most of the big cities of India and its waterscape are indeed a produced landscape with different social actors emerging, some resisting the monopolisation of water by taking environmental justice into their hands and some executing the concept of short-termism to gain profit for their shareholders. Thus, it is pertinent to read the political ecology of water by analysing the socio-economic and political-geographic power relationships determining access to or exclusion from water bodies. The scale of uneven development starts from a small region and moves out to wider platforms at a steady pace, as captured by Banerjee in his portrayal of Tambapur from a “life was good” (Banerjee 4) in the first panel to “the death of a skilled worker, the death of a township, the death of a community” (Banerjee 12). Today, research on water and its related entities has gained prominence due to the widening water crises on a global scale.

Waterscape: The Concept

The concept of waterscape is an emerging area that captures the flows of water and social power relations combined. It encompasses how water travels in time and space and the way it is shaped by culture and geography. The waterscape concept has found its presence in Western scholarships by converging to cultivate uneven socio-ecological arrangements over space and time. Water in the waterscape is not merely a contained element but “a produced socio-natural entity” (Loftus 49) where social power is infused and manifested through various domains. Since Waterscape is co-produced by different agents or agencies, it occurs over “multiple spatial and temporal scales”(Budds and Hinojosa 125). These agents or agencies comprise a huge assemblage of institutions and actors who disperse power and become dominant players. Where institutions and actors converge, violence is instigated. With variations of violence discharged in the waterscapes, it seems to be rather dicey to compartmentalise ecological violence into one kind of violence in the current neoliberal age.

Focusing mainly on the political ecology scholarship, the waterscape perspective has played an important role in reshaping the water debate and expanded the boundaries to include social power and turbo-capitalism as constituents of the emerging field. Following this principle, many scholars have shown interest in analysing the political ecology of water, of which Swyngedouw's seminal paper on Spanish waters is noteworthy. For him, it is the synergy of nature and society that is

both the medium and expression of changing power positions whenever a new water or waterscape is constructed or produced. Since nature and society are fused in multiple ways, waterscape is bound to find answers to the “about who controls, who acts, and who has the power to produce what kind of socionature” (Swyngedouw 461). Swyngedouw suggests that the waterscape indicates a “liminal landscape” (Swyngedouw 29) since water is difficult to contain and can never be fully captured. Consequently, one is tasked with resolving the myriad ways of the dialectic relationship of capitalist development and the production of unequal power relations in new waterscapes. Karen Bakker(2003), one of the influential contributors to the study of the everydayness of water bodies, shows how everyday analyses of water access and distribution of the water supply networks reorganise the circulation of water. To understand the waterscape concept better, one must delve into the politics of everyday life and ordinary moments.

Waterscape in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*

The organisations behind providing urban drinking water transform water into a commodity where access to water depends on social power and money. Banerjee centres this around the character of Rastogi. Rastogi, having “grown up on the wrong side of water racism”(Banerjee 115), is “sensitive”(Banerjee 117) when it comes to water. Since childhood, he understands the value of water, unlike the affluent people who think water is sourced from the building they live in. Rastogi even went to reform school for almost killing someone over water. Because he was born in a poor neighbourhood, he had to fight for a basic commodity every single day, which shows us that Rastogi's childhood and water are deeply enmeshed. For Rastogi, more than an element much needed for survival, water “embodies deep social meaning and cultural value, and internalizes powerful socio-economic and physical relations”(Swyngedouw 28). Given his grounding, Rastogi turns into a water-borne criminal who becomes a big contractor and amasses huge wealth to quench his thirst. Yet, he was not satiated and vowed to drown the city and its people for neglecting people like him. The disproportionate supply of water turned Rastogi into a water monster who pumps up the idea of a water war in Delhi. He also forms an army of agonised youngsters let down by the system and calls them Saraswati Sena. He coaxes Girish, a plumber, into water extraction, calling the business the next profit-making scheme. He buys large properties in Gurgaon and sells them at a high margin to the residents of Delhi who are fleeing the capital for fear of water war, for which, ironically, Rastogi is the reason. He becomes a power monger who uses every opportunity to make business. Being the mastermind who feeds the water war with his army of Sarswati Sena, he placed “the circulation of water directly in the sphere of money circulation”(Swyngedouw 37). By turning water into a marketable commodity, he redrew socio-natural power relations as he wanted and fuelled the water war with his water bandits.

If Rastogi slowly succeeded in controlling the demand and supply of water in Delhi with his team, there were also small players who acted individually to make the

power/water/money trio persist in the system with their day-to-day activities. Banerjee introduces them as the residents of Pataalpuri, whom Girish meets on his journey to find the mythical Saraswati deep underground. The “wronged Jal Board employee”(Banerjee 23), Jagat Ram, was demoted after getting caught while selling public water illegally. He becomes a scapegoat for all the misfortunes done by the board and is continuously demoted until he is sent to Pataalpuri to find Saraswati. Tanker Rajan, in his early days, drew water from farmhouses illegally and even teamed with police officers. To meet his customer's ever-growing demands, he schemed with Jagat Ram to source water from the public water supply and then sold it for exorbitant prices. He decides to voyage towards Saraswati “not to spare any opportunity”(Banerjee 26). We also come across a fallen soldier living underground who has lost his desire to return to the home. Lt. Col. B.K. Gambhir's backstory introduces him as a disgraced soldier who desires to steal water from his neighbour's tank. Each night, when the neighbourhood slept, he stole water, but his thirst saw no end. One day, after reading a letter from the neighbour's wife, which pleads, “Take it from our tank freely but not in the manner in which you are currently employing. Please.” (Banerjee 30), he decides to dig into the source of his guilt and vows to stay there. We meet Philippa Carrey Jones, the wife of the ambassador, who demands her staff drain the swimming pool each time her kid urinates. The last water-borne criminal in Pataalpuri is L. M. Awasthy, a highly placed MCD official who led a pompous life and never cared for others. The water tank in his house constantly overflowed and turned the neighbourhood into a “mangrove forest”(Banerjee 35). After suffering for his sins deep underground, he says to Girish, “I will never throw my weight around. I will never waste water”(Banerjee 37). Awasthy, later in the book, becomes a crucial character who senses the ill notions of Rastogi and saves the day. All these characters' background story reflects how power and money circulate throughout the socio-spatial fabric of everyday life even though they do not deploy it forcefully. For them, it rather becomes a “custom, habit, spontaneous practice”(Eagleton 116) since they have led life privileged.

These residents in their power were on the dominating side of water racism while the kid Rastogi fought each day to have a bucket of water. The whims and wishes of these people before succumbing to Pataalpuri steadily contributed to structured violence. By exploiting and extracting water for personal gains, these people consumed more water than needed, contributing to the widening socio-spatial class inequalities. As Swyngedouw states, we must stay alert to the social relations of power:

It is these power geometries and the social actors who carry them out that ultimately decide who will have access to or control over, and who will be excluded from access to or control over, resources or other components of the environment. These power geometries, in turn, shape the particular social and political configurations and the environments in which we live (Swyngedouw 23).

The strong grip over the liquid power by these social actors further strengthens the power/water/money nexus. This tripartite negotiates through subtle forms of rule,

often through various means of violence. When competing groups struggle for access to water, violence can take myriad forms and often go unnoticed unless scrutinised. The shift of urban water from a basic good to a marketable commodity aggravates the spatial division where money captures the market. While the better-off can relocate to a place where the water supply is constant, the impoverished end up living in isolated pockets. The private tankers and suppliers exploit the wants of the people and evolve into water mafias where physical skirmishes and verbal abuse are daily episodes.

Empty promises, fake optimism, covering the crap with marble, and draining Yamuna to supply water to the capital when there is no clear agenda for treating the wastewater are various examples of short-termism present in everyday life. With “PROFIT, PROFIT, PROFIT”(Banerjee 9) as the motto, Tambapur is one of many places to sink, unable to float amidst the burden of short-term policies dreamt by men like Varun Balla. We learn that Varun is a financial wizard who helps to raise money for the companies and has a hobby of designing costumes for his household staff. Although he deals only with one or two companies in a year, he loses his sleep due to guilt. We later learn that he is the costume superhero H, who provides important visual documentation of each crime propagated by these conglomerates. Thus, he finds solace by being a faceless superhero who helps the common man fight injustice.

The new urban India's desire to implement the policymaker's agendas is like the apartment structure (Figure 1) depicted by Banerjee in a panel explaining short-termism. The structure is held together by “optimism”(Banerjee 55). Paradoxically, it is a false sense of positivity since the building seems devoid of human presence except for the clothes hung to dry. It seems every inch of available space is either used for drying clothes or placing ornamental plants. The purpose behind the steps hanging mid-air from the second floor seems to be a rather futuristic plan for another floor that might be attached if needed.



Figure 1. Optimism building, Banerjee, 55. (Image reproduced with permission of the author).

In another panel, we see the river Yamuna (Figure 2), “sad, sluggish and thick with

industrial effluents”(Banerjee 59). While a man holding a bag walks towards something, another man is seen diving into the murky river. The man with a bag seems to be walking with a purpose, leaving behind deep footprints on the river, while the other man seems to be struck and slowly sinking. This powerful image depicts neoliberal India, where one portion rides swiftly while the other plummets.

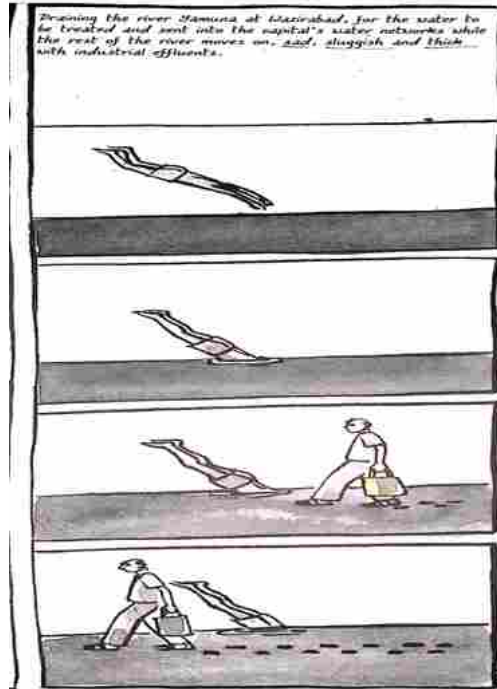


Figure 2. River Yamuna, Banerjee, 59. (Image reproduced with permission of the author).

In the Water Wars of Delhi panels, we see a two-toned black and yellow series of drawings explaining how water has become a much-demanded commodity, with one person from each family in Delhi rising before daybreak to switch on the water pump, waiting for an hour to switch it off and go back to sleep. Banerjee notes that this is a common scene in every neighbourhood of Delhi. However, in the place where Rastogi grew up, he had to run bare feet, stand in the queue for two small buckets of water and be late for his classes. This is in stark contrast to the elite Delhi, where people sit inside their houses and wear mufflers to beat the cold while the water arrives punctually on pipes. Two different stories running behind the same life-saving fluid recall the waterscape as a perspective for analysing the contested waters. In Delhi, there is old India and new India, and both factions need water, yet their flow is capitalised, controlled, and corrupted. With the waterscape steaming as a site of environmental assaults, it becomes necessary to dismember the types of ecological

terrors inflicted.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have worked around the perspective of waterscape as an emerging concept that, as Buds and Hinojosa (2012) categorises has three features:

Waterscape combines water and society, thus becoming a socio-natural entity where water and power are co-produced. The study shows that water and turbocapitalism go hand in hand, where Rastogi exploits Girish's plumbing skills to control an untapped water resource, thereby aiming to control the city. Powerful and powerless, both have symbolic meanings towards water but are fundamentally different. Although the water is the same, one's spatial setting sets the flow, quantity, and quality.

Occurring over multiple spatial and temporal scales, the waterscape concept urges one to move beyond the traditional and conventional hierarchical administrative structures. This helps us identify the subtle violent notions behind the facade of businessmen like Rastogi and Varun. Varun is a two-faced persona where one works for money and the other for justice. While Varun's money-making job is known as his occupation, his identity as H is hidden until the end. In contrast, Rastogi claims that finding Saraswati will resolve the war, a war that he started by instilling evil ideologies in young men and women. Both Varun and Rastogi have different beliefs which are to be seen as the maturation of different life experiences and opportunities. If men like them directly or indirectly impart ecological violence on men like Girish, the collective victimisation over a period of time unites the common men to fight against the slow structural evil. The urge to fight is not to be seen as a mandatory consequence of systematic suppression but as a spirit waiting to be unleashed if necessary.

Waterscape avoids confining to a predetermined space. With its invasive capability, it waltzes into the depths of the earth. On the surface, it embraces the social relations, technologies, institutions, practices and discourses. *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* is a rich embroidery of characters from extreme backgrounds fighting for water. The relentless pace of the novel showcases the 'power of water' in making or breaking social relations. It is also a story of 'power over water' riddled with institutions manipulating everyday practice using technology and discourses.

Although waterscape is a strong argument in analysing the neoliberal world, the political ecology field also has the scope of hydro-social territories and hydro-social circles. The hydro-social territories explore the configuration of people, institutions, water flows, hydraulic technology and the biophysical environment that revolve around the control of water and the hydro-social circles are concerned with the cyclicity of water as it travels through the social and water domains. But as Karpouzoglou (2017) says, the strength of the waterscapes lies in the detailed real-life case studies and rich empirical observation, as Banerjee's novel does.

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“Playing with the Paradoxes of Life --Love and Death”: Changing Forms of Patriarchy in K.R. Meera's *Hangwoman*.

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Abstract

This paper offers a close reading of contemporary Indian feminist writer, K.R. Meera's epic novel *Hangwoman* (2014) that delves into the intricacies of patriarchy, examining its manifestations both in the public and private spheres. Although the title of the novel suggests it as the narrative of a female protagonist into a male dominated profession, her journey is intriguing and through the lens of various characters and their interactions, Meera unveils the nuanced ways in which patriarchal ideologies permeate and influence societal structures and individual lives. It investigates the overlapping, blurring, and melting of boundaries and the constant negotiations between public and private spaces. The current research sheds light on dominant forces of patriarchy in shaping the private as well as public worlds and also focuses on the cultural influences produced by such domination. It delves deep into how the protagonist Chetna, as an individual, strives to carve out a place for herself in the larger society while battling against patriarchal encroachments even in her domestic sphere. The argument here is underpinned by a close textual and thematic analysis of Meera's novel using feminist discourse as a tool. At the end, it traces how power dynamics, gender roles, and societal expectations shape the characters' experiences and relationships.

Keywords: patriarchy, private patriarchy, public patriarchy, subjugation, violence.

Introduction

Contemporary women's writing in India, questions the public/ private binary in the modern capitalist society as women authors show how the individual's personal space is manipulated by the calculations of loss and gain in a collusion between capitalism and patriarchy – to which every relationship is sold out. Thus, the women become the most vulnerable victim of the male search for profit because the man has been assured more control over both public and private institutions by the patriarchal organisation of society and can manipulate those institutions easily. The authority enjoyed in the public world gives one the political power to manipulate even the most private human relationships in a society where women continue to be doubly marginalised as much of their work in the public domain still depend on male decisions while women are forced to negotiate between their conventional roles as homemakers and outdoor activities.

Within a predominantly male literary tradition, women writings in India explore the nuanced reality of being a woman in an extremely patriarchal culture and produces alternative discourse which are distinct from the patriarchal framework of narrative discourse. In their writings they skilfully portray the acts of violence committed against women in Indian society. The women writers have focused primarily on domestic life and the intricacies involved therein. Politics of representation in the public space has been a rare occasion. The legacy of women's writing in India has

been deeply traced by Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha in their bi-partite volumes *Women's Writing in India* (1991, 1993). From their perspective as postcolonial feminists, they have gone on to establish an independent tradition of Indian women's writing and to rethink its literary history. Contemporary Indian women's fiction as a potential genre offers myriad perceptions on patriarchal norms that control women's body and thought: "The novel by Indian women writers makes an extremely significant leap forward as 1970 rolled around: the self becomes in the novels between 1971-1980, the sole preoccupation of the writer" (qtd. in Lau 17). Their writings highlight the intricacies of the various familial and other interactions that women encounter every day in India. In this context this paper examines patriarchal discourses in K.R. Meera's ground-breaking novel *Hangwoman* (2014), translated in English from Malayalam *Aarachaar* (2012) and unfolds the patriarchal discourses that dominate the social life of women in India. Through a nuanced analysis of public and private patriarchies within the novel, the paper investigates how women navigate professional and personal spaces amidst dominant patriarchal structures. It also endeavours to comprehend how traditional social institutions propagate gender roles and the associated challenges.

Situating and Framing the Study

Hangwoman skilfully portrays the story of a female protagonist and her journey into the public world. Her journey is intriguing for understanding the multi-layered nuances of patriarchy at play and how the idea of personal and familiar space is perceived, codified, and theorised. It illustrates the complex othering that exists in society and also highlights the problems that exist in modern society. The way Meera addresses the subtleties of patriarchy and a woman's reaction to the violence perpetrated on her body is evident throughout the novel, and the novel's narrative plays a significant role in the contemporary feminist discourse. The novel foreshadows how violence and the possibility of violence in the domestic sphere constrain and control the actions of women in the public sphere. It analyses patriarchal violence through the lens of everyday, as intimate or personal, gendered and domesticated. These forms of violence cannot simply be explained as 'private' because though certainly intimate this experience is not weaned away from a greater public narrative. The paper also delves deep into patriarchal discourse to trace how the personal space of women overlaps with the public. The concept of private and public have, for a long time, been the matter of debate and discussion. Further, the issues get much more complicated when define gender-based violence is attempted to be defined in the so-called private sphere. Building upon Sylvia Walby's concept of patriarchy, this study perceives patriarchy, not only as a structured system but also as a dynamic process evolving through social, cultural, and political practices. Walby defines patriarchy as a system of interrelated social structures where men exploit women, delineating "private patriarchy" and "public patriarchy" as visible in societal structures (177). In India, patriarchy intersects with caste, religion, and family dynamics, necessitating the inclusion of Indian feminist scholars'

perspectives like Kamla Bhasin and Uma Chakravarti. Bhasin highlights the family as "the most patriarchal" institution, maintaining hierarchical power dynamics with men as superior and dominant. *Hangwoman* vividly portrays a marginalized woman's struggle against patriarchal oppression in various spheres, making it relevant within this theoretical framework.

Hangwoman explores the fictional account of Chetna Gradha Mullick, country's first successful female executioner, and her lonesome journey into the men's world. The novel is written in the form of a bildungsroman of Chetna as she gradually transforms according to the situation around her. Interestingly, although the novel is primarily written in Malayalam, it talks about a Bengali woman Chetna who belongs to Grddha Mullick family from Kolkata, having a long family history of hanging criminals. Hanging is a vocation dominated by men, therefore she has been raised hearing stories of hangings from her male family members throughout her life. Central conflict of the narrative begins, when her elder brother's physical disability and the situations around her resulted in her taking up the position which led the media to portray her as the face of woman empowerment. She was offered the position of Assistant to the State's Chief Hangman just before the hanging of convict Jyotindranath Banerjee. Despite her gender, even though the government placed the employment advertisement as a male-dominated field, Chetna neatly fits into this one. This conflict is beautifully expressed by Meera through her choice of words for the title of the novel. Chetna encounters unusual challenges as a result of the rareness of a female executioner in popular culture and the media's continuous use of the topic for dramatic purposes. Her professional life immediately violates her personal space when Sanjiv Kumar Mitra, a scheming media person enters their family. Anticipating a possibility of public attention in the concept of hangwoman he moves into their household and bribes Chetna's father Phanibhushan with alcohol. Chetna's life becomes more complex when he promises to marry Chetna as it results in Phanibhushan signing contract on behalf of Chetna's public appearance for Mitra's channel. In this way, overnight she has been transformed into a media sensation. Through the course of the narrative Meera skilfully shows how Chetna copes up with the changing situation and finds herself by battling patriarchal encroachments in private as well as public spheres and how she no longer allows patriarchy to diminish her value and existence.

Discussion

Various studies indicate that the majority of societal institutions exhibit patriarchal tendencies. Patriarchal systems and structures find support from foundational pillars such as the family, religion, media, and law. In *What is Patriarchy?* (1993) Kamla Bhasin observes, this interconnected and deeply entrenched network lends patriarchy an aura of invulnerability and inherent legitimacy (21). The patriarchal system forms the foundation of feminist analysis, revealing the systemic inferiority and marginalisation experienced by women within social constructs. Through mechanisms of private patriarchy, certain individual patriarchs exert oppression and

control over women (Walby 177).Patriarchy can be defined as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby 16). Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as structural oppression where six different relatively autonomous structures function together to maintain dominance. These six structures can be identified as “the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relation in paid work, patriarchal relation in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions” (Walby 18).

Patriarchy is a system of hierarchical power relations in which men possess the exclusive control over women. It is an oppressive system that denies women's human rights and upholds men's dominance over them. In a patriarchal society, due to their sex, women experience systematic social injustice and patriarchy, on the other hand, has an impact on every facet of society, including gender, caste, class, the economy, and polity. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970) also tried to theorise the patriarchal discourse where she identifies family as the 'patriarchy's chief institution' and 'foundation unit' that has some prototypical roles. It serves as a bridge between private and public culture and imposes order and conformity in situations where political or other institutions are ineffective or insufficient. It acts as an agent of the patriarchal state that ensures conformity through its family heads. Millet writes:

Traditionally patriarchy granted the father total ownership over wives and children including the powers of physical abuse, even those of abuse and sale. Classically, as head of the family, the father is both the begetter and owner in which kinship is property (33).

Kamla Bhasin, in her work *Understanding Gender* (2003), posits that the roots of patriarchy extend to the expansive household of the patriarch, encompassing women, younger men, children, slaves, and domestic servants, all under the dominion of the dominant male figure. Within the family unit, the male assumes the role of household head, wielding authority not only over matters of sexuality, labour, and reproduction but also dictating the mobility of women. The hierarchical structure of the family positions men as “superior and dominant” while relegating women to “inferior and subordinate” roles (Bhasin 19-21). Bhasin (1993) in rightly observes that the family is also important for socialising the next generation in patriarchal values. It is within the family that we learn the first lessons in hierarchy, subordination, and discrimination. Boys learn to assert and dominate, girls to submit, to expect unequal treatment. Again, although the extent and nature of male control may differ in different families, it is never absent (13).

In *Hangwoman*, Chetna's father, Phanibhusan Grddha Mullick, embodies the patriarchal figurehead within the family, adhering to the traditional Indian family structure. As the sole decision-maker, his authority is unquestioned, solely by virtue of his role as the 'father'. Phanibhushan collaborates with the media, orchestrating efforts to secure a government position as the state hangwoman for his daughter, all without her knowledge. Furthermore, he strikes a pact with Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, a media representative, stipulating her involvement in a series of interviews regarding

the impending execution. His control extends beyond familial boundaries, dictating her actions both within and outside the household, aiming to regulate her action: "It is I who know what's wrong and what's right. Better for everyone to accept that — do what I say and move on" (Meera 204). He even attempts to restrict her movement and speech when he says "Chetu, you will not step out of the house from now without my permission. You will not speak to anyone without my knowledge" (Meera 205). *Hangwoman* portrays extreme patriarchal realities that Sylvia Walby identifies as "private patriarchy" where, "the expropriation of women's labour takes place primarily by individual patriarchs within the household, while in the public form it is more collective appropriation. In private patriarchy the principle patriarchal strategy is exclusionary: in the public it is segregationist and subordination" (177). In order to gain material benefits, Phanibhushan exposes his daughter to a world of politics, bureaucracy, and sensationalist media in the name of money and power. He wants to capitalise on Chetana's sudden fame by getting as much money as he can. This control over and exploitation of women's labour means that men benefit materially from patriarchy; they derive concrete economic gains from the subordination of women.

According to Walby, male aggression towards women is deeply ingrained in every aspect of the social fabric, inseparable from the patriarchal structure. This phenomenon, she argues, cannot be comprehended without considering the broader patriarchal context (16). In countries like India, violence is intricately interwoven with cultural narratives. Within this framework, it's socially sanctioned for male family members to employ violence as a means of asserting dominance over women. Uma Chakravarty characterises this phenomenon as one of the mechanisms utilised to control women's actions (73). In *Hangwoman*, whenever Chetna endeavours to express her individuality, Phanibhushan exerts control over her through either the use of violence or the intimidation of violence: "Disobedient hussy! She's stuffed with pride! I'll kick her out if she doesn't do what I say! Then she will have neither this family nor this house!" (Meera 294). As the epitome of patriarchal ideals, Phanibhushan not only exploits his daughter's domestic world but also manipulates his son's disability to further his own financial interests. When the execution of Jyotindranath Banerjee is delayed, diverting the media's focus away from Chetna, Phanibhushan resorts to exploiting his ailing son, Ramdev, as a means to sustain public attention. This illustrates how in societies like India, where disability and poverty can be monetized, even domestic spheres become politicized with ease.

Traditionally, marriage and intimate relationships were considered sacred, private domains with an emphasis on personal fulfilment. However, social factors such as gender, race, class, caste, and community influence power dynamics within these relationships. Women are often socialised into domestic roles within marriage, perpetuating patriarchal norms. The institution of marriage serves as a tool for patriarchy to exert power and control over individuals, shaping their lives according to societal norms. In *Hangwoman*, Chetna and Sajeev Kumar Mitra shares an

intimate relationship which is sanctioned in the name of marriage. Here Meera demonstrates how patriarchy encroaches on Chetna's personal space by the trap of marriage and then ultimately commodifies that space since marriage is believed to provide social protection for a woman. After being appointed as the first female executioner of the nation, the country's media houses started seeing her potential enough to make money for them. As a result, she is transformed into a media sensation overnight. Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, the media executive, immediately grabs this opportunity and attempts to exploit Chetna for his own professional agenda. He proposes to marry her in front of her father, who is also trying to make the best of the situation. In Indian society where marriage ensures social security Sanjeev Kumar Mitra's proposal is readily bought by Chetna's father. Chetna too Sanjeev Kumar Mitra uses marriage as a strategy to exert control over Chetna's movements and expose her private life. He makes a contract with her father according to which Chetna will appear on his channel for a series of interviews before the execution of Jatindranath Banerjee. Though initially Chetna felt attracted towards Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, when he attempts to molest her, the attraction changes into aversion: "Somehow I felt that he had been attacking my body all that while in some horrible manner. I found it hard to deal the secrets of my body with filthy looks and dirty words, secrets which I kept safe for someone who would desire and respect me deeply." (Meera 41). Chetna is also aware of the fact that he uses marriage as a pawn in order to get access to her body: "... He does not really love me, I was convinced. His concern and tenderness, the glimmer of love in his green eyes --- they are all mere put-ons, I grieve" (Meera 228). On their first encounter, he grabs her and threatens her with his desire to "fuck her hard" (Meera 96).

Therefore, throughout the novel, the micro-physics of power is exercised in gender relations both in private and public spheres. In the disguise of a lover, an intimate partner, Sanjeev Kumar Mitra violates her professional space which should have been her personal space only. Though earlier Chetna was unable to prevent herself from falling prey to Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, at the end of the novel, she is able to show her resistance. She gains control of her public as well as private life gradually and finds her hypocritical lover powerless in front of her bold confrontations: "The training he had received from this world as a man reminded him that sex was the obvious outcome in such a situation. But he was afraid to take a woman who had walked into his bedroom of her own free will." (Meera 328).

The media wield significant influence by informing and shaping societal perceptions. However, feminist critiques highlight pervasive stereotypes and biases, especially regarding women's portrayal. Kamla Bhasin notes the media's role in perpetuating gender and class ideologies. She writes:

Media are very important tools in the hands of upper class, upper caste men to propagate class and gender ideology. From films and television to magazines, newspapers, radio, the portrayal of women is stereotypical and distorted. Messages about male superiority and female inferiority are repeated constantly; violence against women is rampant, especially in films. As with other sectors, women are highly under-represented in the media, professionally, and biases in

reporting coverage, advertising and messaging are still very sexist (Bhasin). Furthermore, contemporary Indian media often prioritises sensationalism over substantive issues, as noted by Uma Chakravarty in an interview with Reva Yunus: "the least idealistic segment of our society' as "they only show what the middle and upper-middle classes want to see, ...these sections do not actually care about all the other people left down below" (Yunus 61). In *Hangwoman*, Chetna experiences the intrusive nature of media attention when thrust into the limelight as India's first female hangwoman. Her private life becomes fodder for public consumption, showcasing the media's penchant for sensationalism. Chetna's narrative underscores the media's role in commodifying women's experiences, reducing them to mere spectacles for public consumption, and perpetuating gender biases. Her unexpected appointment as India's first official hangwoman thrusts her into the harsh glare of media scrutiny. Suddenly thrust into the spotlight, her private life becomes a constant target for invasive media coverage. Sanjiv Kumar Mitra's channel relentlessly invades her domestic space, manipulating her family and subjecting her to constant surveillance. This intrusion strips Chetna of her agency, forcing her to view herself through the lens of media portrayal. The patriarchal media reduces Chetna to a mere visual spectacle, ignoring her role in challenging societal norms and reinforcing gender biases.

Conclusion

K.R. Meera's exploration of women's resistance against patriarchal oppression in *Hangwoman* intricately weaves together the societal and familial realms. The novel delves into multifaceted themes like gender dynamics, tradition, and the ethical dilemmas surrounding the death penalty. Future research could delve deeper into the socio-cultural implications of the protagonist's gender as a female executioner, examining how the narrative challenges or reinforces prevailing norms. Furthermore, an analysis of the protagonist's struggle against patriarchal forces could offer valuable literary insights.

Hangwoman serves as a narrative canvas illustrating the multifaceted layers of patriarchal domination within Indian society. This study interprets it as a reflection of the evolving patriarchal discourses that shape women's lives. It explores the fluid boundaries between public and private spheres, delineating the constant negotiation of power within familial dynamics and societal structures. The narrative vividly portrays Chetna and her family's resistance against entrenched oppression, revealing the pervasive fear and vulnerability experienced by women and younger family members. Through an examination of familial relationships, the paper gradually unpacks the conventional discourse surrounding patriarchy, shedding light on its impact on both private and public spheres of women's lives.

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Female Saga Fiction as a Narrative of Self-Discovery in Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey's *Not Just Another Story*

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Abstract

The genre of saga fiction in literature, typically follows multiple characters and families through stories that span across ages, generations, and regions. A female saga fiction encompasses a multitude of female characters across generations and tries to weave in interconnections. Saga narratives are generally assumed to be male oriented and they are well defined in terms of identity of the protagonist and are built around the themes of success, wealth and power. Whereas female saga fiction focuses on the intricate lives of women and shows how a sense of identity gets gradually forged, in due course of the narrative. Most often, protagonists in these narratives, follow the path awakening through self-discovery. Rita Felski in her article on 'The Novel of Self-Discovery:

Integration and Quest' points to the different stages and shifts in the process of self-discovery, such as starting from alienation, moving to framing a new identity, the importance of female collectivity and so on, with regard to the feminist bildungsroman. It can be seen that the same can be mapped for female saga fiction, with an added factor of expanding time across generations. This paper is an attempt to identify and outline characteristics of the various phases of self-discovery in a recent Indian female saga text, namely *Not Just Another Story* (2019) by Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey. The novel deals with three generations of sex workers in the Sonagachi area of Kolkatta, who are in the constant struggle to move out of their debilitating life circumstances and are thereby trying to move towards emancipation through self-discovery. The paper will substantiate the argument through a critical content analysis of the text through the theoretical framework of Felski. The present study contends that saga fiction not only provides women an avenue to identify and articulate their identities, but also provides a female genealogy.

Female saga narratives follow the intricate lives of intergenerational women in families and project how a sense of identity gets forged gradually, through self-discovery. Rita Felski in her article on 'The Novel of Self-Discovery: Integration and Quest' points to the different stages in the process of self-discovery, such as starting from a point of alienation, framing of a new identity, the importance of female collectivity, which can be mapped for intergenerational female saga narratives. This study aims to identify and outline characteristics of the various phases of self-discovery in a recent Indian female saga text, *Not Just Another Story* (2019) by Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey. The argument will be substantiated through a critical content analysis of the text within the theoretical framework of Felski and contends that, when viewed from the framework of self-discovery, it provides women an avenue to identify and articulate their identities and also presents a female genealogy.

Keywords: female saga fiction, self-discovery, identities, female collectivity, female genealogy.

Introduction

“Each woman's life is important-indeed, precious-and the act of

recording and publishing is one of "writing against the wind."
(Geiger 351)

The literary scenario is filled with a plethora of life narratives by women, on women and for women in the contemporary times. The genre of saga fiction in literature, follows multiple characters and families through stories that span across ages, generations, and regions. Even though, the origins of saga can be traced back to the Icelandic narratives in Old Norse, it includes different forms such as classic family, Aqa, historical and romance sagas.

Saga narratives are generally assumed to be male oriented as they focus on the lives of male protagonists, who try to find an avenue to realize his aspirations and their identities are defined with respect to wealth, success and power. A female saga encompasses intergenerational women characters and begins at a point where the protagonist struggles to identify and articulate her aspirations. They focus on the intricate lives of women and project how a sense of identity gets forged gradually. In this respect, a saga narrative can be compared to a bildungsroman, which is a genre that charts the development of a protagonist from childhood to adulthood and includes various phases of the life course. The multitude of generations spanning across decades and the genealogy that is presented, is what differentiates the scope of a bildungsroman and a saga narrative.

Female sagas can also be considered as narratives of emancipation, as there is more focus on the self-discovery of the protagonist. Most of these texts have crucial moments of shifts or disjunctures, which leads to a renewed awakening through self-discovery in the protagonist. Rita Felski in her article on 'The Novel of Self-Discovery: Integration and Quest' points to the different stages and shifts in the process of self-discovery with regard to the feminist bildungsroman. She traces the process in different steps such as starting from a phase of lack, framing of a new identity, the importance of female collectivity etc. It can be seen that the same can be mapped for intergenerational female sagas.

This study is an attempt to identify and map characteristics of the various phases of self-discovery in a recent Indian female saga text, *Not Just Another Story* (2019) by Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey. The novel deals with three generations of sex workers in the Sonagachi area of Kolkata, namely Saraju (grandmother), Malati (mother) and Lakshmi aka Anjali (daughter). In the beginning of the narrative, we find how Saraju lands up in Sonagachi through trafficking, resists and slowly tries to adapt to be one of the most sought-after sex workers in the area. Malati goes against her mother's wish and initiates herself into the business and continues the tradition, from a different perspective. In spite of being educated and with much resistance from Saraju, Malati's daughter Lakshmi also gets forcefully initiated into the familial business. The narrative ends on a note of hope where we find a drastic transformation in Lakshmi who forges a new name, identity and home – all of which are strategies to deliberately erase traces of her actual lineage. In doing so, Lakshmi is finally successful in the long-drawn struggle, starting from the preceding generations, to move out of the debilitating life circumstances.

The seminal stages of a feminist bildungsroman that will be adapted here are the text starting from a point of alienation, confrontation and dialogue with the social environment, the affirmation of identity and autonomy, female friendships as a mediating structure, painful experiences as necessary steps to maturation and the formation of female genealogy. The study will substantiate the arguments through a critical content analysis of the text through the theoretical framework of Felski. In doing so, it contends that saga fiction when viewed from the framework of self-discovery, provides women an avenue to identify and articulate their identities and also presents a female genealogy.

Explication of Stages of Self Discovery in Saga Fiction

Alienation Phase and the Sense of Lack

Female saga narratives offer insights into phases where there is a break off in the protagonists' life either due to a discordant marriage, mundaneness of daily life or even the loss or separation from a partner. Rita Felski avers that, “the beginning of the text thus typically introduces a negative model, an image of female alienation which the text will strive to overcome” (Felski 129). In *Not Just Another Story*, Saraju is introduced as being severed from a life of security and dignity and pulled towards a loathed life of disgust and shame, which she struggles to cope up with for a long time. Mukherjee thereby presents her life history in a drastically transitional manner. Whereas Malati's sense of lack originates from the rift with her mother over a protected life and she alienates herself from other children of sex workers, when she willingly enters into the business for more money. Here, it is evident that the sense of lack is interpreted and taken forward by both of them, in terms of their life trajectories and therefore alienation is presented and understood in two different ways. Lakshmi defines alienation as her fateful initiation into the business and the subsequent efforts to empower herself through education. For her, alienation leads to the forging of a new name, outlook, community, way of life and identity. Thus, while the sense of lack is thrust upon Saraju, it is a choice for Malati whereas Lakshmi uses it as a strategy. It can thus be averred that in tune with Felski's argument, the intergenerational protagonists go through crucial junctures of lack and estrangement, which is later overcome to significantly alter their life courses.

Confrontation and Dialogue with the Social Environment

Female protagonists in the process of self-discovery, confront stark realities at different points in life and hence there is a constant interrogation and dialogue with the social environment. Felski contends that, “only by moving out into the world can the protagonist become critically aware of the limitations of her previously secluded existence and her unquestioning acceptance of the circumscribed nature of women's social roles” (Felski 135). Such confrontations are what contribute to their self-discovery and Saraju, Malati, Lakshmi undergo them with the world outside Sonagachi, which is perceived as either alien or heaven for them. Constant confrontations also necessitate a back-and-forth dialogue with the social environment. Saraju's initial confrontations are against the norms of the sex worker

community which seem to be deviant for her, but soon turns to a deep rooted acceptance. With the onset of motherhood, there are instances when she understands that she would not have got a life of autonomy and power, if she were still a part of the normative society outside, embracing patriarchal familial roles. Malati's confrontations are around the rich brothels outside Sonagachi, which she ventures out into at a very young age and her modus operandi within and outside her own community, are quite different. This is a deliberate tactic taken forward by her, for survival. She finds it difficult to accept that her daughter is being exposed and given opportunities in the world outside and hence her confrontations are more in the ensuing years. On the other hand, Lakshmi keeps looking forward to dialogues with the civilized world outside Sonagachi and her confrontations are against the unquestioned norms of Sonagachi that she has witnessed since her childhood. Hence, she is of the opinion that, "If I have learnt anything from my education, it is self-reliance. My grandmother was a prostitute and my mother is a practicing one. It runs in my blood... I cannot escape it, but I can turn it to my advantage" (Pandey 173-74). Thus, it can be seen that the individual confrontations of each of these protagonists are fair and justified in terms of their contexts and time frames that they are rooted in, but a combined perspective reveals that they all invariably contribute to embracing change with more awareness.

Conscious Affirmation of Identity

As a consequence of the socio-cultural conflict, a conscious affirmation of a new identity arises through resistance and survival. For this, a radical rupture with the past is necessary as in the words of Felski that, "something radical had broken, and I could not get back to the old way." (Felski 131). It is seen that the break away from an existing state of life is presented as both empowering as well as disabling for the protagonists. For instance, when Saraju's initial resistance fails, she willingly breaks way from the past and affirms her new-found identity, and proves to be a transitioning protagonist attaining agency and empowerment. For her, empowerment gets defined as what provides her a standing in the community along with monetary benefits. The same repeats after a generation, with the reversal of contexts. Lakshmi's life progresses from a disabled identity in terms of her being pushed into sex work, to her embracing an empowered identity when she finally manages to escape the community and adopt a new way of living. In contrast to Saraju, for Lakshmi, empowerment involves a constant erasure of memories of her debilitating past and to present herself as a new woman. In contrast, Malati who is caught in between two generations, struggles to affirm her identity as a sex worker who is bound to the community strongly and with utmost pride, and cannot think of a life beyond Sonagachi. For her, empowerment is defined in terms of her ability to conform to the norms of the business and be devoted to her customers. It is the same that she tries to impart to Lakshmi, which turns out to be disabling for the latter. Even though her character is positioned in between two contrasting generations in the narrative, thereby providing her with an equal glimpse of their identities, she

chooses to affirm her unique self until the end of the narrative, without any visible shifts.

In the context of motherhood, the typical normalized glorification is shattered when it comes to the idea of sex workers being mothers quite unwillingly and due to a careless encounter with their customer. It is an unquestioned norm within the sex work industry to not try and keep the illegitimate child, so that there are no restrictions or barriers to the smooth undertaking of the profession. Saraju stands as an exception, as the moment she is conscious of a life inside her, she goes back to her past of dreaming of a good life and insists that she bear the child and raise her with dignity. It can be clearly seen that such an attitude arises out of her unfortunate background of being trapped into the profession and hence deep down she hopes to rebuild the image of a content family. In contrast, Malati despises motherhood and tries her best to abort the child, which however fails. This is the typical attitude of women who have been born and brought up within the sex work community. Hence, she believes the child to be, “a parasite... She was determined not to let it change her life” (Pandey 71). Thus, it can be seen that affirmation of identity is exercised in vivid manners by the protagonists across generations, based on their socio-cultural contexts and associated mindset.

Female Friendships as a Mediating Structure

The role of female friendships as support mechanisms for protagonists is a very common trope in women's writing. In saga fiction, they are very important as their visible presence and influence is part of the larger trajectory of the protagonist's life. Female friendships turn to be mediating structures when they help in building a collective female consciousness, on the road to self-discovery. Many a times, protagonists find their double in their female friends, as Felski notes that, “the other woman provides a mirror in which the protagonist discovers herself, finding her own female identity reflected: we are doubles; when I encounter her, at the same time I encounter a part of myself” (Felski 132). In midst of their life courses, a glimpse into the path taken by their friends provide insights for the protagonists to pause and reflect and then take a stance. Thus, Lata's absence alerts Saraju to the fact that she cannot escape the trap and she eventually prepares herself for the same. Similarly, the bond Malati shares with Golapi is very intense and we see that she is the only person to whom Malati shares her true self and has feelings for. Many a times Malati also feels that Golapi resembles her mother as both gets trapped into the profession and still yearns for a decent life, deep inside them. Lakshmi almost finds another version of herself in Keka, until misfortune parts them. Thus, it can be seen that female friendships aid and contribute to the ways in which the identity of the protagonist is framed. Female bonding is also important because it points to a lot of memories being represented and mediated. Many a times the author also uses association and interactions with the female friend to develop the character of the protagonist and to point to certain important events in their life. It is also evident that, similar to the formation of alienated selves, female friendships forge a sense of continuity and it

interestingly repeats across generations.

Painful Experiences as Steps to Maturation and Assertion of Female Autonomy

Felski asserts that, “the experiences undergone by the protagonist, while often difficult and painful, are presented as the necessary steps to maturation” (Felski 135). The assumption in the select text is that the experiences of sex workers tend to be mostly painful and poignant. But Jhimli Pandey also makes it a point to include pleasant and eye-opening experiences in their lives. This is a deliberate move on her side as part of the politics of representation. The question of the author being an outsider and the authenticity in portraying experiences looms around the narrative at most points in time. Nevertheless, many of these experiences are constructed in a way that they become crucial junctures on the path to maturation. Prominent instances include Saraju's transformation as a successful prostitute, Malati's strong and assertive tackling of multiple painful experiences, without a tinge of vulnerability and Lakshmi's fortunate and empowering experiences in the world within and outside Sonagachi. It can be understood that each of the experiences of the intergenerational protagonists are traumatic but indicates ways of development and freedom for the sex worker community.

Along with an inward realization and self-discovery, protagonists are provided with the agency to exercise their autonomy. Only when female autonomy is emphasized upon, can we say that a self-discovery narrative has laid out its true purpose. In that sense, *Not Just Another Story* has served justice to the aim of the narrative as all three protagonists are bestowed with autonomy, in their own ways. Saraju's first instance of embracing autonomy is when she decides to bear and raise her child. A middle aged Saraju is more empowered and it is based on her strong will and autonomy that Lakshmi is saved from being trapped into the profession, at an early age. Malati's voluntary initiation into the sex industry and the subsequent encounters outside Sonagachi, are clear examples of her headstrong attitude and her free will. Hence, Saraju's and others' repeated attempts to curtail Malati's autonomy, does not succeed. The same strength is also imparted to Lakshmi in her self-created identity as Anjali. Her decision to never return into her community, is taken forward with much strength and agency. Thus, the author presents a cross-cutting view of all the three protagonists strongly demanding their autonomy when we look at their lives within the community.

Construction of Female Genealogy

Genealogy is basically understood as the study of the line of descent of an individual or a family and includes community histories, biographies and life narratives to understand the socio-cultural patterns of society in large. In most cases, genealogy is generally assumed to be biological in nature, while there can be other types of genealogies existing around geographies, professions, socio-cultural patterns of communities and so on. It can be seen that in due course of the progression of self-discovery and assertion of identities, a particular pattern of genealogy gets built

within female saga narratives. In *Not Just Another Story*, we can trace two parallel genealogies –biological as well as professional, being constructed throughout the narrative, for the same set of protagonists. While biological genealogy is what holds the three generations of women together, it is professional genealogy that allows them to position themselves very distinctly. In terms of biological genealogy, even though there have been repeated instances of discord between Saraju-Malati and Malati-Lakshmi, at some point they cannot escape from the ties and there are moments of discovery where they genuinely acknowledge the presence and impact of their close ones. Hence, Malati realizes the worth of Saraju during certain crucial phases in life such as her pregnancy, phase of depression and more importantly after Saraju's death, while Lakshmi understands the reasons for the ways of her mother at a later stage in life. In terms of professional genealogy, it can be seen that a multitude of sex workers from varied backdrops and age groups exist as a close-knit family and they choose to follow certain community norms that are built on empathy, which in turn holds them all together. It is also striking that familial ties are built not only among females but also with male members associated with Sonagachi. The second half of the novel also hints on a different track of genealogy which arises out of Lakshmi's acquaintance with Paul and Zoya as they are desperate to adopt her, even though their circumstances do not permit them to do so. On the whole it can be seen that while self-discovery narratives may deal with generations distinctly, in saga fiction there is broader scope to view the convergences and divergences among generations as a whole, in order to record how genealogy and its types gets built and represented.

Conclusion

Even though Rita Felski's framework is based on that of a feminist bildungsroman, the stages described in the study can be mapped to female saga fiction. In Felski's words, "An investigation of the distinctive features of the feminist novel of self-discovery in turn reveals a number of illuminating parallels between the structure of recent fictions of female identity and narratives of emancipation shaping feminist ideology itself" (Felski 122). These parallels have been presented by this study in the recent Indian female saga fiction, *Not Just Another Story*. The text includes each of these stages as one leading to the other, in distinct as well as overlapping ways. This affirms that generically it opens an avenue to accommodate techniques similar to that of the female bildungsroman, to articulate the process of self-discovery. The major point of difference would be that the life courses of women is dealt with in a wider manner in female sagas. Thus, there is broader scope to understand the progression and articulation of self-discovery as being etched in the identities of protagonists across generations. In contrast to the linear framework of bildungsroman, saga fiction provides the possibility to account for the relative shifts in generations and thereby acknowledges the presence and impact of previous generations for the protagonists in the present time. On a larger scale, we can also find a female genealogy being built which is not just based on biology, but also a

professional and community-based genealogy. On the whole, they can be analysed diachronically, to understand the evolving status of women. In *Not Just Another Story*, the sex worker community is dealt with in detail across generations, to provide insights on how their ways of living and the representations of it, contribute to the compendium of female collectivity. A vital finding is that over the three generations, social perceptions and practices of sex work have gradually changed. The shifts are visible in the modes of being initiated into the profession, the choice of clients, bodily agency and in the exposure to the world outside Sonagachi. The shifts have been brought into practice by the current generation, but in doing so there is equal acknowledgement of the sustained efforts of the previous generations. A longitudinal cross cutting view of generations helps to perceive progression as a continued one and it is understood better in terms of genealogy being constructed. One of the most important aspects that this genealogy affirms is a steady headway in terms of female autonomy and inward development.

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Prefiguring Pandemic: A Study of Sidin Vadukut's Speculative Sensibility in *Bombay Fever*

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Abstract

Prediction of or preparation for any future event seems highly improbable in this uncertain world. Literature can recount the past and mull over the future. In his medical thriller *Bombay Fever* (2017), Sidin Vadukut imagines a nightmare necropolis. Interestingly, Vadukut's figment of imagination bears an uncanny resemblance with the world assailed by the only-too-real COVID-19 pandemic. As such, Vadukut's narrative appears to become a legitimate indicator of proleptic realism that transcends the boundaries of fantasy and fiction to creep into the world of facts and figures. *Bombay Fever* revolves around a fictional epidemic that ravages India, causing public unrest, destroying lives, and disrupting order. The imagined medical catastrophe that the novelist has represented possesses amazing points of similarity with the COVID-19 pandemic. In hindsight, Vadukut's *Bombay* may be remembered as a crystal ball that projected the COVID-riven India. COVID-19, as much as 'Bombay fever', disrupted normalcy in every conceivable way. The intended study will attempt to rationalize and problematize the novel as a creative text that has prudently speculated about the dystopian world, engaging with it from multiple angles while considering the possible and the plausible.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, 'Bombay fever', India, speculation, dystopia

Introduction

“This is work of fiction— outrage accordingly”

This line has been taken from Sidin Vadukut's opening address to his readers at the beginning of his novel, *Bombay Fever*, published in 2017. Little did he realize that his 'fiction', will appear to serve both as a precursor to and a simulation of the coronavirus-induced pandemic that India witnessed three years later, in 2020. And, little did he expect that the 'outrage' that he spoke about in a humorous connotation, shall ironically turn out to be a bleak forecast of the COVID-19 pandemic. In hindsight, Vadukut's proleptic realism seems to vouch for his authorial sensibility to speculate and strike a resonant chord with the foreseeable future. Although the real inspiration of the fiction was “the plague outbreak in Surat, cholera epidemics in Italy, the Spanish Flu in India”, the author himself said in an interview, “What I wanted across the book was plausibility. I wanted readers to think: *This could happen, and it could happen like this*” (Vadukut 367-68). Consequently, this speculative fiction becomes a “speculative mixing of past and present” raising “questions not only about what might happen, but also about what is happening” (Miner 23). It can be rightly said that to speculate is “to provoke modes of knowing and thinking that brought together the visible and the invisible ... [from] which man rises beyond the known to the unknown” (Savransky et al. 5). As in this case, speculation is generally based on influences of the past and experiences of the present. In other words, speculation is a process that prefixes the past and/or present

to the future, the known to the unknown, and the seen to the unseen. It can be said that “[i]n this literary world, it is not so much the case that the possibility of a future is ascertained from the point of view of the present, but that reality is always already entangled with the 'not-yet', the 'yet-to-come', the 'what-if', the 'already-here', that is, with a sense of the (im)possible” (Savransky et al. 8). Thus, the present or reality appears to be teleologically connected to an anticipant, indeterminate and unrealized but a possible future.

The imagined medical catastrophe in the novel, *Bombay Fever* has an uncanny resemblance with the COVID-19 pandemic in multifarious ways. COVID-19 as much as the eponymous epidemic, colloquially called 'Bombay fever' caused countless deaths, overwhelmed the healthcare system, led to lockdowns, enforced strict travel restrictions, and created a sudden flux of migration, which stranded several citizens. It enabled the spread of panic, disinformation, and stigma. It also disrupted the supply chain as well as facilitated hoarding, black marketing, misinformation, and indiscriminate consumption of pharmaceuticals. And to say the least, both outbreaks initiated the ritualized use of masks and hand sanitizer. Vadukut's microbial imaginaries are grounded in his visions of dystopian futurities— “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (Sargent 9). These dystopian analogies require careful deliberation to fully explore the uncanny similarities between the fictional 'Bombay Fever' and the factual COVID-19 pandemic. In the introduction to *Utopian and Dystopian Explorations of Pandemics and Ecological Breakdown: Entangled Futurities* (2024), it is aptly observed that “dystopias trigger fear for the worst”, “offer[ing] projections of potentially nightmarish futures” (Alberro et al. 7). They “express and encapsulate visions, fears, and risks typical of our time” (Isomaa et al. xv). In doing so, a dystopian writer strives to address pressing issues, such as impending disasters, imagining a world “worse than the ones we live in” (Baccolini and Moylan 1). The dystopian themes in the novel resonate with our experiences and anxieties related to COVID-19, offering a social critique of a catastrophe like an outbreak of a disease.

Land under Lockdown

In the novel, *Bombay Fever* the Central Government of India headed by Prime Minister, Nitin Phadnavis announced a complete lockdown of Mumbai after the outbreak of 'Bombay Fever': “‘All roads in and out of Mumbai are being shut down as we speak,’ Nitin said. ‘The airport will remain closed till further notice. And so will the ports. I have asked the chief minister to ensure nobody enters or leaves Mumbai for the time being’” (Vadukut 205). Completely isolating Bombay from the rest of the world effectively transformed it into an impenetrable ghetto, making it impossible for even the uninfected residents to escape. The public took the situation into their own hands and violently blocked the motorway from Mumbai to Pune even before the authorities issued the order to blockade Mumbai. Additionally, the author also

argues the benefits of a lockdown in curbing the spread of 'Bombay Fever'. The lockdown appeared to be effective, with only isolated cases of severe coughing reported in Pune. There were no new instances of patients experiencing severe symptoms elsewhere outside Mumbai. In Mumbai, the death toll appeared to level off at a fatality rate of 37 percent, which was still unacceptably high considering the number of cases. However, there was a glimmer of hope that the situation was not deteriorating further. During the COVID-19 pandemic, India became a macrocosmic reality of Vadukut's Mumbai in every possible way. To combat and contain the outbreak, Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi also declared a total lockdown of the whole country on March 24, 2020, for twenty-one days. Also, words like 'lockdown' and 'quarantine' are mentioned nine and four times in the novel respectively; as such these became a part of our daily vocabulary during the COVID-19 pandemic. The literary portrayal of the lockdown, which began with the 'Janta Curfew' on March 22, 2020, from 7 am to 9 pm, is effectively captured in the novels, *Pandemic 2020: Rife of the Virus* (2020) by Yash Tiwari and *The Blind Matriarch* (2021) by Namita Gokhale—referred to as the “*Janta Curfew* of fourteen hours” and “the Janta Curfew that the prime minister had imposed” (Tiwari 27; Gokhale 34). Both novels poignantly illustrate how the curfew, initially perceived as a temporary measure, gradually turned into an extended period of isolation, fear, and a redefined normalcy of the lockdown days.

Vadukut informs his readers about international travel restrictions imposed on India by other countries due to the emergence of 'Bombay Fever': “As soon as the Gulf Cooperation Council published a joint travel advisory, other international governments would announce their own notices” (233). Many countries imposed complete or partial restrictions on international flights from India during the surge of COVID-19. Some of these countries were Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Indonesia, UAE, USA, UK, Israel, and Singapore. Shobhaa De's short story “After This, Dubai?” from the collection *Lockdown Liaisons* (2020) explores the life of a woman who feels trapped at home with her husband and child, burdened by domestic work and childcare. Desperate to escape the monotony, she longs to leave everything behind and go to a relative's place in Dubai, but the lockdown prevents her from doing so. The lockdown society that exercised control of movement, closing public spaces, and enforcing quarantines, to limit the spread of the virus is somewhat atypical of the “‘carceral society' of Michel Foucault, as well as the restrictive societies described in many dystopian fictions” (Booker 12).

Trapped in Transit

Vadukut depicted how travelers were left stuck in the Saravli railway station as they boarded the train back to Mumbai just hours before the lockdown was so untimely declared. Without any prior information, travelers could not plan their way in or out of Mumbai. It is through the Twitter post of a teenage character named Priya Kewalramani, that Vadukut provides us with a grim picture of the scenario that we also witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic:

'Sucks to be a Mumbaikar! Nobody wants us anymore! ... The picture that accompanied it showed a large group of people women, men, children—huddled on the platform of a small railway station on the Konkan line. Some sat on the floor, eating from plastic bags and drinking from plastic bottles. Others slept on blankets and bed sheets. Most seemed exhausted (Vadukut 258).

As soon as the COVID-19 lockdown was declared, there were many people from unorganized sectors like small job-holders and migrant laborers who tried to flee to their villages from the Metropolitan cities. All passenger train services of the Indian Railways were suspended for twenty-one days after the initial lockdown was announced, lasting until April 14, 2020. This action was taken to prevent crowding at congested railway stations like Mumbai. But, disregarding all pleas for social distancing, many people, particularly migrant workers started swarming the railway stations to return home. The hardships faced by vulnerable, stranded migrant laborers and their families, working in large cities like Mumbai as they attempt to return to their distant villages, are vividly depicted in Puja Changoiwala's *Homebound* (2021).

In *Bombay Fever* the station seemed like a safer place with amenities like public washrooms and restaurants than trying to return to a blockaded Mumbai. But soon there was a shortage of food and drink at the station and the local traders saw the opportunity and profitably used the crisis to sell eatables like bread, milk, and biscuits at inflated prices. Although at a much wider scale, 'profiteering from pandemic' or 'disaster capitalism' also became an untoward reality during the times of COVID-19 in inflated prices of goods and services around the world. One may observe that *Bombay Fever*, with its trappings of a “[d]ystopian fiction thus stresses the importance of the ethical life at the same time as it expresses worries about the possibility of ethical actions” (Kivisto 42).

Stigmatization of Sickness

The perceived risk of coronavirus's threat to life enforced social exclusion of people who were perceived as potential disease carriers, thus turning it into a social stigma. The article, “Stigma and Discrimination During COVID-19 Pandemic” explains the psychology of the people behind stigmatization, victimization, and discriminatory behavior against patients or people suspected to have been affected by the Coronavirus: “The stigmatizing behavior in the present context is being guided by the famous adage “better safe than sorry” that explains how the fear of something unknown and uncertain accounts for the negative attitudinal reactions directed toward the people who are infected or are suspected and the ones considered responsible for the spread of the virus” (Bhanot et al. 1). In Puja Changoiwala's *Homebound* (2021), some migrant families were walking back home when they came across a young man lying sick on the road. Meher, the young girl who serves as the narrator-protagonist, watches as her father offers the man some water. Her mother quickly intervenes with a warning: “Don't touch him!’ Ma jumped. 'If he has

the virus, it'll jump onto you” (Changoiwala 80). Before ending up in this state, the man was thrown out of a truck by his fellow passengers, who feared he had contracted the coronavirus when he started feeling feverish.

In *Bombay Fever*, the author also acquaints us with these attitudes when an old man who came from Mumbai to an electronic shop in Pune's Jamuna Mall was yelled at and forcefully thrown out after a violent scuffle for coughing. Even the onlookers were reluctant to intervene and scrambled out of the store covering their mouths with their hands: “Somebody who was standing on the first floor and looking down shouted, 'That man has the plague! Don't touch him. Don't touch him! Run.' Dozens of customers bolted away” (179). These acts of dehumanization and stigmatization are indeed characteristic of a dystopian world order that promotes social isolation.

Medicinal Mayhem

We have witnessed indiscriminate hoarding, black marketing, and non-prescribed consumption of drugs during the surge of COVID-19. Drugs like Remdesivir were bought by people without medical consultation. Pharmacies created an artificial shortage by stocking huge volumes of essential medicines to jack up their prices. This was even though there was no medical evidence to prove that Remdesivir or any other drug increases survival rate or improves patients' deteriorating condition. On April 20, 2021, the Delhi High Court intervened and directed the GOI to avoid the stockpiling of life-saving medicines in the face of a record-breaking surge of COVID-19 cases in India. Also, there were rampant circulations of pseudo-medical prescriptions of drugs and other 'homely remedies' like salt-water gargling on social media platforms like WhatsApp to prevent COVID-19. In her short story “Doctor Doctor” from the collection *Lockdown Liaisons* (2020), Shobhaa De highlights the prevalence of quackery during the lockdown: “That Mrs. Gupta keeps sending me Whatsapp messages about drinking three gallons of hot turmeric water daily and biting into soaked peppercorns” (89).

Vadukut's novel also portrays the menace of hoarding and consumption of non-prescribed drugs. In the story, the pharmacies were running out of antibiotics like tetracycline and gentamicin due to indiscriminate stockpiling. A pharmacy was outrageously charging Rs. 2000 for a small pouch of these medicines. The hype around this 'panic buying', as the author suggests “was all because of those stupid WhatsApp messages”:

Ever since the outbreak had been first reported in the media, his friends and relatives had started forwarding messages with 'secret' remedies for the illness. Most of these were obviously ludicrous—like the one that claimed that gargling with hot, salted water every three hours would kill bacteria, or that the disease only affected those who were non-vegetarians (Vadukut 245).

Misinformation spread through social media platforms like WhatsApp is a significant driver of unsafe health practices. These unverified claims and dubious remedies, often shared by well-meaning but misinformed people, contributed to

widespread anxiety and irrational behavior.

Healthcare Crisis and Human Tragedy

When the number of COVID-19 cases escalated, the healthcare system in India came under huge strain. With the paucity of medical resources and no viable solution for the sickness, the hospitals and nursing homes were flooded with critically ill patients. Vadukut also depicts a medical crisis of a similar nature that brought the Mumbai healthcare system under great duress: “There wasn't a hospital, health centre or nursing home within the lockdown zone that wasn't bursting to the seams with patients. Most hospitals had long given up hope of managing the chaos. They could do little other than set up a row of tables, with doctors and nurses on one side, and a growing queue of patients walking past on the other” (238). When the rooms in hospitals were full, the entire hospital was turned into isolation wards while other patients were being treated with less priority. This picture is a grim reminder of COVID-19 isolation wards that were set up in large numbers to contain the virus at medical facilities all around the nation.

Death is an inalienable part of an outbreak of epidemic or pandemic that acts as a socio-psychological scourge claiming countless lives. The morbid image of “sheathed bodies in parking lots” in *Bombay Fever* portrays the depth of societal helplessness (321). Vadukut also portrays how the overwhelming surge of casualties during the crisis led to a collapse of the healthcare system: “By noon, on the eighth day, hospitals began to run out of space in their mortuaries. Bodies, sometimes of entire families, were stacked over blocks of ice. Death was everywhere” (342). As such the “dystopian experiences of pandemic and other virulent infection” may result in “illness, death, and the destruction of community” (Alberro et al. 7). The hospitals were turning into haunting scenes of despair, where medical practitioners worked tirelessly and succumbed to the crisis, as illustrated by the case of Dr. Arvind Bansal. The sheer volume of deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching millions worldwide and including many frontline medical workers, underscores its catastrophic impact on society and its healthcare systems. In *Homebound*, the author skillfully depicts the overwhelming death toll by describing mass graves set up near the hospital for coronavirus patients: “They've built mass graves in an impromptu cemetery near the hospital, where they're tossing bodies of all coronavirus patients” (Changoiwala 143). The overwhelming number of bodies and the infectious nature of the virus made it extremely challenging to perform last rites for the deceased.

The Ubiquity of Masks and Sanitizers

During the time of COVID-19, the usage of masks and hand sanitizer became a ritualistic part of our day-to-day activities. WHO had recommended us to “[c]over mouth and nose with mask” and to “clean ... hands with alcohol-based hand rub or preferably wash with soap and water” to curtail the transmission of the disease (Humphreys 2607). Vadukut also mentions the use of masks and hand sanitizer as preventive measures against the epidemic in a couple of instances. Firstly, it was

when a nurse at Dr. Bansal's clinic, Jacintha John reached out for a bottle of hand sanitizer from a drawer when the clinic was flooded by patients of 'Bombay Fever'. And, on second instance, was when the CM of Maharashtra, Nishtha Sharma was going to give an official press report to the media. Among them, many news reporters and media personnel wore face masks and held onto small bottles of hand sanitizer.

Conclusion

Vadukut's prescient portrayal of the foreboding atmosphere in the novel became eerily relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Alberro et al. observe that there are other “Utopian/dystopian works such as Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), Ling Ma's *Severance* (2018), Kevin Chong's *The Plague* (2018), and Sarah Pinsker's *A Song for a New Day* (2019) turned out to be eerily prescient” (4). Vadukut's astute and imaginative insight into the workings of an epidemic goes beyond mere happenstance. His imaginative correctness stems from his in-depth research on the intricacies of epidemics. He acknowledges this in an interview: “While writing this book, I first spent a few months trying to understand how epidemics work in theory and in real life. Especially when they hit cities. I tried to keep an eye on not just what happened at the cellular level inside the human body, but what happened at the level of individuals and groups” (Vadukut 367). This is primarily the reason why his novel seems like a *déjà vu* of the COVID-19 pandemic, provoking our thoughts when seen in this context. The minatory note that permeates through the novel was co-incidentally actualized during COVID-19. However, the imaginative sensibility of the author in understanding an epidemic is not merely coincidental, to say the least. The dystopian world imagined by the author was indeed like a cautionary tale for future generations—one that would be socially, culturally, politically, and economically more committed to human health while being prepared to face medical disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Spiritual Ecology –A Perspective on Kamala Markandaya’ *Two Virgins*

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Abstract

This paper explores the various shades of Spiritual ecology in Kamala Markandaya’ novel *Two Virgins*. First it defines the concept of Spiritual ecology and its various dimensions highlighting how it connects human beings and nature through the thread of spirituality. Nature is not merely a resource, but an entity that has a sacred value of its own. The novel makes the reader ecologically aware and this ecologically awareness is spiritual awareness. It begins with the traces of Spiritual ecology and also ends with it. It raises various issues related to environment and human beings like pollution, clashes of rural and city life, exploitation of earth and woman, killing of animals etc. This paper makes an attempt to raise human beings’ consciousness towards all sentient beings so that all may live in a harmonious relationship making this Earth a happy place for living.

Keywords: Spiritual ecology, environment, pollution, anthropocentrism, nature

“*mata bhumiḥ putro ’am pṛthivyaḥ*”(Earth is my mother and I am her child)
(*Atharvaveda* 12.1.12, qtd. *In Light of Indian Intellect* 184)

“speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongue”(The Lorax 29)

The world is part of our own self and we are a part of its suffering wholeness... And the deepest part of our separateness from creation lies in our forgetfulness of its sacred nature, which is also our own sacred nature (“ntroduction” *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* vii)

These quotes highlight the profound impact of ‘Nature’ on human life. Jiddu Krishnamurty feels nature as part of spirituality and so urges people to reconnect with the natural world reminding them: “If you hurt nature, you are hurting yourself”(The New Indian Express).

Environmental awareness gained momentum on April 22, 1970, with the inaugural Earth Day. This significant event sparked the rise of concepts such as Spiritual ecology, Ecofeminism, Deep Ecology, Ecological Activism, and Ecological existentialism, which became central to environmental research. As environmental concerns increased, philosophers began to connect nature with spirituality. If nature is connected to spirituality, people will respect and worship its objects. Thus, this spirituality will help in saving the environment from total destruction. Hence there was the need of Spiritual ecology which could solve the environmental problems to some extent.

Human beings and nature are inseparable. They are interconnected somewhere and

the thread that connects them is spirituality. This thread of spirituality with connecting link of ecological awareness forms what is known as Spiritual ecology. Spiritual ecology takes 'nature' not simply a resource, but a living being with a sacred value of its own. Spiritual ecology recommends healing the relationship between human beings and the earth and for this one needs to follow a holistic approach. The cause that leads to ecological crisis is the spiritual crisis resulting in a kind of disconnection from the earth's sacredness. Ecological well-being is as significant as is human beings' spiritual and emotional well-being. Hence spiritual ecology explores the connection between spirituality and the environment seeking to fuse spiritual values and awareness into environmental discourse. In the words of Fritjof Capra, "Ecology and spirituality are fundamentally connected because deep ecological awareness, ultimately, is spiritual awareness"(qtd in Rachel Wheeler 1). While sharing his views about spiritual ecology, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee exhorts the people to serve and love this Earth thus:

Spiritual ecology is about a shift in consciousness, a return to the sacred that embraces and infuses all of creation... in order to heal an Earth polluted and ravaged by our present civilization, the principles of spiritual ecology need to be put into action. This is the calling for those who have the energy and passion to act from a place of service and love for the Earth. (266)

Les Sponsel considers that "the original spiritual ecologists are indigenous peoples with their beliefs and corresponding practices regarding spiritual beings and forces in nature" (20). Notable theorists and figures who have contributed significantly to the development of Spiritual ecology are Thomas Berry, Joanna Macy, Vandana Shiva, Thich Nhat Hanh, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Arne Naess, Steven C. Rockefeller, John C. Elder, Bron Taylor, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, John Grim, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, Stephanie Kaza, Satish Kumar, David R. Kinsley, Roger S. Gottlieb, Bron Taylor, Leslie Sponsel and G. Bingham. They have highlighted the significance of integration of ecological wisdom with spiritual consciousness in order to address the environmental crises.

Some fundamental postulates, which Spiritual ecology follows, include: sacredness of nature, interconnectedness, reciprocity and care, spiritual growth, critiques of industrialism and environmental degradation, ecofeminist concern, and symbols of healing. Nature becomes sacred. Rivers, trees, animals etc. are taken to be spiritual beings. Rituals, prayers, and reverence become essential for showing respect to nature. Human beings, animals and plants remain inseparable. There is 'oneness' with nature. Anthropocentrism is critiqued as it results in industrialism, technology, and environmental degradation. Spiritual ecology shares connections with Ecofeminism, linking the exploitation of nature with the suppression of women and calling for gender equality in environmental care. It advocates for gratitude, interdependence, and healing in fostering a balanced relationship between human beings and the earth. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee states: "spiritual ecology" articulates the need for an ecological approach founded in spiritual awareness rather than

religious belief”(311). These spiritual ecological parameters find expressions in the works of many authors. Kamala Markandaya is one such novelist who has skillfully woven the elements of Spiritual ecology in her novels.

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004), whose real name is Kamala Purnaiya, is a very significant novelist by virtue of her rich contents and forceful narrative designs. She registered her presence in the domain of Indian English novel with *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), a novel of rural India. Her career of writing eleven novels from *Nectar in a Sieve* to *Pleasure City* (1982) and posthumously published *The Bombay Tiger* (2008) reveals the graph of “the ascending order in contents and techniques” making her place “as a serious novelist”(Arora 8) secure. As she is connected to the roots, she has mentioned her ecological concerns almost in every novel. She has attempted to capture the balance between human beings and lands through her presentation of human relationships with the natural environment. Her two novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Coffer Dams* demonstrate the connection of ecology and spirituality. The disruption of this connection results in ecological and spiritual crises. When human beings lose respect for the earth, they lose a part of their spiritual identity. She seems to suggest the ecological harmony through the recognition of the spiritual essence of nature. Nature is not just a resource to be exploited, but a living entity which deserves reverence and care.

This spiritual ecological connection can also be traced in *Two Virgins*, Kamala Markandaya's eighth novel which was appreciated for the presentation of the village versus town life as well as criticized for its obscenity. Leaving apart some scenes, the novel is serious as it offers a message for women and becomes a novel of Spiritual ecology because of its presentation of the village life and ecological concerns. The novel is the story of two sisters—alitha and Saroja who live in a village. Lalitha is smart, beautiful and ambitious while Saroja is simple and traditional. Village becomes a hell for Lalitha who wishes to go to the city to become a film star. She gets the opportunity when the film director Mr Gupta comes to the village. She leaves the village and enters the city where Mr Gupta exploits her sexually and makes her pregnant. Saroja never falls a prey to Devraj in the city as she has learnt the traditional values from her parents and aunt Alamelu. When she returns from the city with her parents, she meets her friend Chingleput who also reveals his evil intention of physical exploitation through his embrace. She draws away from him and passes through the fields to go to her house. Through the story of these two sisters, Kamala Markandaya gives the message of traditional values of purity and innocence otherwise the city life is ready to devour ambitious and glamorous girls like Lalitha. The village life with its rural scenery offers some traces of Spiritual ecology.

The novel begins with these words:

Chingleput ran the only sweet shop in the village, it was static, even moribund, during monsoon, but in the ten months' dry season it became mobile, trundled around on the little cart Chingleput had decked out himself. (*Two Virgins* 1)

The very beginning reveals the ecological influence in the use of the words like “monsoon” and “dry season.” Chingleput runs a sweet shop in the village. This shop

remains static when it is a monsoon season, but as soon as monsoon is over, the shop becomes mobile. The novel also ends with Chingleput when Saroja goes to meet him for sharing her experiences of the city. She considers him as her friend, but when this friend wants to take an advantage, she leaves him as she has learnt from the experiences of her sister Lalitha. She feels sad because she finds that Chingleput is also like other men. Tears come to her eyes, but here it is nature who helps her.

She could hardly see for the tears that were cascading down her face, she couldn't have told for whom they were falling, for her, or Chingleput, or for what was ended. After a while she didn't try. She thought instead of when she was older, felt the wind in her face and the tears drying as she skimmed down the path that led past the fields to the house. (*Two Virgins* 193)

As she loves nature, nature loves her in return. Nature is with her even in her hard time of sad experiences. Like a friend, nature seems to dry her tears. Saroja thinks of leaving neither village nor nature. Nature is sacred, so is Saroja. Nature feels the feelings of human beings if they also have the heart to feel her. Saroja respects nature with the very spirit of sacredness. This feeling becomes a substantial point of Spiritual ecology.

Kamala Markandaya has realistically raised the problem of environmental pollution in *Two Virgins*. She is grieved to see the people polluting the rivers. Rivers are sacred and are taken to be the lifelines for the farmers. In *Two Virgins*, there is one river in which the ashes of the dead persons are thrown. This river is known as Rangu' river. The novelist writes ironically: "The river had a name of its own but after Rangu it became Rangu' River, although it took a lot of people away besides him" (*Two Virgins* 6). Besides the ashes, tins and bottles, pots, wheels, chains of old cycles are also flung into the river. Such things make the river more polluted. The novelist writes: "A lot of things got chucked in the river besides ashes. People flung tins and bottles in it, and bits of broken mud pots, and the wheels and chains of ancient bicycles past redemption even by the blacksmith. The dhobi' donkey went in it too, after it had died" (*Two Virgins* 28). Polluting the river like this reveals the fact that the human beings have lost the feeling of sacredness of the river. If they had thought of its sacredness, they would have not made it polluted. The need is to put the spiritual thoughts in the mind of the people so that they may think before polluting the river. River is a part of this earth and human beings live on this earth. How can they be different or separate from this earth? This feeling of thinking separate from the earth is the root cause of environmental pollution. Hence the need is to educate such people. Here the role of Spiritual ecology begins.

Spiritual ecology has some links with ecofeminism. Earth is taken to be the Mother Earth. Exploiting earth in the name of progress and advancement of industrialization is not proper. To exploit women sexually is also as bad as exploiting the earth or nature. Here woman and nature or earth are interlinked. Only for his sexual pleasure, Mr Gupta spoils the life of Lalitha by making her pregnant. If nature or earth is used for minimum or bare needs of human being, it is good. But it is not proper to exploit her for fulfilling the greed and lust. Pregnancy is a boon, but it becomes a curse if it is

done with the feeling of lust and greed to the extent of use and throw. Appa, the father of Lalitha discusses the matter of pregnancy with the family members. If there are people like Mr Gupta who leaves woman after making them pregnant, there are young people who are ready to accept the fruits of such passion because only woman is not responsible for this state.

He said there were young people coming up who would refuse to crucify passion or the innocent fruits of passion. Fruits of unbridled lust, cried Aunt, she was beside herself. Of nature, said Appa. Then society will tame the beast! Aunt shouted. Nature is not beastly! Appa shouted back. (*Two Virgins* 154)

Those who are nature loving people are not in favour of abortion because they think that such babies are “fruits of passion” but Aunt Allamelu is not ready to accept the plea as she believes that such babies are “fruits of unbridled lust.” Appa considers such babies as fruits of nature and shouts at his sister Aunt Allamelu when she calls nature beastly. Man may be destructive, but nature never becomes so. Appa seems to be the follower of Spiritual ecology when he calls such babies as the babies of nature. Spiritual transformation is possible only through nature. Those who live in harmony with nature and treat it as a mother or friend, find happiness and contentment. Saroja experiences profound changes within herself while living in the village. She feels suffocated when she comes to the city where she is a fish out of water and where everyone is looking at women with the feeling of exploitation and possession. Her roots are in the village and so she never wishes to go anywhere from here. She gets her identity and belongingness in the village. If one gives value to nature, nature also equally responds. This is true in case of Saroja. The novelist writes:

She wanted to go home. At home there were fields to rest your eyes on, colours that changed with the seasons. The tender green of new crops, the tawny shades of harvest, the tints of freshly turned earth, you could have told the week and the month of the year by these alone. You knew each grove, each acre, each homestead on it, who owned them, and the owners of the names. You knew every pathway. No one could ever be lost, not by trying. The wells, the fields, each had its name: the well beside the water meadow, the well by the banyan, the field next to the mill. You always knew where you were. You knew who you were. (*Two Virgins* 187-188)

Saroja feels connected with all the objects of nature. This interconnectedness becomes the hall mark of Spiritual ecology. She does not consider all the objects of nature as separate but as a part and parcel of her being. The well, the fields, grove, the banyan etc. are interconnected to her life. She feels oneness with all these objects of nature.

Animals and plants are the part of a larger part of the web of life. When human beings are the caretaker of this earth or nature, they take care of animals and plants equally. As land is considered to be a resource, it has become a medium of exploitation in the name of progress and advancement. Animals have equal rights to share this earth, but they often deprived of even the most basic needs. On Appa' land there stands a tamarind tree which has become a resting place for monkeys. The boys, along with Saroja, love this tree as they use it for climbing and swinging. For Amma it is

valuable for “enormous quantities of tamarind for her pickles and for sale”(*Two Virgins* 11). In Saroja’s house, a *tulasi* plant which is kept in a brass container emits a “strong, delightful smell”(*Two Virgins* 85). This plant is considered to be of religious significance. The novel also mentions mango trees where parrots settle and enjoy the feast of mangoes. Amma loves animals and does not like if anyone harms monkeys. She feels guilty when a baby monkey gets badly hurt. Saroja also feels agonized when she sees the condition of the baby monkey. She is so innocent that she thinks that the crying of the baby monkey will cause Manikkam’s wife “milk spurting”(*Two Virgins* 12). She imagines that when the baby cries, milk begins to spurt in every mother—e it animal or human being. She is pained to see “the star-shaped hole” in the monkey’s thigh. Amma takes care of this baby monkey wondering what crimes she committed in the past. She connects it to her previous life. Aunt Alamelu also blames Amma for this and thinks that she has got the punishment. This monkey episode clearly reveals that these women are animal-loving. These women also love other animals like crows, cobras and buffaloes. Saroja listens to the “sleepy cawings”(*Two Virgins* 15) of the crows which take rest in the tamarind tree. Amma shares with everyone that animals are “ellow creatures”(*Two Virgins* 70). Aunt Alamelu calls cow as “holy Mother Cow”(*Two Virgins* 71). Animals like cobras are not properly treated as they are put into the basket where they cannot make any movement. “cobras suffered a lot too, stuffed into stuffy baskets and their poison teeth pulled out one by one, but their eyes remained lustrous”(*Two Virgins* 38). Kamala Markandaya echoes the very basic Indian spirit of protecting the sentient beings. Even the constitution talks of animal protection. Multiple animal protection laws have been made to prevent the cruelty to animals. Meneka Gandhi has worked much for animal rights and welfare. Literature is full of such instances. Coleridge’s oft-quoted lines: “He prayeth well, who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast / ... He prayeth best who loveth best, all things both great and small”(47-48) are on everyone’s lips. George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* are the great instances which talk of animals and call for a reassessment of human relationship with non-human animals.

Kamala Markandaya is sentient enough to take care of all living or conscious beings whether they are human beings or animals or plants. She shows such feeling through the character of Gangamma who is mentioned as Manikkam’s wife in the novel as she does not like anyone to call her by her real name. Gangamma is different from her husband Manikkam who wants to sell the old and scaggy cow because she is of no use for him. As he is a person who has no moral or ethical concern, he wants to sell the cow to a butcher. But his wife stops him from doing so as she is a Hindu and being a Hindu, she will not allow him to sell it for some rupees. The cow is a sacred animal which is considered as “*Gau maata*.” Saroja reveals love of Manikkam’s wife for her old cow thus:

In the evenings she (Saroja) watched Manikkam rounding up his three cows to milk them. There was a fourth, but it was barren. Manikkam wanted to sell it to the butcher, old and scraggy though the cow was and only dogs could have chewed

through the gristle, but his wife wouldn't let him. She was a good Hindu, she told him, and never would consent to cow slaughter, but the real thing was she was too fond of the old scraggy cow. (*Two Virgins* 3)

Cow's status as *Gau Mata* is deeply embedded in Hindu mythology, scriptures like *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, and cultural practices. She is referred to as *Kamadhenu*, the divine cow in the *Padma Purana*. Krishna, in *Bhagavata Purana* is often presented as a cowherd. He becomes an ideal of the intimate bond between humans and cows. In some texts like the *Manusmriti*, the protection of cow as moral duty is mentioned. Not to talk of the cow only, all creatures have their rights. Man can use animals but has no right to disturb their integrity. In *Two Virgins*, Lalitha, though has got education in the western school, believes like her other family members. She says: "Men used animals, of course, but you did it with circumspection, the injunction was upon you not to encroach on their integrity" (*Two Virgins* 147-148).

Kamala Markandaya has also presented a critique of anthropocentrism at various points in the novel. Manikkam's wife shares with Saroja when her calf dies. She will have to deceive the cow "by the smell into thinking that it was alive and the milk would continue to flow" (*Two Virgins* 33). When Saroja asks her to watch the calf being stuffed, she refuses saying: "it is not a pretty sight and at your age you should only see pretty sights like birth which is miraculous, it turns your thoughts to God" (*Two Virgins* 34). Saroja hates the idea of stuffing the calf's corpse. She believes that the calf has "an entitlement to its mother's milk" (*Two Virgins* 50) but her brothers make her understand that they are living in a society where animals are not offered any entitlement. They also inform her that the calves are taken away from their mothers when they are born. These calves are "but in wooden crates so small that they could not turn round, could not even turn to lick themselves clean" (*Two Virgins* 50). Such beasts are tethered and are not allowed to see even sunlight or eat grass. Saroja calls this treatment as "wicked madness" (*Two Virgins* 51). This is purely done for the sake of money. Saroja is animal lover who still believes that calves have also rights and to deprive them from their rights is wrong. She, with her sister Lalitha takes the responsibility of taking care of the buffalo. Lalitha is not so serious as Saroja is in her duty. The buffalo eats the hay which is covered in plastic sheet. It has no sense to keep off the mouldy food and can eat plastic as well. Kamala Markandaya puts all the traces of Spiritual ecology in her character by making her considerate towards all—be they human beings, animals or birds or plants. When Saroja returns from the city and sees the buffalo, she showers her love over it imagining that she has the sole right of taking care of it now. "he buffalo won, it had lustrous, irresistible eyes and a formidable bellow. She caressed the animal, it would be in her sole care now, promised to look after it from that day on" (*Two Virgins* 192). Kamala Markandaya's novel *Two Virgins* clearly demonstrates the stances of Spiritual ecology through her characters, particularly Saroja. Saroja seems to represent the very essence of Spiritual ecology. Rafid Sami Majeed and Eiman Abbas El-Nour rightly observe nature in *Two Virgins* and conclude thus:

The Indian nature is like a virgin girl who refuses to violate her virginity by

intruders, and that it does not hesitate to show force and violent reaction if its virginity is subjected to any humiliation and aggression, on one hand. On the other hand, nature welcomes any person who preserves its dignity even if he /she is a foreigner. It treats him / her as part of it and one of its elements to who it is a mother. It offers him / her all her wealth and makes him / her feel the warm welcome to its motherly bosom that holds its little child who needs his / her mother to sponsor and protect. (*AlAdab Journal* 80)

The problem is that man has become money minded and egoistic so profoundly that he wants to have control over nature and thinks himself superior to it. He separates himself and thinks himself as separate identity. He gets advancement in materialistic life, but remains an island without having any peace of mind. He will remain in this condition as long as he does not realize his relationship or connection with all the objects of this earth or nature. Man has to recall what he has forgotten—is own sacred nature as well as the sacredness of this earth. Kamla Markandaya in *Two Virgins* has beautifully explored the relationship of spirituality and the environment while giving the message of integrating the moral and ethical values in consideration of the Earth and human beings. Saroja likes trees, loves her village, follows values, considers all as beings, cares animals and plants and respects nature. She is the virgin of this soil—the Earth. She is Saroja, the meaning of Saroja is 'otus' which grows in the mud. This mud is the materialistic world, but like lotus she is not affected by it. Hence the novel is the novel of education—ducation of Spiritual ecology that one needs to love this Earth and all the sentient beings that have life. Harmony is the lost somewhere in the materialistic world and the need is to search for it for the well-being of this world. What Sandra Ingerman writes is true to all beings. "The Creator created the earth and life out of universal love. As the creator, it is time for us to love the earth and all of life. With every breath and every step, we take on this great earth, let us join our hearts together in love" (241). In brief, human beings may recognize that they are sacred and spiritual to the core and also consider that all beings on this earth are sacred. This is the only solution which Spiritual ecology offers and the novel *Two Virgins* is the best instance.

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Forest Culture and Adivasi Lives in Sheela Tomy's *Valli*

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Abstract

Ecology and ecological issues have been quite manifest in literature as well. Sheela Tomy's *Valli* (2022), trans. Jayasree Kalathil, is one such novel that addresses concerns related to forest and Adivasi lives. The novel explores the nuances of the essence of the wild by narrating the story of the interior Wayanadu, a nature-endowed entity in Kerala, and shows how the tribal community should have a say in guarding the forest terrain and the policy decisions relating to it. By narrating how the lives of the forest dwellers are often manipulated by the system and by the people with vested interests, the author critiques the structures of power that control their lives and change them in an undesirable manner.

Keywords: Forest Culture, Consumer Culture, Structures of Power, Adivasi lives, Exploitation

Forest Culture: Environmental Concerns in Sheela Tomy's *Valli*

The environmental concerns have constantly engaged the attention of various bodies/forums all over the globe in view of the ominous dangers that have imperilled human life. The creative consciousness of the Litterateurs is seized of the grave dangers that have affected human beings, fauna, and flora, and that is finely and subtly articulated in numerous forms of literature. In the Indian context, Sara Joseph's novel *Gift in Green* analyses how the encroachment of corporate forces has wrecked the pristine beauty of the village Adi and its inhabitants. Likewise, Hansda Sowendra Shekhar's *The Adivasis Will Not Dance* narrates stories that pitchfork the concerns of the Adivasis, as the impact of development on Adivasi lives and gradual erasure of their unique identity. *Becoming Me* by Rejina Marandi is a novel about a coming-of-age story of Adivasis in a society encircled by exploitation, discrimination, and all kinds of prejudices. Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* tells a story of survival of how Adivasis treat their land as a place, with which is intertwined their identity.

Sheela Tomy, a prominent Malayalam writer, registered her presence on the literary scene with her debut novel *Valli* in 2020. The novel, which delves into the eco-critical aspects of Wayanadu's bio-rich environment, earned her the prestigious Cherukad Award for Malayalam Literature. In 2022, *Valli* was translated into English by Jayasree Kalathil and received significant recognition, being shortlisted for the JCB Prize for Literature. Sheela Tomy's literary work is deeply rooted in ecological concerns and reflects her commitment to nature and environmental justice. Her stories consistently highlight the intricate relationship between humans and the environment, often addressing pressing ecological issues. In addition to *Valli*, she has authored a short story collection titled *Melquiadesnte*

Pralayapusthakam (Melquiades's *Book of Floods*), published in 2012, which also garnered critical acclaim. She has been recognized with several awards for her short stories, including the Abu Dhabi Arangu Award (2007), the Puzha.com Short Story Award (2008), and the Doha Sanskriti Award (2012). Her most recent work, *Nadiyodu Peru Chodikkaruth* (*Don't Ask the River Her Name*), released in 2024, won the Muthukulam Parvathy Amma Literature Prize and the Maniyoor Balan Novel Award. An analysis of Sheela Tomy's literary contributions reveals a consistent adherence to the principles of environmental justice as her novels explore the complex interplay between human activity and the natural world.

In *Valli*, the story is unveiled partly through the diary writings of Susan. Susan's narrative emphasizes the intention behind such a forest writing at the outset itself saying "The Book of Forest...I began to write for the forest that is on fire, for the people who have no voice, for the language that has no script . . ." (Tomy 11). The forest and the forest dwellers were always left in the margins with no voice. The voicelessness of such a category of people is being taken for granted. As Spivak states in "Can the Subaltern Speak:"

Since only the privileged people in society can represent, effective representation of the subaltern subject can be futile. This will always keep the subaltern in the terrain of margin, the silent center, the center of voicelessness. (Binebai 208)

It is apt to analyze the novel placing it in an eco-critical context as it highlights concerns related to ecology and tribal life. Eco-critical perspectives bring out nuances of ecological devastation caused by human intervention in the forest terrain, in the name of industry and development. Since the novel also analyses issues about tribal life, reflections on the politics of power are apt for examining the hideous ways of manipulating tribal lives. As observed by Cheryll Glotfelty in her introduction to the first *Ecocriticism Reader*,

you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never know that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know that there was an earth at all. (Glotfelty xvi)

In contemporary times ecological concerns have seriously engaged the environmentalists due to the earth's support system constantly under stress in terms of exploitation of the earth, the tribal localities, and unnecessary human intervention in eco-sensitive terrains. *Valli* unravels in the agrarian idyll of Kalluvayal, a village buried deep inside the Western Ghats in Wayanadu, in northern Kerala. Wayanadu is a terrain of forests and folklore, enriched with the culture of Adivasis, the indigenous group of people. Wayanadu was Bayalnad once in history denoting its connection as the land of the paddy fields. *Valli* tells the tale of the people who have bonded closely with the forest. The novel also shows the way of life of the indigenous tribe who were passionately guarding the forest. Wayanadu became a haven for traders, colonialists, and migrants from the lowlands, for its timber and tourist industries. As the forest dwindled, exploitation of the Adivasi way of life became widespread, thus wreaking havoc on Adivasi culture, their way of life, and language, reminiscent of the warning

in Cheryll Glotfelty's words: "As environmental problems compound if we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem" (Glotfelty xxi). The novel offers a graphic account of how human-made problems disrupt an area that was abundant with the beauty of the forest.

From Harmony to Struggle: Adivasi Lives, Forest Bonds, and Exploitation

Valli spans the time between the 1970s and the present and is the tale of four generations who made this land their home. The story is unveiled through a diary left by Susan, the daughter of Thommichan and Sara, who were both teachers. In the diary, Susan shares her life experiences and thoughts with her daughter, Tessa. While the story unfolds, one can glimpse the tales of the land and its inhabitants, highlighting themes of mutuality and exploitation, repression and resistance, despair, and contentment. These narratives are as extensive and captivating as the forest itself once was.

When the narrator Susan reminisces about her life in Kalluvayal, we get a picture of the life in forest. She remembers "A childhood spent in Kalluvayal, amidst forest people and forest myths more astonishing than fairy tales, listening to stories of rivers, mist, and earth, to secrets of the forest in which truth and lies, history and imagination, beliefs and superstitions mingled inseparably together" (Tomy 11). In the novel, Kalluvayal emerges as a haven where forests, rivers, and water are integral to the lives of individuals like Susan. Forest becomes an image of the great provider, filling life with its abundance, and soulful experiences. One gets a taste of the eco-sensitive way of life while unravelling the ecological perspective of the people in Kalluvayal which was integral to their way of life.

Basavan, a character in *Valli* comments on how the Adivasi community regarded forest with a sense of ownership. He says "Kaadu kakkinjaveyaanju kaasuna udamay! Those who guard the forest are the owners of the forest!" (Tomy 231). Observing how individuals like Basavan protect the forest, Padmanabhan Mash comments, "He and his people know every corner of this forest. They are its true owners, they who protect it" (Tomy 231).

It is this sense of ownership that is lacking in the contemporary culture devoured by exploitative consumerist practices. A critical glance at the contemporary culture is mandated in an attempt to compare the essence of the Adivasi culture with consumerism. If we argue that Adivasi culture is not appropriate and practically not viable to the contemporary scenario, the question is, what prevents us from maintaining an eco-sensitive perspective that could be practiced along with the flourishing of contemporariness. The structures of power often create forest laws that focus solely on environmental care, neglecting how Adivasis have traditionally lived in harmony with the forest and considered it an integral part of their lives.

Padmanabhan Mash in the novel is the character who becomes the voice of the people and forest. He became the endeared 'mash' (teacher) to the people of Kalluvayal with his tireless belief in humanism and his deep understanding of the forest. He says:

those who know the forest understand their irrelevance. Those who look down from the top of a peak realize that they are only a small mark in the universe. If we expand our hearts like the sky, we will be able to hear the language of the soil, the rain the mist, the language of the forest itself.” (Tomy 232)

The language of the forest, the soil, and the rain is decipherable with a soulful attempt to bond with nature. In “Some Principles of Ecocriticism,” William Howarth critically observes that ecology helps us realize that life communicates, exchanging coded streams of information that carry meaning and intent, as long as we can accurately interpret the messages (Howarth 77). In the novel, the forest and its rugged landscape are deeply intertwined with the very existence of the people of Kalluvayal, shaping their lives and identities. However, the allure of development and consumerism gradually seduces them, leading to the unravelling of their once-harmonious way of life. As they are drawn into the glittering promises of progress, the resulting changes not only devastate their environment but also disrupt the natural rhythm that has long sustained their community.

The forest narratives draw our attention to autobiographies authored by writers from tribal communities. In C.K. Janu's autobiography *Mother Forest*, she reflects on how the forest serves as a nurturing mother to the tribal children, providing for their needs and alleviating their anxieties and fears about the outside world. In her autobiography, she also laments the transformation of the Mother Forest to Department Forest in the contemporary scenario. (Janu 31)

Valli also presents the context of how the tribal society was exploited by the feudal lords, the Jenmis by granting them only meager wages or demanding hard and free labor. The Adivasis are pushed to the state of being a subaltern, with their existence in the margins embracing an experience of voicelessness. As Foucault says, “Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. . . . We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries” (1982, 216). As Foucault argues, new forms of subjectivity are being imposed on the Adivasi communities, to perpetuate their identity as people in the margins. The story reveals intricacies of the structures of power that repress people who are exploited by Jenmis and the laws of the land. In Padmanabhan Mash's words, “Landowning farmers and Jenmis take Adivasi people on lease as laborers and make them work on their lands. It is called 'vallippani'-laboring in return for valli, a share in the crop. Bonded labor, that's what it is. Slavery has been abolished, and there are laws about minimum wages, but here this happens even now” (Tomy 31).

The title of the novel, *Valli* is a term in Malayalam that signifies both "valli," slender shoot or a vine, often associated with climbing plants or creepers, and "vallipani," which means laboring in exchange for a share of the crop. In literary contexts, "valli" can symbolize growth, resilience, and connection to nature. This duality evokes images of lush greenery, forests, and flora, while also highlighting the plight of tribal societies compelled to toil for landowners in return for meagre wages. The author seeks to draw the readers' attention to the seemingly unrelated yet interconnected

nuances of the term.

The novel also portrays how people who protest and Adivasis, are unjustly labeled as Naxalites to suppress their voices, revealing the brutal ways in which power structures manipulate and control marginalized people. Foucault's observation on the discourse of power is relevant here. He says: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart"(Foucault 1998: 100-1). He suggests that power is not simply imposed top-down by institutions but circulates through discourses that shape social reality. The narrative hints at the discourse of power that attributes labels to protesting voices and people in the margins, to remain vulnerable to experiences of domination. The manipulation and brutal treatment of individuals like Padmanabhan Mash and Peter—who are falsely labeled as Naxalites—expose the underlying agenda, the discourse of power carries. 'The label' was part of a tactic used by people in power to discredit and suppress opposition to the forest township construction, a project that Padmanabhan Mash and others were actively standing up against. The narrative unveils how the repressive tactics of the system inadvertently expose its vulnerabilities and motives. This evidences how the system uses false labels to repress dissent, making innocent people vulnerable to manipulation and injustice.

To elucidate the exploitation of forest dwellers throughout history, the novel presents the narrative of the Veda Princess, highlighting the longstanding nature of this oppression. The story begins thus:

There was a time when the forest was yours, when this soil was yours, only yours.

Then they came, cheated, and took it for themselves. (Tomy 162)

The folklore of the Veda King serves as both a testimony and an analogy for a form of internal colonization, in which forest dwellers were displaced from their land through manipulative and exploitative tactics. Additionally, it highlights how the local folklore reflects historical truths regarding the transformations, the land has undergone. These narratives echo the suffering and exploitation inflicted upon the land by mainstream society.

The novel also critiques contemporary culture's preoccupation with pilgrim tourism, highlighting its disregard for ecological principles and the inherent rhythms of the environment. A group of people in Kalluvayal plans to convert areas of the forest, including a women's place of worship and a sacred temple, into a tourist destination. The proponents of this tourist site symbolize those who support human encroachment on forest territories. As Kalluvayal transforms into a bustling pilgrimage center, the landscape shifts dramatically, reducing it to a mundane place devoid of its former beauty, and turning the Adivasis displaced. Frequently, tourist sites and pilgrimage centers, established for profit, result in the degradation of the environment, turning once-pristine areas into sites of dirt and pollution. When profit-driven development centers are established in forested areas, they devastate the environment and displace tribal societies.

Another novel, *The Adivasis Will Not Dance* by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar,

focuses on how development policies and plans result in the displacement of Adivasis, ultimately rendering them marginalized and voiceless. He says:

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. Which other job should he be made to do? Become a servant in some billionaire's factory built on land that used to belong to that very Adivasi just a week earlier. (Shekhar 185)

Shekhar was pointing out how the honour and dignity of the Adivasi farmers are at risk when constructions are made in the forest, which is their home. As reported by the *International Alliance of Indigenous-Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests*, “Building the industries, mines, townships, dams, forest depots were both by decision and default imposed on the tribal people...the economic path chosen by the rulers has effectively marginalized the tribals in their own domain” (qtd. in Munshi 8). The plight of tribal societies, forced to live as displaced individuals in their own land, raises ethical questions to modern society on human rights.

The novel delves into the struggles of forest dwellers and marginalized communities, highlighting their resistance against encroachments on their private spaces. Characters like Basavan symbolize the voice of defiance, standing firm against the system's threats, to protect their forest land. They oppose the plan to transform Kalluvayal into a tourist destination, fearing it will degrade the environment, particularly with the construction of a pilgrimage center. Despite their spirited resistance—voicing slogans in defence of the forest—the novel ultimately depicts how the overpowering forces of the system silence these voices.

The narrative shows that:

The encroachers had no difficulty getting hold of the necessary paperwork to acquire forest land. The area was to be 'developed' by the Tourist Academy, and the government would do whatever it took to ensure its work went smoothly. (Tomy 310)

Valli critiques the consumerist perspective of modern society, which thwarts the ecological approach and way of life significantly. Criticism is also aimed at the system, that wields power through framing and controlling the laws of the land. The question here is: *Who holds the authority to make decisions?* Specifically, who determines the fate of marginalized communities or makes critical choices about the environment? While encroaching on forest land is legally prohibited, there are mechanisms through which laws can be reshaped or manipulated to serve the interests of those in power. This raises concerns about justice, equity, and the influence of power on legal and environmental frameworks.

Adivasis all over the world experience different phases of displacement due to bureaucratic intervention, policy change etc., and the situation is represented in the novel as well. As mentioned, they are chased away using different manipulative techniques. As cited by Giddens, “...power as being 'generated in and through the reproduction of structures of domination” (Giddens 160). Literature that depicts the forest and its inhabitants also uncovers the power structures that marginalize

indigenous communities and neglect ecosystems.

Mahasweta Devi, the renowned Indian writer, has consistently addressed the challenges faced by the Adivasi community in her works. In her interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, she explains the motivation behind her focus on writing about the tribals thus:

I have to document this period which I have experienced because it is going away, it is vanishing...these people had no resistance against the cultural invasion that took place. It is cultural, it is economic, it is connected with the land, with everything, they want to rob the tribal of everything. (Devi xii).

Devi's fiction explores the cultural devastation the Adivasi community faces from different segments of society. She critiques the unsustainable practices of corporate entities, that harm the ecological balance and the livelihood of forest-dwelling communities. She highlights how development projects, mining, and industrialization threaten their lands, resources, and way of life, causing a 'cultural invasion' on the tribal society.

Likewise, C.K Janu draws a moving picture of the plight of the tribes to fight for basic rights such as the availability of drinking water, and a place to live. Sharp criticism against the projects implemented for the cause of the tribes is also critiqued, pointing attention to the vain promises made and executed, benefiting no one. She says:

We who dug the earth and found water at will are now reduced to agitating for drinking water supplied through pipes. ... But civil society and parties looking for power had to cook up projects apparently for our people, but actually to fulfill the needs of the civil society, siphoning off all that money and transforming our people into good-for-nothings. (Janu 47)

In Jothibai Pariyadath's *Mayilamma: The Life of a Tribal Eco-Warrior*, the narrative highlights how, under the tribal woman Mayilamma's leadership, people protested against the Coca-Cola plant in Plachimada, Kerala, due to concerns over drinking water contamination. This also serves as an example of how corporate forces, supported by the ruling system, consistently attempt to deprive people, especially the tribal community of their land, livelihoods, and water resources while causing environmental disruption.

Similarly, in *Valli*, Sheela Tomy draws the picture of the transformation of Thambrankunnu as a township with amenities for a tourist site. With the onset of developmental waves, the region experienced a phase of ecological decline. This representation functions as both a critique of reckless developmental policies and a realistic depiction of a location's deterioration, in the wake of unconsidered project implementations.

The narrative shows how the soul of the forest and its dwellers are stifled in the relentless pursuit of progress. The entire picture is scary as to see how drastically a place, which was home to many, can change in the wake of unmindful construction projects.

In the blink of an eye, Thambrankunnu disappeared, and a township and tourist resorts appeared in its place. Brokers bringing booze, sex, and other amenities into

'homestays' sauntered between the township's grey buildings, competing and fighting with each other. Young, unemployed men skulked into the darkness under the bridge looking for mind-addling drugs, as the yellow wind of development blew across the line of vehicles in the parking lot created by filling in the fields beyond the culvert. (Tomy 318)

As the author herself observes in the introduction, racing blindfolded towards development can impact the environment and life. The author's intention is not to oppose development itself, but to encourage us to embrace sustainable development, which represents a more thoughtful approach to progress. There is a sense of anxiety and pervading gloom of a dark age looming large in *Valli*, which persuades us to reflect on the impact of consumer culture on ecology, forest, and forest dwellers. As we race ahead, somewhere in our innermost realm, we experience an unexplainable sense of loss, at the green aspect of life. A critique of the structures of power that unmindfully ruin the 'green' and the rights of the people in the green, is quite significant also as a means of self-reflection. It prompts us to question our values and the choices we make in the name of progress, urging us to seek a more harmonious balance between development and the preservation of our natural world!

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A Stylistic Analysis of K. N. Daruwalla's "History" and S. K. Sharma's "Connaught Place"

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Abstract

K. N. Daruwalla is one of the popular Indian poets and his voluminous works have been widely studied by the readers. The application of the literary and linguistic devices in his poems reveals abundant use of figures of speech, imagery, urban and rural landscape, symbolism, religion, nature, mythology, philosophy, regional dialect in his poems. Through his poems, he emerges as a social observer, reformer and critic. On the other hand, S. K. Sharma is another budding poet who has published three books of poems. His poems have attracted attention of the literary readers and critics. His poems are widely read and receive high volumes of critical opinions. The reviewers opted the same track of pointing out literary devices and figures of speech in his works. This research paper is an attempt to analyse poems of these two contemporary Indian bards and find out the stylistic deviations between their styles of writing poetry. It deals with the stylistic point of view through comparative analysis of morphological, grammatical and phonological selections and arrangement of words in their poems. The modal suggested by David Crystal and Derek Davy has been used for analysis of the selected poems.

Keywords: Grammar, morphological level, phonological level, style, stylistics.

Introduction

The term "Stylistics" is derived from 'style', while 'style' is from the Latin word 'stilus' which refers to a small sharp stick used for writing on wax tablet (K. Wales, 397). The term style is used in abundance in the domains of learning, fashion and industry. In the domain of learning, the term "style" generally refers to the 'manner of expression' in writing and speaking. For instance, every poet has a unique style of creating his own web of words. Katie Wales defines style as, "At its simplest, style refers to the perceived distinctive manner of expression in writing or speaking, just as there is a perceived manner of doing things" (397). Writing in comic or ornamental style is also one of the examples of the style of writing a text. Leech and Short define style as, "The way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, and so on" (9). However, every creative field or work has its own individual unique style.

Stylistics, one of the branches of linguistics, deals with the study of the language of a text that plays a pivotal role. Paul Simpson defines stylistics as, "To do stylistics is to explore language, and more specifically, to explore creativity in language use" (3). In his opinion, for stylistics, language is important because linguistic structure constitutes of the various patterns, levels and forms which are important keys of the function and analysis of the text. Michael Burke defines stylistics as study and analysis of literary text (1). In Stylistics, the central phenomenon of analysing the

text trills round the language. Narrowly speaking, stylistics is a discipline that studies styles of the language used in literary works from the linguistic perspective. Therefore, an inference can be drawn that stylisticians in unison recite that, stylistics is studied under the umbrella of linguistics. However, the tools of stylistics as morphology, phonology, syntactic, semantic, discourse analysis investigate the creativity of the language in a text. Though stylistics is a branch of linguistics and it naturally acquires the tools of linguistics for analysing a text yet it is considered one step above linguistics. While conducting stylistic analysis of a text, these tools help in analysing a text objectively and make interpretation a meaningful study.

Research Methodology

In any research study, research methodology plays a significant role. It helps researchers determine the methods, its application and interpretation. In this study, analytical research method has been adopted while comparative research method has been used to deduce distinctions in the styles of both the poets and draw conclusion. Crystal and Davy in their book *Investigating English Style*, defined elaborately style and stylistics and suggested a modal for analysing a literary text which can either be a verse, novel, short story, article of newspaper. One of the aims for selecting stylistics to study a text is its objectivity. The items selected for analysing include morphology, grammatical, phonology (15).

Discussion

Morphological Level:

The 'morpheme' is the minimum individual unit in grammatical analysis. It includes lexis in 'free form' or 'bound form'. The complex words comprise of morphemes and one or more affixes as 'missing, stronger'. In the view of Dominique et al, "An affix that is attached at the end of its host is called a *suffix*; at the beginning of its host, a *prefix*, inside its host an *infix*; at the beginning and end a *circumfix*" (11). Analysing a text at the morphological level means analysis of words and structure formation, compounding, affixes and coinage. Compound words in English language can be created by adding 'nouns with nouns', 'adjectives with nouns', 'adjectives with adjectives', 'noun with verb'. The other three types of compounds are open compounds, closed compounds and hyphenated compounds. Further, Code-Switching is one of the stylistic devices in which a bilingual speaker switches language systematically to comprehend an idea and keep originality of the thought.

Grammatical Level:

Grammar is the central part of linguistic system. Grammar comprises of set of rules by which the words are arranged according to the syntax to give a desired meaning. It includes parts of speech, syntax analysis and it focuses on understanding the logical meaning of a sentence or part of a sentence.

Phonological Level:

Phonology is the study of the sound system of a language. According to Katie Wales, "Phonetics is the well-established term for the technical study of the vocal aspects of

the language: speech sounds and how they are produced articulatory phonetics transmitted (acoustic phonetics) and perceived (auditory phonetics); also, prosodic features of speech such as intonation and stress” (317). Stylistic features of a text are affected by segmental and supra segmental features of the language. Segmental features include vowels and consonants used in the text while Suprasegmental features include rhyme, stress, tone pattern. Phonology also includes: Alliteration, Consonance, Assonance, Phonaesthesia, Asyndeton, Polysyndeton.

A Morphological Analysis of K. N. Daruwalla's “History”

The grammatical inflections in the poem “History” include circumfix 'unwashed', 'uncombed', 'unconcerned', 'returning' (239), 'uncomplaining' (240). The minimal unit is 'wash', 'comb', 'concern', 'complain', 'turn'. The prefix 'un' and suffix 'ed' is added to the verb lexemes to make them adjectives. The addition of prefix 'un' to the lexemes expresses negativity in the text. While suffix 'ly' is added to 'general' (239) to make adjective/noun 'generally'. Suffix 'er' is placed to 'brown' /adj, to make adjective of superlative degree 'brownier'. The suffix 'er' is added to 'light' /noun to make it adjective 'lighter' (239). In the 'hungry', 'strong', 'young'/adj, suffix 'er' is added to make adjective and comparative 'hungrier', 'stronger' (page 239), 'younger' (240). The poet has used genitives 'The Raja's infantry', (240) 'moth's stained-glass wings', 'swami's bed', 'tiger's lair' (241). The 'Infantry of Raja', 'stained-glass wings of moth', 'bed of swami' and 'lair of tiger' shows the genitival possession of two nouns of one possessing another. The superlative/adjective 'oldest', 'latest' (240), 'forgotten' (239) the suffix 'est', 'en' has been added to the adjective 'old', 'late' and 'forgot' to form the superlatives. The poet has the unique quality of creating compounds with wide variety. The open compounds in the poem which are noun with noun compounds are as 'grain bins' (240), 'sulphur dawns' (241). The noun with verb compound includes: 'sunlight buzzing' (241), 'peasantry watched' (239). The 'buzzing' and 'watched' are verbs and blends with 'sunlight' and 'peasantry' to form compound. The adjective with noun compound 'unwashed bodies' (239) is one in which 'bodies' is head. It is a noun, and it qualifies the adjective 'unwashed'. The closed compounds used in the poem are formed by placing noun with noun which are as 'matchlock', 'horseback' (239), 'crossroads' (240). The hyphenated compounds used in the poem are, 'Stronger-thewed' (239), 'Chaff-fires' (239), 'Side-stepping', 'pell-mell' (240), is a noun with noun addition. In 'stained-glass wings', 'dry-leaf fires' (241), 'stained' and 'dry' is adjective while 'glass wings' and 'leaf fires' are nouns. The chain of compound has been used in the line 61 'moth's stained-glass wings' in which adjective 'stained' has been accompanied with three nouns 'moth's, glass, wings.' The poet is a bilingual speaker and has used code switching which are as 'trigamous Raja', 'malefic Rahu' (240), 'nautanki', 'swami', 'shikari' (241), these vernacular words used in the poem as it has been written to appeal Indian conscience and to enhance the vocabulary of universal readers.

Grammatical analysis of K. N. Daruwalla's “History”

'It generally had an aquiline nose (line 2)

and browner hair (line 3)
and a lighter tone of skin. (line 4)'

In these lines the nose which is aquiline, hairs that are browner than brown, and skin that has a lighter tone; the 'aquiline', 'browner' and 'lighter' are adjectives and they are modifying the noun 'nose', 'hair', and 'skin'. The specific use of the adjectives in the clause forms a compound sentence.

'In the meantime the bigamous or trigamous Raja

while countering the intrigues
of his oldest wives against
the latest addition to the harem (line 26-30)'

The epithet 'bigamous', and 'trigamous' act as premodifier for noun 'Raja', draws, the imagery of sensual pleasure has and 'latest addition to harem' shows raja's lust for women.

'and no one knows if the Raja
died or fled; history
loses interest in defeated kings. (line 45-47)'

The participle 'loses' is acting as the post modifier for noun 'history' and the participle 'defeated' acts as premodifier for 'kings.' The semicolon has been employed between the two independent clauses, which are closely related in thought in line 45-46. The noun 'Raja' is missing or has died, that refers to the 'defeated kings' and is lost from the 'history'.

Analysis of Daruwalla's poem “History” on Phonological level

'History always came on horseback (line 6)
The horsemen were always hungrier; (line 10)
And avoiding the shadow of Saturn (line 34)
and the boys brought the cattle home (line 57)'

The consonance in the word 'History' and 'horseback' in line 6, 'horsemen' and 'hungrier' in line 8 begin with letter 'h', while 's' in the words 'shadow' and 'Saturn' in line 34, 'boys' and 'brought' in line 57 begin with 'b'. These alliterative measures beautify and depict the poet's creativity in the poem.

'and sunlight buzzing on the moth's stained-glass wings?
And the drummer boy who fought with the landlord
and ran away to become a bandit?
And the pretty village girl who eloped
and was found later in a city brothel?
And the missing *nautanki* dancer (line 61-66)'

The repetition of the conjunction 'and' depicts the poet's use of anaphora in the poem. It has been used six times (from lines 61-66). It is used at the beginning of the lines connecting phrases, clauses, and interrogations. The conjunction 'and' has been cohesively used to link the clauses. This is done to highlight the poet's thoughts, and his concern for the social condition of the society, aftermath of the

attack and its effect.

'they put a fresh coal in the hubble- bubble
and warmed their hands before chaff-fires. (line 19-20)
charged pell-mell. (line 39)'

There is use of assonance in which repetition of the vowel 'u' in 'hubble-bubble', 'a' in 'and, hand, chaff', and syllable 'e' in 'pell-mell' and different constant sound. The use of these repetitive measure makes the lines rhythmic. In line 20 the syllable 'a' has been used as the stressed syllable which emphasizes upon the main ideas of the stanza.

The poet has used stylistic device polysyndeton in which the repetitive use of conjunction 'and' in quick succession connects the nouns in the stanza. In 'And spark and powder and matchlock' (line 9), the conjunction 'and' connects three nouns 'spark', 'powder', 'matchlock'. The use of conjunction 'and' used before the beginning of these lines (61-66) is connecting the clauses to make a continuous flow of the thought rhythmically.

Morphological analysis of S. K. Sharma's poem “Connaught Place”

Grammatical inflections in the poem, the suffix 's' has been added to the singular lexemes 'blast', 'flutter', 'refugee', and 'horse' to make it plural as 'blasts', 'flutters', 'refugees', 'horses' (82). The suffix 'ly' has been added to adjective 'rightful' to make adverb 'rightfully' (83). Circumfix is used as 'reminds' (82), the prefix 're' and suffix 's' have been added to infix 'mind' to form a singular verb 'reminds'. The suffix 'ed' has been added to the verbs 'pull', 'dispute', 'wander', 'line', 'paste', 'wonder' to form the past participle 'pulled', 'disputed', (82), 'wandered', 'lined', 'pasted', 'wondered' (83). The genitive 'Queen's way' (83) in which 's' is used with noun 'queen' to create the sense of possession that is 'way possessed by the queen' though 'queen's way' is the name of a way in Connaught place, rather than way possessed by the queen. The 's' is added to verb 'keep' and 'lead' to make singular 'keeps', 'leads' (82). The suffix 'ing' has been added to the lexemes 'expand', 'beckon', 'spread', 'vie', 'hoodwink', 'look' to make the present participle or gerund 'expanding', 'beckoning' (82), 'spreading', 'vying', 'hoodwinking', 'looking' (83). The suffix 'est' has been added to the adjective 'old' to form superlative 'oldest' (82).

Code-Switching used in the poem are as 'Hanuman', 'Jeevan Bharti', 'Janpath' (82), 'batik' (83) whose translation is not possible as they are nouns. In the line 33 “*Jootis, mojris, kohlapuris*”, poet's use of this stylistic device creates the visual imagery of the types of shoes available in the market. The use of regional dialect in the poem shows the regional effect on the poet.

'The inner circle and the outer circle, (line 9)
Wandered here year after year (line 48)'

The poet has used the stylistic device polyptoton, 'The inner circle' and 'the outer circle' which has the repetition of the root 'circle' with two adjectives 'inner' and 'outer' that make two compounds. The repetition of the word 'year' in the line 48 with the preposition 'after' gives the meaning every successive year. To the best of the

researcher's knowledge 'inner circle' and 'outer circle' are the places situated at Connaught Place. The poet has also employed alphabetism under which “Connaught Place” has been reduced to 'CP'. It is shortening of the title to initials used in the first line: “The Georgian architecture of CP”. The natives of Delhiite address “Connaught Place” as “CP” in short which depicts, the poet's regional dialectical understanding and its implementation in the poem.

The poet's use of open compounds like 'imperial glory, disputed structure, oldest inhabitant' (82) consists of two independent lexis. The 'glory, structure and inhabitant' are heads and nouns. While the first element 'imperial, disputed, oldest' are modifiers and they receive the most stress in the compound. The poet has used chain of compounds 'circular central love' (line 21). The above phrase consists of adjectives, 'circular', 'central' and noun 'love'. In fact, they are open compounds. The noun with noun compounds used in the poem are as 'heritage festival 'metro station' (82), 'state emporium' (83). The 'heritage', 'metro' and 'state' receive the most stress in the compound while 'festival', 'station', and 'emporium' get less stress. The lexis 'Shopkeepers' (83) is a plural noun with noun compound and it is a closed compound with no space, pause or hyphen. The inflection 's' is used to make it plural and has been applied to the word 'shopkeeper' thus derivation appears inside compounding. The compound word 'carefree' (83), in which 'care' is verb and 'free' is adjective. Such type of compounding is rarely found. The poet has used hyphenated compounds in the poem, for example, 'Ear-rings', and 'Wall-hangings' (83). These are nouns with noun compound and the major stress falls on first element 'ear' and 'wall.'

Grammatical analysis of S. K. Sharma's “Connaught Place”

'The inner circle and the outer circle (line 9)
discrimination between high and low
Indian and foreign, male and female; (line 36-37)'

The poet has used the antonyms in the form of binary adjectives like “inner/outer, high/low, Indian/foreign, male/female”. These have not been used by chance but these antonyms have been skillfully employed forming phrases resulting in compounds.

“*Jootis, mojris, kohlapuris*, drums, horns,
Stamps, coins, postcards, trinkets, necklaces,
Ear-rings, books, wall-hangings, carpets;” (line 33, 34, 35).

The poet has employed stylistic device asyndeton by omitting the conjunction 'and'; all the plural nouns are connected and separated with commas. Though there is no grammatical device as clause, phrase, verb, adjective, which need analysis or parsing. They are good examples of 'signifier' and 'signified'. They draw images clearly and transmit the meaning.

Analysis of S. K. Sharma's poem “Connaught Place” on Phonological level

Have a center where people of all hues. (line 10)
Like a lover (line 19)

All roads lead to the circular central love. (line 21)

Driven like the sun by seven horses (line 22)

Looking for lessons, home and friends. (line 49)

The repetition of the consonant sound 'h' in 'have' and 'hue' in line 10; 'l' in 'like' and 'lover' in line 19, 'lead' and 'love' in line 21, 'looking' and 'lesson' in line 49; sound 's' in the word 'sun' and 'seven' in line 22; 'c' in the word 'circular' and 'central', all are the alliterations used by the poet in the poem. The poet has used anaphora in the poem, 'The inner circle and the outer circle' (line 9), the lexeme 'circle' has been repeated with the antonym 'inner and outer' with different grammatical functions. In 'wandered here year after year (line 48)', 'year' has been repeated, and connected with the preposition 'after' forming a phrase which means 'every year' with the same grammatical function.

The poet S. K. Sharma has used asyndeton which is one of the stylistic devices. The use of such devices makes the verse more dramatic and effective by speeding up its rhythm. In the lines 33, 34, and 35 of the poem, the fourteen nouns separated with commas create a chain of images of the wares. The use of such style speeds up the rhythm of the poem as well. The application of such rhetorical devices is not by chance, but it is a lexical skill in which message is conveyed without using any grammatical tools. It shows the oratory skill of the poet and emphasizes the gravity of the subject matter and the poem.

Conclusion

K. N. Daruwalla's major selection and jargon in his poem "History" is complex, compound and the chain of compounds makes his poetry ambiguous. Having mastered the technique of compounding, he innovates new words to enrich his poetic vocabulary and enhances the meaning of the poem. His unique and oblique style of using words makes his poems enigmatic and less accessible to the reader with less or no literary background. He uses a wide range of morphological inflections in the poem which provides space for in-depth analysis of the poem. His selection of lexis, since he is a poet born and brought with Indian sensibility, uses code-switching to make fluency, originality and assimilate his ideas in the poem. Since he was born and brought up in the colonial India, he elicits influence of British style of writing poems but his selection of problems and issues for poems is vital. On the other hand, S. K. Sharma in his poem "Connaught Place" uses simple and compound words and sentences. His selection of lexis leaves the reader with less space to analyze the morphological inflection in the poem. He is taught and brought up in the post-independence of India. He does not elicit influence of western writers and their styles of versification. His selection of day-to-day words is in vernacular language which makes his poems reader friendly and easily accessible. His style of writing showcases originality of diction, issues, problems, and deals with the Indian sensibility.

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**Affirming 'Self' Representing Dis/ability in
Naseema Hurzuk's Life Narrative, *Naseema: The Incredible Story***

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Abstract

Autobiographical narratives as a medium to communicate and come out as a “counter discourse” (Couser,1997) become important for their merit to challenge the stereotyped notions of disability. Likewise, Civil Rights and Feminist Movements, the disabled people, and mostly activists of the Disability Rights Movement, have also started to narrate their struggles as a part of documenting disabled experiences throughout the world. As Mintz (2007) argued, “life stories told from the margins” do particular kinds of cultural work. Life-writings of Indian disabled women give an opportunity to “investigate . . . multiple, intersecting, unpredictable, and inassimilable identities” (Miller,1998) and they do full-swing activism through their organizations as well.

The title of Naseema Hurzuk's life narrative, *Naseema: The Incredible Story* itself suggests that it is indeed an incredible story, a narration of her challenging life and marked by significant events and occurrences. She has struggled and survived in an Indian environment which lacks infrastructure and necessities for the disabled. The book celebrates her struggle for respect, ability and also initiates a discourse on the intersectionality of women and disability in India that has hitherto not been much discussed. This study explores how life-writing becomes important to challenge stereotypes especially stories told from the margins and the way Indian disabled women represent their life experiences through their autobiographical narratives.

Keywords: Life-writing, Self-representation, Intersecting identities, Social-barriers

'Life writing' expands the domain of literature, encompassing what was formerly considered as autobiography or biography. The word refers to the process of transcending and blurring the traditional boundaries between autobiography, biography, and fiction, as well as the various methods of representing oneself in literature. The process involves creation of a storyline, with the narrative being the fundamental embodiment of traditional knowledge. The recounting of one's life experiences allows both the writer and the reader to get a more comprehensive understanding of themselves and their connection to the world around them. It is the process of sculpting and creating a life story, using both real events and fictional elements to produce a sense of authenticity and truth. Life writing is a domain where the portrayal of one's life and identity is a source of conflict, and provides a sense of empowerment. It is the conferring of an identity on ourselves; it is a controlling, ordering, and possessing of one's life through the language of narrative as Roland Barthes notes, “. . . narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative . . . it is simply there, like life itself” (qtd. by Green 50)

The explicit crossing and blurring of generic boundaries in life writing demonstrates

the genre's rebellious nature and its embrace of life as a mysterious and complicated phenomenon. Life and self are characterised by fragmentation and constant change. Life writing explores the various linguistic aspects that emphasise imagination and personal experiences, all of which are formed from memory. The act of writing about one's own life and self is a matter of much debate due to the innate division between the writer and the subject. The writer must detach themselves and observe themselves as a separate entity, and then write about their life in the first person as if they were an outsider. Autobiography, in this context, is the act of constructing a sense of self, expressed through language by means of a speaking 'I'. The term 'life writing' encompasses several methods of writing about an individual's life experiences. It can be viewed as a novel approach to granting individuals ownership and validation, as well as reclaiming agency for those who have been disadvantaged based on gender, class, and race. Life writing is a site for females to explore subjectivity and, as Linda Anderson explains, to assume authorship of their own lives (Green 52). It is a genre that allows for inclusivity, creating linkages that are not hierarchical and allowing for the expression of different voices and the development of multiple interpretations of the work. Engaging in lifelong writing and reading entails introspection and contemplation of both, oneself and the surrounding world. In Susan Green's opinion, "Life writing permits multiple subject positions, challenging the notion of a single truth or meaning; as a hybrid genre it transgresses borders, resisting containment and an easy definition (52)." Different forms of opposition to the dominant culture are expressed in autobiographical writing. An autobiography, in its traditional sense, is a kind of literature that uses words to represent the self and document one's life experience. It also serves as a means for feminists to critically reconsider the fundamental formation of identity. James Olney writes that "memory and narrative ... the two major epiphenomena of consciousness – are the dual defining conditions of our being human (qtd. by Green 53)." He further asserts that the mutual connection between memory driving the narrative and the narrative serving as a means for remembering is a clear and essential aspect that can be observed throughout history.

Of late, a shift is observed, from the life tales of well-known individuals to those of the subaltern and marginalised. The genre of life writing has become highly significant in attempting to comprehend and examine those who are impoverished and usually do not assert themselves. Autobiographies serve as a means of social protest for the marginalized sections of society, enabling them to voice their grievances and challenge the long-standing injustices and oppression they have endured throughout history. This category includes the Dalits and women in India. When discussing the Dalits, the non-Dalit writers have written about them, but without personally experiencing their circumstances, it was difficult to comprehend their plight. Autobiographical narratives by Dalits have become an essential component of Indian literature. The primary focus of these narratives has been the subaltern awareness, the pursuit of identity, and the endeavour to proclaim their dignity. Additionally, they have embraced autobiography as a method to express

their emotions and write about their own experiences, limited by their little academic education. Conversely, women have also been an oppressed group within the patriarchal social hierarchy in India. Women's autobiographies primarily focus on their interpersonal interactions. However, the experiences of Dalit women, who belong to a group that faces double oppression in society - first as women and then as Dalits - are a significant part of life writing in India.

Similar to the Civil Rights and Feminist Movements, the activists of the Disability Rights Movement across the world (mostly disabled people) have also started to narrate their struggles as a part of documenting disabled experience. In the process, they felt the need for self-representation because their representation in literary writings by the non-disabled has downgraded their dignity and reduced them to a mere object of self-pity and charity which Couser explains as, "like life writing by other marginalized groups—women, African Americans, and gays and lesbian—life writing by disabled people is a cultural manifestation of a human rights movement; significantly, the rise in personal narratives of disability has roughly coincided with the disability rights movement" (457). Life-writing by/of disabled positions disability is a complex socio-political-cultural phenomenon which gives a certain authority to an individual to narrate his/her life-experiences. It is not just a life story but the agenda is to assert their rights of respect, acceptance, and dignity.

A social movement emerged in the 1970s to address the challenges that confronted those with disabilities. The disability movement, like many others that seek to affect social change, has frequently focused on male-dominated issues. Examples of concerns that have received greater attention than challenges related to childbearing include male sexual concerns and work. The goal here is to get to the bottom of the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities. Women with disabilities are a neglected and unexplored subset of the disabled population, despite the widespread focus on disability and specific impairments. The disability autobiography should be viewed as a deliberate and strategic response to the long-standing distortion of disability in socio-cultural environment. It is not merely an act of self-expression, but rather a direct challenge to the prevailing narrative.

With the development of disability studies, writing by disabled people has been encouraged. Their work accurately depicts the issues, challenges, and anguish of people with disabilities and their determination in overcoming them. Several of these writings are *One Little Finger* (2011) by Malini Chib, *Naseema: The Incredible Story* (2005) by Naseema Hurzuk, *The Other Senses* (2012) by Preeti Monga, the first visually impaired aerobic trainer of India, *No Looking Back* (2014) by Shivani Gupta, a disabled activist, *River of Time* (2017) by Jeeja Ghosh, who has cerebral palsy, *Beaver Mole Mother Monk : An Incredible Life Story of an Extraordinary Survivor* (2022) by Yasmin Sawhney, a visually impaired, *The World I Live In* (1908) by Helen Keller, *My Left Foot* (1954) by Christie Brown, who had cerebral palsy, *Face to Face* (1957) by Ved Mehta who was visually impaired and so on.

G. Thomas Couser traces the emergence of disability life writing as a widely embraced genre in the past three decades. He argues that every disabled memoir has

the potential to be constructive as it allows mainstream audiences to have a “mediated access to lives that would otherwise seem opaque and exotic (458).” However, he is careful to distinguish between disability memoirs those he sees as politically encouraging and those that he sees as reinforcing negative preconceptions about disabled people. He says, “cultural representation of disability has functioned at the expense of disabled people, in part because they have rarely controlled their own images (Couser 456).” Over the past few decades, there has been a noticeable shift in the field of life writing, particularly in the genre of autobiography. In the 1970s, it was challenging to come across any depiction of the majority of disabling conditions in autobiographical literature. Due to this shift today, there are multiple portrayals of different conditions. Equally noteworthy, and even more outstanding one can discover autobiographical narratives of circumstances that would appear to exclude any possibility of providing first-hand experiences.

Persons with disabilities have recently emerged as the primary voices in conveying their own experiences, particularly through disability autobiography. They confront their previous subjugation by assuming the position of the subject. When analysing this literature, it is crucial to contemplate the political and ethical aspects related to the depiction of disability, specifically in relation to the idea of 'representation' because in such narratives it is “a political as well as a mimetic act, a matter of speaking for as well as speaking about” (Couser 458). Disabled people have gained greater visibility in public spaces and have been more inclined to be open about their disability. Nevertheless, their presence in the public sphere only grants a restricted form of accessibility. When life narratives are meticulously devised and executed, they can provide the audience with a regulated opportunity to comprehend lives that might otherwise appear strange or unknown to them.

This study explores how life-writing becomes important to challenge stereotypes especially stories told from the margins and the way Indian disabled women represent their life experiences through their autobiographical narratives. It also analyses the story of Naseema Hurzuk as the expression of life-experiences of Indian disabled women at the intersectionality of women and disability identity and their resistance against the attitudinal and infrastructural barriers in Indian society towards disability.

Naseema: The Incredible Story is a personal account of Naseema Hurzuk who became paraplegic, despite having lived a normal and healthy life until the age of 16. This genuine account reveals her challenging personal struggle, her endeavours to confront societal apathy towards disability, astonishing bureaucratic hurdles, lack of fundamental physical accessibility and inclusivity, and ultimately her resilience and determination that propelled her to become a model of strength for other individuals with disabilities that Couser puts as, “One of the social burdens of disability, then, is that it exposes affected individuals to inspection, interrogation, interpretation, and violation of privacy” (Couser 458). Her text is a telling account of the countless issues faced by the unmarried disabled woman before the enactment of first disability legislation, PWD Act 1995 (Boopathi 132). She is the founder of Helpers

of the Handicapped in Kolhapur, Maharashtra and has received various accolades for her remarkable contributions.

Focusing on Naseema Hurzuk's life-writing, the title of the paper suggests that it is indeed an incredible story, a narration of her challenging life and marked by significant events and occurrences. It is a “story of despair, catastrophe, loss, excess, suffering, and relentless cure-seeking” (Garland-Thomson qtd by Ferri, 2269). The book serves as a tangible testament to her ardent commitment, “Never cry, never lose heart.” Naseema Hurzuk embodies a narrative of unwavering determination and resilience that has inspired numerous individuals in similar circumstances to confront life with confidence and self-reliance. Her autobiography titled *Chakachi Khurchi* (2001), which means 'a wheelchair' was released in Marathi and is translated into English by Aasha Deodhar and is released by Viveka Foundation. This wheelchair became her constant companion since the age of sixteen, when a misdiagnosis of her back pain led to paraplegia. She documented her battles and challenges with disability, her aspirations for the empowerment of disabled people, her tireless endeavours to bring them to fruition, her unwavering resolve, honesty, and rigorous self-control. Naseema has been using a wheelchair for the past three decades. She had observed her own body succumbing to defeat and enduring wounds filled with blood and agony. Persistent sleep deprivation, excruciating agony, spasms, and the inability to perform routine bodily activities, she experienced numerous episodes of extreme distress. However, she remained resilient and unwavering in her commitment to assist persons with disabilities.

Women with disabilities sometimes feel that to be a male in our society is to be strong, assertive, and independent whereas to be female is to be weak, passive, and dependent. Society takes disabled women as helpless, asexual and pervasive and perceives their silence in other ways. Therefore, Ferri reiterates that “Multiply situated and grounded in embodied experience, much of contemporary disability life writing can and should be read as challenging a tangle of oppressive ideologies and destabilizing any claim to a normative or fixed center (2270).” Remembering an incident with a gardener who was helping Naseema at the office, she expresses her agony,

Dear God, I thought, what is this gardener up to? Perhaps I should stop taking his help and get my friends to take me instead . . . My bewilderment gave way to irritation. Besides, my silence was being misinterpreted and this I discovered when I began to sense an uneasy proximity and a few extra touches on my shoulder as he wheeled my chair. (85)

Persons with disabilities endure not just physical pain but also mental anguish. The contours of society can be unpleasant. Hurzuk's experiences have evoked a range of emotions, alternating between intense wrath and overwhelming sadness. An individual has the capacity to display great cruelty and lack of compassion but her humanity remained intact, undeterred by even the most brutal and devastating experiences what Couser observes as, “disability auto biographers typically begin from a position of marginalization, belatedness, and pre-inscription. Yet one can see

why autobiography is a particularly important form of life writing about disability: written from inside the experience in question, it involves self-representation by definition and thus offers the best-case scenario for reevaluation of that condition” (458). Naseema shares one of her experiences when she was rejected for a job at a bank due to her disability,

at the end of the interview I was asked,

'How will you pick up the ledger and how will you come to the office?'

I promptly replied, 'the peons can help me with the ledger and I can engage a helper to bring me to the office.'

...They'd asked me only personal questions, not a single question on general knowledge, an area in which I was weak. There seemed little reason for me to fail the interview. I waited and waited for some news. Then, to my horror, I came to know that appointment letters had already been sent and all the vacancies filled. I didn't even get the opportunity! (81)

Disabled women experience higher economic, social, and psychological hardships than their non-disabled female and disabled male counterparts. Although we recognize that disability imposes financial burdens on both males and women, we contend that double discrimination disproportionately affects the latter. The disabled woman is often regarded as an entity determined by her disability, with her personal choices, sexual orientation, and way of life being regarded as outcomes of her disability rather than deliberate choices.

Couser talks about how “autobiography, then, can be an especially powerful medium in which disabled people can demonstrate that they have lives, in defiance of others' common-sense perceptions of them. Indeed, disability autobiography is often in effect a post-colonial, indeed an anti-colonial, phenomenon, a form of autoethnography, as Mary Louise Pratt has defined it: instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with [read: contest] the colonizer's own terms (458).” Naseema's autobiography questions the negligence and lack of awareness of society about disability and also presents a criticism of the western perspective of disability when she writes,

No one told me but by now I knew that I had become a paraplegic. Do you know what it feels like to be a paraplegic? As a small girl, I had read a story about a king who had been cursed by someone. Half of his body turned to stone, rendering him immobile, pinning him down in a particular place for years. Then someone came and removed the curse and he became a whole man again. Half my body, from the waist to the tips of my toes had turned to stone. The only difference was that the king in the story was standing whereas I had to lie down all the while. Half my body was going to be listless for the rest of my life. I had no control over my urine or bowels, neither was I aware of when I passed them. (26)

Naseema has been awarded over seventy national and international honours by Presidents, Prime Ministers, ministers, chief ministers, and dignitaries. Despite these recognitions, she remains committed to working with the less-privileged in society in a modest and quiet manner. She credits her family, colleagues, staff, supporters,

and both known and anonymous donors for her accomplishments. Throughout her 55-year journey in a wheelchair, Naseema humbly recalled her father's advice: "*Khudi ko kar buland itna, Ke har taqdeer se pehle; Khuda bande se khud poochhe -- Bataa, teri raza kya hai*" (Raise yourself to such heights, That God may himself ask -- What's your wish)

Rukmini Shekhar writes that Naseema's "story takes us through the entire landscape of what is commonly known as 'disability studies.' Yes, all that we hear and read about is real." (Shekhar xvii) In continuation to what Couser proposes that "a more critical reading of contemporary disability life writing has the potential to render these works not simply as individualistic trauma narratives, but as important sites of social action and critique" (qtd. by Ferri, 2270), the process of writing one's own autobiography exemplifies the ability to take action and make choices for oneself, which is a central goal of the disability rights movement.

Conclusion

As Mintz wrote, disabled women, although well represented in disability life writing, have "rarely appeared as the subjects of conventional autobiography," which is characterized, at least in Western traditions, by the "disembodied 'I' who pretends to a kind of transparent self-awareness" (qtd by Ferri, 2272) the story of Naseema is an enduring narrative of hardship, driven solely by an unwavering belief in the vitality of existence. This narrative is not merely a work of fiction; it is an accurate representation of real-life events and her consistent efforts towards the advocacy for persons with disabilities. It encompasses agony, a clean atmosphere, motivation, and an unexplored realm. The narration is not flashy but a sincere endeavour to connect with both the able and the disabled. Ferri opines, "instead, by drawing from a more feminist grounded disability studies, she argues that autobiographies of oppressed groups should be read as important sites of intellectual and political resistance rather than apolitical and overly sentimentalized stories about individuals succeeding against the odds or overcoming adversity (2271)." Naseema's autobiography shows her strong determination to challenge the socio-cultural barriers in her ways and her passion for the advocacy of persons with disabilities.

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Unraveling 'Self' : Exploring Lesbian Identity in Sharmila Mukherjee's *The Green Rose*

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Abstract

For ages, Indian society has been patriarchal. It promotes heterosexism, and the ideology has always been selective toward issues of otherness. Economic independence has reshaped Indian women's approach toward their state of servitude. . This paper examines the character construction of the female protagonist and her quest for identity in the novel *Green Rose* (2012) by Sharmila Mukherjee. The paper portrays her quest for identity as the other, the lesbian. Though same-sex relations were decriminalized in 2018 by the Supreme Court of India, the hegemonic structure is still different in Indian society. People presume same-sex couples' desires and 'identities' as 'Sickness.' The paper will focus on how Mukherjee presents the plights of the lesbian community to be understood and supported. The paper concludes with how society needs to update its magnifying glass to understand the challenges of queerness.

Keywords: Desire, Identity, Lesbian, Sexuality.

Introduction - Journey of Becoming 'Self'

It's been seventy-five long years since India got independence from British rule. Yet the freedom of women's lives, their choice of partners, their workplace work, and even their identity is often disregarded and questionable. Identity is consistently associated with the idea of belongingness. It involves the sense of 'Self,' including one's beliefs, values, and individuality. It could be social, cultural, and gender-based, too. No matter what the situation or struggle of women, Societal expectations are much higher for women than in comparison with men.

In India, identity is deeply associated with societal expectations, especially for women. The notion of identity includes both individuality and belonging, constituting gender-based oppression a central motif in Mukherjee's work. This research examines how patriarchal mechanisms, as articulated in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), shape and regulate women's identities, forcing them into passive, objectified roles.

A woman is an existent who is asked to make herself an object; as a subject, she has an aggressive sensuality that does not find satisfaction in the masculine body: from this are born conflicts her eroticism must overcome (Beauvoir 481). French philosopher and feminist activist Simone De Beauvoir forthrightly mentions in her book *The Second Sex* about societal expectations and the painful result of these expectations from women by patriarchal society. She even claims that women are often objectified and expected to play a passive role to men.

Sharmila Mukherjee was born and raised in Kolkata, India. She migrated to the United States in her twenties, and, after much internal migration within the country, she has settled in yet another prototype of Kolkata—New York City. She teaches

English writing and literature. Penguin Publications published her novel, *The Green Rose*, in 2012. *The Green Rose tells the story of Charulata Guha, a young girl.* Mukherjee set the story in a posh area of the country's capital, South Delhi, to illustrate urbanization and highlight how women's perspectives and societal norms in India's capital mirror those in rural areas. It all highlights patriarchy's roots and how they have grown. Mukherjee also talks about the young women of New Delhi who were, in principle, against marriage. They perceived marriage as merely a patriarchal tool, serving to domesticate and subordinate women to their husbands and in-laws (3). She highlights financially independent women who make their own life decisions, a concept society fails to comprehend. These women don't believe in the idea of marriage. According to Indian culture, marriage is what makes life complete. However, they could not agree.

Anna Clark, a renowned scholar, discusses the history of sexuality in her paper '*Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity*' with a live example of Anne Lister's experiences. Anne, the experiences of Anne Lister challenge the social constructionist paradigm, which posits that societal discourses solely shape our sexual identities. Diaries suggest that individuals have innate desires and identities that may not align with societal expectations or definitions. It challenges the notion that sexual identities are entirely constructed and opens up possibilities for understanding the complexity and diversity of human sexual experiences throughout history. Anne Lister's story is essential to understanding lesbian history and pushes readers to reconsider how one approaches the history of sexuality, representation, and agency.

Even as the novel begins, Charu is twenty-five years old, and her parents actively seek a suitable husband for their highly eligible daughter. The world indeed deemed men to be the natural companions of women, but Charu begged to differ on this (6). Charu is different from others; her desires, dreams, and choices differ from those of typical heterosexist women. She keeps her thoughts and her choices to herself only, showing the place of desire in a patriarchal society. To escape from reality, she likes to be in her dreams of 'Lesbos' and 'Sappho.'

Analyzing the history of Lesbians, Professor Jagose (1996) mentions in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some Lesbians who had never identified as feminists continued to work with gay men, and others aligned themselves with both movements. But a considerable number began to analyze the political position of lesbians. (45). Often represented as a coherent movement, both puritanical and prescriptive, lesbian feminism describes a range of sometimes contradictory political and theoretical positions. (56).

The Green Rose displays the segment where the love of Charu's life, Shalini, wrote her letter addressing her as 'A Lesbian mascot,' 'green rose,' she writes in her letter:

'Today's garden is filled with red roses. They all look alike. They all smell alike.

In today's garden, there is no place for the green roses.

They are called monsters, so they have to make a place of their own, separate, outside the main garden..... (77).

She draws her attention to the garden of her terrace, where there used to be a bunch of red roses, and she compares all the red roses with societal norms and hegemony. She calls her '*green rose*' for her unique identity of being lesbian in the heteronormative society as well as her journey to accept herself as who she is. She empowers her with this letter.

The expression and manifestation of desires have a history, personal, social, and political. They do not cease to exist as these histories are changed and reformulated. Nor do they cease to exist if such histories are denied or made invisible. However, desires are made to fit in with social constructions (Thadani 115). Indian historian, author, and activist Giti Thadani talks about the concept of *Shakhiyani* means 'Lesbian Friendship' in her book "*Sakhiyani*(1996). Being Lesbian as a character like Charu indicates a distinct form of desire and love that transcends gender binaries and heteronormative frameworks. The main idea conveyed through character is the existence and significance of diverse and non-conforming desires within human experiences. Charu somehow challenges societal norms and explores how desires are expressed, experienced, and understood beyond the limitations imposed by traditional structures of power and identity.

David J. Huston, in "*Standing Out/Fitting In: Identity, Appearance, and Authenticity in Gay and Lesbian Communities*," talks about how sexuality scholars observed a historical association between one's outward appearance and their identification as gay or lesbian. However, with the changing social environment for gay men and lesbian women over the past few decades, there has been limited research on how these transformations affect individuals' appearance choices as they shape, navigate, and uphold their identities. He conducted in-depth interviews with twenty participants and found that many people utilize their appearance to achieve a sense of authenticity after coming out. Experiencing authenticity within gay and lesbian communities presents unique challenges as individuals face scrutiny from the community.

For fear of judgment, hatred, and ill-treatment, many people do not open up about their sexuality. Despite living in an urban city like Delhi, Charu doesn't share with her parents until she is 25. She continuously tried to talk to her parents. Charu tried approaching the topic more subtly: 'It's congenital.' But her mother would have nothing of anything that had something to do with the genitalia. She had already begun to suspect that Charu was opposed to marriage because there was something seriously unnatural about her body (28). It is an unnatural roadblock for Charu; she can neither open up about herself nor sit and silently face all these because many marriage proposals have been canceled. The perks of living in Indian society include neighbor aunts being more interested in their neighbor households, and their neighbors matter more than their own, resulting from a growing fear. She finally decided to tell the truth to the family; she set her mind and told them she was lesbian. Her mother's calmness reassured Charu while her father remarked, "Well, well, sometimes, Mrs. Guha tries to keep herself busy with household chores." It was only late at night that she could hear her mother's sobbing and her father's consolation to

her mother. Mrs. Guha squeaked forth like a sick bird, her tear-inflected charring at Charu's Americanization. 'Disease,' 'unnatural,' and 'unhealthy' were words strung together with the *L word*, *satellite TV*, and *dirty* (29). It led to a sudden change in Mrs. Guha's behavior. Those friends of Charu, whom she used to admire a lot, suddenly feel hatred towards them and think those are reasons for 'being lesbian' for her. Even one of Charu's close friends, Anjali, was condemned as 'a glorified prostitute.' Over several days, Mrs. Guha's resentment towards Charu intensifies. Whenever she encounters her friends, she endures constant reprimands and harsh remarks from them. They compare her to others and curse her for bearing a male child instead of her own. The concept of Lesbian Feminism is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses a range of perspectives and ideologies. This concept often questions the binary notions of male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, and seeks to destabilize fixed categories and boundaries.

Marginalized Women's Sexuality

India has long marginalized women and their sexuality, with traditional patriarchal norms significantly shaping societal gender roles. These norms enforce expectations of female modesty, purity, and adherence to prescribed gender roles, which can limit women's autonomy and sexual identity. Moreover, various methods such as mobility restrictions, dress codes, and familial expectations have controlled and regulated women's sexuality. This control is intended to safeguard the family's perceived honor and reputation, as they bear responsibility alone. India is the Land of the Epic Book *Kamasutra*, yet Indian society exists with double standards for sexuality when it comes to women's sexuality. Society often views women who express their sexual desires or engage in non-conventional relationships as immoral or deviant, while men are usually granted more sexual freedom and agency.

Although Charu, the novel's protagonist, had a fondness for women and didn't harbor any hatred towards men, she could not envision a romantic relationship or life with them. She always dreams of 'lesbos' in place of handsome boys, but she never shared this with anyone in her family about her preference for girls. She grew up in the posh area of south Delhi, yet no one in her family, friends, or acquaintances is familiar with her desire. Or nobody ever cares that much about others in the cities, which could be a reason.

Sexuality is replaced by sexual behavior. Women's sexual behavior becomes controlled and marginalized; if not denied, male sexual behavior shifts from being based on desire for the other person to being self-absorbed and discharged. Sexual behavior becomes impersonalized. Sexuality has no context. The sexual act becomes brutalized, whether it is between male and female or between male and male. There is no social space for any sexuality that is based on women's pleasure or for women who love and desire other women. Concepts of personal choice and privacy become lost. There can be no development of individuality (Thadani 121). The quote from Thadani's work emphasizes the need for a broader understanding of sexuality that goes beyond mere behavior, acknowledging the importance of

personal choice, pleasure, and the creation of social spaces that embrace and respect diverse forms of sexual expression.

Every day grew more toxic and intolerable for Charu; her parents forbade her from leaving the house, even with her female friends, and they kept a close watch on her. She decided to marry a heterosexual man in an attempt to defy her parents' expectations and gain their acceptance. It was a big relief to her family. She was unsure of how she would manage her married life with a heterosexual man, so she decided to engage with him. Following her engagement, she received numerous gifts. At every other meeting, he occasionally kissed her and held his tongue out salaciously (35). As a lesbian, this infuriated her, so when she returned home in the evening, she scrubbed the areas her fiancé had touched. g when she returned home. One fine day, she screamed over him, which followed the breaking off her engagement. This problem concluded with the death of her father.

In her paper *Becoming Out: Lesbian Identity and Politics*, Shane Phelan discusses the significance of the lesbian identity and the underlying desire for authenticity, exemplified by the concept of "coming out." This term implies that revealing one's lesbian identity is a revelation, an acknowledgment of a truth that was previously concealed. She suggests in her paper that coming out is a process of discovering or admitting one's lesbianism rather than something that is constructed or chosen intentionally. She further concluded by saying that coming out is not an easy process where the person may be in a situation where they lose their family and friends and become alone for life. Analyzing Charu's situation, one gets to know coming out, whether in front of family or friends, is never easy. The major problem facing people belonging to the LGBTQI+ community is the fear of acceptance by their loved ones. When Charu came out in front of her parents, even though she received a cold and bitter attitude from their side, she suffered in silence along with her parents. Her mother especially started pressuring her for her unsupportive society, where their name would be destroyed. Being a dutiful daughter, she tries to be like any other heterosexual girl, but during this time she was starving for identity. One final day, she decided to end her mother's pressure to fit into the social hegemony by accepting herself for who she is. Her journey to accept herself as who she is not the end of the novel, yet this becomes her first step closer to her identity or life. This paper only talks about the journey of a lesbian character named Charu, her struggle, and her significant relationship with her parents during the coming out. It is limited to her quest for desire and identity. Homophobia, irrelevant fear, and hatred towards the LGBTQI+ community are not explored.

In their book *Same-Sex Love in India: Reading from Literature and History* (2000), Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai discuss the increasing instances of hatred towards the LGBTQI+ community, also known as homophobia. Europe, known for its long history of using the Bible to torture and execute homosexuals, brought modern homophobia to India. However, until 1588, when the Portuguese rulers in Goa burned a 15-year-old boy for sodomy, India had never executed anyone for homosexual behavior. The most apparent manifestation of this homophobia was the

anti-sodomy law introduced into the Indian Penal Code in 1861 (Vanita 52). Vanita discusses homophobia, referring to it as 'Modern Homophobia,' while examining and gathering archives from Indian history. She discovers this issue is not a product of Western culture or tradition but rather a persistent aspect of Indian culture and customs. Yet, due to the invasion of Britishers in India, India followed the law and constitution given by the British. It led to the fear or beginning of modern homophobia in the Indian context. It is homophobia, an irrational fear that captures the mind of society. It becomes the reason for the death of her father and her mother's rude behavior. After a certain point, Charu's emotions change vividly. Despite being a strong woman, she started to live as a confused person. She seems submissive to the subjugation of patriarchy and social hegemony, but she holds protests in her actions. She went against her mother's wish and joined the activist teams.

Sharmila Mukherjee discusses a time when internet dating was not popular, and there was a lack of space for lesbians on sites intended for women seeking to date other women. Even nowadays, there are some apps, yet lesbians are forged. Men change their names and start talking to women for their sexual pleasure, as in the same scene shown in the Bollywood film *Badhaai Do* (2022), where Sumi (Bhumi Petnekar) was forged in the same way and was extorted by a boy just to make physical relations with her. People fulfill their greed by misusing others' trust.

Like other contemporary Indian women writing, Mukherjee does not open up about women's sexuality; however, she questions the patriarchal structure of society through her characters. Mukherjee wrote and published in the year 2012, time after the 2009 judgment when Homosexuality was re-criminalized in India. Many gays and lesbians who came out cannot go back. When Charu accepts her identity, she cannot hide it. Being women, then being lesbian, overall, the identity and sexuality of women are consistently marginalized in the patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Sharmila Mukherjee's *Green Rose* is the story of Charu, her journey to find herself, her fight, and her struggle to achieve her goals. The gay and Lesbian community fought a long battle until the judgment of 2018, when on 6th September 2018, the Supreme Court gave a landmark judgment that decriminalizes homosexual relationships in India. Yet LGBTQI+ people still struggle with higher occurrences of depression and suicidal thoughts, which have been linked to personal experiences involving harassment, discrimination, interpersonal conflict, and lack of social support. Several of them feel isolated once family and friends seclude them after discovering it. Not only that, but people presume their desires and identity, make fun of them, and put unrealistic depictions of their relationships, which contribute to shaping hurtful misconceptions about same-sex relationships. Our society is making it hard for the lesbian community to feel understood and supported. They often feel ashamed because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. The rates of suicides are still higher than the rates of acceptance in society. Writers like Sharmila Mukherjee started writing more about these communities to enhance education and awareness of Alternative Sexuality. It could be a reason to reduce the death rates and

a first step in accepting that 'Everybody is equal.'

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Exploring the Notion of Motherhood in Indira Goswami's Select Works

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Abstract

The remarkable literary works of Indira Goswami depict severe societal realities and a litany of agonies. Her art is greatly influenced by the core human qualities that all people possess, and it additionally conveys volumes about her love and compassion for those who are marginalized. The majority of her writings primarily address issues like animal cruelty, restrictive patriarchal norms, motherhood, gender inequality, and extramarital affairs. She investigated the practical realities and raised relevant questions about the patriarchal traditions that prevailed in Assam. A mother's role is to provide her child with unwavering love, care, and support to safeguard their life, preserve, nurture, and instill socially acceptable behavior. It is the established society's ongoing demands placed on mothers to follow the rules. The present paper will study the archetypical nature of the mother and its attributes under the shadow of patriarchy in Indira Goswami's two select works 'Sanskaar' and 'Breaking the Begging Bowl' through the critical lens of Adrienne Rich's concept of Motherhood. Moreover, the paper attempts to uncover the myths and realities attached to motherhood.

Keywords: Indira Goswami, Adrienne Rich, Motherhood, Patriarchy, and Maternal Practices

Introduction

Born in northeast Assam, Indira Goswami was a celebrated writer who personified freedom and resistance. She was born in the year 1942 in a Gossain family. Realistic and sincere, her works cover a wide range of topics, such as problems faced by single mothers, the suffering of labourers, the oppression of widows in homes and in Vrindavan, and animal abuse. Across all of her writings, Goswami conveys her outrage at the outdated customs and shows a great deal of compassion for the lower caste. Some of the famous novels of Goswami include *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, *The Man from Chinnamasta*, *The Blue-Necked God*, and *Pages Stained with Blood*. She is the recipient of various national and international awards and accolades including the Jnanpith Award (2001), Assam Sahitya Sabha Award (1988), Sahitya Academy Award (1983), Bharat Nirman Award (1989), and Kamal Kumari Foundation Award (1996). The stories are inspired by human suffering, their anguish, misery, and grief, and she realistically portrayed their sufferings in her writings. For this reason, Indira Goswami is regarded as the incredibly perceptive voice of modern India. Goswami in her writings expresses potently the conditions of mothers in inexorable patriarchy. In *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, Gossainee encompasses motherly qualities of nurturing and self-sacrificing, taking care of household activities as a passive being, waiting for her son late at night so that she could remain secure as a mother. In *The Man from Chinnamasta*, the writer has represented the condition of the mothers in a patriarchal culture. She explored the deep-seated suffering of the priest wives who become entangled in the web of this

pathetic culture from where it is difficult to escape. In *The Blue Necked God*, Anupama exhibits preservative love for her daughter, Saudamani, who is suffering from discomfort and is looking for tranquilities. She remains worried about her daughter's declining health; therefore, she seeks blessings from Sanyasis and takes Saudamani to every temple in Vrindavan.

The concept of motherhood has been the subject of numerous conversations, debates, and critical assessments over the years. Undoubtedly, critics and feminist activists constantly question and attack the institution's traditions and associated beliefs. Being a mother defines a woman's place in society, both as an experience and an idea. Motherhood undoubtedly involves paradoxical experiences. One's physical and emotional needs must be subordinated to a child's demands. The mothers' authority is divided into two categories. The divine power that the society has invested in goddess worship, while still having the ability to nurture humanity. In India, the scenario is quite different than many of the Western countries. Most household in India wants a male child but ironically, the daughters conceive them. The woman most of the time doesn't have the power of choice. Moreover, the woman who doesn't bear a child is often undervalued by society and labeled as 'incomplete or unwomanly'. This paper looked at the traditional notion of motherhood and also explored the experience of mothers who dismantled such an embedded notion. Furthermore, the paper would dismantle the romantic concept of motherhood and expose the trauma and agony that are quite apparent during motherhood. Becoming a mother is a social construct. Whether or not children accept or reject this kind of approach depends on the patriarchal system that shapes the interactions with their mothers. Maternal practices necessitate arduous involvement and complete focus when raising a child. It also requires consistent dedication and proactive efforts. Mothers are mostly emotionally overworked, frequently accustomed to being alone, and financially dependent on males. Another experience that defines a woman's credentials is her menstrual cycle. Patriarchal cultures impose unwanted expectations on women, which impacts how they are viewed in society and can make them appear immoral or inferior. Adrienne Rich writes, "Somewhere in the feelings, latent and overt, that women carry through menstruation, there is an association of the menstrual period with a profound ambivalence toward our pregnability and toward institutionalized motherhood" (Rich107). Representations of mothers in cinema and other social platforms sparked divided attention as the portrayal of mothers is often strikingly different than what appears in it. The relationships of the mother-child are non-conflictual and challenge social construction such as patriarchy. Motherhood is a process and feelings that come with the experience of being a mother. It is also understood as a moral growth in a woman whereby she develops an attachment to her baby automatically and cultivates natural bonds with the child. Moreover, Motherhood offers happiness, unparalleled joy, and affection but it also brings pain, anxiety, and stress that test a mother's preservative love. For some women, motherhood is a cage that offers no scope for self-growth but cocoons of bondage. However, the mother's sheer strength will transform the shed into a

home. Mothers are undeniably somewhat responsible for the growth and achievement of their children. According to Ruddick, “three central aspects are paramount to Maternal Practices. These are preservative love, the protective work mothers engage in to ensure their children's survival; fostering growth, the work done to nurture “a child's developing spirit” including her “emotional, cognitive, sexual and social development” (Ruddick 82-3); and socialization for acceptance, “training a child to be the kind of person whom others accept and whom the mothers themselves can actively appreciate” (Ruddick 104). Nowadays, Motherhood is no longer connected to biological mothering. It transcends biological, physical, emotional, and societal expectations, and often appreciation and acknowledgment are given to the caregivers for rendering emotional duties and physical help.

A mother in the archetypal sense has always been linked to qualities such as sacrifice, care, and nurture. Motherhood in general is a glorified term. This term has been established as a privileged social position ignoring the sacrifices that have been put up by the woman. Traditionally, the term 'mother' is linked to the *Prithvi* (earth), *Prakriti* (nature), and *Shakti* (power). She is manifested as a divine power that brings prosperity and is also the symbol of destruction. Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) investigates the dynamics of power embodied in motherhood in a patriarchal culture. In this book, she is concerned with the subject of motherhood as an experience and as an established institution. She was a feminist, poet, writer, and most importantly a mother and experienced conflicting emotions during her mothering processes. The practices of patriarchal impositions on women in all its variations have been exposed by Adrienne Rich in this work. According to her, motherhood encompasses ambivalences and complexities of frustrations, dilemmas, anger, and fragility as well as joy. Motherhood for Rich is not only confined to private discussions or affairs; it affects every member of households, and society from fathers to childless women.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of mothers through Indira Goswami's select works by qualitatively applying the concept of motherhood. The study will explicitly focus on motherhood which is archetypically attributed to love, care, and nurture but is subverted in this work thus bringing out the indomitable courage and fighting spirit of the mothers. This study will resort to close reading of the selected works of Indira Goswami, seminal works done on her, and the concept of motherhood. This study will also examine the atypical notion of motherhood that is attributed to Indian mothers. This paper provides a clear perspective to dig deep into the various ideas offered on motherhood employed in the works of Indira Goswami and her contemporary writers.

Significance of the Study

The study is an attempt made on the part of the researcher to highlight the underlying patriarchal practices that are followed by mothers and in due process dismantle the

fundamental structures of autonomy. The focus of the paper is to understand the sacrifices performed by the mothers for their family and it will also unearth the critical conditions of mothers in a patriarchal setup. Further, the paper intends to expose the tremendous sacrifices that a mother renders and unearth the psychological trauma that she faces during mothering.

Review of the Literature

Erma Bombeck writes in her fascinating book *Motherhood: The Second Oldest Profession* that “Motherhood is not a one-size-fits-all, a mold that is all-encompassing and means the same to all people ... No mother is all good or all bad, all laughing or all serious, all loving or all angry. Ambivalence runs through their veins” (1983, 10). Anitha B and M. Ravichand in their research article “A Mother! A Myth: Portrayal of a Mother in Mahasweta Devi's “Breast Giver” exposes the double standard of a patriarchal mindset where a man's intimate desire for the beauty of a woman remains unquestioned, but women are asked to keep their lives private. Furthermore, the paper uncovers the divine myth related to motherhood which in reality given to exploit them. She further narrates how the protagonist, Jashoda is doubly oppressed, firstly being a woman, and secondly for her motherhood. Manohar D. Dugaje in his paper “Mothers Mummified: A Study of the Novels of Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee” exhibits the fact that mothers are solely responsible for the upbringing of their children. Therefore, the role played by the mothers influences the lives of their daughters when they experience motherhood. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* notes “Indeed, from childhood woman is repeatedly told she is made to bear children, and the praises of motherhood are sung” (Beauvoir 605).

Methodology

This paper requires an analytical understanding of Indira Goswami's select short stories 'Sanskaar' and 'Breaking the Begging Bowl'. It is recourse to close reading of the select short stories of Indira Goswami and secondary texts on her and also various works written on the concept of care. Adrienne Rich's concept of Motherhood and Sara Ruddick's Maternal Practices would be applied to foreground the conception of motherhood.

Analysis

The short story 'Breaking the Begging Bowl' discusses a mother's sheer struggle and indomitable courage to protect her children from restrictive culture through the lens of the writer. The title of the story contextually refers to the adversity in the life of a widow, named Phuleshwari, who was left in despair, like the last thing of a beggar's assets breaks and the beggar left with nothing. The backdrop of the story is set in the period of the 1980s; when Assam witnessed ethnic conflicts, land struggles, insurgency, agitations, and poverty. The story also depicts the helplessness of an ailing mother, burdened with societal expectations and inability to fulfill them. The

mother is caught in the web of past and present and unable to withdraw from the mothering responsibility often predisposed by patriarchal society. Phuleshwari existence was crushed under the rigid practices that offer no help but demand continuous sacrifices. Her two daughters, Annobala and Bhubaneshwari are also victims of the patriarchal violence that caused emotional and physical paralysis. Moreover, Phuleshwari suffered emotionally from the loss of her son, who went missing and was rumored to have joined a terrorist organization. Moreover, she was deprived of love and care from her son in declining years. Like all the mothers do, she continuously awaited his arrival, keeping a little hope that he might be alive. In order to run the family, she moved from one house to another, engaged in cleaning duties, and went out to the faraway jungle to collect edible leaves. Mehboob Khan's film *Mother India* and the Indian mythology both contain similar stories concerning sacrificial mothers. *Mother India* is a film that beautifully depicts the role of Indian mothers as guardians of tradition and sources of unwavering loyalty. Nargis portrayed as a single mother bringing up two kids in abject poverty. She is represented as a strong mother who can destroy, defend, and save. Mothers of the epic *Ramayana* shared the same fundamental qualities as all mothers: they were loving and caring. Lord Rama was born to Mata Kausalya, daughter of Kosala, who wed Dasharatha. She is also shown as a loving mother who does not take an active role. She was powerless to stop Dasharatha from marrying another woman. She waited fourteen years patiently for her son's homecoming without any complaints. Mata Sita is the epitome of motherhood in Indian culture. Her husband chooses his subject over Sita and deserts her knowing she is expecting a baby and sends her to Sage Balmiki's ashram. There, she single-handedly gave birth to Luv and Kush declining the comfort of the palace. She struggles, sacrifices and most importantly obediently follows the order decided by society. These types of narratives are common in Indian cinema and myths, and are found in other writings as well. The maternal body is a site for contests. Adrienne Rich writes:

Because we all had mothers, the institution affects all women, and though differently- all men. Patriarchal violence and callousness are often visited through women upon children- not only the "battered" child but the children desperately pushed, cajoled, manipulated, the children dependent on one uncertain, weary woman for their day-in, day-out care and emotional sustenance, the male children who grow up believing that a woman is nothing so much as an emotional climate made to soothe and reassure, or an emotional whirlwind bent on their destruction (277).

Indian culture which is predominantly patriarchal fosters the notion of motherhood as an essential component of a woman's identity. While some of the mothers bear children compulsorily, the others must look into the chores to serve the family. Tutun Mukherjee writes "Typically on attaining puberty, a young girl is seen as a woman and has to be trained to shoulder the responsibilities ahead of her. She is given lessons on different household duties, social etiquette, obedience, and wifely duties on how to serve her husband and his family, and such other matters that define her womanhood in a hierarchical society (Mukherjee 19). The primordial relationship of

mother-daughter might be described as mentorship, where daughters are trained in the art of housewifery and given practice as a role of caregivers by their mothers from a very early age. Here, in the story, we see that, at a very young age, Bhubaneshwari helped her mother in household activities. From cooking food to cleaning work, moreover, preparing aeri (silk) thread, and pounding rice, she has been a kind of support to Phuleshwari. Phuleshwari underwent deep emotional pain; her condition silenced her thought process thus making her unable to decide. Moreover, at the age of 62 years, she somehow manages to juggle a dozen tasks at once. “The scene of Phuleshwari doing everything alone, from lifting water from the well, to clearing the courtyard to cleaning rice from the husk was heart-wrenching...And slowly, the villagers even got used to Phuleshwari sprouting heart-breaking curses intermittently. The entire village was poor and wretched. Who would help?” (Goswami 69). Anindita Ghosh's novel *Illuminated* explores the complex relationship between daughter-mother, particularly in the context of distress. Shashi is a widow and a single parent raising her daughter Tara, while experiencing personal difficulties. On the other hand, Tara too deals with her own emotional disorder. Here, Ghosh delves into the intricacies of motherhood and the different ways in which mothers cope with trauma. The author also elaborately underpins how theoretical understanding of motherhood has often faced conflict with the practices and experiences of mothers in real life. Menstruation is an experience unique to females. It has always been surrounded by cultural myths and practices. It is a license given to women to exercise femaleness. In the story, Indira Goswami exposes the underlying myths that are attached to menstruation practices followed by Assamese culture. In the story, menstruation is seen as a sin as well as a permit towards motherhood. When Bhubaneshwari came to age early in the morning, she was considered impure. Somewhere, her mother had an ambivalent feeling about receiving the news. She felt the utmost joy that her daughter would become a mother and at the same time, was sad because there is an underlying myth attached to menstruation, where the morning menstruating girl becomes barren.

'Sanskaar' is another story by Indira Goswami which is about a mother, who refuses to surrender to the system, and goes out of her way to feed the children. The story discusses Damayanti, a young mother as well as a widow, and how a problematic situation forced her to engage in prostitution because of familial responsibility. In doing so, she dismantles the patriarchy that often dictates the conduct of women. Without any pinch of shame, she courageously dissembled societal expectations and wrestled with the rigid culture. As a mother, she sacrificed cultural beliefs to nurture her children. She belonged to a poor Brahmin family, and it was expected of a Brahmin woman to maintain distance from the lower caste men. However, Damayanti engaged herself with Pitambor who belonged to a lower caste, sexually. Indian feminist Jasodhara Bagchi in her book *Interrogating Motherhood* writes, “A woman's most obvious power to reproduce and nurture the species is then made into the most effective engine of her enslavement” (Bagchi xxii). According to her, the experience of Motherhood provides an association of affection, emotion, and bonds

that are central to women. Pitambor was looking for a partner who could provide him with a male child. He was an old man of about sixty. He had married his second wife just two months after his first wife had died, mainly because his first wife died childless (6). Often, we have seen that in Indian culture, a male child is desired over a female child. It is believed that a son could only carry the family lineage. But a female child would lead to more debts. "You are so absent-minded, engrossed all the time with only the fact that you don't have a son and heir, that many people here in our 'satra' have started saying that you are becoming unbalanced and that you are on the verge of insanity," (6). He went crazy for not being able to have a son.

A woman's identity lies in becoming a mother. The second wife of Pitambor couldn't able to provide him with a child; therefore, she was neglected, leaving her completely isolated from society. She suffers from emotional pain as well as loneliness. "The woman's eyes were now shut, but it seemed as though she was undergoing some terrible suffering and pain" (Goswami 9). In society, a woman is treated according to her ability to become a mother. A woman who doesn't want to have a child or cannot give birth is looked down dreadfully by society. Damayanti, on the other hand, aborted many times to continue the profession which is often considered illicit. The irony is that on the one hand a woman who couldn't become a mother is treated poorly, and on the other hand, a woman who could give birth, but because she was unlikely into the sex profession is also looked down terribly. Here, both women suffered under the rigid custom. Adrienne Rich wrote "Throughout history numberless women have killed children they knew they could not rear, whether economically or emotionally, children forced upon them by rape, ignorance, poverty, marriage, or by the absence of, or sanctions against, birth control or abortion (Rich 258). Motherhood is often marked by ambivalence, mixed and conflicting feelings. Bhubaneshwari said "What other option did I have... I own some acres of farmland in Satpakhila, but I have not been given my share of five maunds of paddy ever since my husband died. I have not able to pay the revenue tax for that land for three years, and the land could be auctioned off any day now. What was I to do? I had to think of feeding my two daughters" (Goswami 14). Meanwhile, the priest Krishnakanta helped Pitambor with a quick intimate encounter with Damayanti and suggested he provide a small pill of opium to his ailing wife on the night of the meeting. Even in the darkness, Pitambor's wife could able to sense the reality in which the society operated. Since pregnancy and giving birth are the conditions of femininity, therefore who couldn't become a part remain overly threatened. The desire to father a male child is so much cultured into the thoughts of Pitambor that he already imagined the child in Damayanti's womb to be a son. However, she aborted the baby thus dismantling the romantic idea of motherhood. "She has spoilt it, Mahajan, she has aborted! She has spoilt your seed Pitambor; she has finished her pregnancy!" (Goswami 25). Adrienne Rich writes:

The woman's body with its potential for gestating, bringing forth and nourishing new life, has been through the ages a field of contradictions: a space invested with power, and an acute vulnerability; a numinous figure and the incarnations of evil; a hoard of

ambivalences, most of which have worked to disqualify women from the collective act of defining culture (104).

When mothers are unable to handle the pressure any longer, they explode with violence. Their attitudes and actions towards their children are constantly observed by society. The way moms raised their children indirectly influenced both their success and failure. As a result, they show their fragility by choosing to express their anguish through pain. “Instead of recognizing the institutional violence of patriarchal motherhood, society labels those women who finally erupt in violence as psychopathological (Rich 263).

Conclusion

The two short stories 'Breaking the Begging Bowl' and 'Sanskaar' depicts the uncanny social structures that often led to an imbalance in society, thus worsening the conditions of women. Goswami explores the plight of Hindu mothers surrounded by a restrictive culture that doesn't allow autonomy and enforces a series of instructions upon them. She provided an extremely significant insight into the experiences of mothers as well as discussed motherhood as a cage that holds captive to domesticity. Her perspectives on motherhood are vividly illustrated through the lens of Phuleshwari and Damayanti. Both of these women, who are widowed, as well as single mothers', wrestled through the oppressive society in order to provide nourishment to their children. Both of them are portrayed as caring, nurturing, and sacrificial as most Hindu women, however, they turn violent and act as destroyers on demand. Through these women she explores the joy, despair, and disillusionment faced by single mothers while fostering children in times of adversity as in Maithreyi krishnaraj words “motherhood oscillates between the ambivalence of power and powerlessness”. Through these two short stories, Indira Goswami questioned and criticized the obsession of male children in Hindu culture that regards sons as highly esteemed while female children are undervalued. However, the writer also discusses the essence of motherly love that is unquestionably provided to children by mothers. But, in doing so, the psychological well-being of mothers' is neglected which later leads to deep agonies and eruptions of conflicts. The writer critically contested the gendered norms dictated by society and advised to rethink and alter the status and condition of mothers considering their potentiality.

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Disability and the Search for Identity in Malsawmi Jacob's *Zorami: A Redemption Song*

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Abstract

The present article explores societal views towards an individual that has survived sexual violence which can accelerate the possibility of disability in Malsawmi Jacob's "*Zorami: A Redemption Song*" (2015). The paper investigates the level of outlook and attitudes toward sexually assaulted survivors. The sexually assaulted victim is not only left with physical injuries but often acquire trauma-induced mental illness. It further aims to highlight the concerns of complexity of disability as lived experience, psychological as well as sociological. Representation of trauma faced by women survivors of war is mentioned in the work, creating a space for identity and transparency in a predominantly patriarchal culture. Through the lens of disability and vulnerability study, the paper will challenge dominant beliefs about disability and vulnerability in selected narratives to understand the dialectics of alienation and silence of women victims as such.

Keywords: Disability, identity, society, alienation, trauma, silence.

These spaces belong to everyone.

- Goyal, Nidhi 2018

Introduction

The silent epidemic of sexual violence must be brought to light for a nuanced discussion by various justice and reproductive rights. The intersection of gender and violence is often silenced resulting in a form of retreat leading to mental and physical disabilities. Numerous attempts and initiatives have been carried out to address the issue at hand, they have contributed and collaborated to shed light on the two spaces of sex and violence and the impact it has caused. Violence towards the female sex is a silent epidemic which has often been overlooked by governments and organizations. Women are at a much higher risk of victimization- especially with women belonging to the rural sphere. They are often targeted not only because of their sex status but also their economic standing. This engages them to handle an additional spectrum of objectification in a patriarchal society with potential dynamics of power that limit self-volition and access. Women are more prone to victimization owing to perceived power imbalances in established affinity, which are often manipulated. Being undervalued because of sexual assaults or being rape survivors, this dichotomy of power would often surface in acts of passive aggressiveness or to the extremity of physical violence by a partner or anyone of close contact with the survivor. What is eventually visible at this juncture is the mental stress and traumatic episodes that the silent woman suffers, be it on account of lack of self-acceptance or the undying need for emotional and physical support. Society has swept under the rug the sufferings of

these women as normal but subtly patronizing their encounters with a sense of alienation with a message that they are unworthy of love, of being asexual and unwelcomed to be in the internal settings in society.

“Disability makes us feel,” Ria Cheyne (ix) states in a study, which undertakes its unrelenting representation in art, literature, and additional avenues of cultural production. Accordingly, centering on the realm of literature, it has the possibility to display the attributes of life, the intricate details on how ordinary people struggle and survive and braved certain historical happenings and at one point, confront their formidable narrations- to express in writings calls for the process of uncovering old hatchets and wounds, traumas, and painful memories. Thus, for a writer to work on these concerns, it is required of him/her to build a distinct world, a space, and psychological temperaments that will validate him/her to voice out what has been weakening and disabling for a long time as well as give perceptibility to lawlessness and immoralities. Spatial mobility, as a functioning structure, is fabricated within physical boundaries and in the aspects created by the partakers, in the framework of its individuals, “space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the 'apparently innocent spatiality of social life' and how human geographies often become filled with politics and ideology.” (Soja 1996). With that, the written work of literature becomes recollections that support indications of the all-inclusive ordeals which have been a disputation in Malsawmi Jacob's novel. Therefore, the characters' physical and spiritual sense of being in the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* represent the damage and trauma confronted by untold inhabitants who witnessed and experienced the miseries of the war, made noticeable by the author's documentation. From this frame of reference, the dominant beliefs of sexually assaulted victims as disrepute can be seen through the ordinary people who have been affected by war. This novel has been examined from various perspectives by researchers interested in the troubled years “*rambuai*” of Mizoram; or in the contestations of women's bodies that are etched as well as recollected through memory.

In an interview with *The Northeast Today* (2017), Malsawmi Jacob mentioned that the driving force that led to her writing of *Zorami: A Redemption Song* was propelled by a combination of factors, such as the history of the Mizo Insurgency period, an incident that could never be erased from the collective memories of the Mizo community. She opines that a fictional literary interpretation would be more apt in engaging a wider audience with the trauma and horror of war than a non-fictional historical account. In *The Better India* (2016), Jacob recalls: “In 2004, I had travelled to Mizoram to do research for the novel. I met several people and recorded their reflections on tape. But later when I started to write I could only manage to do a few chapters. It was just too painful. It was finally in 2013 that my publisher, Morph Books, and my editor were able to motivate me to finish the manuscript.” Her recollections of the *Rambuai* period with the frightful images of laceration and its aftermath allowed her to obtain a diverse way of looking at societal spheres. The wars are ever present in her novel, shifting between an open existence or concealed

presence, but consistently focused on the way casualties and their sufferings influence the community where they reside or retreat to. Accordingly, the sociological; the consolidated; the psychological in its entirety; the space, put up with a doubled circumstance: the impact the victims expend on the community and of the impact that affects them individually. The present paper centers on Malsawmi Jacob's all-inclusive disclosure to everyday person's lived experiences and the trajectories of how they recollect their traumas and expose their stand in the world after the terrors suffered in the Insurgency war. More intricate is the study of the complexity of disability faced by rape- surviving women.

Disability and Identity in Selected Text

Historical Context

To tell the story of Mizoram, one cannot leave out the ethnic and political conflict it has dealt with. Oftentimes, literature from the Northeast part of India has been termed as a voicing of terror, loss, violence, and insurgency. Given what has been said, writings that emerged from these geographical areas are intermittently examined from perspectives of historiographic narratives, memory, identity, and trauma studies. As such, focusing on its aftermath- trauma induced impairments on its inhabitants are its sediments. Unravelling the journey of pain and hopelessness, what is visible is the temporality of time, of traumatic events which often result in the silencing of voices and horrific encounters. This sets off a meta-reading of history which then leaves a manifestation of an understanding in a new perspective. Mizoram Peace Accord was signed and the bleak period of twenty years (1966-1986) was folded, however the incidents left an indelible mark that are embodied in memory, repressing it in silence. Malsawmi Jacob, with her art, has offered a distinct arena in *Zorami: A Redemption Song* where this assertion of sex and its implications of disability can be established, and the feeling of alienation by such survivors can be seen.

The account takes place in Mizoram throughout the 1960s and the 1980s, during the Indian government occupation of the region to subdue the armed rebellion of Mizo National Front (MNF). The protagonist, Zorampari recalls and narrates the events and tribulations of the effects of the *Rambuai* in her life as well as the ordeal Mizoram dealt with during the period. Delineating from Judy Cashmore's (2013) association of child sexual abuse and its later outcomes and Jan Assmann's (2011) talk of the link between the three themes of memory (or reference to the past), identity (or political imaginations) and cultural continuity (or the formation of tradition), this article combines rape with memory to contend that both these factors are expressive of uncovering and reconciliation, on the one hand, and of the impact of rape on interpersonal functioning and physical health. The novel employs memory in a nonlinear arrangement, and oftentimes this very memory of the protagonist serves not only as a tool for healing but also for unveiling and reliving the trauma repeatedly.

Zorami's Tribulations

Literature from Northeast India as “emerging literatures are variously critiqued as ethnic writing, lacking in history and tradition, and often subjected to the virulent diatribe that it lacks in aesthetic virtuosity” (Baral, 2013, p.4). Writings in English or indigenous dialect, however, strive to define a universality of the human life and its context, its shared history. Malsawmi Jacob has skillfully deployed the protagonist Zorami as an allegory for the whole of Mizoram. The development of thought and the events that follow in the life of Zorami parallels the exploits that the state was coping with at the time of turmoil and conflict. A closer reading draws a rethinking based on disability studies, which shows how traumatic events of war, both spiritually and physically bring about a confusion in understanding one's own identity, of being and becoming. An area of exploration is thus available within the field of disability and the indication exhibited by sexually assaulted victims that have journeyed through turbulent period of war.

Zorami, being a victim of rape and a survivor of war was scarred as well as silenced and this articulation of suppression of feelings is visible in Malsawmi Jacob's portrayal of her: “Thus Zorami learned to be ashamed. And to keep quiet. So she did not tell anyone [...]. Neither did she tell about the dirty man with the dirty touch. From then on, she has frequent attacks of severe migraine (43). It was her own mother who told her that girls should not talk too much showing traces of a dominant patriarchal society where women are expected to be passive which is often more harmful. As such, “through the ages, women have been subjected to violence within the family in one form or another. The family socializes them to bear their trauma with sealed lips.” (Aruna Burte, 1). Societal norms and cultural constructions cannot be the only factor as can be seen in the protagonist Zorami. She was not only silenced but had to face the ordeal of trauma and stress as a rape victim. The mental and physical impact of the assault maimed her very being, stealing her peace of mind and control of her senses. Zorami had to find her stance despite the shame, secrecy, and silence which is a mirroring of the status of women in pre-contemporary Mizo society.

To quote McCall in *Lushai Chrysalis* (1949):

“There is little in the Lushai background to disclose the sense of any great chivalry towards woman. Without any ambiguity, Lushai has been and still is a country for men before it is one for women, or even children. But where better placed, Lushai spare their women the bondage common to the majority, the women retain chorus and grace well into the late years”. But the attitude of old Lushai is betrayed by an old saying on par with our own sentiment of old- 'A woman, a dog and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they be' (Lalfakzuali 24)

The Mizos leaned closer to a practice of 'ambivalent sexism'. According to Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001), “sexism is a multidimensional construct that encompasses two sets of sexist attitudes: hostile and benevolent. While hostile sexism communicates a clear antipathy toward women, benevolent sexism takes the form of seemingly positive but in fact patronizing beliefs about women. Benevolent sexism as a set of attitudes is sexist in viewing women stereotypically and restricting their roles, but

that are subjectively positive in feeling tone and also tend to elicit behavior typically categorized as pro social (e.g., helping) or intimacy seeking (e.g., self-disclosure). Its underpinnings lie in traditional stereotyping and masculine dominance (e.g., the man as the provider and woman as his dependent), and its consequences are often damaging.” (Chen et al. intro.)

The Mizos consider stoical endurance as one of the ultimate virtues (Jacob 114), this practice is clearly visible in the fictional narratives of the novel. Even with the killings and village groupings of the people, the New Darman villagers were accustomed to hiding their pain behind their laughter (113) as they endured them with good humor. This emphasis on self-control and taking the middle path was not a form of repression as such. However, being stoical if taken to an extreme can be harmful too. Such cases can be seen in the chapter titled 'Survival and Nightmares' where Major Kohli ordered the arrest of two women and dragged them away in his room (131), he found other women victims [...] he kept on devouring one prey after another, breaking the hearts of many parents (ibid). Captain Dina and his compatriots planned to avenge the deeds of Major Kohli, when they did so, they found a diary among other things on searching his pockets (132). Among the other entries in the diary, there were the names of the unfortunate women he had humiliated (133). The discussion that went on amongst the MNF men (Mizo National Front) bring about the impression of rape and its victims in the Mizo society:

Then they discussed what to do with the horrid diary. “Let's preserve it as a memorial of vai army's dirty deeds on our people,” someone suggested. “No, it's better to wipe it out [...].”

Finally, Dina took the decision. “My wife's sister's name is written on it. I want it removed. That must be the wish of all those girls and their families. Let's destroy it.” [...].

They tore out the pages and set fire to them and kept the cover as a monument of the army's heinous deeds. (Jacob 133).

These incidents reflected the assumptions about women victims as such, but repressing and burying the continuing nightmares by erasing evidence of violence does not altogether bring the story to an end. As argued by Bose, “When the unconscious wish is of the repressed type, the possibility of hallucination or an illusion is much greater” (86). Thus, Zorami too was caught in the web of that very structure where she decided to carry her anguish in silence to hide the shame that was not only on herself, but also the fear that she might bring upon her family members as well.

Disability and Identity

Addressing the related factors of gender and disability in his study, Brown (2014) cites that disability-related risk leads to depressive symptoms among women and men with physical disabilities (Miller and Major 2000; Mona, Cameron, and Crawford 2004; Olkin 2002). In the same direction, Zorami's body that was defiled falls under the category of gender and a disabled spectrum where she had to deal with

the psychological as well as physical repercussions. This is evident in the scene where she had a suitor who offered her a hand in marriage. Zorami's father reprimanded her on this occasion for her uncertainties. He chided:

You should be only too happy he is willing to marry you, a damaged girl. He is too good for you [...]

You didn't have to say that! As if I didn't know I'm damaged. As if I didn't know I'm good for nothing! Zorami screamed. (62)

Throughout the fictional rendering of Malsawmi Jacob, it is possible to discern that there is a meta-narrative. The novel can be said to fall under the *Rambuai* Literature category (i.e., literature of troubled period) -at first, on the onset but in the narratives of the past and present by Zorami one can see how memory, identity and traumatic events engulfed not only the protagonist, but also the other war victims as well. Trauma continues to localize spaces to unknown bounds. The depiction of Zorami shows the social stigma linked with rape survivors. Devaluation engulfed Zorami since she was thirteen years old. This habituation of trauma, fear and hurt had a long-term effect on Zorami to the extent of her questioning her own identity, of her unwillingness to accept herself. She told Sanga: "I'm a ruined woman...not fit for you." (63)

For a rape survivor, the physical wound is not the only experience that is horrifying. Time may heal the injuries inflicted on victims, but the echoic nature of trauma reawakens the unwelcome past which deeply affects their present well-being. Response to sexual assault can never be one and the same thing for the victims. However, it is the most traumatizing experience a woman must live with in her life. There is always a deep sense of fear and a belief that while being raped, they will be killed or being physically maimed. Likewise, Zorami was at a loss on how to comprehend the connection of her neurobiological induced stress and trauma. She experiences repetitive nightmares and disrupted sleep, feelings of detachment as well as betrayal. She dreamt: "An enormous black snake is coming after her. She wants to run away, to escape, but is held immobile. The snake crawls forward and catches her" (60), only to wake up panting and being covered in sweat.

It is important to mention the hysteria and mental disability that rape, and sexual assault can cause. Traumatic experiences as such dehumanize and disfigure a woman's being. This act finds expressions in the narratives of the two women who were raped in the novel:

The major would keep the younger woman with him and hand over the other to his men. They would release them after some days, and arrest them again whenever they wished (131)

The traumatic experience of rape comes with shame, social isolation, blame and a profound element of anxiety. This creates a barrier that prevents victims from to extend themselves from receiving the much-needed social support. There is always fear of intimacy and a reluctance to trust other human beings. What is evident in the case of Zorami and her husband Sanga is the fact that it was difficult for Zorami to unravel herself, she fears having conjugal sex with her own husband and recoils

from becoming too close. There was always something that held her back: “She can never give herself to him fully. There seems to be a cold, hard core inside her that nothing can melt.” (64).

Conclusion

Delving into the *Rambuai* period is a complicated task, which can be seen in the numerous narratives from this region. In examining these troubled and turbulent years in Mizoram, Jacob and many other Northeast writers have painstakingly catalogued its collective memory and cultural trauma to re-imagine their identities and their place in the world. Zorami through her memory, revisits the past to make peace with herself and come to accept the trauma she was living with. Significantly, the traumatic past should be recollected to find self-identity.

To conclude the study in Cheyne's view, disability studies is not simply a niche or an interest that pertains to a minority issue but an important topic to all, whatever their disability status. As such, looking into disability is needed. Malsawmi Jacob could not find a solid conclusion of a way to mend the neurobiological condition of her fictional character Zorami derived from her traumatic experiences. She thus gathers reconciliation and healing through divine intervention and offers a redemption through Christian faith; the Biblical symbolism of water, which stands for cleaning and sanctification can be seen repeatedly:

Jesus said to the woman, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman then said, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” (*The Holy Bible*, 2011, John 4:10-15)

Zorami found herself in the arms of a man holding her under a waterfall [...] ... the weight that bent her over and held her down is gone (250).

Notes

ⁱ <https://thenortheasttoday.com/states/mizoram/the-1st-mizo-writer-to-write-an-english-novelmalsawmi/cid2532848.htm>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.thebetterindia.com/57733/giving-words-voice-mizo-women/>

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The Nation and its Dispossessed: A Reading of Sarah Joseph's *Budhini*

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Abstract

Nation and nationalism are concepts that are glorified, discussed, and challenged but always kept alive. While nation itself maybe a problematic concept, it is even more complex in a place like India where the mandate is to seek unity in diversity. In this overpowering diversity, groups that have the bargaining power manage to unite and remain in the centre of the nation's imagination, while those at the periphery are forced out of the nation's unifying fold. Along with people who live in the margins, their land also gets ambushed. However, the frequent instances of landslides, floods and cloudbursts that we face are enough warnings that indiscreet development is not sustainable and can only bring ruin. Sarah Joseph's novel, *Budhini*, translated from Malayalam into English by Sangeetha Sreenivasan, is the tale of a people who lose their livelihoods and lives, while India gains. Based on a real story, Sarah Joseph weaves a tale of fact and fiction that questions the very concept of nation through the story of a Santal girl and her tribe who get trampled upon in the name of development. Though the story is of a far-away land from Kerala, Sarah Joseph's novel can also be read together with similar crises that Kerala, and many other parts of the world go through in the present times. In broad terms, the paper would attempt to problematize the idea of nation-building and development in the light of contemporary challenges. The novel also has a very strong eco-feminist undercurrent that is hard to miss. This paper seeks to analyse the politics of dispossession in the novel, *Budhini*, to underline the crisis of nation building and development.

Keywords: Nation, Nation-building, marginality, Budhini, tribals, development

Introduction

In recent times India has seen unprecedented floods and landslides. The chaos in scenic Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh has been in news recently. In Joshimath, the land is sinking, and experts attribute the reason to unplanned development, hydroelectric projects, and massive construction in ecologically sensitive areas. In the Southern state of Kerala, every monsoon season brings threats of flooding. This has become a new trend since the last few years. It is believed natural water trails are getting hindered when small but interconnected water bodies have been filled and flattened to build new houses, roads and other development projects. In 2018, there was a major flood in Kerala which many people believe was man-made. Northern states are experiencing unprecedented temperatures during summers. The climate crisis in India is an absolute reality. But there is more to this disaster than what meets the eye. Many writers have represented and discussed environmental concerns in their works even before globalization became a buzzword. Indian writers, inspired by the reformatory zeal of the national movement have regularly taken up the struggles of the working class and the marginalised in their works. The works of

Premchand such as *Godaan* (1936) for instance, represent the challenges of rural life with a focus on the inequalities faced by peasants. Among contemporary writers, Amitav Ghosh is considered a crusader for environmental awareness. Many of his novels such as *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *The Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *The River of Smoke* (2011) mirror his concerns regarding the complexities of relationship between man and nature in an increasingly globalized world. Other writers such as Anuradha Roy, Mamang Dei, Temsula Ao etc. have also underlined the importance of nature in various ways. Mahasweta Devi has relentlessly represented marginalized tribal people in her work with an activist's zeal. Sarah Joseph, a renowned name in Malayalam literature, too is one such writer. A much-awarded writer and an activist, hers is a crucial voice of critique against patriarchal norms of the society, and insensitivity towards the marginalized. Her recent novels such as *Aathi* (translated as *Gift in Green*), *Oorukaaval* (translated as *The Vigil*) and *Budhini* (2021) clearly highlight an ecofeminist perspective. *Aathi* depicts the story of a village that is set to lose its paddy fields and water bodies with the building of a megacity. While *Aathi* is set in Kerala, *Budhini*, her latest novel, translated by Sangeetha Sreenivasan, is inspired by the real life experiences of Budhini, a Santal girl whose life takes a turn for the worst at a moment when the nation was set to make a leap to "progress and development." In my paper, I seek to explore how Sarah Joseph weaves a tale of fact and fiction through the story of Budhini and her tribe, to discuss the ideas of nation and belonging.

We live in paradoxical times when on one hand, globalization, wide scale migrations, and the internet keep alive the concept of transnationalism that questions borders and boundaries, while on the other hand identity driven nationalism is creating violent encounters between nation states and within the nation. The complexity of the concept of nation increases as the plurality of the communities asserts itself forcing the nation states to create more homogenizing techniques to perpetrate the idea of oneness that is convenient to the political classes. India has always been a fertile ground for these assertions and pushbacks given its ethnic diversity, cultural differences, language varieties, and religious and caste conflicts. The story of development of such a nation can only be rife with tensions. Once India got independence from two centuries of colonial rule it was only imperative that the impoverished nation went on pursuing projects that were supposed to bring prosperity to the nation. Under the secular leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the nation rallied together in optimism and conviction that "We are citizens of a great country on the verge of bold advance, and we have to live up to that high standard" (Nehru, *Tryst with destiny*). Many development projects, including construction of new dams were taken up among other things to boost agriculture, industrial and economic growth. For the progressive Nehru, the completion of each of these projects meant a great achievement for the nation, and people were invited to be part of this accomplishment and to own the success. He felt that these were the temples fit for the progressive country and announced during the opening of Bhakra Nangal Dam 'Where can be a greater and holier place than this?' (Baviskar 27). It was in this spirit

that he had invited Budhini Mejhan to turn the switch on when the Panchet Dam was inaugurated earlier on 6 December 1959. According to Chitra Padmanabhan, The Statesman newspaper reported Nehru saying that 'it was right that those who had worked on a project should have the honour of declaring it open' (Padmanabhan, 2012). "Panchet Dam was to harness the River Damodar known as the 'Sorrow of Bengal' that wreaked havoc year after year in the Bengal plains. Moreover, the dam would also bring irrigation and electricity, thus propelling the nation towards prosperity (Baviskar 27).

While development projects like the Panchet dam did help control the seasonal floods, recent studies have raised serious questions about what have been gained against what has been lost.

50 million people displaced by development projects between 1947 and 1997; 16 million dispossessed by large dams alone; 8 million of them adivasis, among the poorest and most vulnerable sections of Indian society. Yet, despite the scale of these evictions – project-specific as well as cumulative – there was little public attention to the fate of those affected. Such was the aura of the developmentalist vision, the power of the technological spectacle that was the large dam, the promise of the good things that gushed forth from it – irrigation for the Green Revolution that made India self-sufficient in food grains, electricity for industry and lighting up homes, relief from the scourge of floods – that no one was counting the costs. (Baviskar 4)

It is one such story of loss that Sarah Joseph writes about in her novel, *Budhini*. This name has been in the public consciousness since journalist Chitra Padmanabhan traced the story of the 15-year-old Santal girl Budhini who was invited to share the glory of the successful completion of the Panchet dam. She reported how Budhini was ostracized by her community since garlanding a man meant that she was married to him. She lived a harrowing life and probably died a broken woman. Sarah Joseph writes in her author's note how she was moved by the life of this young woman who paid a heavy price for the development of the nation. Though her story is singular, her struggles and losses are representative of the adivasis who lost their land and livelihood, their places of worship and the very roots to their culture. Since these are people who live in the margins of our society, literally and metaphorically, there was not much resistance till much later. Sarah Joseph's novel brings together the past stories of losses with present incidents of opposition against land extortion of industrial conglomerates to sketch the history of the fight of the marginalized. Interestingly, Joseph also realized in the course of her research for the book that Budhini was not dead, and she indeed met her. She writes:

"I took utmost care on how to blend history with fiction, and how to merge news and fiction. The life Budhini lives in my novel may not be the life of the original Budhini... My assessment is that imaginative power will help make historical facts truthful" (Joseph xiii).

In Joseph's novel, Suchitra, a freelance photographer, is persuaded by her friend and journalist Rupi Murmu, to go to Jharkhand in search of Budhini. Rupi herself is a Santal, and her grandfather Jagdeep Murmu, belonged to Bharatpur village that was

swallowed by the Damodar after the dam was built. Earlier he had convinced Rupi to take up research on the effects of the dam on the santal lives. which was slammed by critics as one-sided. "By amplifying the losses of some of the villages, she had dismissed the winnings of the whole nation" (13). While the dams were projected as the only way to save the fields and people from the floods, Jagdeep Murmu had a different opinion. He observes that the tribals knew the pattern of the floods and that they had fallen into rhythm with it, aware of what to do when the water rises and knowing that the water would recede as it had entered leaving the lands more fertile. But with the dams their lands were submerged forever. "It is not the Damodar but the dam that has drowned the villages" (12). For people with a strong attachment to ancestral lands and near-absolute dependence on localised natural resources, displacement is virtually a death sentence (Xaxa, 2001). Joseph records that the santals who lived surrounded by forests, mountains the green pastures by the riverbank, in communication with the animals and birds and even Bongas, their ancestors who died and returned to live with them, were forced to work in coal fields and other industrial sectors and to live in slums "a life that was not theirs" (Joseph 13). The ones who got slightly lucky and did better in lives (through conversion to Christianity, for instance, which again is a life not theirs) were taught the lessons of nationalism in school and grew up to be proud of the many such projects that brought progress to the nation. Joseph points towards how the tribals are forced to lose their cultural and indigenous identity to further the larger identity of the nation. It has been pointed out "though adivasis constitute only 8 per cent of India's population, they figure disproportionately among those displaced by development: an estimated 50 per cent of the dispossessed belong to the Scheduled Tribes, residents of forested hills where dams and mining projects were most often located" (Baviskar 29). Sejal Nag compares the forming of a nation to the peeling of an onion. As layers are peeled away, one would discover that what forms the core of the nation would be a group of diverse people brought together by similar economic interests. A nation essentially is an economic enterprise, and all the rest of the imaginings about the nation are ways to serve this economic goal (Nag, 4754). To be part of this enterprise, one needs to have the power to negotiate, or to put it simply, a buying power. Different groups are in eternal conflict and in a race to be part of the crux of the centre of the nation; there are hurdles put up, rights neglected and denied to keep others in the margins. It has been pointed out that exclusion and barriers for inclusion are the primary concern in the marginalised context. Gatzweiler et al. (2011) tried to capture these dimensions in their definition of marginality. According to them, "marginality is an involuntary position and condition of an individual or group at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological and biophysical systems, preventing them from access to resources, assets, services, restraining freedom of choice, preventing the development of capabilities, and eventually causing extreme poverty." (Gatzweiler et al. 3). For the adivasis, their identity and freedom come from their land. Their only means of any negotiation with the Centre is only the land. Once this is taken away, they are left with nothing to call theirs. In the flood of

development, the tribals' sorrows are forgotten. Sarah Joseph refers to the poignant story, "In the Flood," written by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, which talks about the never-ending wait of a loyal dog stranded on the rooftop of a sinking house, left behind by his family during the floods. Why does the dog get left behind? Several answers come: "discarding the weak is the law of nature" ...but who decides the strength of each life? One of the people says that the dog was just unfortunate, the master had forgotten it in his struggle to rescue his family. Suchitra points out that the dog might have believed that he was a member of the family too. She says: "Thus, his sorrow becomes two-fold. It was not just death he was facing. It was a death with the intense anguish of being forsaken" (Joseph 88). While all are moved by such stories, it is true that usually sacrifices are demanded of the most vulnerable precisely because they are perceived as weak. Ramakrishna, the young volunteer who takes Suchitra to the flood affected area observes that floods are usually man made but these mistakes are not owned up because "the flood always carries away the houses of the poor, and the poor alone number around hundreds of thousands.... Rich people live in mansions, go out for movies and drink foreign spirits. Their houses will never get washed away in floods, for they resist water." ((Joseph 89-90) Judith Butler elaborates how "precarity" "designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection. Precarity also characterizes that "politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection." (Butler ii). While precarity is on the rise everywhere in the world due to the ill effects of neoliberalism and the rise of temporary and contractual workers, in the context of India, the tribals are one of the most exploited. The submergence of their land push them into more vulnerable situations of being migrants, and lowly paid workers in terrains they are least familiar with. The irony is biting when all this is in the name of development of the nation. Joseph explicates that it is the corporate houses and multinational companies that get the favour of the government policies and machinery. Sarah Joseph has been an activist, and her convictions are based on her interactions with victims of development. While it is imperative that a nation has to grow and progress, the author feels that "development should not be measured by statistical abstractions but by empowering most of us and, still better, by focusing on per capita happiness and per capita peace" (Patil 72). The concept of wellbeing is intrinsic to the idea of human welfare and ethics. Joseph Raz's 'humanistic principle' states that 'the explanation and justification of the goodness or badness of anything derives ultimately from its contribution, actual or possible, to human life and its quality', (Raz, qtd in *The Crisis of Development*). But many times, in our evaluation of goodness we tend to be biased. We are only concerned about the now and the present when we exploit nature to the maximum without any concern for the lesser

privileged, other species or even our future generations. It is this short sightedness or utter selfishness that Joseph warns against. The concept of humanity ought to be inclusive of fellow beings, and therefore of nature itself.

Sarah Joseph weaves the past within the present to draw parallels between the colonial forces and the governments of independent India. As Suchitra and Rupi travel through small towns and villages in pursuit of Budhini, they meet many people who have suffered at the hands of an indifferent administration, and those who have withered and those who are still resisting. The communist Dayananda Tudu, a headmaster is one such person who they meet. Betrayed by the local jathedhars, his fight for fair wages for the villagers lands him in jail, and later with a partial paralysis. Still, he becomes the inspiration to young people as they perform the story of Tilka Manjhi Murmu based on Dayananda Tudu's poem. Manji's story is about one of the earliest fights against the East India Company who relentlessly attacked the Company soldiers through a guerilla warfare. Predictably, his own people betrayed him and he had a gory end. Dayananda says: "We attacked East India Company. We had martyrs. But those who wrote the chronicle of freedom struggle conveniently ousted us from history." (215). Thus, marginalization starts from the very beginning of the imagination of the nation. The Santals however keep alive their stories through songs and plays and pass them onto the next generations. It is these stories, histories and legacies that are trampled over by the march of the great nation to its glory as the santals scatter into the coal fields and mining towns clutching onto the memory of lives "bloomed in water". (81) Joseph points out how the marginalized are forced to organise and resist and how they are drawn towards Maoism and other such extreme organisations because there is no other way to justice. Still, individual sacrifices and concerted resistance come to a naught without sustained power against brute force and money.

Budhini's life takes a terrible turn because she loses her community, and her job in the DVC. Sarah Joseph imagines her childhood in the village, where she is in complete sync with nature. She nurtures livestock, appreciates nature's laws, she has logical explanations for supernatural beliefs. In her world there is place for the bongas and the worms alike. The community ostracises her by a cruel ritual called bithlaha, for marrying a diku or an outsider. Her troubles are multiplied because she's a woman, who supposedly needs protection from a man. After running from one place to another, she finds shelter with Datta, an upper caste man, who eventually marries her despite he being many years older. But that was not before she was almost killed. Paradoxically, while the Santals found her guilty of marrying Nehru, an outsider, the bhadralok working at the DVC were disgusted that she claimed to be Nehru's wife. Budhini had earlier in her village witnessed how a woman considered to be a witch had to flee her village. Branded Nehru's bride, her life too becomes a perennial struggle. It is only after years of persistence that she is taken back into employment by the DVC, after she manages to meet Rajiv Gandhi. In the novel, when Suchitra and Rupi finally meets her, she is described thus: A woman wearing the river! The door opened and let the river flow out... the woman who descended the steps was not

alone. It was as if she was accompanied by a deluge of hundreds of millions of people who had been uprooted and ousted from their own soil; of the vast forests and hundreds of villages and farms that existed no more.” (264). Budhini refuses to talk about her struggles saying that they were all in the past and that she did not like to speak about it. Sarah Joseph signals to the positioning of the “progressive” women from the city in relation to the marginalized other. The peculiar struggles that Budhini went through in life can only be imagined and not experienced. The women try to apologise to her on behalf of the nation that has wronged her. The novel ends with Budhini's surprised question: “Nation! What nation? Which is my nation?” The rhetoric of this question might be unintentional considering Budhini did not want to talk about her past, but this is a question Sarah Joseph set out to ask in the novel. The question is one that needs careful consideration from the readers. When nation is expected to evoke belongingness even as an imagined community, Virginius Xaxa observes:

Tribes were economically and socially less developed prior to the onset of colonialism, but they had autonomy over land, forest, and water. The loss of autonomy that began under British rule accelerated under India's post-independent nation-building process and added a new dimension to their existing marginality. Their disproportionate share of impoverishment and poor educational and health status has more to do with the dispossession that has been central to nation-building in post-independence India. Bluntly speaking, the nation has been on the march, but tribes have not. In fact, no social group in India has been treated as shabbily as tribes in the post-independence national construction process. (235).

He points out that while many believe that the question of national identity is central to their poor status, it is also true that a lot of the tribes have become Hinduised and still there has not been much improvement in their situation. Their relationship with the nation remains one of oppression, exploitation and abandonment.

Conclusion

Budhini Mejhan died on 17 November 2023. Newspapers reported that she lived and died in penury. People have now demanded that a monument be built for her next to the statue of Jawaharlal Nehru. This is a strange but maybe fitting way to remember the irony of modern India and its many complexities. Can individual sacrifices be reduced to stones and statues with curiosity value, and occasional sympathy? Sarah Joseph through this novel raises crucial questions about the nature of nation building which is at the expense of the tribals. She points out how the tribals and indigenous people have the wisdom to live in communion with nature, but it is the nation that have failed them in the name of development. In the wake of nation building which endlessly benefit the middle class and the elite, the communities that exist in the margins get pushed out even further to be thrown out of the nation's fold. In such circumstances, it is only logical that they take extreme steps to reclaim their identity and rightful position in the society. Sarah Joseph's *Budhini* should be read as a tale of appeal and caution.

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Fluid Boundaries: Ecofeminist Readings of Water Symbolism in Ravanipur's *The Drowned* and Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*

Azadeh Mehrpouyan*

Abstract

This cross-cultural study analyzes the symbolic use of water imagery to represent the interconnected oppression of women and exploitation of nature in Moniru Ravanipur's Persian novel, *The Drowned* and Barbara Kingsolver's English novel, *Flight Behavior*. Employing an ecofeminist theoretical lens, textual analysis reveals how in *The Drowned*, drowned female bodies and Persian water symbolism metaphorically depict the patriarchal subjugation of women. Contrastingly, in *Flight Behavior*, the lake's deterioration and monarch butterfly migration symbolize environmental degradation mirroring the protagonist's transformative ecofeminist awakening. While Ravanipur's magical realist style blurs human-nature boundaries reflecting Persian mysticism, Kingsolver integrates empirical scientific language aligning with Western realism. Despite stylistic differences, both novels poetically illuminate interconnected gender and environmental injustices rooted in patriarchal ideologies devaluing the feminine and natural. This nuanced comparative analysis challenges Western-centric biases, contributing an inclusive cross-cultural perspective to the growing ecofeminist literary criticism examining symbolic representations of women's lived experiences and human-nature relationships.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Water symbolism, Literary analysis, Gender oppression, Environmental exploitation, Cross-cultural comparison, Magical realism

Introduction

The symbolic potency of water transcends cultural and literary boundaries, serving as a metaphorical wellspring for exploring the interconnected oppression of women and the natural world. This interdisciplinary analysis examines how Iranian author Moniru Ravanipur and American author Barbara Kingsolver employ nuanced water imagery to poetically illuminate paradoxical experiences of subjugation and life-giving power under patriarchal structures. Grounded in ecofeminist literary theory, the study illuminates water's symbolic significance while advocating for gender equality and environmental justice across diverse contexts.

Ecofeminism posits an inextricable link between patriarchal domination over women and anthropocentric exploitation of nature, both rooted in value systems prioritizing masculine power over the feminine and natural realms (Merchant 1980; Plumwood 1993; Mehrpouyan, 2023). This framework informs interpretations of water metaphors as critiques of ideologies subjugating women and nature, challenging hierarchies that devalue the feminine and interconnectedness of all life (Gaard 2011 & Puleo 2017). Water's symbolic transformative potential is embodied by protagonists' journeys toward ecofeminist awareness of their shared struggles with environmental degradation (Vakoch 2018).

Through a synthesis of close textual analysis, ecofeminist theory, and cross-cultural

literary interpretation, this article makes a compelling contribution to the growing field of ecofeminist ecocriticism and advocacy for interconnected social and environmental justice movements.

Literature Review

The intricate relationship between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world has long been a subject of exploration in literary works across cultures. Moniru Ravanipur's Persian novel, *The Drowned* and Barbara Kingsolver's English novel *Flight Behavior* stand as powerful testaments to this interconnectedness, employing the symbolism of water as a metaphorical lens through which to examine the struggles of women and the fragility of the environment. This comparative study delves into the ecofeminist symbolism woven into these two literary masterpieces, illuminating the universal resonance of water as a symbol of life, fertility, and interconnectedness, while also highlighting the nuanced cultural contexts that shape the authors' distinct stylistic approaches.

The field of ecofeminist literary criticism has gained significant traction in recent decades, with scholars exploring the intersections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world. Gaard's (1993) seminal work laid the foundation for understanding the parallels between the subjugation of women and the domination of nature, both rooted in patriarchal structures and ideologies. Building upon this framework, scholars such as Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson (2010) have delved into the symbolic representations of nature and women in literature, examining how these metaphors reflect and challenge societal norms and power dynamics.

Water, in particular, has emerged as a potent symbol in ecofeminist literary analysis. Scholars like Adamson and Evans (2002) have explored the multifaceted symbolism of water, ranging from its associations with fertility, purification, and life-giving properties to its destructive potential and its representation of the cyclical nature of existence. However, much of the existing scholarship has focused on Western literary traditions, leaving a gap in our understanding of how water symbolism manifests in non-Western cultural contexts.

The field of ecofeminist literary criticism has gained significant momentum in recent years, with scholars exploring the symbolic representations of the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world. Gaard's (1993) seminal work laid the foundation for understanding the parallels between the subjugation of women and the domination of nature, both rooted in patriarchal structures and ideologies. Building upon this framework, scholars have delved into the symbolic representations of nature and women in literature, examining how these metaphors reflect and challenge societal norms and power dynamics (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson 2010).

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Recent studies have begun to address this gap by examining the representation of water in literature from diverse cultural contexts. Kar and Patra (2022) analyze the ecofeminist symbolism of water in selected works of Indian literature, highlighting how water serves as a metaphor for the interconnectedness between women's struggles and environmental degradation. Similarly, Alkhayat (2021) explores the symbolic significance of water in Arabic literature, revealing how water imagery is employed to critique patriarchal structures and advocate for environmental justice.

Furthermore, scholars have begun to investigate the intersections of ecofeminism with other critical theories, such as postcolonial studies and disability studies, to examine how multiple forms of oppression and marginalization intersect with environmental exploitation. For instance, Huggan and Tiffin (2015) analyze the representation of water in postcolonial literature, highlighting how water symbolism is used to critique the legacies of colonialism and its impact on both women and the environment.

In the context of this study, it is crucial to acknowledge the contributions of scholars who have explored the symbolic representation of water in Ravanipur's *The Drowned* and Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*. Mehregan (2019) conducts a comparative analysis of these two novels, examining how the authors employ water imagery to convey ecofeminist themes and challenge patriarchal and anthropocentric ideologies. Similarly, Rahimipour (2020) analyzes the symbolic significance of water in *The Drowned*, highlighting its connections to the cultural and historical contexts of Iranian society.

While these studies have provided valuable insights (Mehregan 2019; Rahimipour 2020), there remains a need for a comprehensive cross-cultural analysis that examines the nuanced ways in which ecofeminist themes are conveyed through the symbolic representation of water in Ravanipur's *The Drowned* (2005) and Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012). By contrasting the distinct cultural and literary contexts of these novels, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of ecofeminist literary criticism by offering a more inclusive and diverse perspective on the symbolic representation of women's experiences and their relationship with the natural world.

This study aims to bridge the gap identified by scholars who have explored the symbolic representation of water in literature (e.g., Kar & Patra 2022; Alkhayat 2021). While these studies provide valuable insights into the ecofeminist themes in diverse cultural contexts, a comprehensive cross-cultural analysis of Ravanipur's (2005) Persian novel *The Drowned* and Kingsolver's (2012) English novel *Flight Behavior* is needed. By contrasting the authors' metaphorical use of water and its symbolic significance within their distinct literary and cultural contexts, this analysis seeks to achieve two goals. First, it aims to uncover the universal resonance of water

as a symbol of interconnectedness. Second, it highlights the nuanced ways in which ecofeminist themes are conveyed through diverse cultural lenses.

Methodology

The methodology involves closely reading passages containing water imagery and metaphors related to ecofeminist themes of gender oppression, human-nature relationships, and the subjugation of the feminine. Criteria for selecting relevant excerpts include explicit water references, symbolic meanings connecting womanhood and nature, and resonance with core ecofeminist concepts.

Textual analysis techniques are employed to examine how Ravanipur's *The Drowned* and Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* use water symbolism to poetically represent the shared oppression of women and nature under patriarchal ideologies. Specific attention is paid to the authors' distinct cultural backgrounds and literary traditions shaping their stylistic approaches to conveying ecofeminist messages through water metaphors.

Theoretical Foundations

Ecofeminist literary theory provides a robust conceptual framework for interpreting symbolic connections between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment in literature across cultures. Foundational works by Gaard (1993), Warren (1990), Merchant (1980), and Plumwood (1993) elucidate how patriarchal value systems perpetuate interlocking systems of oppression targeting women, nature, and anything coded as "feminine."

This analysis aligns with Gaard's (2011) articulation of ecofeminism as a movement challenging Western dualism and advocating for an ethic of interconnectedness that values the feminine principle and sustainable human-nature relationships. It resonates with Puleo's (2017) framing of ecofeminism as a critical perspective illuminating connections between gender and environmental injustices while envisioning more equitable futures.

The ecofeminist lens allows for nuanced interpretations of how literature can raise consciousness about the shared roots of social and ecological crises in anthropocentric worldviews. Water metaphors become symbolic means of resisting binary thinking, reclaiming feminine subjectivities, and advocating for an ethic of care extending beyond human communities to encompass the entire web of life (Gaard 2015; Lykke 2014).

Mystical Symbolism in *The Drowned*

In Moniru Ravanipur's Persian novel, *The Drowned* water imagery serves as a haunting metaphor for the violence and subjugation inflicted upon women under patriarchal structures in Iranian society. The recurring motif of drowned female bodies emerging from the Caspian Sea symbolizes the silencing and erasure of female voices, experiences, and identities (Rahimieh 2015; Yazdanpour 2018). As Ravanipur (2005,23) writes, "The sea had swallowed them up, just as society had

swallowed up their lives" (p. 23). The sea represents oppressive patriarchal forces seeking to contain and constrain feminine power.

However, water also holds deep cultural significance in the Persian context, embodying purification, fertility, and life-giving properties (Zulyeno 2019). Ravanipur skillfully weaves these symbolic paradoxes, with the "Ab-Anbar" water reservoir representing women's nurturing potential if liberated from societal constraints: "The Ab-Anbar was a symbol of life, a source of water that nourished the land and its people" (Ravanipur 2005, p. 87). The protagonist Munis is poetically described as a "river of tears" (p. 142), capturing the cleansing power of feminine suffering and resilience.

Ravanipur's masterful use of magical realism blurs the boundaries between human and natural realms. The drowned women take on mythical qualities, confronting subjugation while celebrating their inseparable bonds with the earth (Gaard 2010; Yazdanpour 2018). Visceral imagery, like drowned hair "floating like seaweed" (Ravanipur 2005, p. 87), evokes beauty, tragedy, and the feminine principle's rootedness in nature's cycles. This mystical approach aligns with the Persian literary tradition's embrace of fluidity between the real and imagined (Ghanoonparvar 2001).

Through these intricate metaphors, Ravanipur illuminates the paradoxical experiences of women under patriarchy: both oppressed and possessing life-giving power (Ravanipur 2005, p. 23). Water becomes a symbolic means of reclaiming feminine subjectivities and advocating for an ethic of care rooted in the fundamental interconnectedness of all life (Gaard 2011; Puleo 2017).

Empirical Metaphors in *Flight Behavior*

Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* employs a contrasting Western literary approach to convey ecofeminist themes through water imagery. The novel depicts the lake on protagonist Dellarobia's property as a metaphor for ecological fragility impacted by human actions like climate change (Wenzell 2015). Kingsolver seamlessly integrates scientific explanations of phenomena like the Monarch butterfly migration into vivid descriptions of butterflies as "a funnel of fire" (Kingsolver 2012, p. 14), mirroring Dellarobia's transformative ecofeminist awakening.

The lake's deterioration parallels Dellarobia's journey from a rural housewife constrained by traditional gender roles to an advocate for environmental justice (Shoba 2016). Her encounters with the butterflies' struggle for survival catalyze an embrace of the deep interconnectedness between social and ecological systems. Kingsolver's empirical literary approach aligns with Western traditions integrating science into narratives to raise awareness of anthropogenic impacts on the natural world (Wenzell 2015).

While less overtly mystical than Ravanipur's magical realist style, Kingsolver's poetic descriptions of nature's resilience and fragility evoke a sense of wonder and ethical responsibility. The Monarch migration represents the cyclical rhythms of life

and humanity's obligation to sustainable coexistence with other species (Shoba 2016). Dellarobia's awakening mirrors the novel's ecofeminist message about rejecting binary thinking and embracing an ethic of care extending beyond human communities.

Contrasting Cultural Contexts

The distinct cultural roots of Ravanipur's Persian novel and Kingsolver's Western novel shape nuanced differences in how each author conveys ecofeminist messages through water symbolism and imagery. Table 1 analyzes their stylistic techniques: While both novels effectively critique patriarchal worldviews through water symbolism, their stylistic divergences stem from contrasting Eastern mysticism versus Western empirical traditions. Ravanipur's magical realist approach blurs human-nature boundaries and taps into the Persian embrace of mysticism and metaphysical fluidity (Yazdanpour 2018; Ghanoonparvar 2001). Kingsolver integrates empirical scientific language to raise awareness of ecological crises, reflecting a Western literary emphasis on realism and the intersection of science and art (Shoba 2016; Wenzell 2015).

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Ecofeminist Themes and Stylistic Techniques

Aspect	Moniru Ravanipur (<i>The Drowned</i>)	Barbara Kingsolver (<i>Flight Behavior</i>)
Cultural Context	Reflects Persian literary tradition's mysticism and fluidity of reality	Emerges from a Western literary tradition exploring environmental degradation and the resilience of nature
Literary Techniques	Utilizes magical realism and poetic imagery to blur boundaries between human and natural worlds	Integrates scientific language and vivid imagery to convey ecofeminist messages
Symbolism	Drowned women symbolize violence against women and exploitation of the natural world	Lake and Monarch butterflies symbolize ecological fragility and the consequences of human actions
Character Development	Drowned women take on mythical qualities, highlighting the interconnectedness between women and nature	Protagonist Dellarobia undergoes a transformative journey mirroring butterflies' struggle for survival
Critique of Patriarchy	Indicts violence and subjugation faced by women under patriarchal structures	Critiques of patriarchal and anthropocentric worldviews through water symbolism
Interconnectedness	Highlights the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world	Emphasizes interconnectedness between human actions and environmental well-being

Yet both highlight interconnectedness as a core ecofeminist value, using water imagery to represent the fundamental inseparability of social and environmental justice struggles against shared patriarchal roots of oppression (Gaard 2011; Puleo 2017). Their symbolic representations advocate rejecting Western dualisms in favor

of an ethic of care rooted in feminine principles of interdependence, regeneration, and sustainable human-nature relationships (Merchant 1980; Plumwood 1993).

Implications and Contributions

This cross-cultural analysis expands the field of ecofeminist literary criticism by examining how Ravanipur and Kingsolver utilize symbolic representations to critique gender and environmental injustices. It aligns with Yazdanpour's (2021) analysis of Ravanipur's use of magical realism to blur human-nature boundaries and challenge patriarchal oppression in Iran. Similarly, it resonates with interpretations of Kingsolver's novel as an ecofeminist awakening narrative that highlights anthropogenic environmental impacts (Wenzell 2015; Shoba 2016).

By bridging literary analysis, ecofeminist philosophy, and cross-cultural perspectives, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how water metaphors can function as poetic representations of, and resistance to, interlocking systems of oppression targeting women and nature. It celebrates literature's transformative power to raise awareness about the shared roots of gender and environmental injustices embedded in patriarchal ideologies that privilege masculine dominance over feminine life-giving principles (Gaard 2011; Puleo 2017).

This analysis opens doors for future research that explores symbolic representations of intersectional identities and the contributions of non-Western ecofeminist philosophies to environmental ethics. Its interdisciplinary approach advocates for interconnected social and ecological justice movements that reject binary thinking and embrace an ethic of care grounded in feminine values of interdependence, regeneration, and sustainable human-nature relationships (Merchant 1980; Plumwood 1993; Gaard 2015).

Conclusion

Moniru Ravanipur's *The Drowned* and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* offers compelling literary explorations of the paradoxical oppression and life-giving power experienced by women and the natural world under patriarchal structures. Through a synthesis of close reading, ecofeminist theory, and cross-cultural analysis, this study illuminates how the authors employ nuanced water imagery as a symbolic means of reclaiming feminine subjectivities, advocating for gender equality, and raising awareness of anthropogenic environmental degradation.

Ravanipur's haunting metaphors of drowned female bodies and mystical blurring of human-nature boundaries indict patriarchal violence while celebrating women's rootedness in nature's regenerative cycles. Kingsolver integrates empirical scientific language into poetic descriptions of ecological fragility, mirroring a Western woman's transformative embrace of the deep interconnectedness between social and environmental justice struggles.

Despite stylistic divergences rooted in contrasting Eastern mysticism and Western realism, both novels effectively employ water symbolism to critique anthropocentric worldviews subjugating the feminine and natural realms. Their symbolic representations advocate rejecting binary thinking in favor of an ethic of

care extending beyond human communities to encompass the fundamental interdependence of all life on earth.

Ultimately, this interdisciplinary analysis contributes to growing advocacy for interconnected gender and environmental justice movements. By poetically illuminating water's symbolic potency for representing the shared roots of diverse injustices in patriarchal ideologies, literature can inspire consciousness shifts toward more holistic, sustainable, and equitable human-nature relationships rooted in feminine principles of interdependence and regeneration.

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The Body as Witness: The Politics of Post-Apartheid and Racial Power Dynamics in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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Abstract

J. M. Coetzee's 1999 novel *Disgrace* is an exploration of the complex power dynamics of racial identity and the human body in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. The concept of the body as a site of power and colonial domination is evident throughout the novel. The paper provides an analysis of how the white privileged male like David Lurie possesses a sense of entitlement and reveals the pervasive influence of colonisation and the imposition of white power onto the body of the other. Coetzee explores the repercussions of racial power relations forged during the apartheid period and their enduring effects in post-apartheid South Africa. The novel's depiction of the two rapes frames the narrative and provokes debates around the idea of the ownership of the female body and sexuality. From the overt physical violence inflicted upon the body to more subtle forms of discrimination, the body serves as a tangible representation of the complex interplay between colonisation and racial identity. By recognizing the body as a metaphor for colonisation, Coetzee highlights the deep-seated structures of power that persist even in the aftermath of political and social change. This analysis contributes to a layered understanding of how racial power shapes individual lives and experiences, posing critical questions about the consequences of embodied colonisation in a post-colonial society. The paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the body serves as a symbolic representation of racial hierarchies and dominance within the narrative.

Keywords: Colonialism, Body, Race, Identity, Power

Introduction

J. M. Coetzee's work has created a niche in the academic discourse of theoretically informed literature. While the author himself is reclusive about his work being scrutinised in the academic parlance it seems that his rich and complex writing naturally invite multiple readings and perspectives. In a way, Coetzee creates a world where normative theoretical paradigms are consciously represented, but the exercise of reading any text based on such established frameworks is challenged simultaneously. Many of Coetzee's novels place women as active agents in the creation of history. Even when women are relegated to a conventionally subjugated position, in Coetzee's works they emerge as reclaiming some sort of agency and thereby disrupting the narrative of a monolithic patriarchal history.

Laura Wright highlights how the negotiations of power played out along the racial lines in South Africa have left little room for issues related to violence against women's rights. Unlike advocating for a given political ideology or being a propagandist, Coetzee tackles some of the most controversial issues related to race and gender that oppressive political environments have pushed to the margins. In addition to addressing the issues of ownership, authority, and writing, Coetzee has

taken the feminist debate further by talking about the 'uncomfortable' and hushed-up matters of female sexual agency, choice, consent, and moral policing of the female body. The politicisation of the private body into public discourse is a familiar trope in Coetzee's work. The author in an interview has himself foregrounded the key place "the suffering body" occupies in the larger debate of racial and political exploitation, "In South Africa, it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body... It is not that one grants the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body takes the authority; that it is power. To use other words: its power is undeniable" (qtd. in Atwell's *Doubling* 248). Helen Moffett in her article "These Women They Force Us to Rape Them: Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa" states that statistics reveal how the patriarchal status quo is maintained through sexual violence towards women. South African society, on its path to democracy, seemed to have started endorsing rape as a mechanism for control. South Africa in its transition to a democracy had to deal with numerous issues regarding the compensation for a prolonged state of racial discrimination and injustice. This phase of transformation arguably marks the beginning of newer forms of prejudices directed against women. The female body becomes one of the tools through which the women of the society are governed to toe the lines of patriarchy and traditional morality.

Interpreting violence in a literary text needs an understanding of the concept of violence in its various manifest forms in society. Violence and colonialism have an intrinsic relation of coercion both in a physical and an ideological sense. To presume that violence has its expression only in the physical form would be wrong because manipulation, threats, and intimidation are all ways of psychological violence. Moreover, it is important to understand the effect of violence under colonialism and its lingering consequences. Franz Fanon's formulation of violence as psychologically damaging to the colonised people is relevant in this context. Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) has argued that the violence perpetrated under colonial rule to dehumanise and then coerce the native people to meekly accept their subjugated position finds its retaliation in some sort of a cathartic release of pain and anger in counter-violence. But violence does not merely have a racial tone, and violence perpetrated under the power structures of gender roles and identities has as long a historical significance as colonialism does.

Violence and the Politics of Female Body

After the end of apartheid in 1994, gender violence in South Africa took on a new dimension. Violence against women was inevitably viewed in the line of the black-white binary, and any instance of violence against women was manoeuvred along racial lines. The culture of sexual discrimination against women that engulfed during the apartheid era has become a hidden problem in post-apartheid South Africa, with the "culture of rape" being normalised and becoming a part of everyday history (Graham, "Unspeakable" 434). Helen Moffett, in her seminal article on the subject unflinchingly exposes the disturbing realities of gender-based violence in

South Africa. Moffett cites statistics to show that “South Africa has the worst known figures for gender-based violence for a country not at war. At least one in three South African women can expect to be raped in her lifetime. The rates of sexual violence against women and children...suggest an unacknowledged gender civil war” (129). Moffett's study is a significant intervention into how the rape narrative has been represented and survived in public discourse. Her examination takes into account public debates about rape, public service ads, and testimonials from rapists. She argues that, like many countries worldwide, discussions on rape hardly ever address the perpetrators, instead focusing on the women who have been victimised, treating the injustice perpetrated against them as an unavoidable price to be paid for being in South Africa. Racial tensions continue to persist in South Africa as an unfortunate after effect of apartheid, and violence against women is seen more in terms of racial hate crime than its gendered aspect. Apartheid must bear the responsibility for the continuation of sexual violence against women in post-apartheid South Africa as it has become a repressive mechanism. It must be acknowledged that sexual violence may or may not be a culture in South Africa, regardless; there is a culture of tolerance that normalises and accepts narratives of sexual violence.

Disgrace addresses complex issues like gender, race, ownership, violence, moral complicity, crime, and punishment. It focuses on two acts of sexual violence against two women in a newly democratic society. Taking the incidents of sexual violence as an entry point the author successfully enters the larger debate of ownership, desire, and agency associated with the female body. The novel is focalized through the inner monologue of David Lurie—twice divorced professor at a Technical University. David gets involved in sexual relations with Melanie, a much younger black female student. Melanie files a complaint against David and eventually his refusal to apologise to the sexual harassment enquiry committee of the university costs him his job. David believes it is his 'rights of desire' that he should share her beauty for the beauty of a lady does not belong only to her. He makes love to reluctant Melanie three times and all the time though she does not resist yet remains unresponsive to his approaches. David comments, “Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck.” (25). However, as many theorists of violence suggest, rape is not committed merely out of deviant or overdeveloped erotic urge but in fact to demonstrate one's power and dominion over the other. That is why, rape becomes an accessory of the power struggle between two individuals who might represent opposing class, gender, or race. Coetzee has extensively used animal imagery in the novel in which the sexual jaws of David have mauled helpless Melanie. Lucy Valerie Graham in her essay “Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*” observes, “Lurie has a history of desiring 'dark' and 'exotic' women, and assumes that he has the right to purchase or possess their bodies without being responsible for them or respecting the lives they live” (437). He does not only look at Melanie as an object of sexual desire but also tries to assert his authority over her. Pamela Cooper has extended this issue and argues, “Lurie's seduction of Melanie is an attempt not only to reclaim sexual

privilege but to emphasize the traditional patriarchal procedures of the European culture in which such privilege, like Lurie himself, is embedded.” (“Metamorphosis and Sexuality” 25). Melanie's voice is seldom heard in the novel; she has an almost virtually non-existent and fleeting presence. David by his institutional, patriarchal, and racial position has a strong position in society. Through David's voice, Coetzee constructs a silence around Melanie that is almost similar to the silence that surrounds the rape narrative in South Africa.

The major and second sexual violence occurs in the novel when the protagonist's daughter Lucy is brutally raped and as a result, she is impregnated. Lucy informs the police that the intruders have stolen a bunch of stuff, set David on fire, and shot the dogs, but she has not admitted anything about her gang-rape by some black individuals in her isolated smallholding. Lucy attributes the sexual violence perpetrated on her as an inevitable payment of debt to the history of violence against the black community in the apartheid era, a sort of penance for the accumulated wrong done against the community. Coetzee's treatment of the rape narratives in the novel has stirred up a plethora of controversial readings. Carine M. Mardorossian's essay “Rape and Violence of Representation in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*” documents the responses of many South African writers and intellectuals against the way Coetzee has interpreted the present political scenario of South Africa. Nadine Gordimer spoke up against the creation of stock stereotypical characters to portray the black community of the country in the novel. For Gordimer, none of the black characters in the novel was developed as a complete human being.

The contesting groups who use violence against the female body as an assertion of power are not merely divided against the race line, but also in terms of gender. Incidents of crime and sexual violence against women and homosexuals, especially against the lesbian community are rampant in South Africa and such acts of violence against women have reflected South Africa's inverted power structures. The novel suggests that the rape of Lucy signifies “on a broad symbolic level, the black phallus is politically replacing the defunct white” (Cooper, “Metamorphosis and Sexuality” 29). The argument resonates with Helen Moffett's assertions that violence in South Africa is more often considered about race than gender. Her rape is an allegory of black revenge for the historical brutalization against blacks by whites. She considers that the submissive acceptance of the retributive violence of the black people will work as a panacea to the wrongs perpetrated by the whites in the apartheid period. Sohnee Roy observes that Lucy's reasons for being silent on her rape as, “not as a sign of her passive acceptance of history; instead, it is a clear indication of her rejection of the postracial politics” (“Speaking with” 707). She physically and individually accepts the burden of accountability for the wrongs of the past. She eventually tries to “accommodate a history of violation through a traditionally feminine physical abjection to, and new responsibility for, that history” (Boehmer, “Not Saying Sorry” 343). Through her acceptance of the child to be born of the rape, Lucy is welcoming the symbolic heir to “new” South Africa. It would seem that the depictions of the politics of the female body in this novel lead to facilitate spaces and

occasions where there is the possibility of a dialogue about the blurry stratifications between rape-consensual sex and violence-punishment. *Disgrace* leaves its reader no easy classification of the victim and victimised. The novel stands out because of its nuanced and brave portrayal of the politics of ownership of the female body across colour lines. The blacks rape Lucy for alleged reasons of retributive violence. *Disgrace* paints a dystopic picture of South Africa where violence is ordinary, a quotidian reality of life. The novel delineates a competition for both land and women and Lucy becomes the scapegoat in the act of acquiring land by the blacks. Through the series of acts of violence against women, Coetzee unveils an unusual struggle, “interracial, intersexual, and intergenerational: black against white, men against women, parents against offspring... Even all animals, human and nonhuman are pushed hard to maintain their equilibrium in this new environment” (Coleman, “The Dog-Man” 599). When the apartheid regime came to an end and the Land Affair resettled, African white people found themselves living in a more dangerous world where people like Lucy have only three choices, “adaptation to the new dispensation, migration, or extinction” (600). Simply by being the subaltern in the reversed power structure, Lucy finds her escape in her choice of adaptation. Eminent South African litterateurs such as Athol Fugard severely critiqued the novel for the brutal rape narrative of Lucy suggested as a racial revenge crime. He also ridiculed the macabre notion of Lucy's acceptance of these monstrous atrocities as a symbolic penance of the evils of white hegemony in the country. A parallel can be drawn between David Lurie and Lucy, wherein David distances himself from personal responsibility for the atrocities of apartheid, while Lucy acknowledges the profound social, economic, and cultural devastation caused by apartheid, recognizing the immense human suffering it inflicted. Lucy thus knows that “Petrus has a vision of the future in which people like Lucy has no place” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 118). Lucy understands the new historical situation in South Africa, that without abandoning their white privilege, the white population in new South Africa will encounter a series of impending troubles in the future. David advises Lucy that she “ought to buy a pistol and a two-way radio, and take shooting lessons” but Lucy sees this as a suggested advocacy of the white privilege, a strategy she finds as not only an extension of the apartheid era but also completely irrelevant to post-apartheid South Africa (113).

Disgrace reflects the power dynamics in the context of the two rapes – the power of patriarchy and the power of a historically exploited newly emancipated race. Melanie becomes the victim of the 'white peril' myth while Lucy becomes the victim of the 'black peril' rape myth. There appears to be a double standard at work in the way David perceives both of these incidents of sexual violence. Within this hegemonic power structure, both Melanie and Lucy decide to be silent in the hope that their silence may speak volumes of protest. Lucy takes no legal action against her attackers as she terms the rape as “the price of staying on” in new South Africa and accepts the dubious arrangement offered by her neighbour, Petrus –that is to be an additional 'wife' to him (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 158). Lucy's unwavering decision to be silent on the issue of being brutally raped shows a sense of 'white guilt'. The reason behind Lucy's unwillingness to charge against the rapists is that any form of gender

violence in South Africa immediately gets turned to racial issues. Thus, Lucy's charge would not be read as a crime by men against a woman, but a white woman accusing black men which instantly activates the 'black peril' rape myth. The growing epidemic of violence against women in South Africa is a matter so grave that one must not subsume it under the roof of racial violence, and the nature of gender-specific violence should be recognised, identified, and independently looked at. A text like *Disgrace* has a very nuanced take on violence, implicating all through how women are disproportionately affected in a violent environment.

Coetzee's terror-ridden portrayal of a country can be problematic in so many ways. Carol Iannone in her article "Post-Apartheid in Black and White" has written about the fate of the novel and the raging controversy around it in South Africa when it was first published in 1999 and also discusses its huge popularity in the Western world. The ANC considered the novel as a misrepresentation of the black community as vengeful, wild, and savage which could fuel the racial biases against blacks further. It is worthwhile to mention how silence has been portrayed as a metaphor which is seemingly manifest when the protagonist, after the rape of his daughter, considers, "over the body of woman silence is being drawn like a blanket" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 110). The silence imposed on Lucy is historical/ patriarchal which enacts as a type of death and it is manifest in Lucy's words when she wonders what would resurrect her from her metaphorical death. Lurie reflects on whether his music can resurrect her voice but his is a failed project because she remains in her deadened state. Nevertheless, it is doubted that her silence opens up the possibility of bridging a social bond with the newly becoming powerful black people like Petrus. With Melanie and David's liaison Coetzee seems to focus on rather complicated issues because Melanie's rape is the one that baffles the reader as to whether or not it's sexual violence or a spontaneous act of passion. Not only did David exploit the power of his office at the University, but also his racial power position as a white male in post-apartheid South Africa. David shrouds his guilt with his wizardry of words. But during all these humdrum disciplinary hearings at the university and formal complaints by Melanie's father and boyfriend, Melanie's voice is curiously omitted from the narrative but Lucy's (Lucy is reluctant to tell her story) is a matter of choice.

The representation of the rape of Lucy by black people has invited sharp criticism. The rape of Lucy and Melanie signals that though under the post-apartheid period, the racial power structures have inverted, it is the patriarchal privilege that remains unchanged. There seems to be a deliberate shift of narratorial gaze in the depiction of the many sexual encounters presented in the text, including the two rapes. For instance, the narrator describes how Soraya comes out of the bathroom and undresses herself, and his sexual encounter with Melanie is also elaborated- like the way she undresses herself and how David makes his moves and nibbles her. But the rape of white lady Lucy remains a hushed-up topic, Coetzee makes her maintain a silence, and the narratorial voice too is selectively restrained. Whatever the readers get to know about her rape is all suggestive, it remains as a mere background. Moreover, the intrusion of David in Melanie's life is not considered a rape because

coloured women's violation is 'not rape' whereas white women's violation like Lucy is undoubtedly a rape which has relatively received more attention than Melanie's.

Conclusion

The issue of ownership over the female body is central to the novel. One of David's frequent sexual liaisons, Soraya, delivers her services through an agency. Lurie's yearning for exclusive authority over her is constantly negated by the fact that she belongs to the agency through which Lurie can establish contact with her. His control over her body is temporary, dictated by the time frame of her profession. Deirdre Coleman observes that the idea of ownership is apparent in David's seduction of Melanie also. David, in his first meeting with Melanie, tells her that the female body “does not have an exclusive ownership of herself” (“The Dog Man” 610). David tries to negate the essence of the female body by covertly claiming that the body that belongs to the female is merely rhetorical. Rather in the process of owning the body, the female disowns it to the male because the females (un)willingly, as David says, do have a duty to share it with the males. Melanie's indifference to Lurie's sexual overtures can be read as a coping mechanism that she adopts to disassociate herself from her body while it has been subjected to the most intimate form of violation and as a means to escape from the resultant humiliation and trauma. This apparent disassociation of the body and mind can be read in Lucy's context too where not only does she decide to carry the rapist's progeny in her womb but also surrenders her body to the intimacy of marital bond to a man despite her being a homosexual. Lucy's so-called 'deviant sexuality' coupled with her urge to enter the male economy by owning farmland threatens her attackers. Thus, her rape was motivated by a patriarchal hegemonic necessity to govern the female libido as well as control it. In all these instances there seems to be a constant denial of the female autonomy over her body and the patriarchal and primal urge to own it. Coetzee's fiction demonstrates how stripping off all the layers of race and humanity a female body is always gazed at through the lenses of objectification and commodification.

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Resettlement of Partition Refugees in Intizar Husain's Selected Novels: Preserving Memories through Everyday Cultural Practices

Aprajita*

Abstract

The Partition of India in 1947 profoundly affected the everyday lives of millions of people. The mass exodus of people across newly drawn borders uprooted families, leading to a loss of homes, properties, and livelihoods. Communities that had coexisted for centuries were suddenly divided along religious lines. This led to the breakdown of social networks, inter-community relationships, and cultural practices that had been shared across religious boundaries. This paper takes up Intizar Husain's two novels *The Sea Lies Ahead* and *Basti* as they delve into the dislocation and identity crises faced by those who migrated from India to Pakistan, capturing the nostalgic yearning for a lost homeland and the struggle to adapt to new environments. Through bringing everyday life to the centre, as discussed by Michel de Certeau, this paper redefines the historical narrative of the Partition. This academic exploration seeks to unravel the intricate ways in which Partition redefined the ordinary, elucidating the nuanced intersections of history, identity and the mundane.

Keywords: Partition, Resettlement, Everyday Life, Memory, Culture

“Memory makes a major departure from history in its emphasis on the everyday, the ordinary, the banal, even in the recall of cataclysmic events. Irrespective of whether they witnessed violence directly or not, survivors dwelt on the everyday, the ordinary” (Roy 38).

The Partition of India in 1947 upheaved the fabric of everyday life, shattering the routine harmony that once characterized communities. Daily practices were marred by the disintegration of social bonds, economic disarray, and the pervasive anxiety stemming from the abrupt geopolitical changes. Social cohesion, once a cornerstone of communal life, crumbled under the weight of forced migrations and communal tensions. The daily rituals and practices that once anchored individuals to a familiar rhythm were now refracted through the prism of uncertainty. Everyday language failed to fathom the depth of brutality and atrocities perpetrated on innocent lives, the classic example is Manto's “Toba Tek Singh”. The refugees, bereft of a physical homeland, clung to the repository of memories which manifested itself through their daily practices, serving as a poignant reflection of their shared experiences and resilient identity in the face of displacement. Everyday life became a tapestry woven with threads of dislocation, nostalgia, and the persistent undercurrent of an altered socio-political landscape.

Everyday human experience can help an individual to navigate and resist dominant structures in their daily lives through language use, cultural expression and acts of defiance contributing to social transformation. Individuals transform and appropriate spaces through their everyday activities, thereby challenging dominant spatial configurations and social hierarchies. Marginalized communities reclaim

neglected or contested spaces for the purpose of cultural expression. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau challenges deterministic views of social life and highlights the capacity of individuals to enact change within their immediate environment. It challenges traditional historical methodologies, acknowledges the agency and contribution of ordinary people. By bringing everyday practices to the centre, de Certeau offers a new perspective on historical analysis that emphasizes the multiplicity of voices and narratives that shape the historical landscape.

Partition narratives act as the repository for preserving the heritage of displaced communities through producing a milieu of syncretic culture where different communities laid claim to a common past and cultural practices. Partition literature captures a profound sense of loss, displacement, and trauma that accompanied this historical event. Writers like Khushwant Singh, Manto, Amrita Pritam, Bhisham Sahni, Rabinder Singh Bedi, Qurratulain Hyder, etc. illustrated through their works the deep pain of separation from families and communities. They also demonstrated that the trauma caused due to massacre and bloodshed was the same across the religious groups and they all yearned for their lost homeland. Intizar Husain's *The Sea Lies Ahead* skillfully weaves together the lives of diverse characters, each grappling with the emotional and psychological scars of displacement through various experiences and interactions of its central character Jawad with a diverse array of other characters.

In the novel, the refugees try to bring their everyday practices into their new settlement areas through various tactics like food, names and architectural designs. They resist the change in their cultural rituals and practices and adhere to their way of life through insignificant nothings. For instance, Tausif Miyan and Baji Akhtari treat their neighbours to *nauchandi parathas* and Khair Nagar “brand” *seekh kebabs* of Meerut emphasizing on their originality and authenticity; and read panegyrics in praise of *til bugga* and *gur rewri* of Meerut as if it is the prime characteristic of their social identity and a way to re-establish themselves in the new surroundings. *Besan laddu* made by Banwari *halwai* is the first thing Karbalai sahab remembers while describing his Shikarpur. Talking about the role of culinary nostalgia in post-Partition resettlement aiming to explore the “invisible every day,” Ritu Bhagat says, “Foodways reflect the cultural value of an ethnic community preserved over time and recollection emerges as an attempt to reclaim identity and understand the everyday reality of times that are lost in official histories” (133). The refugees carry their culture to their places of migration and it continues to be reflected in various everyday cultural practices, as it also reinforces their sense of identity and belonging.

In *The Sea Lies Ahead*, Majju Bhai reflects how the refugees from Amroha continue to assert their identity of being an “*Amrohvi*” even though Amroha might have itself changed now. “The state of being an *Amrohvi* is a constant” (Husain 37). This signifies a reference to “a signature attesting to an origin, the neighborhood is inscribed in the history of the subject like the mark of an indelible belonging inasmuch as it is the primary configuration, the archetype of every process of

appropriation of space as a place for everyday public life” (Certeau 12). And it is not just people from famous cities who want to blow trumpet about their belongings but even “those *qasbas* of UP that were entirely unheard of then” (Husain 37) are more particular about it. So, this “practice” of harking back to a past helps the *muhajirs* to establish an identity and adapt and situate themselves within the new network of social relations that are carried out in everyday life. “Home is reconstructed either as language, as culture, as forms of sociality or rituals and as everyday practices” (Roy 15). Michel de Certeau defines neighbourhood to be “a mastery of the social environment because, for the dweller, it is a known area of social space in which, to a greater or lesser degree, he or she knows himself or herself to be recognized” (9). In the context of the Partition, Roy says, “The affective accounts of a city provide a reflexive, habitual relationship between it and its inhabitants. Affective responses to the sensescapes of a place are at the heart of the Partition survivors' subjectivity, such as in their self-identifications as *Lahoria*, *Lyallpuri*, *Ambarsaria* or *Ludhianvi*” (147). The *muhajirs* assert their identities through creative ways in order to become a part of the new neighbourhood that has brought people from different social and cultural milieu together. In *nom de plume* like “*Amrohvi*, *Badauni*, *Galauthvi*, *Etawi*” can be seen an attempt to hold on to the lost homeland as the regional place of origin.

In *Basti*, the protagonist Zakir navigates the history from various perspectives, taking a more nuanced approach. The title of the novel encapsulates the close-knit community that the protagonist grows up in and where he imbibes a multi-cultural perspective of understanding things. Zakir has been exposed to both Hindu mythology and Islamic verses equally in his childhood in a fictional town of Rupnagar. It is the loss of this cultural syncretism that defines the loss of his home, but he still makes peace as he finds a new land to make a new beginning with the memories of the past. “Husain saw the creation of Pakistan as an opportunity for South Asian Muslims to explore their wider Islamic heritage” (Lindgren “Chronicling”). According to Certeau, there is no grand narrative, but a polyphony of voice, there is no unique historical text but various subtexts and divergent stories. In moments of utter confusion, Zakir is able to go back to mythology, stories of long-ago time, even historical events. He easily leaps from the mutiny of 1857 to the invasion of Delhi by Persian armies to Mahabharata. His meditations include Buddhist tales, and tales of Hindu gods and goddesses. Chief amongst these reminiscences is the account of Husain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammed, which recounts the loss suffered by his small army at the Battle of Karbala. “Immigrants are always trying to grasp their roots and the beginning of their histories. This search for roots generates new meanings and spaces, in which float the fluid identities of the exiled” (Asim and Alam 13). In his imaginations, Zakir roams from city to city to find a place for himself but everywhere he feels lost and estranged. The psychological trauma affects his capacity to think coherently and hence, his experiences are defined by a lack of uniformity and exist in fragments and through these fragments, he attempts to make an identity for himself.

In *Basti*, the act of walking is a very significant and self-conscious exercise. On a stroll in the evening, Zakir, not able to examine the faces of the people, starts examining the way they walk and he realizes that it looked as if they had lost their identities. He says quite assertively, "A man is recognized by his walk" (105). Michel de Certeau defines strolling as an important exercise which carries several meanings which the stroller attaches to the public space based on the state of his emotions and thus helps in the increasing appropriation and privatization of this public space. He says that "the subject has refabricated it for his or her own use by undoing the constraints of the urban apparatus, and as a consumer of space, imposes his or her own law on the external order of the city" (13). During his dream-like walks, Zakir dissociates himself from the outer world and imaginatively situates himself in a zone of memories, looking back at the past, forcing those memories into the present. Thus, it is a meaningful practice through which Zakir actively engages with and navigates the complexities of everyday existence in the aftermath of Partition. When migrants encounter the totalitarianism that the newly formed state imposes on its dwellers, he or she must find a way to assimilate in the new environment. Hence, the dwellers consistently manage to create personal retreats and routes for their own use and enjoyment, leaving unique imprints on the urban space that is distinctly theirs. Shiraz, the coffee house where Zakir and his friends come together to discuss various topics, is a private niche, a space created in order to talk about the totalitarian ways of the government. Through constant engagement of the body in public space, it results in an appropriation of the urban landscape and maintains "continuity between what is the most intimate (the private space of one's lodging) and what is the most unknown (the totality of the city or even, by extension, the rest of the world)" (Certeau 11). This is the connection Zakir tries to impose as through his vivid dreams, he tries to make sense of the chaos that is unfolding in the society. In *The Sea Lies Ahead*, as Majju Bhai moves in the neighbourhood, meeting people in the social circle, he forces Jawad to accompany him. He acts on the belief that "through habituation, through strolling, the dweller can constantly verify the intensity of his or her insertion in the social environment" (Certeau 13). The people in the neighbourhood meet each other to meet their everyday needs. There is a certain way each *muhajir* family appropriates the surroundings in a new city in order to resettle into their new surroundings. Aqa Hasan accepts that "keeping the changing times in mind, we kept aside *Lucknowi* ways and decided to make our peace with the new world" (169).

The uncanny nature of the migrant experience during Partition deeply affects everydayness, the routine aspects of daily life, leading to a sense of disorientation and instability. Everyday tasks such as finding shelter, procuring food, and navigating new surroundings, become fraught with challenges and uncertainty. The sense of displacement and estrangement can also permeate social interactions, making it difficult to form connections and establish a sense of community in unfamiliar territories. Overall, the uncanny nature of the migrant experience disrupts the fabric of everyday life, leaving individuals grappling with a sense of alienation

and uncertainty. In the opening of the novel *Basti*, the new land of Pakistan is described as something brand new, where sky is still fresh, earth is not yet soiled, etc., yet it is marked by something familiar, something known through ages. “How astonished he was, looking all around, that everything was so new, and yet looked so old” (Husain 3). Zakir realizes that everything in the new country is imbued with a freshness, yet everything looks the same. A feeling of 'homesickness' and 'uncanniness' is evoked by the environment, which “unsettles time, space, order and sense” (Royale 2). Anjali Gera Roy links this idea of the uncanny to “the crisis of the proper” (1) by Nicholas Royale. This “proper” is the reality that migrants experienced every day, how they perceived their reality in relation to these everyday objects. Zakir's desire to go back to his organic roots formed in his childhood under the influence of multicultural tales of Bhagat ji, Abba Jan and Bi Amma underscores the importance of ordinary moments in the formation of individual identity and comprehension of the world. The ordinary has been imbued with certain elements of astonishment, surprise and unlikeness. The places and people that were once familiar now evoke feelings of fear and unease, creating a sense of uncanniness in the migrants' new surroundings. Through these stories, the novel suggests that cultural richness isn't confined to grand events but is embedded in the fabric of daily life and when these are encountered in a different setting, they give rise to a feeling of 'unhomeliness' or strangeness.

Husain highlights how individuals can shape their own social reality through their agency. Ordinary people act as historical actors and they play a role in shaping social reality and historical change. The *muhajirs* find comfort in the memories of their past in various cities and *mohallas* of undivided India, “they talked of the Lal Quila though they were living in Lalu Khet” (210). Their self-fashioned identity is fraught with belongings to their ancestral homes and a compulsive urge to belong to a new one. Their nostalgia binds them to their origins while the new nation demands new allegiances and associations. “The text reveals the migrants adopt various strategies to feel at home in Karachi by appropriating aspects of their Indian past – some organized culinary feasts, others hosted grand poetry recitals, while others chose to be oblivious to everything” (Neogi 35). These cultural practices help to sustain the memories of the homeland left behind but the *muhajirs* do not only claim them superior to the culture of the new land but also amongst each other as a way of affirming their separate identities. As Majju Bhai ruminates that each *qasba* has cooked up a grand story about their place of origins and each defines itself as unmatched in its grandeur. Whether it is Achchi Bi exaggerating that there were mounds of riches in the *Suiwala Mohulla* or Chacha Karbalai claiming “no dearth of splendour in our Shikarpur” (93), all the *muhajirs* believe that the past that they come from was magnificent in its opulence. But Husain has carefully debunked this mythical representation in Jawad's revisit to his hometown Vyaspur after Partition. To Jawad's bafflement, he is irked at the “narrowness of the street and the large numbers of people present all around” (Husain 111). The creeping feeling of uncanniness increases as he finds that “even those houses that once seemed so large and spacious now seemed small and weary as though they had shrivelled and

shrunk” (112) as did the old *haveli* which earlier used to look high and mighty. Anjali Gera Roy also emphasizes how the everyday sounds coming from the streets like tongas, rickshaws, cycles, street vendors, etc. form the urban sonic scape that enriches the sensuous recall of a partition survivor. But “as they proceed to narrate the atmosphere prevailing before the onset of Partition, familiar comforting sounds are displaced by the nightmarish sounds of a fearful city reverberating with chants of religious groups” (149). When Saiyad Aqa Hasan mentions that his ears and stomach “have something to say” and describes his inability “to listen to these new-fangled *mushairas*, nor the stamina to digest these new kinds of food” (53), he is referring to the change in everyday sounds of the environment. He is referring to the disruption of the pre-Partition rhythm that his body was used to living in. All that *muhajirs* hear now in their new neighbourhood are either the *mushairas* or the gunshots of the zealots. In Rafiq Sahab's language, it is either to live with the pupils of Dagh or the disciples of Meeraji. In the former case, it is at least possible to “savour the taste of the language” (231), indicating the possibility of the comfort of language encountered every day in the past. The *mushairas* definitively influence the auditory environment of the society. It is either littered with a brigade of poets clamoring for your attention and appreciation or there is political sloganeering which is even more painful to listen to. Partition caused a major disruption in the sounds of the everyday and it can be agreed to Rafiq Sahab's observation that they all are “living in a gigantic torture chamber” (232) now. Nobody who comes to this neighbourhood can go unscathed by the attack of a bullet or *ghazal* and in fact, one helps in avoiding the other.

Linguistic markers such as dialects, idioms, and accents not only convey cultural nuances but also reinforce group cohesion and solidarity among migrants. At the same time, these also preserve their cultural distinctiveness and may lead to the development of a sense of superiority based on the belief that their linguistic and cultural heritage is more authentic, sophisticated, or prestigious compared to that of others. Additionally, the trauma and upheaval experienced during Partition may exacerbate feelings of insecurity or the need to assert one's identity, leading to the elevation of one's own language and culture as a form of psychological defense mechanism. When Jawad meets Karbalai sahib and Saiyadani Chachi, he realizes that they don't speak the same language in the terms that one remembers Shikarpur very differently from the other. Majju Bhai chides Tausif on carrying out his *Meeruti* ways in front of *Lucknowalas* who are also his prospective in-laws. In response, Tausif laments that “these people will drive me crazy with their idioms dipped in the waters of Gomti River,” (62) reflecting that the locality of a particular community affects its language and its everyday use. They have at their perusal not just a diversity of famous poets to quote from like Hazrat Safi Lucknowi and Boom Hapuri or Bayan Yazdani from Meerut, but also how they relate to their own culture through a set of linguistically encoded symbols of their superiority

In conclusion, the examination of memories associated with food, sounds and language use as markers of distinct cultural identities in Intizar Husain's *The Sea Lies*

Ahead and *Basti*, underscores the profound significance of everyday practices in shaping individual and collective experiences of displacement and belonging. By interrogating the intersections of memory, resilience, and cultural continuity, this research enhances comprehension of the intricate dynamics affecting the lives of partitioned refugees. Moreover, this study underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing the diverse ways individuals negotiate their sense of identity and belonging in the aftermath of displacement. Despite the passage of time, a cataclysmic effect such as Partition continues to have its effects in the everyday lives of the individuals and communities, serving as a constant reminder of the upheaval and trauma endured by the displaced communities.

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Use of Literature in Language Learning: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students of District Fatehgarh Sahib in Punjab

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Abstract

Literature as a language learning tool is the most powerful instrument, easily available to most of English language teachers in India. It is not only a powerful medium but an excellent source of motivation for the students of language learning. Literature plays an important role in the language classroom as it provides authentic material for the development of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills. This research paper is based on a pilot study as it is important for the improvement of the quality and efficiency of any major research work. This pilot study involves 140 graduate students. The data collection tools include students' questionnaire. The questionnaire measured students' attitudes, notions, and views about the use of literature in an ELT classroom.

Keywords: Literature, Language Learning, Authentic Material, Integrating Language and Literature.

Introduction

Language is a system of communication that is used by people. Language is the key factor that gives identity to the people of every country and community. There are several languages in this world. Everyone needs to learn the languages of other countries and communities because today's world is interconnected. So, this interconnection has become a reason for learning a second language. In present times, the English language plays a dominant role and it has become an international language that is widely used as compared to other languages. The success and failure of schools and colleges depend upon the level of learners in the English language. According to Onukaogu “the available evidence in the way our students use English in our school and colleges shows that their English language competence and English language awareness leave much to be desired” (300).

In most schools and colleges, students hardly express their thoughts and ideas in spoken and written form of English. So, mostly the educational system starts an English language classroom for the students because the classroom is the perfect way for learning language. Most schools and colleges start teaching literature in a language classroom as it comes across as authentic material and an excellent source of motivation to be used for language learning. According to Baud “Literature is the use of language effectively in suitable conditions” (203). Literature is a reflection of society and ideas of literature are related to every human being. Literature uses simple language that helps students develop their grammar, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge and improve language skills and personal development. Lazar defines, “Literature as those novels, short- stories, plays and poems which are fictional and convey their message by paying considerable attention to language which is rich and

multi-layered” (p.5).

In fact, there are several definitions of literature and it can be interpreted at multiple levels. The word literature comes from the Latin word *Littera* meaning letter or handwriting. So, literature is about all written accounts. The term literature is used in different senses. Firstly, literature is written material and second, literature is a subject that is studied in colleges and universities, and third, literature is information about society's customs, values, and traditions that are provided to the next generation.

Role of Literature in Language Learning: A Historical Review

Communicative Language Teaching is a powerful theoretical model in ELT and is recognized by many applied linguists and teachers as a useful approach to language teaching. Educators such as Galloway, Savignon, Richards and Rodgers state that the origins of communicative language teaching are many, in so far as one teaching methodology tends to influence the next. Galloway says that the communicative approach could be said to be the product of educators and linguists who had grown dissatisfied with the audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods of foreign language instruction. Richards and Rodgers, on the other hand, claim that the origins of communicative language teaching are to be found in the changes in situational language teaching approaches, which influenced the British language teaching tradition till the late 1960s. Meanwhile, Savignon asserts that the emergence of CLT can be traced to concurrent developments on both sides of the Atlantic, i.e., in Europe and the United States. Educators and linguists, as Candlin and Widdowson saw the need to focus in language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures. They felt that students were not learning enough realistic, whole language in those methods, i.e., situational language teaching, audio-lingual or grammar-translation method (Richards and Rodgers; Savignon; Galloway). Students did not know how to communicate using appropriate social languages, gestures, or expressions; in brief, they were at a loss to communicate in the cultures of the language studied. It is the ability to know “how sentences are used to communicate effectively” (Widdowson). Similarly, Howatt says that “the original motivation for adopting a communicative approach in the early seventies was remedial, an attempt to overcome the inadequacies of existing, structural syllabuses, materials, and methods” (287). There was a positive response from linguists, methodologists and classroom teachers offering the best hope for the elaboration and diffusion of language teaching methods and materials that work, encourage and support learners in the development of their communicative competence (Savignon).

A case in point, as Richards and Rodgers describe, British language teaching specialists emphasized another fundamental dimension of language that was addressed in current approaches to language teaching at that time- the functional and communicative potential of language. To put simply, the rapid application of these ideas by textbook writers; and the equally rapid acceptance of these new principles

by language teaching specialists, curriculum development centers, and even governments gave prominence nationally and internationally to what came to be referred to as the Communicative approach or simply Communicative language teaching. Although the movement began as largely British innovations focusing on alternative conceptions of a syllabus since the mid-1970s, the scope of communicative language teaching has expanded since then. Interest in and the development of the communicative style of teaching mushroomed in those years; authentic language use and classroom exchanges where students engaged in real communication with one another became quite popular. Communicative language teaching has served the language teaching profession for many years since 1970 (Richards and Rodgers; Bax). However, despite the wide use of CLT in English language classrooms for the last three decades, claims are still being made that the CLT method is not finding its full expression (Thompson; Bax; and Richards) in that practitioners perceive CLT in different ways. Does CLT mean teaching conversation, neglecting the teaching of grammar or paying much attention to open-ended discussion activities as the main feature of a course? This question is posed because many language teachers consider CLT as if it were a method that focuses only on speaking, role play, or drama and that neglects grammar; thus, they are uncertain about what CLT is and are unsure about how to implement it in language classrooms (Thompson 1996; Gatbonton and Segalowitz).

As is clear from the above discussion, in the early nineteenth century, the grammar-translation method played a prominent role in language learning which emphasized the grammatical rules of language and translation wherein literature was used simply as a vehicle to practice grammar and translation. But with the rise of other methods like the direct method, and audio-lingual method focusing more on structure and vocabulary, literature gradually disappeared from the curriculum and the language classrooms.

In the 1970s and 1980s, when the emphasis was given to the spoken form of language in language classrooms, the communicative approach emerged. During that time, literature became a valuable source for language learning and gained its position in the language classroom. Literature is a sufficient material that provides various benefits to language learners which are:

Literature provides a good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Enrichment in vocabulary and grammar can be gained through literary text. Students come across a wide range of vocabulary through literature and become familiar with grammatical, lexical, and syntactical items of language. Spack argues that “it is in literature that the resources of the language are most fully and skillfully used” (705).

Literature is a meaningful input material for language learning. In the language classroom, learners learn about the language structure and styles but how to apply these rules are learned through literature. Learners not only learn how to use these rules in the classroom but also how to utilize them in society.

Literature is the mirror of society. Literature helps students in their social development. Literature talks about world issues. Learners learn about these issues through literature. “Literature is the experience of the world. To learn about people

around the world, culturally, geographically and historically, looking into what has happened in the world. (Lorena Giuria, 11).

Literature is a motivational material for language learning. There are two types of motivation. One is intrinsic motivation and the second is extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation means we tend to scan one thing for our pleasure and enjoyment. We tend to actively participate throughout reading the text. Extrinsic motivation means we read something to reward and avoid punishment. Literature increases our intrinsic motivation because, during the reading of literary texts, we actively participate and deeply analyse the text. So, literature motivates us for more and more reading which makes us lifelong readers.

Literature is to signify cultural knowledge. Language is related to culture. If we know about the culture of the target language, we can easily learn the target language. Language is derived from the culture. Goodwyn says, "The English curriculum is a place for enjoying and reflecting on... cultural resource, debating their values, and imaging and designing... future" (12). There are no other sources that can help us to attain cultural knowledge of the target language. Through novels, poems, short stories and dramas, we gain cultural knowledge because most literary works carry out cultural knowledge. Literature provides cultural knowledge effortlessly.

Literature develops the expository ability of students. Interpretation skill is more important in language learning and learners develop this skill through literature. When we read the text in the language classroom, we are searching for the meaning of the text, that meaning motivates the learners for the interpretations. Learners present their interpretations in written and oral form. Literary texts don't depend upon one meaning, it is filled with innumerable interpretations.

Literature can be helpful for the development of four basic language skills-reading, writing, speaking and listening. Literature is a meaningful source for language teachers who involve their students in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It especially improves their reading and writing skills strategies. Belcher and Hirvela, hold that "Literature is rich with innumerable authentic tokens of language for the development of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills." Students enjoy reading the text, ultimately, they increase their reading ability. When they present their views, they improve their speaking and writing skills. Sometimes they listen to the views of others which helps improve their listening skills.

On the contrary, literary texts may sometimes create certain difficulties for teachers and students. Some of them which are based on personal experience and interactions in the classroom are:

From the students' perspective, literature creates problems for language learning. Most of the students can't understand literature, some students have no interest in the text and some believe that a lot of time is wasted in reading and understanding the text which makes them feel bored with literature-based language learning.

Sometimes selected texts are not appropriate. The literary texts which are chosen by the teachers are not suitable according to the students' age and comprehension level. So those literary texts create problems for students because they can't understand them properly.

The length of the text creates difficulty. Shorter text can be easily read during one or two class periods but longer text that contains various themes and characters can't be read in one or two class periods, they take more time. If the text has a wider length, it decreases the interest of the students in language learning.

Culture creates a difficult situation for language learning. Literary text is mainly a reflection of the culture of the target language which is unfamiliar to the learners. Students read the cultural concept in the text and they can't understand this concept because they don't know the other culture, their customs and traditions.

Literary texts use complex vocabulary and grammatical structures that students can't understand on their own. Literary texts never use such language that we use in our everyday life. According to Lima, the mastering of grammatical forms and graded structures that usually guide the EFL teaching clashes violently with the intentional bending and breaking of grammatical rules that seem to be the main features of Literature” (186).

Research Methodology

The research methodology follows a case study model. It has been done to focus on a specific case, that is, the ELT scene among the students with special reference to the use of literature. Stake describes the purpose of a case study as identifying a single case, adding that it is “a process of inquiry about the case and the product of inquiry” (Stake 436). A case study design based on Yin's explanation of case studies was chosen. He states that in a case study, the phenomenon and the context are inseparable. Since, interest was in the views, insights and experiences of the teachers and the learners in a particular ELT set-up, it justifies the selection of a case study. Three characteristics of case studies given by Merriam also explain why a case study was appropriate for this research. These three characteristics that describe case studies are “particularistic”, “descriptive”, and “heuristic” (29-30). A case study is particularistic because it emphasizes a specific program, group and situation. It is descriptive because it collects data with thick descriptions. Finally, it is a heuristic because it describes to the readers and researchers the phenomenon being studied and explains the situation in detail.

The research design and methodology targeted the end-users of the language i.e. undergraduate students. A total of 140 undergraduate students of the Bachelor of Arts (BA) program, were randomly selected from different colleges of Fatehgarh Sahib District since random sampling, according to Bailey (1994), delivers chances for everyone to be a member of the sample.

For this research, a survey questionnaire adapted from Karavas-Doukas and Kim was composed of Likert-type close-ended items. The close-ended questions were drafted to gather information on students' opinions about language learning through literature.

As stated by Taylor, cited in Gebru, Likert assigned numerical values to responses and the numerical representation (the coding) of the items went through the following two procedures:

The favourable items or statements that directly address or are consonant with the

communicative language teaching principles were coded as:

'Strongly Agree' (SA)=5;

'Agree' (A)=4;

'Undecided' (U)=3;

'Disagree' (D)=2; and

'Strongly Disagree' (SD)=1.

The unfavourable items or statements which are designed to cross-check the teachers' view and address non-communicative aspects were coded in the reverse manner:

'Strongly Agree' (SA)=1;

'Agree' (A)=2;

'Undecided' (U)=3;

'Disagree' (D)=4; and

'Strongly Disagree' (SD)=5.

Findings

This part presents the findings from the responses given by undergraduate students. A total number of 140 students have given the answers. The main aspects of the questionnaire were skill-focused, personal life experience, a particular genre, motivation and against arguments.

Table 1- Skill Focused

Scale Value		5	4	3	2	1	Total	Mean
		1*	2*	3*	4*	5*		
Sr. No.	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD		
1	Literary text helps me to improve basic language skills.	49 (35)	41 (29.28)	13 (9.28)	22 (15.71)	15 (10.71)	140 (100)	3.29
2	Literature plays an important role in improving my writing skills in English language.	61 (43.57)	49 (35)	10 (7.14)	9 (6.42)	11 (7.85)	140 (100)	4

In this case, 35 percent and 29.28 percent of students strongly agree and agree that literature provides helpful material for improving their language skills. There is a greater number of strongly agree and agree than disagree and strongly disagree. Also, a fairly high percentage of students (43.57 and 35) believe that literature plays an important role in improving their writing skills

Table 2- Learners Motivation

ScaleValue		5	4	3	2	1	Total	Mean
		1*	2*	3*	4*	5*		
Sr. No	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD		
1	Literature presents authentic material for learning a second language.	57 (40.71)	38 (27.14)	12 (8.57)	20 (14.28)	13 (9.28)	140 (100)	
2	Literature helps in nurturing my intellectual development.	48 (34.28)	36 (25.71)	16 (11.42)	24 (17.14)	16 (11.42)	140 (100)	3.54

In this case, a total of 67.85 percent of students agree that literature provides authentic material for language awareness and 59.9 percent of students agree with a high mean value of 3.54 that literature plays an important role in intellectual and personal growth. Clearly, a much greater number of students strongly agree and agree than disagree and strongly disagree.

Table 3- Preference to Particular Genre

ScaleValue		5	4	3	2	1	Total	Mean
		1*	2*	3*	4*	5*		
Sr. No.	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD		
1	When reading literary texts, I often enjoyed novels.	54 (38.57)	44 (31.42)	14 (10)	14 (10)	14 (10)	140 (100)	3.78
2	When reading literary texts, I often enjoyed short-stories.	61 (43.57)	40 (28.57)	15 (10.71)	12 (8.57)	13 (9.28)	140 (100)	3.91

In this case, a total of 69.9 percent of students give preference to reading novels and 72.14 percent of students give preference to the reading of short stories because their length is too short.

Table 4- Increase Knowledge about Personal Life

Scale Value		5	4	3	2	1	Total	Mean
		1*	2*	3*	4*	5*		
Sr. No.	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD		
1	Literature helps me to understand the society in a better way.	52 (37.14)	41 (29.28)	14 (10)	24 (17.14)	9 (6.42)	140 (100)	3.73
2	Literature encourages the students to relate the topic or theme of the literary texts to their personal experience.	54 (38.57)	40 (28.57)	15 (10.71)	16 (11.42)	15 (10.71)	140 (100)	3.72

In this case, a total of 66.42 percent of students strongly agree and agree that literature presents discourse in social contexts and helps to understand society in a better way. Also, a total of 67.14 percent of students agree with the mean value of 3.72 that literature facilitates personal growth of the students.

Table 5- Arguments against Literary Texts

Scale Value		5	4	3	2	1	Total	Mean
		1*	2*	3*	4*	5*		
Sr. No.	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD		
1	Length of literary texts creates problems.	17 (12.14)	14 (10)	12 (8.57)	43 (30.71)	54 (38.57)	140 (100)	3.73
2	Language of literary texts is not used in real life.	18 (12.85)	16 (11.42)	14 (10)	44 (31.42)	48 (34.28)	140 (100)	3.62

In this case, a total of 69.28 percent of students agree that the length of literary texts creates problems for language learning and a total of 65.7 percent of students agree that literary language cannot be used in real-life contexts.

Discussion and Conclusion

McRae is of the opinion that literary texts are representational rather than referential. Referential language is very informational and as a result, less appealing. On the other hand, representational language appeals to one's emotions

and as a result extremely interesting. Referential language appeals to the imagination of students and makes them empathetic towards society as a whole. That's why the language used in popular songs or films can be retained for a long, without serious effort. Various genres of literature like short stories, poems, novels; plays etc. can be used effectively in the ELT classroom to make learning a euphoric participation for students. Rote learning can be replaced by participative learning. Students can be encouraged to participate in skits, one-act plays, presentations, etc. Once they have a good command over the prescribed literary texts. Literature can be taught to students through audio-texts, music CDs, film clips etc. that will help the students to understand the beauty of language without much difficulty. ELT experts emphasized four skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). Through Literature, students can be taught all these four skills by paying attention to sentence structures and new vocabulary. Students find it really fulfilling to read authentic texts instead of the artificial language used in certain sources Findings of the study of the students' opinions on using literature in language classrooms augment the above discussion. Studies must always have their objectives connected with feasibility and may inform researchers about the best way to conduct full-scale projects in the future. Meanwhile, the findings revealed the mean score of students' responses regarding the use of literature in a language classroom. From the five parts of the questionnaire, we gained a positive mean score of students. So, this positive mean score revealed that most students agreed with the usage of literature in an ELT classroom. Most students think that literature is a rich resource for language learning and it motivates them to read in English. Zyngier (1994) states that literary texts are intellectually stimulating. They allow the readers to create worlds that they may not be familiar with and the way they do it is by relying on language. In building meaning, the reader reconstructs or recreates what he or she thinks the writer is trying to communicate. In this sense, the reader becomes a performer, an actor in a communicative event (6).

Use of literature adds to the linguistic competence and consequent performance. Reading and virtual enacting a piece of literature means beginning a creative process in the minds and emotions of the student making him relate to the socio-psychological contexts. He may also develop an innate possibility of contributing positively to a larger world than just his own. For all students, literature is an ideal vehicle for illustrating language use and for introducing cultural assumptions. It adds to their wholesome learning of the language.

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Investigating 'Killer Plants' in the 'Botanical Gothic': An Insight into Ecocritical Crime Fiction

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Abstract

This paper delves into the subgenre of Gothic fiction involving predatory plants, tracing its evolution from Victorian cultural myths to contemporary ecological anxieties. The paper explores the role of ecological crime fiction by examining broader implications of human-plant interactions and sheds light on the critical concept of the 'econoir', with a deeper understanding of our ecological footprint. The paper also investigates the alien temporality of plants, and elucidates how authors crafted such narratives to instil profound fears of plant life and to depict nature's retaliatory actions.

Keywords: killer plants, econoir, botanical gothic, ecophobia, anthropocene

Introduction

Discourse on crime fiction has shifted from a formalist analysis of plot and structure, to a broader area encompassing critiques of gender, class, politics, globalization, neocolonialism and the environment. Reading ecological crime fiction necessitates a shifting of focus to features of a text often dismissed as mere backdrops to human activity – rivers, forests, landscapes, climate and the planetary ecosystem. This shift prompts an adjustment of temporalities, urging scholars to contextualize human actions within seasonal, anthropological, evolutionary and deep time scales. An ecocritical reading leads to several questions - is the environment active or passive? And the relationships forged between the characters and other agencies with the natural world within which crimes unfold, are investigated and resolved.

In its nascent stage, ecocriticism was primarily concerned with theories concerning nature and responses to industrialization, as evident in Romantic poetry and American Transcendentalism. As the field expanded, its scope broadened considerably and proliferated across various 'popular' genres including science fiction, horror, computer games and the newly emerging genre of climate fiction, or cli-fi. Cli-fi novels began to incorporate conventions typically associated with crime fiction, such as themes of eco-disaster and psychological violence in *The Rapture* (2009) by Liz Jensen, corporate crimes and green conspiracy in *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) by Nathaniel Rich.

Intriguing parallels lie between crime narratives and modern environmental discourse and several authors have explored crime narratives containing ecological themes. Katherine E. Bishop forwards the idea of 'Botanical Murder Mysteries,' a subgenre of Imperial Gothic in which carnivorous plants challenge human rationality and ecological dynamics, highlighting the agency of flora and 'plant crime' (Walton and Walton 2). With imperialism, fantasies of colonial otherness prevailed, and exotic plants became available to affluent Victorian collectors and the man-eating plant emerged as a literary sensation in the nineteenth century. This

botanical menace captivated the imaginations of writers like Arthur Conan Doyle, H.G Wells, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman who tapped into the prevailing anxieties of this distinct genre of plant horror, labelled as 'Botanical Gothic'. The term was first used by Daisy Butcher in “*Evil Roots – Killer Tales of the Botanical Gothic*” (2019) to highlight the genre of botanical-themed gothic fiction depicting fears of hybridity and consequence of nature's retaliation.

Understanding the Econoir

It is seldom noted that the emergence of crime fiction coincided with the development of conservation and environmental movements – from 18th century Romanticism, through the American wilderness preservation discussions of the 1890s, the British reforestation movement of 1920s, to the emergence of ecological consciousness and growing anxieties about toxicity and pollution from 1960 onwards. In the Golden Age detective novels, natural landscapes such as forests, rivers, mountains etc serve as barriers that impede law enforcement and isolate characters, thereby creating a Hobbesian state of nature. Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* (1937) and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) are significant examples in this regard. An ecocritical reading of the texts raise pertinent questions – does nature merely provide atmosphere? and is it a force to be tamed? Ecocriticism has debated since long the reinforcement of hierarchical boundaries in the cultural construction of the idea of nature and challenged the dichotomies of traditional narratives - reason, civilization, and the urban being associated with masculinity; while supernatural, wildness and nature with femininity (Ashman 21). The text of environmental crime fiction, like 'traditional' crime fiction, contains corpses and crime scenes which loom over the text. Ecological enmeshment persists in such narratives and posits that humans are intricately interconnected with non-human matter; living, dead, synthetic matter, and environmental processes. To understand this requires adopting the perspective of a noir detective, wherein the investigator initially approaches an ostensibly external situation from a seemingly neutral standpoint, only to realise their own implication in it (Morton 111). Paradoxically, the detective's very presence contaminates the scene, blurring the boundaries between observer and participant. In “When 'tis Night, Death is Green” (2018) Bishop forwards the idea of the 'Econoir'. By viewing environmental crime fiction through the lens of econoir, we uncover the noir sensibilities, merging the nature and culture binaries while acknowledging the impossibility that we can never look at nature or the environment from an outsider perspective.

Crime fiction featuring murderous plants evokes the notion of 'Dark Ecology' or Ecological Noir, characterized by hesitation, uncertainty, negativity and irony, ugliness and horror, corruption and defilement (Bookchin 4). The enigmatic nature of plants renders it a fascinating addition to crime fiction. To avoid reader fatigue from repetitive whodunits, authors began exploring new perpetrators and settings, leading to the creation of the killer plant. Once regarded as mere background or as decorative greenery, literary crime scenes soon became filled with lush vegetation

and it was used to commit, conceal, or, in rare cases, reveal murders. As Katherine E. Bishop puts it, “One may suspect the Butler but not his begonias” (Bishop 1). These 'unusual' suspects exposed anxieties about the human supremacy over nature and disrupted the rationalist perspective of plants as inert beings. By doing so, they reveal the anthropocene as an epistemological crime scene stained by the erasure of plant consciousness and agency. While the perpetrator may have been apprehended, the safety of the domestic sphere has been compromised. The killer-plants prowl not only in dense forests and untamed wilderness, but they also lurk in gardens, as symbols of cultivated ornamentation. They wait patiently, biding their time. While classic crime fiction reinforces sociocultural power dynamics by upholding normativity through linear storytelling, econoir texts disrupt this paradigm. The plant's agency, nebulous personhood and existential temporality destabilizes the foundations of the narrative's core. They challenge the hierarchical placement of plants and humans along the ecological continuum, prompting a re-evaluation of the connection of humanity with the ecological world.

Humans, the Environment, and Botanical Crime

As the interest in carnivorous plants grew, the expeditions to fetch them became more dangerous and expensive. To justify the high prices and to add value to the plants, stories were told of the dangers that emerged while trying to collect them – from cannibal natives to monstrous boas. However, it was not until the publication of Darwin's *Insectivorous Plants* (1875) that the stories of man-eating plants began to emerge in cultural and literary narratives. Darwin's work expanded that sensitive root tips called as radicles, transmitted information between different plant organs, similar to neural cells in humans. Darwin's contemporary, Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose conducted groundbreaking research and demonstrated that plants can actively sense and experience emotions and physical sensations akin to humans.

The motif of man-eating plants emerged from 18th century speculations surrounding the Japanese Upas tree. Tales of it emitting poisonous gas killing all beings within a several mile radius, shocked the public (Scientists have now disproved this theory. The secretion of the tree is deadly poison, not its aroma or odour). Speculation surrounding plant sentience, mobility and communication has persisted across cultures - the dryads in Greek myths, mythical plantimals such as the laughing Japanese Jinmenju in Asian folklore, Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanical Garden* (1791) which delves into the interplay of botanicals and eroticism, and the artworks of Italian painter Arcimboldo, featuring vegetal faces (Chang). Attempts to anthropomorphize plants or portray them as monstrous entities are common, yet the inherent alien nature of plants renders such categorizations uncertain. Their divergence from anthropocentric perspectives creates discomfort and uncanniness. Chad Arment's compilations of newspaper hoaxes and short stories sourced from early 19th century periodicals about narratives involving sinister vegetation provide valuable resources. These collections labelled under 'Cryptobotany' include *Flora Curiosa: Cryptobotany, Mysterious Fungi, Sentient Trees, and Deadly Plants in*

Classic Science Fiction and Fantasy (2008), and *Botanica Deliria: More Stories of Strange, Undiscovered, and Murderous Vegetation* (2010).

Arthur Conan Doyle's short story "The American's Tale" (1879) bridges the divide between mid-century narratives portraying inert yet lethal plants and later fictional depictions of carnivorous flora. His narrative mirrors the folktale of "Rot-Gut Pete" and creates a monstrous entity by turning the carnivorous pitcher plant into an active predator that sustains itself through consumption of animal flesh. Phil Robinson's short story "The Man-Eating Tree" (1881) and Frank Aubrey's novel *The Devil-Tree of El Dorado* (1897) depict trees as opportunistic man-eaters situated in deep, unexplored jungles of colonized nations. The trees actively pursue, seize and ensnare prey.

As fascination with botanical gothic narratives grew, the setting transitioned from colonial jungles to suburban spaces; specially gardens, as vines and lianas. Vine is an umbrella term for climbing plants, while lianas are woody climbers, rooted in soil and they constitute forest canopies. Both vines and lianas live off their host plant by strangling or parasitizing them. For instance, the *Cuscuta* vine ensnares its host and penetrates its vascular system by inserting fang-like haustoria. Lacking in chlorophyll, the vine extracts nutrients from its host, resembling a vampiric entity feeding off its victim, as depicted in Hesketh Prichards' "The Story of the Grey House" (1899). Apart from vines and lianas, the killer orchid emerged as a unique subgenre, characterized by its sexual and feminine descriptions which transformed the flower into a femme fatale. The stories featuring such orchids include "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid" (1894) by H.G. Wells, and "Venus Orchis" (1913) by George Glendon.

These meat-eating machines do not discriminate and consume everything within their reach. The stories are terrariums of terror. Degeneration and devolution mark these narratives - from Emma Vane's "The Moaning Lily" (1935) which features a grotesquely grafted lily to which humans serve as hosts, and Lucy Hooper's cephalopod *Drosera* in "Carnivorine" (1889), these narratives were crafted by authors to instill a profound fear of plant life and to depict nature's retaliatory actions. In W.H Hodgson's "The Voice in the Night" (1906) humans are transformed into fungus, in H. G. Wells' "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid" (1894) humans are devoured whole by plants. Many of these tales exemplify various gothic subgenres; the motif of the crazy scientist narrative appears in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844), and in E. Nesbit's "The Pavilion" (1915). The haunted plant in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Giant Wistaria" (1891) symbolizes a haunted and bereft mind. Ambrose Bierce's "A Vine on a House" (1905), M. R. James' "The Ash Tree" (1904), and H. C. McNeile's "The Green Death" (1920) are interwoven with themes of crime fiction, plant horror and supernatural elements. These stories feature women disappearing, spider-like beings descending from trees and serpentine vines that ensnare humans. The crimes featured in these narratives may seem nearly implausible to contemporary readers, however, the solution to these fantastical crimes hinges upon ostensible scientific

knowledge often derived from the protagonist's experiences abroad, thus satisfying the crime genre's need for rationality. Knowledge of toxicology, tropical medicine, and botanical science play a crucial role in uncovering the murderer. Making use of worldly experience and scientific acumen to solve otherwise inexplicable crimes leads to a justified resolution.

Plants adhere to a temporal framework markedly distinct from human experience, and their life cycles and morphology are so fundamentally alien that there lies temptation, even ease, in denying their classification as animate organisms (Laist 12). McNeile's locked-room mystery, "The Green Death" (1920) explores botanic temporalities ruling the liminal space of the murder. The riddle reflects the time cycle of the vine, "When 'tis hot, shun this spot./When 'tis rain, come again./When 'tis day, all serene./When 'tis night, death is green."(McNeile 97) The vine's time is seasonal, cyclical and contextualised in terms of birth, and rebirth; even "death is green." Although the riddle furnishes clues, uncovering the perpetrator as a non-mammalian entity necessitates a level of expertise on behalf of the protagonist-detective.

While drawing parallels between humans and plants it is seen that botanicals showcase manifestations of criminal behaviour, suggesting that traits such as premeditation, ambush, and killing for gain are inherent in the microstructure of organic tissue rather than stemming from conscious will (Lombroso 167). The principle of 'phytophenomenology' suggests that our autonomy is intricately linked to botanical ancestry. Human cognition and behaviour, when confronted with the vegetal, undergoes a process of "de-humanization"; altering perceptions of human agency and autonomy (Marder 103).

Ecophobia and Ecohorror

The killer plant narrative constitutes its own genre of "ecohorror", marked by an illustrious and complex literary history. 'Ecophobia' denotes an irrational fear or hatred of nature world. Plants having the appetite and cognition of a mammalian predator suggested a disturbing new evolutionary hybrid. Grotesque plants and animals that exist in gothic environments resist scientific taxonomy and reflect cultural anxieties of the "freakish body", serving as a magnet drawing out man's fears about the natural world. As humans are placed at the top of the evolutionary food chain, the idea that plants would rise up and threaten our position inspired terror (Estok 203).

Victorians viewed the English countryside as domesticated nature while terrains outside of Britain were seen as exotic, threatening and sublime, awaiting exploration and discovery. This distinction suggests that British ecophobia was largely directed towards colonial settings. Writers of that time lived in heavily populated industrialized cities, and news of geographical voyages and scientific knowledge about evolution and discovery of new species offered a wide field for extensive imaginative exploration. 19th century British Gothic fiction began to voyage to the 'contact zones' between Britain and new imperial environments. These zones illustrated the impact of colonization on native environments, making them rich sites

for critical readings of fin-de-siècle ecophobia.

Plant horror encapsulates humanity's fear of the wildness of vegetal nature – its untameability and purposeless excess. Vegetation makes up over ninety nine percent of the biomass and plants embody an inscrutable silence and implacable strangeness that humans have sought to tame. (Nealon 32). Plants challenge our understanding because they “silently deconstruct” our very system of metaphysics. Plants exhibit an indifference, a silent detachment as it showcases a form of cognition profoundly alien to human experience. They resist complete categorization and this resistance places them perilously close to the classification of monsters (Marder 102). In analysing horror narratives we see that the monster is the embodiment of the impure and contradicts categorization. It is an unnatural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature (N.Carroll 16). A reading of Sartre's *Nausea* (1964) addresses the horror induced by the novel's chestnut tree, highlighting the vegetal's evasion of categories. Sartre writes, "Each of its qualities escaped it a little, flowed out of it, half solidified, almost became a thing". This “flowing away” from definition, transforms the tree into an unrecognizable “thing”, a moniker for that which resists categories (Laist 12). This concept of 'capitalized' nature is seen as depicting otherness or difference (Jameson 114).

At the heart of plant horror lies the struggle for recognition of that which human civilization oppresses and denies, and its consequential re-emergence is dramatized as a thing of horror in cultural narratives. In their invisibility and tendency to remain unseen, plants merge with the primordial threat of darkness, one of humanity's most fundamental fears (Price 312). In modern times, the killer plant has become a staple of the digital gaming world as a 'classic enemy' encountered in nearly every forest, swamp or jungle level. Moreover, the predatory plant has also been featured in several films and TV shows, notably the 'Demogorgon' in the widely popular Netflix series *Stranger Things* (2016-present). The killer plant exhibits numerous similarities with the alien in terms of symbolism and alien horror draws inspiration from the legacy of killer plants (Butcher).

Conclusion

Econoir texts reconfigure notions of power, knowledge and privilege. The narratives conclude with monstrous plants being uprooted, 'perpetrators' being punished and the dominance of the human world impeccably restored. However, plants germinate and naturalise, their intricate network of roots are deep and widespread. To eradicate them, we would also have to remove parts of ourselves and the ways in which we differentiate us from them. These narratives force us to contemplate on the frameworks and mechanisms through which we try to assess and balance the scales in our favour, by enforcing our linear timeframe onto the cyclical logic of vegetal time. Our growing dependence on plants and our disregard for them is becoming increasingly evident, with the Anthropocene emerging as a widely discussed concept of the current millennium. As the impending climate change looms over us, the exploration of issues highlighted by econoir has become increasingly imperative. It

is imperative for us to contemplate on our actions, especially in the light of our evolving understanding of plant's capabilities. At the end, the central 'mystery' of such narratives revolves around how do we survive this wreckage of our own making.

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Epoch of the Anthropocene: Human and Environment Interactions in Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin*

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Abstract

This paper explores the compelling intersections between literature, environmental consciousness, and the Anthropocene in Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012). In light of the multifaceted and pressing challenges presented by climate change and ecological degradation, this literary analysis undertakes a comprehensive examination of the novel's exploration of human-environment relationships within the framework of the Anthropocene, an epoch defined by significant human influence on the environment. It articulates the representation of the delicate interconnection between humanity and the natural world, thereby inviting a critical reassessment of established ecocritical paradigms. By examining the characters' interactions with their environment in the rugged landscape of northern Pakistan, this article considers how Khan's narrative sheds light on the multi-layered entanglements between individuals, society, and nature in the Anthropocene era. It investigates the ways in which Khan's literary artistry challenges and reconfigures prevailing ecocritical paradigms, emphasising the human-environment relations in the age of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Anthropocene, climate change, ecocriticism, landscape, Pakistan

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the narrative of the Anthropocene in ecocriticism studies has emerged as a profound and essential field of inquiry. Its renewed interest in the concept of “eco-cosmopolitanism” and its intricate connections with the persistently complex discourse of “globalization” (Heise 10) have provided valuable insights into the ever-evolving relationship between humans and the environment. However, the most crucial focus for the future of ecocriticism lies in its ability to thoroughly examine the intricate ties “between literature and the environment” (Glotfelty xviii). This is especially pertinent in the context of Pakistan, where intellectuals grapple with unique challenges when addressing environmental issues within the framework of their nation. This study seeks to map out and establish novel pathways for existence that challenge the prevailing paradigm of “anthropocentric capitalism” (Rahman 317), which has often been held to blame for the ruthless manipulation of natural phenomena. By investigating the realm of environmental literature, we gain a deeper understanding of how diverse cultures relate to “their natural surroundings and how distinct communities respond to environmental crises and changes” (Thornber 998). This exploration transcends geographical boundaries, shedding light on humanity's shared responsibility to protect our planet and fostering a sense of interconnectedness in the face of global

ecological challenges. It paves the way for a more harmonious and sustainable coexistence between humans and their environment.

Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), invites readers into a complex narrative that intertwines “the historical experience of indigenous peoples is of paradigmatic significance for the Anthropocene” (Horn and Bergthaller 91). In this literary work, Khan deftly explores the intricate “relationship between humanity and nature” (Biermann and Lovbrand 4), framing her story in a way that calls for a revisitation of ecocriticism in the framework of contemporary literature. The term 'Anthropocene' refers to a proposed geological epoch characterised by the profound impact of human activities on Earth's systems, positioning humanity as a significant geophysical force. In the context of the novel, this idea serves as a critical framework through which the text engages with themes of ecological transformation and human agency in environmental degradation. Through the lens of ecocriticism, we can examine how Khan's narrative provides a nuanced portrayal of the relationship between the natural world and the characters' lives. Her storytelling transcends the traditional boundaries of human-centered narratives, offering an alternative perspective on the environment that underscores the impact of “climate change”, and “ecological degradation” (Johns-Putra 271), and the profound interdependence of all living beings. By weaving elements of ecological consciousness into her characters' experiences, Khan invites readers to engage with the fragility and interconnectedness of the planet, stressing the urgent need for environmental awareness and action. As we delve into this study, we are prompted to consider the evolving role of ecocriticism in literature, which goes beyond traditional nature writing to encompass the myriad ways in which humans and the environment “coexisted in a harmonious relationship with their natural environment” (Horn and Bergthaller 54). In this paper, we analyze the multifaceted dimensions of Khan's narrative and its potential to redefine the boundaries of ecocriticism, highlighting how *Thinner Than Skin* serves as a compelling literary bridge between human stories and “the global ecological crisis and the sublime of the Anthropocene politics of scale” (Hamilton et al. 20).

The term 'Anthropocene' has garnered significant attention and relevance in recent years within the realms of “environmental humanities contextualise and complements environmental sciences and policy with a focus on narrative” (Oppermann and Iovino 1). It serves as a pivotal concept in describing human activities' profound and far-reaching consequences on the Earth's delicate ecosystems and the overall global environment. Anthropocene signifies a distinct era, a time when human influence has become a dominant force, reshaping landscapes, “atmosphere, climate change, and our decimation of biodiversity” (Dubeck and Hupkes 51) on an unprecedented scale. The rise of the Anthropocene as a recognised era has spurred a surge of interest in how it is depicted and interpreted within the realms of literature and the environment. In the contemporary age, it has become increasingly evident that the significant literary response to the Anthropocene justifies further investigation. This response has given rise to a

diverse range of speeches, narratives, and perspectives within the domain of environmental literature. This literary exploration is crucial in shedding light on the intricate “relationship between humans to the natural world” (Hamilton et al. 3) and how these relationships have evolved in the face of the Anthropocene's challenges. One noteworthy work that stands out in this context is Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012). This novel adeptly integrates ecocritical frameworks to offer a nuanced and incisive examination of the Anthropocene, foregrounding human activity and environmental transformations in ways that challenge and expand current discourses on the ecological crisis. It emphasises the growing “self-consciousness” that has developed regarding the intricate and often precarious connections “between humans” (Cordle and Cristofaro 5) and the environment. In the Anthropocene era, the implications of human actions are undeniable. The large destruction of plant “species, the pollution of the sky, sea, and land”, and the transformation of landscapes underscore the urgent need for a deeper exploration of this significant literary and environmental phenomenon. The narratives of the Anthropocene within “twenty-first-century literature” (Thorner 989) are closely clustered, reflecting a collective awareness of the profound challenges and responsibilities that accompany the Anthropocene's arrival. It is through these narratives and literary explorations that we can gain a deeper interpretation of humanity and the environment in this pivotal era of Earth's history.

Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) unfolds against the breathtaking backdrop of “northern Pakistan” (Khan 174), a region adorned with awe-inspiring landscapes, towering mountains, pristine glaciers, and lush green valleys. Nestled within this picturesque terrain is the valley of Kaghan, a place that, as Khan observes, is both “shadowed and graced by nomads” (Khan 9), highlighting the delicate interplay between the land and its inhabitants. Through her evocative storytelling, Khan delves deep into the complex tapestry of human emotions, particularly the profound sense of grief, as the story's narrator grapples with the sudden unraveling of lives and how one's identity is intricately molded by the environment in which they find themselves. Khan's narrative is a profound exploration of the rekindling of long-forgotten indigenous traditions, shedding light on the profound wisdom of these aboriginal ways of interacting with and understanding the local landscape. Khan invites readers on a transformative journey, both through the stunning scenery of northern Pakistan and the rich, multifaceted emotions of her characters:

Glaciers in the eastern Himalayas are receding. Some say the Alps will be ice-free by 2100 . . . However, in parts of Pakistan, glaciers could be expanding. It was a possibility Wes and Farhana had come to explore. (Khan 43)

Through the characters of Wes and Farhana, Khan attempts to illustrate the profound impact of global warming on the highest mountain regions in disparate corners of the world, stretching from the mountainous terrains of “northern Pakistan” to the coastal areas of “northern California” (Khan 57). This geographical juxtaposition underscores the universality of the issue and its transcendent nature. As Chaudhuri notes, this environmental crisis is primarily a result of the “anthropogenic nature of

climate change” (6), emphasising the human responsibility in exacerbating these environmental shifts. Khan's narrative brilliantly encapsulates this human-induced dilemma in the novel by portraying it as a situation where the world is “consumed equally by terror as by trivia”. The characters grapple with mundane concerns like fixing their “phone, toilet, air conditioner, cable, and road” (Khan 25), while the world around them undergoes irreversible transformations. This stark contrast highlights the urgency and often paradoxical nature of addressing climate change in our modern lives. Khan's work thus becomes emblematic of the Anthropocene literary movement, offering a poignant commentary on the restructuring of scales and concepts related to transience, climate change, and collective environmental action in this new age.

Huggan and Tiffin, prominent figures in the realm of postcolonial eco-criticism, delve into the reasons behind the discomfort that individuals from “postcolonial places are uncomfortable” with discussions surrounding “animal rights” (152). Their work underscores the complex dynamics at play in these areas, where the local population has historically been subjected to onerous fees for activities like “grazing and tree-cutting” (Khan 250), as exemplified in Khan's observations. Scott Slovic, a respected environmental critic, adds another layer to this discourse by raising important questions about the third wave of ecocriticism. He challenges us to consider the “possibility of post-national and post-ethnic visions of the human experience of the environment” (6). In doing so, ecocriticism serves to reposition humanity within a broader ecological framework. It promotes a biocentric perspective that highlights the intricate web of interrelationships and interdependence between “humans and other creatures” (Hamilton et al. 107), ultimately reshaping our understanding of our place in the natural order.

Climate change, as addressed by the Paris Agreement in 2015, outlines a comprehensive strategy aimed at curbing the ever-increasing emissions of carbon gases, with the primary goal of mitigating the effects of global warming and ensuring a sustainable, habitable planet. In her insightful work, Khan describes glaciers as resilient entities that have withstood the onslaught of “global gas emissions and spurned newness” (Khan 44) while continuing to inspire hope for a better future. The foremost factor contributing to the intensification of this environmental crisis is the mounting concentration of greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere, a phenomenon predominantly attributed to human activities. These activities encompass a wide spectrum, ranging from large-scale farming and deforestation to the everyday use of domestic wood fuels. The significant contributions of Glotfelty, who, in her own scholarly work, has delved into the difficulties of climate change and its implications for our world:

The alarming growth of the world's population, mounting evidence of global warming, destruction of the planet's protective ozone layer, . . . an increasing rate of extinction of plant and animal species. (226-27)

In Khan's insightful discussion, she delves into the critical issues responsible for the rapid melting of the “Malika Parbat snow” (Khan 46). This alarming phenomenon

has had devastating consequences on the local ecosystem, resulting in the destruction of native flora, fauna, shrubs, small lakes, and the delicate balance of life itself. Khan's analysis effectively mirrors the escalating concerns of global warming that plague our collective consciousness, emphasising the pivotal role played by the bountiful natural resources of lush valleys and picturesque meadows in the mountain's fragile survival. She underscores the significance of "glacial growth and decline" as clear "indicators of global warming crisis" (Khan 44). In tandem with Khan's perspective, Scott Slovic aptly points out the prevalence of "the ubiquitous concerns about environmental degradation" (9) within modern Pakistani discourse. The Kaghan valley, as Khan aptly illustrates, has historically been inhabited by "semi-nomadic tribes", who migrate seasonally, spending "their summers in the mountain pastures" (Khan 19) and retreating to the plains during the harsh winters. This delicate balance between nature and culture in the "upper Kaghan Valley" (Khan 153) is at the heart of the environmental challenges, making it all the more imperative for us to address the issues raised by Khan.

Ecocriticism highlights the permeable "intersections of literature and environment" (James and Morel 355), emphasising the interconnectedness and interdependence of the two. Khan adeptly elucidates between human agency and the natural world, foregrounding the interdependencies and shared trajectories that bind them. Through her nuanced narrative, she features the environment not as a passive backdrop to human actions but as an active, dynamic force, shaping human choices and challenging the inherent resistance to adaptation. This perspective reorients our understanding of the environment as an integral, co-evolving component of human experience, rather than a mere externality. This narrative resonates deeply with the principles of ecocriticism, which goes beyond the superficial notion of "safeguarding untouched, external nature" (Garrard 158). The connection between an unfertile environment and the unyielding nature of social obstinacy is described in the novel. The story unfolds with the heart-wrenching account of Maryam, a local tribal girl in the "Northern Areas" (Khan 167) of Pakistan. In the aftermath of the catastrophic floods, she faces the profound tragedy of losing her daughter, Kiran. Maryam's life is deeply rotated with the cycles of her environment, where she and her family move along the mountainside each summer, following a tradition that echoes the timeless nomadic rhythms of people across South Asia. The novel eloquently illustrates this bond between the human and natural worlds, capturing the very moment "when nomads all over Asia have moved from their winter homes into summer pastures" (Khan 141). Khan's portrayal of the tribal communities in the novel features the inherent resistance to change present in the environment itself. This resistance is mirrored in the landscape itself, as even the construction of the "Karakoram Highway stretch of a road cut the tallest peaks, creating passes within passes" (Khan 228). The relentless determination of both the environment and the people to remain unaltered serves as a powerful backdrop for the broader themes of the novel.

The anthropocentric idea that we are all in this together is questioned and challenged

in the rich tapestry of “environmental justice literature,” which places a spotlight on the glaring disparities in both “responsibility and vulnerability” among nations, offering a striking counter-narrative to the prevailing ideologies “of industrialized nations” (Cosmos and Rosenthal IX-X). Khan's voice resonates with concern as she highlights the alarming proliferation of global capitalism across the world. She keenly observes how “in the south, in Baluchistan, with Pakistan selling its coast to China. . . the north, where China built a road straight through the heart of the Karakoram Range” (Khan 206). The Anthropocene, often depicted as an expression of human agency and responsibility, is portrayed in a manner that seems one-sided and incomplete. However, this age, defined by unprecedented “human impact on the planet, transformations of the landscape, urbanisation, and resources extraction” (Hamilton et al. 3), marks a new shape of links between humans and the physical environment. This study, by contrast, offers a fresh perspective that enables a concentric reorganisation of complex realities and local histories. It meticulously integrates the ecological histories, highlighting the profound interrelationships within natural valleys and landscapes, while deliberately avoiding the reductionist tendencies prevalent in conventional thought that often homogenise distinct differences.

Conclusion

Therefore, the novel discusses from an ecocritical perspective that critiques the replication of foreign development models in developing countries. This research questions the accuracy of these models and highlights their adverse environmental impact and their impact on indigenous communities. Ecocriticism not only disseminates social scientists' findings but also plays an important role in raising a deeper interpretation of human and their environment. The focus of ecocriticism in this context centres on anthropocentrism and ecocentrism within environmental discourse. Moreover, this research has advanced the integration of environmental justice into ecocritical theory, bridging the gap between social and environmental justice. Khan offers a compelling narrative that effectively revisits the field of ecocriticism in the context of the Anthropocene. Through a richly woven tapestry of characters, landscapes, and interconnectedness, the novel exemplifies the urgent need to reevaluate our connection with the environment in an era defined by unprecedented environmental challenges. Khan's exploration of the Anthropocene, with its themes of climate change, globalisation, and human impact on the environment, serves as a poignant reminder of our responsibilities as custodians of the Earth. The narrative features the ecological implications of our actions between the psychological and emotional dimensions of our dense connection to the environment. By intertwining human and ecological narratives, it sheds light on the delicate balance between human existence and the natural world. In doing so, it reinvigorates ecocriticism by providing a literary lens through which we can reflect on the profound ecological issues of our time, inviting readers to engage in thoughtful dialogues about the Anthropocene and the future of our planet. Khan's

work stands as a powerful testament to the potential of literature to inspire deeper environmental awareness and a sense of responsibility in our rapidly changing world.

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Love and Loss in the Poetry of Ocean Vuong

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Abstract

The poetry of Ocean Vuong is an eloquent reflection of the complexity and intensity of human feeling. His verse is filled with strong emotions, and the theme of love and loss can be traced consistently. Vuong is an immigrant from Vietnam, but the threads of his personal history are woven deeply with the history of his native country. In his poetry, he pays attention to the Vietnam War, its consequences, and the immigrant's experience. His publication, *Night Sky with the Exit Wounds*, is filled with delicate, vivid lines and images. The themes of the intersection of language and silence and identity can be found there, as well as that of queer love and bond between people of the same blood.

Moreover, the form of his poetry breaks up the traditional rules of writing. Love in Vuong's poetry is not idealized; it is also not expressed in easy words. For him, love is a complicated feeling that can bring extreme joy but simultaneously devastate a person to the roots of the soul. On the other hand, loss and grief are presented as dominant themes in Vuong's poems. Paradoxically, these themes are interwoven in many poems, and only gentle and unobvious backcrossing can be traced, but this is only possible for the poet. The reader is left with an opportunity to penetrate the innermost of the poet's heart and witness the unearthing representation of grief and thoughtfulness towards the meaning of being connected to other humans.

Keywords: Ocean Vuong, Contemporary Poetry, Love and Loss, Immigrant Experience, Queer Identity.

Introduction

The poetry of Ocean Vuong resonates as a beacon of profound empathy and introspective profundity in modern literature. Born in Saigon, Vietnam, and immigrating to the United States as a youthful boy, Vuong's labour is indelibly stamped by motifs of displacement, persona, and the intricate tapestry of human experience. His initial important collection, "Night Sky with Exit Wounds," garnering widespread praise and prestigious honours, including the T. S. Eliot Prize, unveils the poet's exceptional voice and resonant emotional lucidity. Vuong's poetry intricately weaves personal narrative with broader historical context in a complex, bursting manner. He delves into his family's past, the repercussions of the Vietnam War, and the immigrant experience through short, direct sentences alongside elaborate, winding phrases, generating a haunting and compelling dialogue between personal and collective memory. The poems often explore the intersections of language and silence, examining how words can simultaneously illuminate and obscure the most profound human truths in various sentence structures. The potency of Vuong's work lies in its lyrical precision and stark imagery. An economy of

language characterizes his verses, yet each word is imbued with layers of meaning. This mastery enables him to succinctly convey complex emotional landscapes through more lyrical, flowing sentences. Traditional forms do not confine Vuong's work; his poetry fluidly navigates free verse, prose poems, and other innovative structures, reflecting the fluidity of identity and experience he often portrays in sentences of varying complexity. Themes of love and loss, mainly through the lens of queer identity, are recurrent and poignant in his poetry, expressed through both direct statements and more elaborate metaphors. Smitha K. M. opines:

The theme of love and loss is a universal and timeless topic that has been explored by poets throughout the ages. In the Romantic era, however, two poets stood out for their profound exploration of this theme: John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Both poets were known for their ability to capture the emotional complexity of the human experience, and their poetry reflects a deep engagement with the themes of love, loss, and mortality (M. 148).

Vuong writes with an unflinching honesty that invites readers into the intimate recesses of his heart and mind through short, personal anecdotes and more expansive reflections. This vulnerability is coupled with a profound sense of resilience, as the speaker often transcends pain by articulating various sentence constructions. In addition, Vuong's work is distinguished by its intertextuality, drawing on a wide array of cultural, literary, and historical references, skills, and voices. This amalgamation enriches his poetry, inviting readers to engage with multiple voices and narratives through explicit references and more obscure allusions. In an interview with Vuong, he says:

I don't want to render the reader passive. I think I would truly fail at my work if a reader "gets lost" in my story. We often want that, but I think I would totally fail if my reader felt they had entered my world so completely that they "lost themselves." It's important for me to constantly point at the fact that we are two people, negotiating one unknown. That, to me, is more beautiful than my reader getting "lost" in my story. (Mehrish)

His allusions to classical mythology, contemporary culture, and personal lore create a rich, multilayered tapestry that rewards deep and thoughtful reading expressed in various sentence types. As far as one is concerned, the main thing about Vuong's poetry is that he entirely concentrated on the beautiful meaning of love in all its forms—familial, romantic, and self-love. Most of his literary works present a sentimental and, at the same time, dramatic dissection of the ties that bond people.

Love and Loss in the Fragile Connection

Although love is the prevailing motif in Vuong's literature, the theme of loss is also present and is often interlinked. In this regard, while reading his poetry, it is possible to feel that loss will strike anyone regardless of the love they had before. Touching upon loss, Vuong explores different kinds of this feeling: separation from people, the cultural loss of immigrants, and the loss of ideas, desires, and unexplored states of being. Wally Suphap says, "Vuong also foregrounds losses that transcend the purely private: losses instigated by atrocities against peoples and communities. In "The

Punctum," Vuong pays homage to victims of lynchings in California from 1830 to 1935, many of whom were of Mexican, Chinese, and Native American descent." (Suphap)

The combination of love and loss in Vuong's poetry reveals the fragility and transience of the human bond. Vuong makes the readers aware of the short-lasting viewers that make up the beauty of one's life, encouraging them to perceive and embrace the beauty in them. In his works, Vuong's textual tools appear to remain a memory, harboring it and simultaneously allowing for the healing of loss and love, reflecting the pain experienced and transforming it into something more significant, thus adding meaning to the suffering of one individual. Making a profound artistic statement, Ocean Vuong points toward the inseparable nature of love and loss and advantageously combines the two. With his exquisite and heartfelt poetry, the author invites the audience to reflect on the nature of love and grief and enjoy the immense beauty of his language.

In the poem "Trojan" by Ocean Vuong, *The Way We Roll Here*, love and loss come together with lovely images and rich metaphors hauntingly woven into the narrative. It begins at twilight - a metaphor representing the dimness of innocence giving way to experience and an early suggestion of love with all its fragility against the darkness it eventually brings.

A finger's worth of dark from daybreak, he steps
 into a red dress. A flame caught
 in a mirror the width of a coffin. Steel glinting
 in the back of his throat. A flash, a white
 asterisk. Look
 how he dances. The bruise-blue wallpaper peeling
 into hooks as he twirls, his horse
 -head shadow thrown on the family
 portraits, glass cracking beneath
 its stain. (9)

The narrator, stepping into a red dress, signifies a bold assertion of identity, simultaneously beautiful and perilous. The red dress, aflame in reflection, captures both the passion of love and the destructive potential of rejection and violence. This duality is a recurring motif in Vuong's oeuvre, portraying the bittersweet essence of human connection. As the narrator dances, the bruise-blue wallpaper and the cracking glass echo the internal and external fractures caused by love unreciprocated or unaccepted. The imagery of the horse with a human face and the belly full of blades further amplifies the theme of betrayal and suffering. As the horse runs until it dissolves into the wind, it reflects how, despite the beauty and grace of love, the individual is often left to contend with their disintegration and loss. While galloping towards inevitable destruction, the poem captures the tragic dance between love and its often painful consequences.

How a horse will run until it breaks
 into weather-- into wind. How like
 the wind, they will see him. They will see him

clearest
when the city burns. (9)

The poem leaves a chilling image in its concluding lines: the red-dressed boy is clearest in their vision "when the city burns." This culmination signifies the ultimate recognition and acceptance of one's true self at the cost of profound devastation, reflecting the ultimate paradox of love and loss. The interplay of love and loss is a profound theme that permeates Ocean Vuong's poem "A Little Closer to the Edge." This theme manifests through striking imagery and poignant moments, encapsulating the ephemeral beauty of love and the inevitable shadow of loss accompanying it. From the very outset, the poem juxtaposes the innocence of young love with the grim reality of impending change. The young lovers, "hand in hand... into the bomb crater," symbolize a tender intimacy set against a backdrop of violence and destruction. This stark contrast underscores the fragility of their relationship as the "night full of black teeth" looms ominously around them, foreshadowing the trials that will soon follow.

Ocean Vuong's "Immigrant Haibun" intricately weaves the themes of love and loss through a vivid and poignant narrative. The poem, characterized by its haunting imagery and emotive language, reflects on the ephemeral nature of existence and the enduring bonds that tether individuals to one another despite the inexorable passage of time and the inevitability of separation. The opening lines of Edmond Jabes set a tone of peril and hope intertwined, suggesting that love can make seemingly insurmountable journeys possible: "The road which leads me to you is safe even when it runs into oceans." Despite the existential threats that lie ahead, the journey toward the beloved is rendered safe by the power of love. This sentiment is further emphasized by the imagery of sacrifice, "While I slept, he burned his last violin to keep my feet warm," (13), illustrating acts of devotion even in the bleakest circumstances. Burning a treasured instrument symbolizes the profound selflessness that often accompanies love. Jessica Liu, while reviewing the book *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*, says:

In his poems, Vuong also draws from his family's experience with immigration and the cultural divides stemming from his origins. "Immigrant Haibun" unfolds as the narrator and his family travel across the ocean, escaping the war-torn city they once lived in; above them, stars symbolize the promise of safety like "little centuries opening just long enough for us to slip through." This experience serves as a reminder of the perilous journeys many refugees and immigrants have endured throughout history. (Liu)

Echoes of Loss: Resilience Amidst Ruins

As the narrative progresses, images of a dilapidated city underscore the theme of loss. "When we left it, the city was still smouldering...a carousel spinning its blackened horses" (13). These scenes of destruction contrast starkly with the tender moments shared between the characters. The themes of love and loss converge poignantly towards the poem's conclusion. The characters confront an existential

abyss, symbolized by the disappearing horizon: "The fog lifts. And we see it. The horizon – suddenly gone." This moment encapsulates the inevitability of loss as the seemingly endless journey ends abruptly. Despite this, the resilience of love persists as they continue to sail forward, united even as they face an unknown and potentially perilous destiny.

The fog lifts. And we see it. The horizon - suddenly gone. An aqua sheen leading to the hard drop. Clean and merciful - just like he wanted. Just like the fairy tales. The one where the book closes and turns to laughter in our laps. I pull the mast to full sail. He throws my name into the air. I watch the syllables crumble into pebbles across the deck. (14)

Ocean Vuong's poem "Thanksgiving 2006" poignantly explores the intertwined themes of love and loss through its evocative imagery and introspective voice. The work is permeated with longing and melancholy, capturing the emotional weight of distance and the search for connection in a cold, impersonal setting. The poem begins with a stark portrayal of isolation: "Brooklyn's too cold tonight / & all my friends are three years away" (29). The physical coldness of Brooklyn serves as a metaphor for emotional desolation, highlighting the speaker's separation from loved ones. The temporal distance of "three years away" amplifies this sense of estrangement, suggesting a chasm that cannot be easily bridged. This opening sets the stage for the poem's more profound exploration of loss. Vuong further delves into themes of love and loss through the speaker's reflection on life choices. The line "My mother said I could be anything / I wanted but I chose to live" (29) conveys a profound decision that impacts the speaker's entire existence. Abbigale Kernya says:

The singular aspect that ties humans together is the shared fact that we will all die—it's perhaps the only similarity to be found among us as a collective species. Despite this known aspect of existence, how does one move on after death? In a tender and intimate ode to the life of his mother and an ode to his grief, Vuong uses this collection to find power in the aftershock of her passing. (Kernya)

Choosing to "live" implies a conscious embrace of all life's accompanying joys and sorrows, love and loss interwoven. The imagery of a cigarette flaring and fading introduces a fleeting connection: "On the stoop of an old brownstone, a cigarette flares, then fades." Here, the fleeting nature of the cigarette mirrors transient human connections, reinforcing the theme of ephemeral relationships. The presence of another person, "His jawline etched in smoke," suggests a momentary encounter that, despite its brevity, leaves a significant imprint. The smoke connects and obscures, symbolizing human bonds' tenuous and elusive nature. The poem's climax brings the themes of love and loss to a palpable conclusion with the lines: "I am ready to be every animal / you leave behind." This declaration signifies a readiness to embrace vulnerability and perhaps even abandonment. "Thanksgiving 2006" intricately weaves the themes of love and loss through its rich, emotive language and poignant imagery. The poem paints a vivid picture of a soul navigating through moments of connection and separation, highlighting the inextricable bond between the capacity to love and the experience of loss. The speaker's journey through the

cold streets of Brooklyn becomes a metaphor for the universal human experience of seeking warmth amidst life's inevitable chill. The cyclical nature of love and loss is poignantly summarized: "this is how we danced: alone in sleeping bodies. Which is to say: this is how we loved: a knife on the tongue turning into a tongue." The dance, initially shared, ends in solitude, just as love, once a source of connection, transforms into something painful—a knife. This transition from connection to isolation, from tenderness to pain, vividly encapsulates the inherent duality of love and loss. Vuong Vu in the review of *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* says:

With a line from the poem "Homewrecker," for example, you, too, feel the spark and flame of a lover's touch: "Your fingers/ through my hair—my hair a wildfire." It is not just the clarity and confidence of Vuong's descriptions that amaze me, but it is that they also have something of linguistic alchemy, the power to transform and even re-invent experience, where everyday sensations and notions are re-imagined and transfigured, and you see the world as never before. (Vu)

The poem by Ocean Vuong, with its intricate imagery and evocative language, delves deeply into themes of love and loss, intertwining them in a visceral exploration of human experience. The poem's fragmented structure and vivid metaphors create a tapestry that captures the ephemeral nature of existence and the profound impact of love and loss on the human soul.

The imagery of being "pulled / with a hook / in your mouth" evokes a sense of violence and helplessness, symbolizing the painful extraction from a place of belonging. This metaphor can be interpreted as the experience of being torn away from a loved one or a cherished state of being, highlighting the agony of loss. The poem explores this theme through the line, "sometimes / your hand / is all you have / to hold / yourself to this / world," (60) emphasizing the isolation and self-reliance required to endure such loss.

Vuong's poem also touches on finding solace and meaning amidst suffering. The line, "it's / the sound not / the prayer / that enters / the thunder not / the lightning / that wakes you," (60) suggests that true awakening comes from the raw, unfiltered life experiences rather than superficial comforts or rituals. This notion is further reinforced by the imagery of "midnight's neon/parking lot / holy water / smeared / between / your thighs," which juxtaposes the sacred and the profane, illustrating the complex interplay of love, desire, and loss. The poem's exploration of love is multifaceted, encompassing physical and emotional dimensions. The phrase "the cumshot / an art / -iculation / of chewed stars" (60) is a striking example of how Vuong blends the celestial with the corporeal, portraying love as an act of creation and destruction. This duality is echoed in the lines, "to be lost in / an image / is to find within it / a door," suggesting that love can be both a means of escape and a path to deeper understanding. Ultimately, the poem conveys a sense of resilience and defiance in the face of loss. The concluding lines, "don't / be afraid / to be this / luminous / to be so bright so / empty / the bullets pass / right through you" (60), are a powerful reminder of the strength that can be found in vulnerability. By embracing the full spectrum of human experience, including the pain of loss and the ecstasy of

love, one can achieve a state of transcendence.

The profound intricacies of love and loss weave a poignant tapestry in Ocean Vuong's poem "Deto(Nation)." The poem captures the essence of emotional devastation and the haunting echoes left by paternal absence within a context ravaged by conflict. Vuong's exploration of these themes is intimate and universal, demonstrating the lasting impact of war on personal relationships and memory.

The theme of loss is palpable throughout the poem as it recounts a deep emotional void caused by a father's absence, symbolizing the irreparable gap left by war. Vuong begins with a striking line that connects humour and devastation: "There's a joke that ends with-huh? It's the bomb saying here is your father." The father's presence is ironically persistent even in his figurative death, with his essence pervading the narrator's very breath: "Now here is your father inside your lungs. Look how lighter / the earth is afterward." (58) This imagery conveys the omnipresent yet weightless nature of grief. To mention "father" itself is an act tarnished by memory's association with destruction: "To even write father / is to carve a portion of the day out of a bomb-bright page." (58). The poem also delves into the theme of love, a complex, fragmented connection, as the narrator addresses his filial bond amidst the chaos of war. The narrative's retreat into the past reveals paternal guidance mixed with protective sorrow: "Don't stay here, he said, my boy has broken by the names of flowers. Don't cry / anymore." (58) The father's directive not to remain in sorrow's grip propels the narrator into the night, symbolizing an escape from the overwhelming grasp of grief. The convergence of love and loss is poignantly crystallized in the climactic image of pressing a hand to a "blood-warm body / like a word / being nailed / to its meaning." This final metaphor captures the intense yearning for connection and the painful reality of its impossibility.

Simultaneously, Vuong's poetry does not shy away from exploring the devastation of loss. The abruptness and intensity of loss are portrayed through stark, often violent imagery, reflecting the sudden void it creates. This loss is not just physical but deeply emotional, leaving lasting scars and a sense of emptiness that permeates the speaker's existence. While cherished, the memories of lost loved ones also bring pain, highlighting the duality of remembrance as both a source of connection and a reminder of absence. Henry Chandonnet says, "For Vuong, the writing itself becomes a way to perpetuate life, to confer a kind of immortality. By alluding to his mother in the present tense, she is not really gone. His words are corpses yet read by others on the page they (and his mother) come to life" (Chandonnet).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ocean Vuong's poetry, characterized by its intricate imagery and evocative language, offers a profound exploration of the intertwined themes of love and loss. Through fragmented structures and vivid metaphors, Vuong captures the ephemeral nature of existence and the profound impact of these emotions on the human soul. His depiction of love is multifaceted, blending physical and emotional dimensions, while his portrayal of loss is deeply visceral, emphasizing the isolation

and self-reliance needed to endure it. Vuong's work highlights the duality of human experience, where love can be both a means of escape and a path to deeper understanding, and where loss can create an irreparable void while also providing moments of connection and meaning. Ultimately, Vuong's poetry conveys resilience and defiance in the face of suffering, suggesting that embracing the full spectrum of human emotions can lead to a transcendent state. His intimate and universal exploration of love and loss, set against the backdrop of personal and collective trauma, demonstrates the lasting impact of these themes on personal relationships and memory, offering a poignant meditation on the resilience of the human spirit.

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Hindu Gods, Demons, and Concepts in *Naruto*: Analyzing Masashi Kishimoto's Mythopoeic Vision

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Abstract

The study aims to unravel and analyze references to Hindu myths, deities, and concepts in Masashi Kishimoto's *Naruto*. Manga artists are known for referencing myths and mythical deities from around the globe. Kishimoto is no exception, and his shonen masterpiece *Naruto* is rich in mythical allusions and references. *Naruto* follows the story of Naruto Uzumaki, a teenage ninja whose aim is to become the Hokage. The manga makes a plethora of references to Japanese mythology and Hindu mythology. However, though studies are available on Kishimoto's use of Japanese mythology in the manga, no study exists on his use of Hindu mythology. Thus, the present paper aims to fill that research gap by conducting an in-depth study of how Kishimoto has portrayed Hindu deities, demons, and concepts. The paper will adhere to Jolyon Baraka Thomas' concept of "show" and Julie Sanders' theory of appropriation to analyze the references to Hindu myths, deities, and concepts in the manga.

Keywords: Manga, *Naruto*, Hindu mythology, Appropriation, Mythopoeia

Introduction

Myths are not just fictional stories about creation, gods, and demons; they also reflect how human beings conceive the world and cosmos. As Joseph Campbell writes, "Mythology is not a lie, mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical" (206). Myths reflect how the primordial human mind answered the questions about creation. However, myths still find a place in modern times in various ways. Myths provide a rich reservoir of stories. Every country has its corpus of mythology that informs its customs, rituals, and beliefs. Writers, artists, and movie directors adapt, borrow, appropriate, and reinterpret these stories according to their artistic purpose or ideological agendas. A.S. Byatt writes, "...the great makers constantly raided previous works— whether in pebble, or marble, or glass, or silver and gold— for tesserae which they rewrought into new images" (29). This creative aspect of making and remaking myth is called "mythopoeia."

J.R.R. Tolkien popularized the term "mythopoeia," by which he means the creation of myth (Kazlev 7). According to Sujatha Aravindakshan Menon, there are two types of mythopoeia: "generative mythopoeia" and "adaptive mythopoeia" (81). She observes:

Generative mythopoeia is where the writer designs a cosmos that is similar to the one found in existing myths but which is the product of a higher degree of ingenuity...Generative mythopoeia is like constructing a building from the very scratch...Adaptive mythopoeia, on the contrary, is like renovating or modifying an existing construction. (Menon 81)

Generative mythopoeia is the creation of a new myth, whereas adaptive mythopoeia is the renewal or reimagining of an existing myth. For example, William Blake created his own mythical gods in his book *Jerusalem* ("William Blake's cast of

characters”). It is an instance of generative mythopoeia. On the other hand, Marvel Comics' *Thor* is a modern take on Norse mythology. It is an example of adaptive mythopoeia.

Manga are Japanese comics and graphic novels. Manga artists are famous for incorporating myths from the reservoir of Japanese mythology and myths from around the globe (Levi 37, 63, 65). Masashi Kishimoto is no exception. He references various myths and mythical deities from Japanese mythology and folklore in his shonen manga *Naruto* (Plumb 243-244). He also incorporates mythical deities and esoteric concepts from Hinduism. However, though there are studies on the influences of Japanese mythology on *Naruto* (243-244), no academic study is there on the use of Hindu myths and deities in the manga. The present paper, therefore, aims to fill that research gap by attempting an in-depth study of how Kishimoto has portrayed Hindu myths, deities, and concepts in his manga. The study adheres to Julie Sanders' theory of appropriation and Jolyon Baraka Thomas' concept of “show” as the theoretical framework.

Naruto is one of the Big Three of shonen manga (“Big Three”). Its story is as follows. Naruto Uzumaki is a teen shinobi who wants recognition from the people around him and aims to become the Hokage (ninja village chief). He has a fox spirit sealed inside him, which is why the villagers are unfriendly toward him. However, eventually, he enters ninja school and makes friends with fellow ninjas Sasuke Uchiha and Sakura Haruno. He receives training from Kakashi Hatake. Along the way to becoming Hokage, he meets various people (friends and foes), greatly shaping his personality. It is a bildungsroman story of how Naruto and his friends go on adventures, face challenges, gain wisdom, and succeed.

Hindu Gods, Demons, and Concepts in *Naruto*

Though we can find several references to Hindu mythology in *Naruto*, Kishimoto has not chosen any single Hindu text (epics, Puranas, Vedas, and so on) to draw on. His borrowings reflect an eclectic approach. Kishimoto's use of Hindu myths and concepts parallels Jolyon Baraka Thomas' concept of “show.” *Show* means using religious concepts or images cosmetically to increase the attractiveness of a story. Thomas writes:

I plot manga and anime along a continuum ranging between aesthetic and didactic types, which respectively focus on the “show” and “tell” of religion. On the one hand, authors of aesthetic products use religious vocabulary and imagery cosmetically. Their primary aim is to mobilize religious concepts, characters, and images in the service of entertaining their audiences... Authors of didactic products, on the other hand, use a pedagogical mode to introduce audiences to information about religions or a hortatory mode to persuade and convert. (Thomas 58-59)

Here, “aesthetic products” means manga that are written for entertainment purposes and not for religious teachings, and “didactic products” denotes manga that are hagiographies or are written for disseminating religious teachings and proselytizing (Thomas 58-59). *Naruto* is an aesthetic product and uses the *show* model of using myths and religious concepts because the manga is neither a hagiography nor is written to give religious teachings. It is a popular cultural text that uses mythical

stories and religious concepts for aesthetic purposes without seriously aiming to disseminate religious teaching. For example, it uses the Hindu/Buddhist concept of the third eye without being faithful to the original meaning associated with the concept. In Hinduism/Buddhism, the third eye symbolizes enlightenment and enhanced consciousness (Cavendish 2606). However, Kishimoto uses the concept as a story element to increase the “coolness” of the fights without giving much heed to the original intent behind the concept.

We also find instances of “appropriation.” Appropriation is a “technique through which old images and texts are given new meaning” (Sturken and Cartwright 81). Julie Sanders observes:

...appropriation frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the actions of interpolation and critique as much as through the movement from one genre to others...appropriations tend to have a more complicated, intricate and sometimes embedded relationship to their intertexts than a straightforward film version of a canonical or well-known text would suggest. The relationship can therefore seem more sideways or deflected, further along the spectrum of distance than a straightforward generic transposition. (Sanders 35-36)

Following are the references to and analyses of Hindu mythology and Hindu concepts in *Naruto*. These examples from the text show how Kishimoto follows the *show* model and appropriates Hindu myths, concepts, and deities, thereby resulting in adaptive mythopoeia.

Chakras:

Chakras are focal energy points in our astral body (Lochtefeld 137). According to John A. Grimes, “A *chakra* [chakra] is a center of energy located in the subtle body where the channels (*nāḍīs*) converge, giving the appearance of a lotus” (100). Chakras are associated with esoteric teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism (Jones and Ryan 102; White 14-15). In *Naruto*, Kishimoto portrays chakra as energy, similar to the Hindu concept of “prana.” He shows chakra to be bound by the Eight Gates (limiters of chakra). If any of the Eight Gates is opened, it gives an immense flow of chakra to the user. The Eight Gates are more aligned with the Hindu concept of chakra. It is a convoluted view of the original concept. In the manga, chakra becomes energy/prana, and the Eight Gates become limiters to chakra.

Third Eye:

In Hinduism/Buddhism, there is the symbolism of the third eye situated between the eyebrows. It symbolizes enlightenment, clairvoyance, a higher degree of perception, and so on (Leadbeater 79; Cavendish 2606; McKenna 21). In *Naruto*, Kishimoto appropriates the concept in various ways. In Volume 13, Chapter 113, the Third Eye is shown as Gaara's ninja technique. He creates a sand eye, which can act as an additional eye that grants the user surveillance powers without being noticed. In Volume 70, Chapter 677, Madara Uchiha opens his third eye and performs a genjutsu called the Infinite Tsukuyomi. It is a very powerful genjutsu that hypnotizes the

entire world into daydreaming. So, instead of granting enlightenment, the third eye is shown as causing hypnosis.

C4 Karura:

The C4 Karura is a powerful ninja technique created by Deidara in Volume 39, Chapters 359-361. The C4 Karura technique consists of microscopic bombs that enter the blood of any animal and, on Deidara's command, start to explode, disintegrating anyone who comes under its effect. The microscopic bombs resemble birds. Karura is the Japanese name for Garuda, a bird-like deity who is the king of the birds in Hindu mythology (Chaudhuri 151). Kishimoto here appropriates the Hindu god Garuda and reimagines him as a ninja technique.

Indra and Ashura:

In Hindu mythology, Indra is the king of the Devas (Jones and Ryan 195; Maruvada 211) and the ruler of heaven (Wilkins 52; Maruvada 211). He is the god of thunder (Berry 20-21). Though in the Vedic period Indra is depicted as a powerful and prominent deity, his importance diminishes in the post-Vedic period (Doniger 229). The Vedic Indra is a supreme god, and most of the hymns in the *Rig Veda* are dedicated to him (Gonda 3). In the holy text, he is called the sky god and is associated with water, thunder, rain, war, weather, and lightning (Perry 121).

Asura, in Hindu mythology, refers to a class of power-hungry beings. They oppose the Suras/Devas. The Deva/Asura binary represents good/bad qualities (Daniélou 141-142). In the *Mahabharata*, Asuras are referred to as demonic beings. Asuras and Devas are step-brothers (Hale 4). Their father is Sage Kashyapa (Wilson 259). The Deva/Asura conflict is a recurring theme in Hindu mythology.

In *Naruto*, Kishimoto appropriates the myth of Indra and Asura and reimagines them. In the manga, Indra and Ashura were brothers. Hagoromo, or the Sage of Six Paths, was their father. Indra was the elder brother, and Ashura was the younger brother. Indra was blessed with ocular powers and was a genius. On the other hand, Ashura lacked Indra's intelligence and inherited powers. Indra always liked to do things independently and, over time, concluded using power to accomplish anything. Ashura could not do anything by himself and depended upon others to achieve anything. He decided that love and friendship were more important than power. Indra's philosophy was the way of power, and Ashura's philosophy was the way of love and friendship. Hagoromo decides to make Ashura the leader and guardian of Ninshu. However, Indra gets infuriated and goes to war with his brother Ashura. Kishimoto switches roles given Hindu mythology. Indra becomes the one who is power-hungry and creates conflicts, whereas Asura becomes the beacon of love and communal harmony.

Makara:

Makara is a chimeric creature in Hindu mythology. In Hindu iconography, the Makara is portrayed as a half-fish and half-animal chimera (Williams 294). The most popular depiction of Makara is that it has the head of an elephant or seal and the body

of a fish (Rosen 136). It is the Vahana of Varuna, the god of oceans (Williams 294). In Volume 63, Chapter 607, Hashirama's wooden dragon resembles the Makara. Kishimoto reimagines the mythical creature and portrays it as “Mokuton” (“Wood Release”), a “kekkei genkai” inherited by Hashirama Senju, Naruto's ancestor.

The Concept of Incarnation:

Incarnation means the living embodiment of God or a deity. In Hinduism, the idea of incarnation is identical to the concept of avatars (Thangaraj 169-176) and is mostly related to Lord Vishnu (Lochtefield 72-73). Avatar means “descent, alight, to make one's appearance” (Monier-Williams 90). The term also means “to overcome, to remove, to bring down, to cross something” (90). In Hindu mythology, the idea of an avatar comes from the mytheme of good-vs-evil. In Chapter 4, Verse 7 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, it is said that whenever there is a decline in dharma Lord Vishnu will incarnate as an avatar to reinstate Dharma and destroy evil (Easwaran 117). In Volume 70 of *Naruto*, the idea of incarnation has been portrayed. Hagoromo says that Naruto and Sasuke are incarnations of Ashura and Indra, respectively. However, they do not fight each other but work together to defeat Kaguya Otsutsuki. Kishimoto appropriates the mytheme of Devas-vs-Asuras (Indra vs. Ashura) and portrays them as friends (Naruto and Sasuke).

Though Kishimoto often takes up Hindu gods and concepts and plays with them, sometimes he stays faithful to the source material. The following examples show where Kishimoto stays faithful to the depiction of Hindu myths and concepts in *Naruto*.

Garuda:

Garuda is a deity in Hindu mythology. He is the *vahana* of Lord Vishnu and the king of birds (Dalal 145). In Hindu iconography, he is depicted as a semi-bird and semi-human deity. His portrayals within Hinduism range from zoomorphism to anthropomorphism (Rao 285-287; Donaldson 253-259). He is portrayed as a giant bird with partially open wings in his zoomorphic form. In his anthropomorphic form, he is depicted as a deity with some ornithic attributes (Dalal 144-145; Williams 138-139; Rao 285-287). Garuda's archenemies are the Nagas (Ashok 173-175). In Volume 38, Chapters 344-346, Sasuke Uchiha assumes a hawk-like form and attacks Orochimaru, who also assumes a snake form. This fight resembles the archetypal enmity of Garuda vs Nagas in Hindu mythology.

Orochimaru and Nagas:

One of the Sannin, Orochimaru bears several similarities with the Nagas, a class of semidivine beings in Hinduism (Werner 74; Stutley and Stutley 198; Jones and Ryan 300). In Hindu mythology, Nagas are portrayed as half-serpent, half-human beings who reside in the Patala (Wilson 209-213). They can also assume human form (Smith and Brown 253). Their arch-enemy is Garuda, the king of the birds (Williams 21, 24, 63, 138; Rao 285-287). Similar to the Nagas of Hindu mythology, Orochimaru is a snakelike character. He can shapeshift into a snake and assume a

human form. Just as the Nagas dwell in Patala, Orochimaru lives in his underground chamber. His underground den is shown in Volume 34. Orochimaru's fight with Sasuke Uchiha in Volume 38 parallels the archetypal rivalry between Nagas and Garuda.

Turtle Island and Kurma Avatara:

In Volume 52, Naruto and Killer Bee are transported to Turtle Island, a living turtle the size of an island. The turtle's name is Genbu, an ancient giant domesticated turtle. The reason is the safety of these two from the Akatsuki. In Hindu mythology, Kurma is the second avatar of Lord Vishnu, the Hindu god of preservation (Dowson 36). Kurma is his tortoise form (Iyengar 122). During the churning of milk ocean to extract “amrita,” Lord Vishnu took the shape of a tortoise to support Mandara Mountain, which was used by the Devas as the churning stick (Klostermaier 241). Just as Lord Vishnu helped the Devas to churn the ocean of milk, Genma similarly helped Naruto and Killer Bee by protecting them from the Akatsuki and hiding them from the Fourth Shinobi World War carnage.

Though Kishimoto stays faithful to the source (Hindu mythology) in the above-mentioned examples, he still follows Thomas' *show* model as he does not aim to preach Hinduism to his audience. He is referencing these myths and deities to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the story.

Conclusion

In *Naruto*, Masashi Kishimoto takes concepts and deities from Hinduism and tweaks them to enhance the attractiveness of the storylines. His revision of Hindu myths and deities falls into the category of adaptive mythopoeia. However, it is not to be confused with Adrienne Rich's notion of “re-vision,” which means looking at myths with a critical lens (Rich 369). Rich's term is backed by ideological connotations, which we do not find in Kishimoto's portrayal of Hindu mythology. His depictions align more with Thomas' notion of *show*, which means using religious imagery and ideas for cosmetic purposes. Most manga artists use mythology for cosmetic purposes and not with any serious political aim (Thomas 58-59; Levi 63). The same is true for Kishimoto. Though there are examples where Kishimoto stays faithful to the source material, he still adheres to the *show* model of using mythical stories.

Notes

¹ Manga aimed at the teenage male readers

² The Big Three of shonen are *Naruto*, *Bleach*, and *One Piece*

³ Ninja

⁴ The concept of a subtle body proposed in the esoteric traditions of Eastern religions and theosophists

⁵ Life force

⁶ Illusionary ninja technique

⁷ A divine being or god

- ⁸. The Japanese term for Asura
- ⁹. Hagoromo's religious and philosophical teachings about using chakra to achieve peace and order.
- ¹⁰. A ninja technique combining the elements of earth and water
- ¹¹. Ninja techniques inherited via bloodline
- ¹². Righteous way of living
- ¹³. Mount
- ¹⁴. The three legendary ninjas of Konoha; they are Jiraya, Tsunade, and Orochimaru
- ¹⁵. The Hindu concept of the netherworld; it consists of seven realms
- ¹⁶. A group of outcast shinobi who differed from the conventional shinobi village system
- ¹⁷. Incarnation
- ¹⁸. Elixir that grants eternal life

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Neurolinguistics for Language Acquisition

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Abstract

This research paper explores the relationship between neural mechanisms underlying first language acquisition in early childhood and the conscious learning of a second language from a neurolinguistic perspective. This research examines how brain functions adapt in language acquisition, focusing on the shift from left hemisphere dominance in early language learning to the involvement of the right hemisphere in second language acquisition (SLA). Furthermore, this paper aligns its findings with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, particularly multilingualism. It offers a scientific rationale for introducing multiple languages during early developmental years to strengthen language learning outcomes. It provides practical insights that can inform and shape educational policies, thereby enlightening the reader on the potential benefits of multilingualism in education, such as enhanced cognitive abilities and improved academic performance.

Keywords: Neurolinguistics, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Neural Mechanisms, Brain Evolution, Multilingualism

Introduction

The interdisciplinary domain of neurolinguistics bridges the gap between linguistics and neuroscience and examines the complex interplay between neural processes and human linguistic abilities. It uncovers neural mechanisms governing language acquisition, comprehension, and production. Within this interdisciplinary field, the study of additional language learning emerges as a captivating domain for investigation. Second language acquisition encompasses individuals' journey to learn and integrate a new language alongside their native tongue. Investigating the neurological underpinnings of how the brain navigates the complexities of acquiring a second language provides invaluable insights into the cognitive processes involved in multilingualism. This intersection of neurolinguistics and second language acquisition unravels the mysteries of how the brain adapts to linguistic diversity, shedding light on both the universal and individual aspects of language learning. An intriguing aspect of neurolinguistics lies in its significant implications for second language acquisition (SLA).

Learning a second language (SL) involves acquiring a new language beyond one's native tongue, which is complex and multifaceted. Whether motivated by necessity, interest, or cultural exploration, people of all ages embark on acquiring additional languages. This process is often marked by distinct challenges and successes, influenced by cognitive factors, environmental conditions, and, significantly, the age at which language learning begins.

In this paper, we venture into neurolinguistics and additional language learning, aiming to unravel intricate connections between the brain processes that govern

native language development during early childhood and conscious additional language learning. Additionally, we investigate the evolution of the brain's linguistic functions, tracing the transition from the left hemisphere's dominance in early language acquisition to the involvement of the right hemisphere in second language acquisition (SLA). Furthermore, this paper delves into the recommendations outlined in NEP 2020 concerning multilingualism.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India significantly emphasises language learning as a fundamental aspect of education. The policy recognises the pivotal role of language in cognitive development, communication, and overall learning. Here are key points regarding language learning as outlined in NEP 2020:

Multilingualism: NEP 2020 advocates for a multilingual approach to education, endorsing the utilisation of multiple languages in teaching and learning. It underscores the significance of proficiency in the mother tongue, emphasising its pivotal role in education or regional language alongside learning additional languages, including English. The initiative promotes education in vernacular languages during the initial years of schooling. This strategy is thought to bolster comprehension and lay a strong foundation for learning, which aligns with cognitive research findings on language development.

Three-Language Formula: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates adopting a three-language formula in India, aiming for students to attain proficiency in three languages. This approach typically involves mastery of vernacular languages, acquiring a second language, preferably from a different language family, and proficiency in a foreign language like English. Implementing this formula usually commences early in a child's education, aligning with NEP 2020's directive to foster multilingualism and linguistic diversity among students. The suggested languages are:

Mother Tongue or Regional Language: This is spoken at home or in the state's regional language where the school is located.

Second Language: This is usually another Indian language from a different language family than the mother tongue. It is introduced early in the child's education.

Foreign Language: Given its global importance, English is often recommended as the third language. However, schools have flexibility in this choice, which can include other foreign languages based on availability and interest.

Literature Review

Language acquisition has been approached through several methodologies, including naturalistic, formal, and interactionist techniques. The naturalistic method centres on immersion in environments rich in language exposure, where learners acquire language through interaction (92). On the other hand, formal language learning typically involves structured lessons with an explicit focus on grammar, often used in second language education (492). More recently, interactionist

theories integrate meaningful social interactions with language input to foster more effective learning (1996). Recent research highlights multiple methodologies in language acquisition, including immersive, formal, and interactionist approaches. Immersive learning, which relies heavily on natural exposure, is vital, especially for acquiring first and second languages (Gass and Mackey 326). Formal instruction, focusing on structured lessons for grammar and vocabulary, remains an essential part of classroom-based language learning (Lightbown and Spada 218). Interactionist methods have also gained recognition, emphasising social communication's importance in providing language input and opportunities for usage, enhancing the language learning process in social contexts (et al. 166).

Since 2020, language revival initiatives have increasingly prioritised community engagement and digital technologies. Immersion programs remain critical in revitalising Indigenous languages, often supported by technological tools like apps and online platforms (Hinton et al. 471). The master-apprentice approach has adapted to the virtual space, improving access and facilitating interactions between elders and learners (King and Hermes 314). Furthermore, social media and community workshops have become essential in maintaining and revitalising endangered languages and providing resources for language communities (Austin and Sallabank 307). Harry Whitaker significantly promoted neurolinguistics in the US during the 1970s (Eling 398; Peng 17). Throughout the twentieth century, significant progress was achieved in comprehending the intricate connection between language and the brain. This progress ultimately led to the establishment of the interdisciplinary field of neurolinguistics during the 1960s.

This area merges linguistics and neuroscience, focusing on localizing language functions within the brain (Goodglass15). By the mid-twentieth century, research in what would later be termed neurolinguistics branched into two main directions. One of the research directions examined was aphasia (Goodglass15). Through postmortem examinations of brain injuries, many links were established to language disorders such as aphasia (Caplan 593; Eling 683). Neurolinguistics, which explores the human nervous system and language (Stavrakaki 219), examines the neural networks responsible for linguistic acquirement, understanding, and construction of structures. At its core, neurolinguistics aims to comprehend and clarify the neural basis of language and speech, mapping out the functions and procedures that enable linguistic communication (Nuessel 671). The field of neurolinguistics is broad, encompassing research on various impairments (Aminoff et al.540; Stavrakaki223).

Early Language Learning and the Left Hemisphere

Early in life, during the critical time of language development, the brain's left hemisphere takes the lead in acquiring one's native tongue. This lateralisation of language functions is a remarkable phenomenon that underpins the efficient acquisition of one's first language (L1). As per et al., language is mainly controlled by the left side of the brain throughout life. However, when we are young, the right

side also plays a significant role in language processing. This contribution, from the right side, decreases as we grow older. This early involvement of the right side in language could help recover from left-side brain injuries that occur early in life (23478). Here are some key points that delve deeper into the left hemisphere's involvement in early language learning:

Phonological Processing: The left hemisphere is primarily responsible for processing language sounds. It manages the recognition and discrimination of speech sounds, allowing infants to differentiate between different phonemes and develop the phonological inventory necessary for language comprehension and production. For example, when a baby listens to speech, the left hemisphere actively processes the speech sounds to identify familiar words and linguistic patterns. Multivariate Pattern-Analysis (MVPA) revealed that young children who are skilled readers are already using the left side of their brain for processing sounds related to language. This includes specific areas, the inferior frontal gyrus (IFG), the superior gyrus and the fusiform gyrus (Mathur et al. 218).

Syntactic Processing: As language acquisition progresses, the left hemisphere takes charge of syntactic processing, enabling the comprehension of sentence structure and grammar. It helps children understand word order, verb tense, and grammatical rules, which are fundamental to constructing and understanding sentences. According to , the features based on language structure explain more variation in brain activity across different areas of linguistic regions despite considering a system of measurement that measures how mentally demanding the task is (9849).

Semantic Processing: Another significant function of the left hemisphere is semantic processing. This hemisphere handles the comprehension and production of word meanings and the relationships between words. For instance, it helps a child understand lexical definitions and semantic composition within sentences. Mathur et al. state that when young children (aged 5-7 years old) engage in tasks involving visual rhyming and semantic judgment while undergoing functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), the neural activity they exhibit shows activation on both sides of the brain, indicating a bilateral pattern of involvement.

Broca's Area: During the nineteenth century, research suggested that specific brain regions possessed specialized functions, particularly in the frontal areas, which were believed to govern language. Broca's area emerged as a crucial centre for language production, overseeing speech motor control and the formulation of grammatically accurate sentences. Broca's studies marked a significant milestone, providing empirical support for the connection between brain function and language processing. Broca's area allows children to express their thoughts and ideas fluently as they progress in their language development. The technical term for Broca's area is the “anterior speech cortex”. The discussion about Broca's area implies that its significance in language processing could be understood through its anatomical connections and involvement in various functional networks crucial for language learning (Miller 245).

In the field of neurolinguistics during the nineteenth century, Carl Wernicke, a

German physician, made significant contributions by identifying cases where brain damage led to impaired speech comprehension. Through his work, he pinpointed the specific area within the temporal lobe, predominantly found in the left hemisphere of the brain, responsible for this function. This region, termed Wernicke's area or the posterior speech cortex, is vital for processing auditory and written language, enabling individuals to understand spoken and written words.

Wernicke's area is a crucial link between hearing or seeing words and comprehending their meanings. Bloch et al. (640) observed that the older the learners, the more variability in cerebral activation patterns within a multilingual repertoire, particularly in the primary language area associated with Wernicke's area. This variability underscores the complex interplay between language acquisition and neural processing, highlighting the intricate role of Wernicke's area in language comprehension across different linguistic contexts and stages of development.

Critical Period Hypothesis: CPH, proposed in 1967, posits that the critical age for language acquisition begins at around two years old and concludes at puberty, coinciding with the brain's lateralisation process (241). In early childhood, the left hemisphere's specialisation in language processing aligns with this hypothesis, indicating an optimal window for language acquisition. This period is characterised by heightened brain plasticity and sensitivity to linguistic input, making early language learning highly efficient. opines that the critical period theory in learning a second language is still argued about in studying how we learn languages. People often question how reliable the evidence is for this theory and welcome criticisms of the methods used to study it. Also, the arguments often centre on which version of the theory is being supported or challenged. These versions differ in terms of who they apply to, when they apply, and what they predict (31).

Understanding the left hemisphere's role in early language learning is central to grasping the foundation for subsequent language acquisition processes. The left hemisphere's ability to process phonological, syntactic, and semantic information provides the essential building blocks for effective communication, and this knowledge is pivotal as we explore the transition to the right hemisphere for second language acquisition in the later stages of life.

The Transition to the Right Hemisphere in SLA (Second Language Acquisition)

A noteworthy shift occurs in the brain's linguistic processing when learners acquire a second language. While the left hemisphere remains active in managing the native language, the right hemisphere comes to the forefront for processing aspects of a non-native language. This shift raises intriguing questions about the neural mechanisms involved in conscious language learning, especially in SLA. The brain's right side is more active in decoding unfamiliar linguistic phonetics, structures, and meanings, working with the left hemisphere to facilitate language acquisition. This transition, often observed in older learners or those acquiring a second language after the critical period, reflects the brain's remarkable adaptability

and plasticity. It is a testament to the brain's ability to accommodate and process new linguistic information, even as the dominant hemisphere for language functions shifts.

Cross Talk between Left & Right Hemispheres

Researchers at UC San Francisco highlight interhemispheric collaboration as crucial for advanced linguistic abilities. Language processing areas are traditionally primarily situated in the brain's left hemisphere. However, individuals with trouble understanding language, such as those with autism, may encounter challenges due to inadequate communication between the brain's left and right sides. In such cases, language processing may rely more on the right hemisphere than the left (Morris).

(1259) supported the idea that the left hemisphere primarily mediates language skills. Various theories exist regarding how languages are organized in the brains of bilingual individuals. Some propose that all languages utilize the same brain areas (Freud 19; Minknovaski136; Pitres 880), while others suggest that each language has its designated space (Scoresby-Jackson 702). Another perspective posits that bilinguals develop distinct brain centres (Potzl153). Additionally, there is the idea that all languages share common brain regions (Minknovaski148). These diverse theories provide valuable insights into how the brain manages multiple languages in bilingual individuals.

Seliger directed his attention towards the Right Hemisphere of the brain (RH), examining its role in language processing. He investigated how the right hemisphere assumes language functions once the left hemisphere predominantly handles the first language. Seliger also explored the linguistic responsibilities of the right hemisphere following this specialisation and its involvement in learning a proficient vernacular language and another language. According to his findings, the right hemisphere encompasses several functions that may be crucial in acquiring a second language (311-312).

Bilingualism in Early Childhood

Bilingualism refers to the ability to communicate using two or more languages. Exposure to and active use of two languages during early childhood has several notable effects on cognitive and linguistic development. Learning and using two languages concurrently profoundly impacts the brain's functional organisation and can influence the roles of the left and right hemispheres.

Effect on the Left Hemisphere: Bilingual children frequently exhibit heightened language processing abilities in the left hemisphere, attributed to their exposure to and proficiency in two linguistic systems. This enhanced efficiency stems from the practice they receive in navigating between languages, showcasing their cognitive flexibility. Bilingual individuals demonstrate adeptness in language switching, a skill reflected in their processing of linguistic information primarily in the left hemisphere. Moreover, bilingualism correlates with enhanced executive functions, including cognitive control, working memory, and attention. Bilingual children

often outperform their monolingual counterparts in tasks demanding attentional control and the ability to switch between competing stimuli, underscoring the involvement of the left hemisphere in these cognitive processes.

Impact on the Right Hemisphere: Linguistic control and monitoring entail a division of labour between the brain's hemispheres, with the left hemisphere primarily handling language processing tasks and the right hemisphere contributing to language control and monitoring. In bilingual individuals, the right hemisphere becomes involved when managing interference between their two languages, monitoring language usage across different contexts, or suppressing one language to prioritise another. This indicates an active role for the right hemisphere in overseeing bilingual language management processes.

Interplay between Hemispheres

Bilingualism gives rise to a continuous interplay of the brain's bilateral regions. The left hemisphere handles linguistic cognition and meaning in both languages, while the right hemisphere becomes more engaged in managing linguistic and cognitive control tasks. This dynamic interaction contributes to the bilingual brain's adaptability and cognitive flexibility.

During early childhood, bilingualism significantly influences both hemispheres of the brain. The left hemisphere remains the primary centre for language processing, while the right hemisphere assumes a crucial role in language control and cognitive functions related to managing two linguistic systems. Understanding these effects is vital for recognising bilingualism's cognitive advantages and challenges in brain development.

Conclusion

According to the NEP 2020 policy document, the English language is introduced at grade 5 or preferably at grade 8. It means that by the time the student is either 11 or 14 years old, there is a high chance that the left hemisphere may not support second language acquisition as it supports first language acquisition in early childhood. As per neurolinguistics, the left hemisphere acquires two or more languages comfortably in early childhood. After a certain age, the right hemisphere consciously picks up the language. It can be recommended that bilingualism should start in schools at the pre-school level. It could be easier for kids to acquire two or more languages in early childhood. When he/ she has to use another language (other than his mother tongue) or a second/third (English) language, there is a chance of the right hemisphere intervening with the left hemisphere. When other languages are spoken, the right hemisphere will suppress the mother tongue, and the student can use other languages easily.

Research consistently demonstrates that children exhibit a remarkable ability to acquire languages swiftly between the ages of two and eight, and embracing multilingualism during early education offers significant cognitive advantages to young learners. To harness these benefits, children can be introduced to various languages from the foundational stage onwards, stressing more vernacular

language. The approach will be interactive and enjoyable, fostering conversations in multiple languages, with an early focus on reading and writing in the mother tongue during the early years. By Grade three and beyond, students will develop skills in reading and writing in additional languages.

In conclusion, integrating multilingualism into early childhood education, as proposed, aligns with insights from neurolinguistics and complements the principles outlined in the NEP 2020. It focuses on using mother tongue and regional languages until at least Grade 5 finds support in the neurological advantages of early language learning. This paper, grounded in neurolinguistic research, strengthens NEP 2020 by providing a scientific basis for introducing multiple languages during the critical early developmental years. This paper recommends integrating multilingualism into the preschool curriculum to agree with the advances in cognitive science and harmonise with the national education agenda. This alignment positions our education system to embrace a holistic, culturally sensitive, and scientifically informed approach, enriching our young learners' linguistic and cognitive development.

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Commitment Beyond Fictionality in Mahasweta Devi's Fiction: A Study of Short Story "Statue"

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Abstract

The proposition of committed literature came after World War II against the creed of "art for art's sake." Its major proponent, Jean-Paul Sartre, argued that an artist, as a free individual, should commit himself/herself to some social cause, as the purpose of art, especially the prose, is essentially utilitarian. He saw commitment "as a form of open-ended engagement with contemporary history" and the writer as "a situated being who was compelled to address social issues in the hope that they could be re-presented imaginatively" (Gašiorek 613-614). While rejecting political commitment as "the false commitment of the inserted political reference," Raymond Williams also argued that the writer was obliged to make active and conscious interventions for some social cause. Postcolonial literature, with its need to disentangle literature from the hegemony of the West and to seek a postcolonial identity, made a significant contribution to the discourse on committed literature. The paper examines the political, aesthetic, and ethical paradigms of commitment in the writings of the Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi to reach an understanding of her engagement with the cause of the tribals and oppressed communities of northern India. This research article adopted a qualitative research methodology to analyze Devi's short story "Statue" as a case study.

Keywords: Commitment, utilitarian, engagement, Mahasweta Devi, postcolonial.

Introduction

"We would be hunters of meaning, we would speak the truth about the world and about our own lives," writes Sartre ("What" 4) while presenting his case for *littérature engagée* or "Committed Literature," the term used by him in the preface to the first edition of his journal *Les Temps Modernes* (1945). Simply speaking, the literature of commitment refers to the works firmly rooted in the complexity of the social reality, where the writer writes with a sense of serious responsibility to society, as Sartre stressed in an interview:

If literature is not everything, it is worth nothing. This is what I mean by 'commitment.' It wilts if it is reduced to innocence or songs. If a written sentence does not reverberate at every level of man and society, then it makes no sense. What is the literature of an epoch, but the epoch appropriated by its literature? (Sartre 13-14)

The idea of commitment came to light in response to the proposition of the 18th and 19th centuries that the artist was a free individual. During World War II, Jean-Paul Sartre suggested that a free individual can choose to be committed. He, thus, revived the idea of the writer's responsibility towards society against the avant-garde creed of "art for art's sake," which committed itself only to the aesthetic responsibility of the writer rather than having some utilitarian component and considered art as a self-sufficient cultural product free of any outside authority or obligation. For Sartre,

writing was a sort of action; the literary text was "explicitly conceived as a weapon in the struggle that men wage against evil," and literature was "the preeminent discourse in which art, ethics, and politics were inextricably linked" (qtd. in Gąsiorek 614). Commitment, however, could be the alignment of the writer with some political party or the recognition by the writer of the responsibility towards socially useful ends. Raymond Williams, in his 1980 essay "The Writer: Commitment and Alignment," differentiates between the commitment "to production linked to a cause" and a commitment or "subservience to some version of desirable production arbitrarily decided by a party and its ideologies," ("Resources" 79). Sartre's *littérature engagée* concerns the writer's responsibility for a conscious engagement with the deeper historical processes at work in society; it is against taking a particular position on any political issue or ideology. The writers of committed literature make conscious and active interventions for some social cause, which is different from compromise, opportunism, or subservience to political parties or authority, as was seen during the reign of Stalin in the Soviet Union when the writers were forced to promote the ideology and interests of the party. Such opportunism to seek political attention is called "alignment," which defeats the very idea of commitment; Williams calls it "the false commitment of the inserted political reference" ("Resources" 80). In other words, committed literature is utilitarian in that it reflects a certain attitude to society, its structure, and organization, where the writer draws attention to the injustices and inequalities prevalent in society; as Sartre writes in "What is Literature," "prose is, in essence, utilitarian" ("What" 34).

In his famous distinction between "High and Popular Culture," Raymond Williams addresses the issue of commitment in literature. "High culture," according to Williams, "cannot in practice be abstracted" from the "direct political and economic interests" of "an invading or dominant society" which imposes it on a native culture "by suppression." Thus, he fixes the responsibility of the postcolonial writers to recover and reanimate the "popular culture," which he sees as the "suppressed, neglected and disregarded cultures: the meanings and values, in some cases the works, of dominated peoples and classes, and of minorities that have suffered discrimination" (Williams). The writer, thus, should be engaged in some undertaking. Williams has noted in this context that commitment means "taking social reality, historical reality, the development of social and historical reality, as the centers of attention, and then finding some of the hundreds of ways in which all those processes can be written" ("Resources" 79). The committed writer situates his/her work in the historical and social developments of the times to relate to the lives of the common man. Commitment is a matter of epistemology and method; "the most serious case for commitment is that we should commit ourselves far enough to social reality to be conscious of this level of sociality" ("Resources" 86). To be committed means "the discovery of those social relationships which are in any case there," it is "the active consciousness of those social relationships which includes ourselves and our practices" ("Resources" 87). Williams asserted that various influences and factors shape every person; these may be the social or familial relationships and

responsibilities, the language in which one is born, education, or the physical environment. A writer writes with the consciousness of these processes and formative influences, which may come at odds with dominant cultural assumptions and ideologies and, thus, may meet resistance from these centers of cultural privilege.

As against the self-indulgence of proponents of the “art for art's sake” school of thought, the school of committed literature promotes a comprehensive and profound understanding of the objective social reality, that is, its socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, and allows the writer to know the basic facts and trends in several binary opposites: between the exploited and exploiting classes; between the state and the people; between reactionary and revolutionary culture. While differentiating “commitment” from “compromise” in literature, Gaither Stewart writes that the “Modern concept of the literature of commitment emerged from the conflict of 20th-century ideologies that have reflected the deep social changes of our times,” which he counts as “the domination of Nazism and Communism in Europe, the victory of world Capitalism over Communism, and today the clash between market ideology and the rich world on one hand and the other the growing rebellion of the impoverished, non-developing four-fifths of our planet.” While criticizing art for art's sake school of thought Georgy Plekhanov, the Russian Communist theorist, has stated that the concept of art for art's sake “arises when artists and people keenly interested in art are hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment” (qtd. in Stewart). On the other hand, the committed writers are social realists who consciously observe their surroundings and develop some attitude towards them, which is reflected in their works. He/she “must stand inside the society,” and “not in the shadow of the periphery—and he must tell the truth” suggests that Stewart while elaborating that “. . . commitment to truth is inherent in the act of good writing. It is a moral absolute. To write is to reveal an aspect of the world in order to change it. In that respect, writing is and has always been didactic” (Stewart).

Mahasweta Devi as a Committed writer

The social scenario of the post-modern world, with its multiple problems of alienation and cultural degradation, the questions of truth and freedom, decolonization and neo-colonialism, economic progress and impoverishment, scientific advances and climate crisis, has underlined the enhanced requirement of literature that is socially aware and committed to the cause of the marginalized, as, states Gayatri Spivak, “we draw out from literary and social texts some impossible yet necessary project of changing the minds that innocently support a vicious system” (“Imaginary” 200). The committed literature impels the writers to situate themselves in the world, analyze and understand their position and their responsibility vis-a-vis their fellow humans, and then produce the literature based on “human truths and human potentials” while adopting an ethical-aesthetic approach without digressing into sentimentalism (Stewart). Mahasweta is one such

"socially committed" writer; as the blurb of her story collection *Old Women* (1999) reads, "standing as she does at the intersection of vital contemporary questions of politics, gender, and class, she is a significant figure in the field of socially committed literature" ("Old"). For her writing was a social act meant to resolve social questions; she confessed while acknowledging her duty to society, "I think a creative writer should have a social conscience. . . a duty toward society" ("Imaginary" xvi). Mahasweta's literature maps her passionate commitment and her obsessive sense of duty as reflected in her haunting tales of marginalization, exploitation, inhumanity, and struggle of dispossessed, disempowered, and defenseless people, which expose the mechanisms of oppression working within the society at various levels. She had her authoritative style in exploring subalternity through her field experiences and realistic representations of postcoloniality in India. Her stories are the deconstructive narratives of the elitist nationalist history intending to present a counter-history by re-centering the subaltern's hitherto marginalized and forgotten oral histories. Her works present a counter-hegemonic discourse and make visible the plight of the stigmatized tribal population by questioning the neo-colonialist tendencies of the mainstream groups in post-independent India, which work under the cover of development and modernization.

Documentary Realism in Mahasweta's Works

Mahasweta's polemical work presents a powerful social commentary and is an invaluable documentation of the marginalized communities that have been exploited, neglected, and destroyed largely in the development process by man's greed, narrowness, and selfishness. As a sensitive, ethical-social activist, she was actively involved with human lives and worked with the landless labourers and the tribal communities of eastern India, particularly of West Bengal and Bihar – the Kherias, Shabars, Santhals, Mundas, Bhumij, Muchi, Bauri – for over a quarter of a century and spoke of them forcefully and passionately. Her writings are inseparable from her social activism and her investigative journalism as she stresses upon her first-hand experiences and observations of the tribal's fate:

I have always believed that the real history is made by ordinary people. . . The reason and the inspiration for my writing are those people who are exploited and used and do not accept defeat. For me, the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazingly noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw materials elsewhere, once I have started knowing them? Sometimes, it seems to me that my writing is really their doing. (qtd. in Bardhan 24-25)

Her work is imbued with profound humanism and a deep-rooted love for the tyrannized and exploited people who are condemned to live in conditions of abject poverty. Her mission, as "a responsible writer," to transform the existing social system by taking a stand "in defense of the exploited" is voiced in her bold statements, like the following:

After thirty-one years of independence, I find my people still groaning under hunger, landlessness, indebtedness, and bonded labor. Anger, luminous, burning, and passionate, directed against a system that has failed to liberate my people from

these horrible constraints, is the only source of inspiration for all my writing. . . . Hence, I go on writing to the best of my capability about the people, so that I can face myself without any sense of guilt or shame. ("Five Plays" viii-ix)

Mahasweta Devi, despite her socialist views and demands for the rights of the aboriginals, professes to have little interest in ideological abstractions. However, she accepts some influence on her ideas of socialism, which took roots in India during her youthful days; she has confessed, "In retrospect, I think that my understanding of the people and their struggles come from those days" (qtd. in Dwivedi 112). In her narratives, we find the amalgamation of contemporary socio-political events and the indigenous oral histories of the tribals with the motive to uncover the bitter relationship between the tribal communities and the dominant groups within the country. Her perception of society is reflected in the lives of her characters as they navigate through the harsh and unfriendly path of life while struggling to maintain their dignity and self-reflect amidst an environment of indifference, apathy, and hostility. Chotti Munda, Draupadi, Chandī, Bashai Tudū, Jasoda, Doulati, Dhowli, Mary Oraon – all belong to subaltern marginalized tribal and landless communities who try to survive somehow while living at the bottom of Indian society.

"Statue": A Site of Socio-Economic Exploitation

"Statue" is a touching and poignant tale of a subaltern, old, low caste widow, Dulali or Brajadulali, who is a victim of society's hypocrisy, complacency, indifference, and apathy. Set in post-independence India in a small village of Chhatim in Midnapore (West Bengal), the story presents a critique of the authoritarian system that crushes and subjugates the poverty-ridden, illiterate subalterns and pushes them farthest to the fringes of the social ladder and life. Dulali is a victim of intersectional oppression, which is at once economic, cultural, social, and gendered. The free-willed daughter of a landowner, she is now reduced to a "decrepit old woman" (12) who tries hard to survive from day to day in the patriarchal society. Life has become only a struggle for survival: "all her thoughts are belly-centred, when she dreams, she dreams crude dreams. In her dream she wears a whole cloth and eats a full serving of rice in a bell-metal plate" (16). Life has lost all its meaning for her. This poignant transformation of a blooming girl into a wretched psycho-maniac underlines the narrator's deep-seated anger at the oppressive and exploitative feudal system, which treats women as powerless dumb animals who are silenced into subjugation and slavery. Dulali symbolizes crushed humanity, "thrown in a corner with less power than field cattle" (26). She is a pathetic picture of resignation and meek endurance who is crushed by the barbaric hegemonic social structure. In her meaningless existence, she is just a "walking shadow," a lifeless object that "makes no protest. Long ago, a long time back, she forgot to protest against other's behaviour towards herself. She has accepted hunger pangs as chronic and inalterable reality. She died, possibly, long ago" (13). The class, caste, and gender-biased society feasts upon the soul of the oppressed and subjugated groups.

Dulali's life is a narrative of deprivation, subordination, discrimination, victimization, and neglect. It exposes the multi-leveled patriarchy prevalent in the

heterogeneity of the Indian experience. A tragic, forbidden love returns to haunt all her life. Her act of loving Dindayal Thakur or Dinu, the son of an upper-caste Brahmin, changed the course of her life and brought disasters upon her. Once “diffident and blooming as a fully flowering fragrant and white Kamini tree,” lovingly considered as “a village daughter” (29), Dulali, a child widow, turns into an outcast, “a misfortune,” and “a witch” – a sub-human creature with sinister powers, in the caste-ridden society. In her “widow's white clothes” (12), her presence at a wedding is considered inauspicious, which could bring an apocalypse, and whose breath could kill a child. In the feudal social order, Dulali had committed a double crime by loving Dinu; first, she was a Bhunya, a low caste girl, and second, and more dangerous, was that she was a widow, a child widow who broke the social norms by committing the crime of dreaming for which she is punished ruthlessly.

According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Statue” presents an extremely rich site of feminist discourse, for Dulali as a low-caste woman is a doubly oppressed character – firstly, for being poor she has lost all the rights to a dignified life – sitting in a “single-room hut past the courtyard of the Bhunya-house,” she “looks like the Manosha-crone of myth. White hair, torn clothes, emaciated body” (12). Life has become a hopeless tale of miseries where even her past has been appropriated by the heartless system, leaving no place for romanticization or dreaming: “At seventy-eight, the body becomes such that today's unappeased hunger appears much more than the unrequited love of the past” (27). Secondly, being a woman in a patriarchal and patrilineal society, she is disenfranchised of property and has no access to the power of the dominant groups, both within and outside the family. Her gendered identity imposes restrictions upon her; her role is defined by social stereotypes where women are considered inferior to men, as Mahasweta comments, “a man's guilt can be washed off, not a woman's” (40). All her rights as a normal human being have been confiscated by the orthodox society – married off at the age of four, Dulali becomes a widow at six, and since then, she is forced to wear “widow's white” and never allowed to wear “shellac bangles, saris with borders, silver fish pins in her hair, anklets on her legs” (28). Through Dulali, Mahasweta voices her critique of the orthodox tradition of child marriage and stigmatization of widowhood, which is considered a curse upon a woman in rural India, and harsh and meaningless social restrictions are imposed upon her even on matters of normal living. Dulali is not allowed even to look in the mirror; she “doesn't braid her hair, just winds it on her fingers and puts it up anyhow” (31). Bereft of any understanding, love, or compassion, her life becomes like a parched land waiting silently to be replenished by a little care and warmth. She has become like the “cracked and dry” thirsty soil who “doesn't know how to complain. Just as the thirsty soil, begging for love, dresses in the grass with just a bit of water, Pishi too wants to pour herself out with just a little love from Nabin” (57). Neglected, discriminated, and oppressed, Dulali has accepted her fate resignedly with no complaints, as she feels that she has come into this life “only to endure” (58).

“Statue”: Deconstructing the Narrative of Nationalism and Modernization

Devi has displayed great sensitivity and tenderness in portraying an old tribal widow, but her narrative is more than a feminist discourse. It exposes the multiple-layered reality of decolonized India, where the marginalized and dispossessed people still face exploitation and oppression. Maheshwara Devi herself disliked being called a feminist, as she asserted that "I write as a writer, not as a woman. . . . I look at the class, not at the gender problems" (qtd. in Dwivedi 112). Indeed, intense class consciousness is conspicuous in Devi's writing, and her portrait of exploited women should be seen more broadly as the exploitation of the lower class as a whole. Dulali is the representative of the suppressed and oppressed tribal community for which liberty is still a distant dream even after three decades of decolonization of India. In her fate is reflected the fate of the tribals, whose present is as bleak as their future is murky. Her exhaustion encompasses the entire village, which "too, is aging. Getting exhausted" by the constant neglect and partisanship by the government, and like Dulali, it too is "asking for a bit of attention, affection, compassion" from mainstream India (59). Dulali's fate is the microcosm of her village's fate. The inhabitants of the "gloomy and isolated destitute" Chhatim village are condemned to live in abject poverty and "eternal darkness" due to the narcissistic tendencies of greedy government officials, political manipulators, and dominant caste groups. Dispossessed of their lands, these tribals, literate and illiterate alike, passed their days "in the difficult struggle of share cropping rice" in "the casual labour" or as "field hands now and then" and are "occupied with filling their bellies" (1). Their "aching" bellies and "the tedium of passing each day" (47) prove to be too suppressing for their spirits to keep them entangled in the moment so that they are de-historicized and lose hold over their past, nor are they allowed to venture into the future, which seems as distant to them as the "myth" of independence which like the myth of Manosha—the village goddess—existed only in the "fairy tales" and has never happened.

The story intensely critiques the ideology of national liberation and decolonization. Mahasweta herself observed in the introduction to "Imaginary Maps," "Decolonization has not reached the poor" (xx) whose exploitation continues, even after the ouster of the predatory colonial agents, both by the "outsiders" (the state authorities and the politicians) and by the "insiders" (their own people who have become the new elites). The whole drama of the "statue erection" of Dindayal Thakur, "the freedom fighter," exposes the farce of nationalism, simultaneously intensifying the totality of disenfranchisement and pauperization of the illiterate tribals.

The narrative opens with a decision of the state authorities "to raise a bronze statue of Dindayal Thakur, the Freedom Fighter" in his native Chhatim village, who, in 1924, was "caught, imprisoned, tortured, and finally killed on the gallows for the attempted robbery and looting of a train" (4). Devi weaves no euphoria or romanticism around Dindayal's martyrdom or its recognition by independent India after 54 years. Dinu has been presented as a victim of circumstances who "was not

always a freedom fighter” (57) and was betrayed by his own people. He was a guileless Brahmin boy who had “wanted to change his own times” (57) by marrying a scheduled caste child widow, Dulali. However, fiercely opposed by the caste and class-ridden society, he left the village, joined revolutionaries, and was hanged at the age of 24. His hanging symbolizes his ostracization by his own people for revolting against their oppressive customs and beliefs, “It seems as if unrequited love and participation in revolutionary activities were interdependent” (18). His martyrdom is, in fact, a show of his protest against the dead and defunct code of authoritarian feudal social order whose survival is possible only by keeping its subjects in the darkness of poverty and illiteracy. These feudal lords crush the dreams of every forward-looking youth who tries to lift the veil of darkness from the "ever dark souls" (5) of poor tribals or goes against its norms – whether it is Dulali, Dinu or Nabin Bhunya (Dulali's nephew).

After fifty-four years of Dinu's martyrdom, Nabin too tries to drag “a new time into the village” (49) “to lift dead Chattim village from archaic and twentieth-century hearsay and half-truths and join modern time by way of a road” (12). Road to him is a symbol of progress and happiness, a connection with the present, a bridge between the marginalized and mainstream, and liberation from the age-long slavery, bondage, and exploitation. For him, it will break the silent indifference of the "gloomy and isolated destitute village," giving it a new lease of life. However, his efforts are opposed and defeated by both insider and outsider "dikus” (the exploiters) because building a road means loss of "field hands" and cheap labor for one and loss of authority to exploit for another. The independence of India signified, in theory, the end of colonialism, inequality, discrimination, and exploitation, and the beginning of a fight against poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance. But, for the tribals, independence has never happened; instead of a road, they are handed over “the statue of a dead man by the callous, narcissistic administration," which to it “is much more important than other living problems” (21). The explicit irony of these words presents a criticism of the system of slavery that works silently but surely towards the dehumanization of the tribals to transform them into insensitive, inanimate objects. Dinu's statue provides a perfect metaphor for this process of transformation:

The long-forgotten and suddenly rediscovered martyr is raised to the dais bound in rope much tougher than the hangman's. . . The school magazine photo supplied by Sadan Khan was not very credible. As a result, Dinu's hard, energetic air and astonishingly bright eyes are transformed into a new Dinu with a calm, serious, detached gaze. (67)

Mahasweta characterizes today's poor as the suffering “spectators as India moves toward the twenty-first century” (“Imaginary” 200). Dinu's village "has remained as sunk in the darkness of ignorance, poverty and underdevelopment as he had left it" (67) 54 years ago. For the tribals, independence is a "myth," a "fairy tale," at once beautiful and wanted but distant and elusive like the eternal myth of the snake goddess, Manosha. All the myths merge and become one in the collective consciousness of the poor, as happens with the old Dulali, who has come out of her

hut to have a look at the “high, Great statue” of Dinu, which has been appropriated and commodified by the neo-colonialist India:

Why can she not match this high, Great statue with that Dinu? Has Dinu become a god? Like the open shrine of Manosha? . . . Suddenly Pishi . . . said in a voice of dry pain, "The flowers at his feet are already wilted, Nabin. Crows will shit on his head; Dirt will cover him. Haven't you seen the distress of the god at Manosha's open shrine all year round? (72).

And herein lies the peculiarity of the tribal's tragic fate—at once "unwanted and indispensable" for the survival of the myth of the nation and the system of slavery.

Conclusion

To conclude, “Statue” perfectly presents Mahasweta's commitment to social truth and her reflections upon the human condition in the modern world with an “experience of an impossible global justice” (“Imaginary” 197). Her closing remarks ruthlessly expose the callousness and inhumanity of the administration and demystify the narrative of development in postcolonial India. She deconstructs the metanarrative of the nation as an overarching value system to foreground the counter-narratives of the subaltern groups, the tribals, the Dalits, the landless peasants, women, and all other subordinate groups. In the frustration of Dulali is hidden the writer's wish to remake the society, which, however, meets defeat in the face of the politicized aims of the postcolonial state; she concludes pithily, “Yet for the sake of a statue a great disappointment can descend on the Nabins of this world, it has happened to this Nabin” (72). Here, she voices the cause of the subaltern by savagely exposing the structures of socio-economic exploitation and neglect of the poor. Her writing emerges as a form of service to the people with its amalgamation of “art and activism” through which she tried to reclaim for tribals “a just and honorable place in India's national life” (Ramon). Committed to the "poetics of resistance," Mahasweta's writings give voice to the silent subalterns, and her crusading social activism gives hope amid despair and rejection. Due to her “intimate and abyssal responsibility toward that originary history of India” (“Imaginary” 198), her work crosses the boundaries of fiction to re-write history by problematizing the present and putting faith in the future.

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Delineating Memoryscapes as Sites of Mnemonic Resistance: A Study of Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*

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Abstract

Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*, set in the nascent precolonial northeast region of India, narrates the saga of the indigenous tribes of the Mishmi hills (now part of China-occupied Tibet) as they resist encroachment on their land and strive to assert sovereignty. Currently, studies in landscape and memory intersect with ecocriticism to attribute agency to the land, creating cognitive maps from personal and shared experiences. Based on this intersection, this analysis attempts to identify the major memoryscapes in the text and explore their role as mnemonic devices in reconstructing chronological events and mapping locales amidst sparse historical documentation. Drawing on concepts from Maurice Halbwachs and Tim Ingold, it discusses how landscapes act as dynamic repositories of memory, shaping identities and blending private and public realms in the context of the narrative. It argues that such landscapes serve as vital sites for challenging historical erasures and reaffirming the indigenous presence in history. The broader aim of this paper is to show the relevance of memoryscapes as sites for the preservation of indigenous identity and culture.

Keywords: Memoryscapes, collective memory, mnemonic resistance, indigenous identity

Introduction

Landscapes transcend their physical existence, serving as rich canvases of memory. Standing in a bustling city square or a tranquil countryside, each step resonates with stories, emotions, and histories long past; these memoryscapes, rich with the imprints of human experience, shape the understanding of the world and give one a sense of identity. Pierre Nora's (1989) concept of "lieux de memoire" (places of memory) encapsulates how specific sites become symbolic anchors for collective memory, laden with cultural and historical significance. David Lowenthal states that 'each scene and object is invested with a history of real or imagined involvements' for people to function with tangible evidence of a past that bestows a sense of continuity and intimate living history (6). Over generations, landscapes accumulate layers of occupancy, becoming symbols of durability in the collective consciousness of a group (10). Dwyer and Alderman in "Memorial landscapes: analytic questions and metaphors" (2008) explain that landscape "is applied in metaphorical ways in Geographies of memory." Even places where "practices of localised memory" are carried out, such as farmlands, ceremonial grounds, or places of cultural value, function as "relics of a time past" (Maus 215). These places of memory are material media of recollection, filled with symbolic meaning and commemorative rituals (216).

In postcolonial theory, memoryscapes often play a crucial role in challenging dominant narratives and recovering marginalised histories such as those of the indigenous peoples, allowing for the contestation and reimagining of their identities. Currently, studies in landscape and memory intersect with ecocriticism to attribute

agency to the land in shaping memories and guiding human actions. In this approach, mapping transcends traditional two-dimensional representations, embracing oral narratives and memory-laden places to form maps beyond material boundaries. This framework views landscapes through the lens of personal and shared experiences, creating cognitive maps from these place-based memories (Bridges and Osterhoudt 3-4).

Navigating the Interplay of Collective Memory and Mnemonic Resistance

Maurice Halbwachs in *On Collective Memory* (1992) conceptualised “collective memory as a social construct and its key feature as being shared between members of a group.” This notion, however, has often limited its application in anthropological research focused on the political dimensions of memory, such as its role in building power relations and identity. However, supporting the group's present is a key function of Halbwachs' collective memory. The western paradigm of nature-culture divide has also stagnated research in memory studies for decades. (Boreiko 68).

New ontologies in anthropology, like Tim Ingold's “dwelling perspective,” challenge western naturalism and view landscape as a process. Ingold recognises landscapes as repositories of collective memory and catalysts for community identity (71). It has paved the way for recognising parallel histories of indigenous peoples through orally transmitted toponymic narratives and “countermapping” practices. Margaret Wickens Pearce' *Coming Home to Indigenous Place Names in Canada* (2017) is a prime example. Her work meticulously maps the place names of various First Nations, Metis, and Inuit groups across Canada. By challenging traditional eurocentric narratives in History and Geography, this work enriches the understanding of indigenous history and culture while reasserting indigenous authority in a geopolitical context that often overlooks such views (Bridges and Osterhoudt 3).

Similarly, in *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and Sense of Place* (1993), Kent C. Ryden, describes cognitive maps formed by both direct and vicarious experiences encapsulated in place-based memories. He highlights Place-making as a continuous activity, with references to places reviving related memories and morals, and its role in historical reinterpretation (Ibid).

Michael Kenny in “A Place for Memory: The Interface between Individual and Collective History” (1999) posits that the past is contestable, with collective memory being influenced by shifts in collective perspectives and individual or group resistance (Ryan 159). As a result, collective memory can be reinterpreted, altered, or even outright rejected by the memory consumer. This means that while memories are formed, they are not merely replicated; instead, shifts in collective perspectives can dislodge established memories. Thus, memoryscapes inevitably become mnemonic devices for the group members, especially during a crisis or an event of colonization (Bridges and Osterhoudt 4). This process is influenced by various factors, including the critical role of individuals, the potential for altering or reinterpreting messages upon reception, and changes across generations.

Additionally, memoryscapes frequently serve a critical function in addressing historical omissions within collective memory, thereby fostering a form of mnemonic resistance. This resistance emerges from individuals and communities actively striving to assert their identity and autonomy. Consequently, memoryscapes acquire significant geopolitical importance within the lifeworlds of these communities as integral components of their cultural and historical identity.

Discussion

The Black Hill (hereafter *TBH*) narrates the story of Gimur, a woman of the Abor tribe, and Kajinsha, of the Mishmee tribe, from the erstwhile Mishmi hills of the Assam valley, who marry against tradition. The tribes comprise various clans consisting extended families residing within a specific geographical region. Amidst the manipulative tactics of tribal chiefs and relatives who plot to gain power and autonomy over land and resources, the couple's existence becomes turbulent. The narrative unfolds between 1847 and 1855, an era marked by extensive British colonial subjugation, marking a decisive period in the region's history.

Mamang Dai possesses firsthand knowledge of the tribe's history and way of life, given her association with the Adi tribe, formerly known as the Abor tribe. Dai contrasts the indigenous people's deep connection to their land with the colonisers' reliance on maps and records. Despite attempts to suppress their identity, the tribes' resilience is portrayed through their rich oral history and unyielding faith. Dai stresses the enduring power of narrative in preserving identity and history, concluding that while lives may end, stories never do (Chakraborty 57, 58). In *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land*, she writes – “very often the names of places recorded in memory in the form of legends cannot be identified with anything recorded in maps” (Dai 19).

In *TBH*, The tribes' landscapes are integral to their collective memory and historical narrative – “We read the land. The land is our book” (Dai 140). Tim Ingold's relational model of identity offers an alternative to the genealogical model in western ontology. For indigenous peoples, their history is intrinsically linked to their interaction with the land. In this model, ancestry and identity are formed not through linear descent but through a dynamic network of relationships, where life is a continuous process of growth and regeneration within an interconnected world of human and non-human elements. Memory is not a static retrieval of cultural knowledge but an active process shaped by individual contexts and experiences. This model blurs traditional distinctions between animate and inanimate, emphasising the importance of nurturing relational networks (Ingold 140-150). The landscape itself becomes a living archive, with generations of occupancy layering together to forge the tribe's profound sense of history and identity.

Suddya valley, situated in the Brahmaputra basin, is an important memoryscape in the text. It is deeply ingrained in the collective memory of the Mishmi tribes as the site of the Khampti rebellion of 1839. In the dead of the night, five hundred armed *Khampti* rebels advanced on the British station and unleashed a surprise attack.

Political Agent Colonel Adam White and eighty soldiers were brutally killed (Dai 9). Dr. Rabu Tani observes that the Khampti rebellion is regarded as one of the earliest significant armed revolts against colonial rule in northeast India. However, the prevalent understanding of this resistance has been primarily shaped by colonial narratives, often uncritically adopted by post-colonial scholars. This outlook typically portrays tribal actions as savage, neglecting the tribal viewpoint and their perceptions of encounters with colonial powers (79).

In addition to subjective interpretation, individuals have the capacity to not only challenge the prevailing memory narrative but also to imbue it with their unique perspectives, thereby reversing its original meaning. This act of recontextualisation functions as a mechanism of empowerment for those individuals who ordinarily do not possess significant authority in their everyday lives (Ryan 159, 160). Dai meticulously upholds an unbiased interpretation of the event while simultaneously adhering to a postcolonial analysis of the memoryscape. She portrays Suddya as a symbol of the Khampti's resistance and represents a significant challenge to the might of the imperial forces – “No European could again feel safe in Suddya. The place had been abandoned and the army cantonment shifted to Saikwa Ghat on the opposite bank of the Burhampooter” (Dai 59).

Halbwachs argues that while memory is an individual function, it is through social and group affiliation that people can form and exchange memories, including those of events not personally experienced. This characteristic emphasises the nature of social construction of Halbwach's collective memory (Boreiko 68). Although Gimur had no direct experience of the rebellion, she felt connected to it through Moi's recounting of the incident, believing that her father's early death was tied to that event – “How strange! thought Gimur. The past was not so distant from the present after all. It was as if they were all bound by the name of a place (Suddya) she had never seen” (Dai 23).

Memoryscapes, through collective memory, aid the merging of private and public realms by attaching personal significance to major historical events, and by creating a shared historical narrative. This blending is internalised through an individual's mnemonic socialisation, a process in which people learn to align, organise, and present their memories in line with prevailing social norms and beliefs. This process occurs within various mnemonic communities, as described by Zerubavel in “Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past” (1997). Even intimate social settings like families are involved in this process, thereby perpetuating the officially recognised version of events. The family, in particular, is a primary mnemonic community, playing a key role in teaching children to remember their past in a manner that is both structured and socially approved (Ryan 156). Kajinsha's identity is shaped by the memory of the rebellion in the private realm. “The interpretative process of the memory consumer is always interpreted through the prism of the memory consumers' experience” (162). It was the sight of his father dying in the rebellion that had stiffened Kajinsha's resolve to bring ownership and rest to the land:

He was looking at the Suddya country of upper Assam in the extreme eastern end of the Burhampooter valley...The country seemed to be at rest. But Kajinsha never forgot anything. And now, as memory returned afresh. He stood up to continue his journey. Rest...There was no rest. 'Be ready, my son,' his father had said. 'Prepare yourself.' Be ready!... All Kajinsha remembered was his father's perplexed gaze and the way he had lifted his hand as if trying to point to something beyond (Dai 10, 11).

This memory guides Kajinsha to retract from plotting against Nicolas Krick, the French priest who enters the hills to find a passage to Tibet. Whereas, Kajinsha's uncle Marpa exploits the memory of the Khampti rebellion to inflame animosity among different clans for personal and political advantage.

The Khampti Rebellion has been progressively integrated into the historiography of India's national movement, marking a significant shift in the narrative framework. Previously viewed as a localised tribal insurgency, it is now recognised as a crucial event in the broader context of India's struggle for independence. This acknowledgement reflects a growing appreciation of the diverse and multifaceted nature of anti-colonial resistance across India, highlighting the critical role played by indigenous communities in challenging and resisting the imperialist agenda.

Another important memoryscape depicted in the novel is the ancestral village of Mebo where the Abor tribe lived. The origin of the name of the village was unknown, "but the name Mebo stuck, meaning both desire and nostalgia for the long-ago time when brothers had lived together" (Dai 27). The Abor considered Mebo as the first major settlement of their tribe. It was a strategic location situated on the way to the villages of the different Abor clans. As their population grew, feuds between clans for land and resources became common – "Men fought and killed each other. Blood flowed. Brothers became enemies" (70).

Memory acts as a stabilising force amid changing landscapes, offering a sense of continuity during periods of change. While physical landscapes provide a tangible link across different times, in environments undergoing transformation, memories tied to specific places become crucial in navigating changing social contexts. As landscapes evolve, particularly in stressful times, communities and individuals engage with place-based memories in various ways: some nostalgically recall a vanishing past, others strive to reconstruct it, and some physically alter the landscape with monuments to commemorate significant historical sites (Bridges and Osterhoudt 6). In the present, the people of Mebo were threatened by the presence of strangers in their land. The men of the tribe conducted late-night meetings to discuss the current events. During such times, Mebo inspired the yearning for a harmonious past they once inhabited.

Before the Mishmee plot to murder Father Nicolas Krick, they try to dissuade him with threats and mockery. In one such instance, Yanjee, the slave woman kept by Lamet, points to the spot where Permanund Acharjya, an Indian Fakir, was killed by the tribes in 1848. She warns, "Look! This is where the baba sabe was killed. Here, his body was thrown off from here" (Dai 99). This nameless site, unknown to outsiders and not recorded on any map, remains a potent memoryscape of mnemonic resistance for the Mishmee. The murder of the mendicant serves as a historical

reminder and a symbol of defiance against external oppression, reinforcing the Mishmee's collective memory and resistance narrative.

Dibrugarh is another crucial memoryscape that acts as a site of mnemonic resistance in the text. It was a charming and salubrious place that had grown from a small settlement on the left bank of the Dibru river, a little above its confluence with the Burhampooter, into an important frontier station and commercial center of upper Assam. In 1839, the Assam Tea Company was formed, and gardens opened in and around the town. Marwari traders entered and started a lively bazaar on the banks of the Dibru that also attracted tribes from the surrounding hills, giving Dibrugarh the air of an adventurous border town (283). Kajinsha was imprisoned at this site, where Gimur's attempt to rescue him led to her stabbing a prison guard. Kajinsha was later hanged by the British authorities on charges of murdering Father Nicolas Krick and Augustin Bourry.

Kajinsha's death sparked a wave of attacks on settlements along the border in upper Assam, including a raid by the Idu Mishmee clans in 1855. This string of events ultimately set the stage for the Anglo-Abor war, lasting fifty years and impacting many Abor villages, including Gimur and Lendem's home village of Mebo (287). Gimur's act of resistance and Kajinsha's martyrdom infused the site with symbolic value, serving as a rallying point for the Mishmee in their struggle against colonial forces.

In the text, an additional instance of landscape exerting influence upon the sensory plane manifests through the belief systems surrounding spiritual entities. These spiritual beings are attributed distinct roles within the natural world, becoming entrenched within the collective consciousness of the tribes. Primarily, ancestral spirits inhabited lofty arboreal entities and elevated mountain summits, while pernicious spirits dwelled amidst the impenetrable depths of dense forests. Further, a serpent spirit, poised at the river's bed, assumes an ominous presence, waiting to ensnare unsuspecting individuals:

Everything here on this hill, the grass and rocks and stones is saying something. And what falls from the sky—rain, thunder and lightning—are also the voices of spirits telling us something. It is how we have learnt what is good and what is sweet or bitter, by living here and remembering what happens during the day and the night, every day, for hundreds of years... (Dai 140).

Ritualistic practices, often implemented as acts of propitiation, were diligently undertaken to assuage these spiritual entities and ensure harmonious interactions with the metaphysical realm - “The village *miri* (priest) performed rituals. He was busy all the time for there were many people who fell ill or said they had encountered *uyus*—evil spirits. No house was safe and every day some ritual was performed by a household to ward off disease and death” (Dai 171). Such rituals, deeply embedded in cultural practices, are considered an essential part of the “praxis of remembering” (Maus 216). Petermann asserts that People craft meaningful spaces through rituals at remembrance sites, selectively using places and artifacts to establish social and personal significance. Rituals, rich in symbols and myths, commemorate past events and create spaces of unique importance, often with collective rather than individual

actions. These spaces, encompassing political, religious, and historical dimensions, are imbued with underlying messages and perceptions, serving as physical embodiments of ideology, faith, and knowledge (236).

Conclusion

The major memoryscapes depicted in *TBH*, act as repositories of memory, agents of resistance, and vehicles for identity construction. For the Mishmee and Abor tribes, their land transcends mere physical existence, becoming a living emblem of historical experiences and cultural practices, serving as a communal memory bank that shapes their worldview and sense of belonging within the social fabric. Suddya and Mebo assume emblematic roles in the tribes' resistance against colonial forces and their yearning for an idyllic past. These landscapes have evolved into a unifying symbol, galvanising the tribes in their struggle against colonial impositions, and inspiring a shared sense of belonging and collective action. Moreover, memoryscapes blur the boundaries between the private and public domains, intricately interweaving personal recollections with shared historical narratives. The inherited memories of Kajinsha and Gimur deeply shape their actions, beliefs, and interpersonal dynamics, emphasising the acute influence of memoryscapes on individual and communal identities. The rituals and belief systems intricately weave together the spiritual and physical landscapes, embedding cultural memory and communal identity of the tribes within the natural world.

The landscapes the tribes inhabited served as living archives of their past, bridging temporal divides and creating intergenerational connections. Thus, protecting and nurturing these memoryscapes is essential for cultural heritage conservation, enabling indigenous communities to deeply understand their histories and place in the world. Moreover, safeguarding these memoryscapes requires preserving the flora and fauna within them. The narrative demonstrates that ecological elements are integral to the cultural and historical essence of indigenous memoryscapes. Preserving these natural components is crucial for maintaining the authenticity and continuity of these living archives. Therefore, effective conservation strategies must include ecological preservation to fully support the cultural heritage and identity of indigenous communities.

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Book Review

Dr. Shruti Lahiri. Gender Endangered: Shakespearean Perspectives
New Delhi: Authors Press, 2023. Rs. 1100/- 186pages. ISBN 978-93-5529-626-9

Prof. Somdatta Mandal*

I begin this review with a rather cliched statement - there is indeed no end to Shakespeare studies and scholarship even in this twenty-first century and with each new book the weight of Shakespeareana goes on increasing. As the title suggests, this book shows us how Shakespeare had made use of the concept of interchangeability of gender that lay at the very root of the Renaissance concept of man. This may also be a way for the playwright to challenge accepted gender norms. Renaissance society was a crucial site of masculinized power. But with the appearance of Queen Elizabeth, a new vision of female self-identity evolved before Shakespeare which largely inspired him. This led him to create a series of bright heroines throughout his literary career, who may be seen as protesters against the patriarchal Elizabethan society.

Apart from the Introduction and the Conclusion, the study has been undertaken through eight separate chapters, each one of which elucidates the main argument of the author and gives us a clear picture of the socio-cultural ethos of Early Modern England in the 16th century. In the introduction the author defines how the concept of gender has been inextricably intertwined with questions regarding the generation of the universe since the time of pre-Socrates and Plato. 'Gender' is a matter of culture and refers to the social classification as 'masculine' and 'feminine.' For ages women were considered to be weaker and inferior to men and this hierarchical way of thinking about gender was given a moral reflection by Christian theologians. The uniqueness of Shakespeare lies in the fact that he made a very bold attempt to ungender these traditional gender conceptions. According to the author, Shakespeare took up this novel effort because Renaissance cultural ethos had not established a fixed concept of one's sexuality or physicality that could dictate one's being. One's sex did not cause or dictate one's gender or social role. Also, Shakespeare exhibited such ungendering of gender in two ways – firstly he proclaimed female power by radically subverting male domination. The iconic figure of Queen Elizabeth and her influence on the playwright had much inspired him to adopt this female oriented view. Secondly, Shakespeare made use of the Renaissance concept of gender fusion between two sexes of human entities. He brought in the concept of homoeroticism and most tactfully projected how straight gendered characters look like in their hermaphroditic apparel.

Shakespeare imperils the normative gender narratives of his age by introducing alternative constructs. As daughters, sisters, mothers, wives, lovers and widows, women in his plays encounter specific gendered pressures. They must make decisions about their physical selves – their bodies and their sexual choices. They must also evaluate their relationship where men control the major sources of power. They challenge expected societal norms of a woman's behaviour exhibiting compliance, self-sacrifice, dependence, nurturance and emotionalism. In this manner he 'ungenders' his female protagonists by creating them against traditional gender norms. In the second chapter we find examples of the 'ungendered female' in an early heroine like Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew* to a late heroine like Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*. In both the plays Shakespeare seems to have been fascinated with the idea of the assertive woman, an idea so long undermined by contemporary misogynist thoughts that were backed by classical literature as well as *The Bible*. The aggression and virility of both Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew* and Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors* appear all the more voiced in contrast to the meekness and silent suffering of Bianca and Luciana respectively. Portia, Rosalind and Viola exhibit unique sense of mind, befitting to the male garbs and facades they adopt. Their transformations in a way prove the superficiality of gender construct that may be ungendered, discarded and regained as necessity dictate at any moment of time. Also, each of these female protagonists indulges in masculine linguistic exuberance.

In the third chapter entitled “The Shakespearean Hermaphrodite” we are shown how Shakespeare is acutely conscious of the Renaissance obsession of gender interchangeability and by introducing the popular icon of the hermaphrodite or the eunuch, he toys with the so-called rigidity of traditional gender conceptions. The appearance as eunuchs is nothing but masks for Julia, Portia, Rosalind and Viola to hide their real selves, to outwit the male world of authority and ultimately to achieve their fixed goals. The next two chapters cover deviant emotions in Shakespeare's plays. First it deals with homoeroticism and against the backdrop of Elizabethan social and cultural ethos as the proximity of relationship between two male friends recurs again and again in Shakespeare's comedies, tragi-comedies and tragedies. Proteus – Silvia Valentine, Bassanio-Portia-Antonio, Sebastian-Olivia-Antonio and Bertram-Helena-Parolles, all play out varying relationships of homosexual and heterosexual love. In *Twelfth Night*, the apparent homoerotic intimacy between Cesario and Duke Orsino becomes an external façade of a deeper heterosexual attraction between the two.

The second section deals with lesbian relationships, and they are explored against a more mythic than social background. Intimacy is shown to exist between Portia-Nerissa (*The Merchant of Venice*), Rosalind-Celia (*As You Like It*), Viola-Olivia (*Twelfth Night*), Isabella-Mariana (*Measure for Measure*), Helena-Diana (*All's Well That Ends Well*), Hemione-Paulina (*The Winter's Tale*) and each relationship

gradually becomes an important factor in moulding, twisting and directing the course of action in the plot of the respective plays. The sixth chapter focuses on the dismal situation faced by the supernumerary daughters in the society of the 16th century early modern England. Isabella, the notable female protagonist of *All's Well That Ends Well*, stands as an example of the innumerable unmarried maidens who went to the convent to protect their virginity from unwanted assaults.

In the last two chapters the author discusses briefly how Shakespeare dwells on the policies adopted by King James and uses the monarch's character in the formation of the persona of Duke Vincentio who became the guiding force of all actions that take place in the plot of *Measure for Measure*. She also points out the failure of the Jacobean administration to keep up to the expectations of the countrymen in contrast to the preceding Queen Elizabeth's golden reign. The author feels that what finally emerges from these speculations is the fact that many of the male characters in Shakespeare's comedies suffer from various shortcomings that draw them back from being ideal masculine entities. It seems that the playwright feels comfortable to imagine a 'space' where the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' are fused and that for him it is only the body of an androgyne which can constitute such a space. Thus, for Shakespeare there is no correlation between one's sex and gender. Masculinity and femininity only represent abstract qualities, qualities that prove their existence through one's performance. It is ultimately performance that decides and fixes up the gender of a particular human being in Shakespeare's plays.

Before concluding it needs to be mentioned that in this book the author has treated the plays as texts, and not as theatre performances on stage. The cover of the book is very attractive and several black and white illustrations within the text enhance the visual appeal of the text further. The book therefore adds significantly to Shakespeare studies in general and gender studies in particular. It is strongly recommended for all categories of scholars and even for anyone who is interested in knowing about further socio-cultural details of Elizabethan England.

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Book Review

Koushik Goswami. *Reimagining Tibet: Politics of Literary Representation*
New York: Routledge, 2023. Pp. 216.

Dr Sanjoy Malik*

Tibet, being isolated from the rest of the world and the highest region on earth located in the central part of East Asia, had been known as the 'Forbidden Land' until the 1950s. It is stereotyped as 'Shangri-la,' a 'Paradise on Earth' or 'a mythical Himalayan Utopia,' and in the Western imaginary, it exists as what Said calls the 'Silent Other' and the Exotic Other. Tibet has found literary and cultural representations, but such representations are often politically motivated and often serve the interests of the representers. Dibyesh Anand observes: “Representations support not only particular politics of the representer toward the represented but, significantly, they construct the very identities of the actors involved, especially the Other. Representations are productively linked with identity discourses of all kinds. The conventional idea that representation draws upon a pre-given identity is turned on its head, for it is identity that is fashioned out of particularized presentations. In the case of Exotica Tibet, then, representational discourses are not reflective of, but actually productive of, Tibetan identity. (qtd.in Goswami 4).

So, representational discourses often have the tendency to contain alternative ways of self-expression. This explains why 'reimagining' Tibet is the need of the hour and accordingly, Koushik Goswami in his newly published book, *Reimagining Tibet: Politics of Literary Representation*, makes attempts to critically examine the representations of Tibet and Tibetans in three works of fiction, namely James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (1933), Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes: The Adventures of the Great Detective in India and Tibet* (1999), and Kaushik Barua's *Windhorse* (2013). While doing so, he uses the lens of gaze theory, in relation to Stuart Hall's theory of representations and Foucault's idea of discourse.

In the introduction to the book, Goswami dwells on the Western and Chinese representations of Tibet, and finds that like the West, China also constructs Tibet as the Other. Much like the Western imagination, the Chinese imagination is also based on the idea of power politics and imperialistic design, and the Chinese are no different from the Western colonizers as if China were the 'white man of Asia.' In the book, Goswami presents three perspectives on Tibet — an outsider's, an insider's and an insider-outsider's.

In the chapter, “Tibet as Myth: Patterns of Gaze in James Hillton's *Lost Horizon*,” Goswami provides an outsider's perspective on Tibet and he discusses James Hilton's fiction *Lost Horizon*, written after the First World War that had claimed the lives of millions of Europeans and left the Europeans ravaged. Jaded by the war, the Europeans were seeking refuge and they found such a refuge in Tibet, In *Lost Horizon*, that can be read as what Alison Becker calls, 'an imperial romance,' Hilton's

portrayal of Tibet as a land of fantasy is marked by the Orientalist tendencies of the European colonizers (qtd. in Goswami 43-44). Governed by his Orientalist prejudice, Hilton thinks that the indigenous people lack leadership qualities and cannot govern an institution like a lamasery, and so, he uses a Western individual to head the lamasery. “[T]he lamasery at Shangri-La is,” Goswami maintains, “exclusively a Western project on the Tibetan territory, a strategic equivalent to the political project of imperialism” (48). Hilton's representation of Tibet, as Goswami exposes, is informed by Eurocentrism and an imperialist design,

In contrast to the outsider's perspective on Tibet, Goswami presents an insider's perspective on it in the chapter, “An Insider's View of Tibet: Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*.” Here he critically discusses the perspective of Jamyang Norbu, a Tibetan writer. In his novel, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes: The Adventures of the Great Detective in India and Tibet* which is set in the pre 1950s, Norbu contests Western stereotypes and tries to de-romanticize Tibet (Goswami 107). Notably enough, Norbu does not use Tibetan characters, rather he uses two Western characters Sherlock Holmes and his rival Professor Moriarty, with a view to facilitating a better understanding of the relationship between the East and the West. To this end, he presents them as rational characters who are “not dismissive of the Oriental customs and rites” (Goswami 99). He makes them learn Tibetan language and culture, and shows that Holmes stays back in Tibet for two years for the purpose of scientifically understanding, for instance, the 'mysterious happening in the Ice Temple.' Moriarty too offers his scientific explanation of the 'Great Power Stone' (Goswami 99). By rationalizing Tibet's religio-cultural practices through European characters, he seeks to explode the myth of 'Exotic Tibet.' In contrast to the Western construction of Tibet as a Fantasy world, Norbu projects Tibet as, in the words of Shelly Bhoil, “a real world with its own valuable customs, traditions and a well-defined social order” (qtd. in Goswami 98). While attempting to write back to the West, Norbu offers a contestation of the imperialist designs of both Britain and China through Sherlock Holmes. Being an insider who knows the Tibetan life and culture, Norbu's representation of Tibet seems to bear a stamp of authenticity.

In the chapter, “Looking at Tibet from India: Tibetan Resistance Movement in Kaushik Barua's *Windhorse*,” Goswami discusses an insider-outsider's perspective on Tibet and brings in Kaushik Barua, hailing from Assam in the North East of India. Barua offers an Indian perspective on Tibet in his fiction *Windhorse*, written against the backdrop of Tibetan resistance movement against the Chinese occupation, covering the period from the 1940s to the 1970s. He realistically portrays how the Tibetans suffer when China unleashes violence against them. “As a postcolonial Indian,” Goswami comments, “Barua knows what colonialism means and what forms the aspirations of the native people may take” (65). In fact, for writing this fiction, Barua does considerable research on the Chinese occupation of Tibet and discovers the imperialistic design of China. Being a non-Tibetan, Barua is an outsider, but given his 'politico-cultural location' and his concern for the Tibetans, particularly for the Tibetan refugees scattered across the world, he may be seen as an

insider, seeking to elicit sympathetic responses of the global communities to Tibet. Besides examining the representations of Tibet in three fictional works, the book focuses its attention on the crucial role the Tibetan activists, particularly the Tibetan diasporic subjects, play in bringing about changes in the outsiders' perception of Tibet. Goswami discusses this role in the chapter, "Reconfiguring Tibet: Tibetan Activism in Diaspora," which is in keeping with the note of contestation as found in the preceding chapters. Since the late twentieth century, as Goswami shows, the Western views of Tibet as a mythical place of mystery and spirituality have undergone changes (111). The Tibetans, including the ones in the diaspora, begin to give up their age-old image of being non-violent and spiritual practitioners, in order to emphasize the need to reimagine Tibet in a radical way and on the other hand, to achieve success in salvaging Tibet from the Chinese occupation. So, the Tibetans inside and outside embark on the project of building a sovereign identity for Tibet and engage in the act of nation-building and strive to create a pan-Tibetan identity. In the book, however, Goswami highlights the Tibetan creative writing in English, an emerging phenomenon that may be instrumental in attracting global attention to their crisis, caused by the onslaughts of Chinese colonialism. The Tibetans engage also in political movements and keep mobilizing them by making the most of virtual networking. Goswami's personal interviews of some Anglophone Tibetan writers that he uses as part of the appendices of the book, provide contemporary thoughts on Tibetan realities, with a particular focus on the Tibetan movement—its directions and prospects. So, Goswami's study of the literary representations of Tibet is in a way complemented by these interviews.

In his book, *Reimagining Tibet: Politics of Literary Representation*, Goswami contrasts the literary representations of Tibet made from the Western, Indian and Tibetan perspectives. He uses a lucid style of writing that may grow readers' interest in the book. He highlights the important role the virtual network plays in engaging the Tibetans, particularly the Tibetans across the world, in their efforts to foster a pan-Tibetan identity and also in enabling them to mobilize the Tibetan Liberation movement. The author and the publisher deserve thanks for making sincere efforts towards drawing a global attention to the crises of Tibet located in the Himalayan region of South Asia, desperately struggling even in this twenty first century for its independence from Chinese colonization. This book is a valuable addition to the existing corpus of postcolonial studies as well as diaspora studies of Tibet. The scholars interested in pursuing research on the history and culture of Tibet may find the book immensely useful and intellectually stimulating.

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Book Review

Each Day that Passes: Memories of Words by Prof. Jaydeep Sarangi
Authorspress, New Delhi: 2023, pp. 76, Rs. 295

Tanmoy Bhattacharjee*

Memories of Words by poet, editor and academician Jaydeep Sarangi is a collection of fifty-one poems under three categoric subsections--- *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattva*. The first thirteen poems belong to *Tamas*, the next twenty-eight to *Rajas* and the remaining ten to *Sattva*. If we go by author R. K. Dasgupta's overview, we find that according to Isvarakrishna's *Sankhya-Karika*, "Prakriti' possesses three qualities or *gunas* meaning strands, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, that is goodness, dynamism and indifference, which first lie in a state of perfect equipoise in Prakriti" (*Swami Vivekananda on Indian Philosophy and Literature* 93). In fact, in all the sentient beings, all these three *gunas* exist at the same time--- either dominant or recessive:

"Rajas *tamas* c *abhibhuya sattvam bhavati Bharata* /
rajah sattvam tamas c aiva Tamah sattvam rajas tatha // 10 //

(Overpowering *Rajas* and *Tamas*, *Sattva* prevails (sometimes); suppressing *Sattva* and *Tamas*, *Rajas* becomes dominant; and likewise dominating over *Sattva* and *Rajas*, *Tamas* holds the field" (*Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita* 363).

Thus, the three *gunas*, which are surfacing in Sarangi's collection as three distinct units, are purely metaphorical. They signify the curious melange of "goodness, dynamism and indifference" in our day-to-day life and living. This curious melange has its ambivalence, too and this is best explored in the depiction of Lord Krishna, in which Krishna is both an abundance and an emptiness:

"You are my amplitude and my void.

False is all I make in the river of longings.

I can cross oceans to meet you" (*Memories of Words* 24)

The third chapter of the *Gita* has, on the one hand, recognized this "river of longings" and, on the other, recommended ways for overcoming them. It shows how the path of action, once rightly followed, leads one to the horizon of enlightenment; it is the right action with the right intent that "make [s] us tragic and beautiful":

"Neither my words nor my flute knows

Any magic in my prayer, marriage and morals.

Our forms make us tragic and beautiful.

I start playing it again

Flowers spread fragrance, bees bum

Ultimately, this paradox is my Krishna" (24)

Identifying Krishna so very rigorously with 'paradox' is a rarity in Indian English poetry and the poet has accomplished it with what I choose to call a perpendicular directness. The "paradox" lies, on the one hand, in ruling out any possibility of

“magic” in the prayer and, on the other, in devout “preparing for the prayer . . . beside an ancient river of faith” in the poem “Varanasi” (29). This same poem, as it were, deifies Varanasi, an Indian city, as the “Home for all who have no/ homes to go, no links to live,” while pleading for the immortal essence of prayer: “Only prayers exist for ages/ are a window, hope of a river flowing/ carrying the heart of a nation/ living and longing, faithfully.” The quality of *tamas*, by the way, is a sheer paradox, an unmanageable convolution, and that is why the longing, however faithful it promises to be, ends in futility. The prayer, which once sustained the poet through “the world hard” (29) presently brings not an iota of solace to the heart, which is now “a plundered acre of green” in “Sleep-habit.” The prayers, contrary to our expectations, are no longer the bastion of hope, faith and reliability. Rather, in the corridors of memory bedecked with memory's “ancient stones and pebbles,” the poet rummages the comfort for the “plundered acre of green”. Not some tranquil incantations, not the routine-driven prayer, not the thousand ostensible rites of life; the poet ardently longs to internalize the habit of re-living “memories of silence” (26). After all, as the poet's literary journey picks pace, we perceive that memory for him is never static. Even in the seeming inaction of sleep, the poet sees the “acts of memory” in rushing flurry of “dreams.”

In fact, the poet's refusal about experimenting in relationships is not a chance-decision. All relations with either human or nonhuman are basically peripatetic. These protean relational terms have occupied the poet so copiously that he has already stated his fidelity to such a theme in the dedicatory section of the book:

““Why does one room invariably lead into other room?” (From '*The Moon Moments*' by Jayanta Mahapatra)” (7).

Thus, relations are as varied as the thoughts, which, as we see in Mahapatra's poems, “invariably lead into another room.” Curiously enough, thoughts come to the poet as vignettes of spaces and he is even confronted with thoughts that he neither “sees” nor “hears” but only perceives as “winter of things flow / at the wheel of flying to and fro.” This flow of things is a recurring image for Jaydeep's oeuvre. He has, time and again, craved a visit to this flow of things in a number of rivers he has mentioned throughout his poetry. In the acknowledgements, he mentions how the rivers are just indistinguishable from his own selves: “My hometown (Jhargram) is always a character in my works. Dulung and other rivers are my holy selves” (10). Thus, rivers from far away Tweed to our Ganga, from Richmond to our Dulung have invariably etched their meandering courses through his works, making way to “A passage to Myself” (70) both literally and metaphorically. The passage to the poet's self, to use Professor of Sociology at the New School for Social Research, Jeffrey Goldfarb's words, is “critical” in the sense of being the influence of the past over the present:

“On the other hand, studies that recognize the power of the past over the present go in two directions, positive and critical. The “positivists” show how going into the past reveals experiences that shape our present circumstances, how cultural and social traditions work . . . But remembering the past also involves the discovery of roads not taken, to dive down into the past to find pearls of past experience that can

enrich the present, suggesting alternatives, disrupting hegemonic common sense and prevailing ideologies” (*Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* 54).

To my mind, Sarangi's *Memories of Words* possesses all the potentials to be the same “pearls of past experiences that can enrich the present.” That he intends to explore possibilities by virtue of past memories has found the best utterance in the last two stanzas of the eponymous “Memories of Words”. In fact, “each day that passes” (22) is, for the poet, a particular spatiotemporality whence the poet can introduce himself the most unselfconsciously. His identity resonates through a compact epigram in “My Mate: I only travel” (19). Thus, the poem “My Mate,” strangely enough, is not a journey from one's home to river but vice versa and here, the “dear river” is a true reflection of all his memories. The appeal to the river in the last two lines melts the most recalcitrant of stone and transcends the mere corporeality. Sarangi profoundly clings to retaining the memory as his never-failing ventilator only to feel the “shadow spaces at Chandrabhaga beach” or “the slow soundless night at Cuttack” or the “wearying banks of the Mahanadi”. If *tamas* is dynamism, his “The Sun Moments” (35) exudes the heat and luminescence to the fullest.

Sarangi has already shown the poetic efficacy of what I dare describe as relentless euphemism in his coinage “pulls off its dry frame” (25) but when the same mind sees hope resurrecting even amid “Hampi's ruins”, he rings out the most lyrically through an unprecedented chiasmus: “. . . mapping/ The mind, minding the maps somewhere/ Beyond Hampi's ruins” (43). The pursuit of dynamism has, by now, turned a full circle and, in the *Sattva* part, he, as though, readies himself “to gradually find myself [his own self]/ beside an ancient body, calm by the power of surrender” (70). In this last section, the sense of surrender has so overwhelmed the poet that he completely identifies himself with “the dazzling eyes of the forest green” only to perceive “the earth's first fire.”

For him, as he illustrates in the last poem of the book “Epilogue”, “each day's success” may be just a passing phase or even the moments may not be lasting long but memories, to our greatest relief, live: “Moments last for seconds, memories live” (73). The noted editor and critic Vinayak Krishna Gokak in his Introduction to *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry* (2005) has estimated the role of a poet in these terms:

“A poet has not only to throw open his window on the worlds around him and study the face of Nature, Love, Man and Human Achievement. He has also to look into his own heart, the cerebral cortex and the world of his imaginations and fantasies. Poets will have to be judged by their achievement in this sphere of experience too” (34).

I believe Sarangi has woven both the home and the world in his *Memories of Words*.

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Book Review

Kapil Pandey. *Phoolsunghi: First Bhojpuri Novel in English Translation*

(Trans. Gautam Choubey. (e-book). Penguin Books. 2020)

Aakash Pandey*

A notable literary accomplishment, Gautam Choubey's English translation of *Phoolsunghi* (2020) introduces a broader readership to the depths of Bhojpuri literature. An important work of Bhojpuri fiction, originally penned by Pandey Kapil in 1977, it combines rich emotional narratives with historical background. The text authentically uses Bhojpuri terms, idioms, and cultural references, thereby preserving the essence of Pandey Kapil's original Bhojpuri novel. The narrative style uses straightforward sentence structures, a conversational tone, and vivid descriptive imagery to resemble oral storytelling. The dialogue between the characters is more realistic because it has distinct voices and regional speech patterns. Bhojpuri is a language spoken primarily in Indian states like Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh. It is also spoken in places like Fiji, Trinidad, Nepal, and Mauritius. Bhojpuri literature is primarily known for its folktales, and poetry. Sant Kabirdas is believed to be the very first Bhojpuri poet. The Bhojpuri novel marked its presence only after the Indian independence. Ramnath Pandey's *Bindiya* was the first Bhojpuri novel which was published in 1956.

Since *Phoolsunghi* is the inaugural Bhojpuri novel translated into English, the translator has deliberately added, at the beginning, the author's biography, a brief summary of the original narrative, an introduction to Bhojpuri folk poets, a discussion on the Tawaif (courtesan) culture, and insights into the patriots, sahibs, and migrants. This extensive preface is intended to furnish readers with the necessary context and background. The famous Bhojpuri poet named Mahendra Mishra and his unfulfilled love for a courtesan named Dhelabai are at the center of *Phoolsunghi's* story. Intimate themes of love, longing, and social constraints are explored in this colonial India story. The central theme of the book is the enduring emotional bond between Mahendra and Dhelabai, which goes beyond social conventions. Named after the flowerpecker bird, the title represents Dhelabai's lives' delicate balance between freedom and restriction.

The narrative opens with a heated argument between Gulzaribai, a renowned courtesan famously monikered as Dhelabai, and the village landlord Haliwant Sahay. Dhelabai, celebrated for her exceptional beauty, elegant dance, and melodious singing, had garnered considerable admiration. Haliwant, a middle-aged man with a penchant for indulgence, was rebuffed by Dhelabai when he made advances towards her. She firmly declined his proposal, stating, "Babu Sahib! You must have heard of a Phoolsunghi—the flowerpecker—yes? It can never be held captive in a cage" (Choubey 25). This sets the stage for the conflict between Dhelabai and Haliwant Sahay. The plot intensifies when Haliwant Sahay abducts

Dhelabai and confines her within the specially constructed Red Mansion. Despite this, Dhelabai's social standing improves, and she eventually inherits half of Sahay's property. Meanwhile, Dhelabai's lover, Mahender Misir, fails in his attempts to rescue her and ultimately ends up in jail for forgery. Mahender Misir and Dhelabai are historical figures, and the story of their love affair is based on true events. This Bhojpuri novel sheds light on the harsh realities of Bhojpuri society and culture, particularly focusing on the zamindari system and the *tawaif* culture. The author portrays the dynamic interactions between music, dance, patrons, tawaifs, and maestros. Special attention is given to the tawaifs, illustrated by the story of Janki Bai, a patron who dedicated his entire life and wealth to the mujras. Historically, tawaifs were respected and celebrated for their artistic talents. Unfortunately, their image has declined over time, and they are now often compared to prostitutes. The migrant tawaifs who settled in Bihar brought with them the popular art forms of Delhi Durba and Lucknow. Additionally, *Phoolsunghi* reveals that a group of courtesans from Iran settled in the Gopalganj district of Bihar and were pioneers of the popular Bhojpuri folk theatre.

The translation into English truly reflects Gautam Choubey's deep connection to Bhojpuri culture and his skill as a writer. Coming from a family deeply involved in literature, especially Bhojpuri literature, he brings authenticity to his translation. He beautifully maintains the poetic style and heartfelt emotions of the original text, showing his profound understanding of the language and its cultural nuances. It includes cultural references and sayings that draw readers into the story, making it feel real and relatable while still being easy to understand. Critics and readers have praised Mr. Choubey for his ability to capture the essence of Bhojpuri culture and present it in a way that speaks to everyone. Also, the translation is seen as an important contribution to Indian literary translations, enhancing the visibility of Bhojpuri literature and encouraging further exploration of regional Indian narratives.

Readers fascinated by Indian Regional literature, folklore, or timeless themes like love and freedom will find this book captivating. Through its English translation, the timeless tale of Mahendra Mishra and Dhelabai is vividly revived, providing a poignant exploration of human emotions and the quest for personal freedom.

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POETRY

Srishti*

The Displaced 'Coolie' Daughter

I left the shores of Bharat's tender land,
Where Ganges flows and whispers to the sand,
Hopes tied like anklets 'round my eager feet,
Dreaming new skies where freedom's heart could beat.

Beneath the banyan's shade, I bid farewell,
To hearth and kin, where cherished memories dwell,
My mother's songs, the village's fragrant air,
Left behind for dreams that drifted fair.

Akriti came with promises so bright,
A better life beneath the Western light,
She spoke of lands where gold was in the ground,
Where freedom's voice in every heart was found.

Yet chains of patriarchy held me tight,
A daughter's voice muted in endless night,
Colonial shadows darkened every dawn,
In search of light, I ventured, hope withdrawn.

The ship set sail to Caribbean's distant shore,
Promised lands where life would bind no more,
But dreams turned dust, beneath the sun's fierce glare,
In fields of cane, I toiled in deep despair.

No temple bells, no sacred threads to keep,
My culture lost in ocean's endless sweep,
Friends and family, ghosts upon the breeze,
Homesick heart, a prisoner on its knees.

On that cursed ship, my dignity was torn,
By British hands, my soul was left to mourn,
Deprived of food, my body weak and thin,
A forced submission, shrouded deep within.

Coolie they called me, stripped of name and past,
In foreign lands, my spirit's die was cast,

Colonial masters held their whips and words,
Patriarchal chains in foreign lands transferred,

From one rule to another, pain's design,
My spirit broken, dreams now left behind,
Yet in the night, I whisper to the stars,
My soul's lament, a symphony of scars,

For though the journey took all I possessed,
The hope for freedom lives within my chest.
Oh, Bharat Mata, hear your daughter's cry,
Across the seas where broken dreams now lie,

For though I left to seek a brighter way,
In this dark night, I yearn for yesterday.

Between Shores: A Poem by Second-Generation Indo-Caribbean

In the whispers of the cane fields,
Where ancestor's sweat sowed the earth,
We sprouted, hybrid daughters,
Caught in the crosswinds of birth.

Our roots, tangled in the Caribbean soil,
Yet watered by the Gange's flow,
Sing songs in forgotten tongues,
Echoes of a past we scarcely know.

Creole patois fills our mouths,
Melting with the curry's spice,
While sari and carnival collide,
In a dance of sugar and sacrifice.

We stand, neither here nor there,
In the liminal, uncertain space,
Where the mirror shows two faces,
And we search for a single place.

Between temples and calypso beats,
Our hearts weave a fractured hymn,
Of loss, of identity, of culture,
And the hope to belong within.

Who are we, but the daughters of diaspora,
Crafting a mosaic from shards of home,
Walking the line between worlds,
Forever caught in the unknown.

Yet, in this confusion, we find strength,
A legacy of resilience and grace,
For in the fusion of our histories,
We claim a unique, sacred place.

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Dr. Alapati Purnachandra Rao*

Patriotism

The heroic deeds of patriots flooded with valour and concern
offered Indian crowds sleep in peace and comfort zone;

It's an epitome of endless spirit that invigorated
The hearts with everlasting patriotic fervour;

The freedom energized each soul with will and zeal
To nurture the minds of native land with resourcefulness;

The breath of every Indian now reflects the unity of nation
Who aspire to serve the country with mind and hand;

Everyone's mind is brimmed with resolute actions
To make the mother land brim with green and gleam.

Fruits of Non-Violence

Amidst World War 1 and II where weapons dictated
The fate of warring nations with bloodshed;

Had you known the Indian independence movement
That taught a lesson to the world with non-violence;

The weapon that was unheard awakened the mankind
To win over the opponents with soulful reasons;

It was a rare feat that made the universe wondered
When Indian nation twinkled like a star-studded sky;

The democratic principles that paved a way
To remain as a transformed free nation;

Ah! The sung and unsung heroes of Indian nation
Gleefully unfurled the tricoloured flag with pride.

Post-Independent India

The grieved souls of Indian continent sense the relief
When the mother land is shackled-free from other's clutches
In the desert of abstract conclusions about freedom
Indians search for hope in conflict-ridden land;

Seventy-five years pass by amidst distant dreams
Which stimulate the long-awaiting reality that soothes
The patriots' minds fill with kindled thoughts
To convert the land into treasure island;

The fragrance of freedom makes people
Stretch their wings with new faces and beady eyes
That are arrayed to reflect a ray of optimism
With scintillating nationalistic fervour;

Amid convenience and claims for growth
The people run after to reap the ancient heritage
The long-lasting debates with unabated faith
Make the land gleam in the free age;

The road to journey is mixed with actions and myths
To develop it as a country of great significance
Where people form a strong base to survive
Having their heads held high with self-esteem.

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Prof. (Dr.) Kum Kum Ray*

Of Ancient Civilization Along "The Mai Ganga"

We love this body, and get attached to the soul,
As the body fades the attachment grows.
The years move on ...
from childhood to youth to adulthood to old age
Chances on Death: 'Dirt thou art to dirt returnest.'

One's mind wanders through the lanes and bylanes of Kashi . . .
The dead mingling happy with the alive . . .
witnessing people carry dead bodies to the ghats
to bathe them before putting them on their pyre to burn.
'Ganga Mai' cleanses them all: both living and the dead.

Swami Vivekananda's words resonate in my being,
"The day, man will find that he never really dies;
that his soul persists beyond death; he will have no fear of death."
'Atma' 'the true self' - the imperishable - the free - eternal unchangeable element
subject neither to birth nor death - ever existing . . .

Annihilates the fear of death
pierces through layers of ignorance
and lands us in bliss and divinity of humanity...
At the ghats of 'Ganga Mai' in 'Kashi'
The most ancient living city on Planet Earth!

In the light of the burning pyre;
In the darkness of the night
Creep out, the Aghori Sadhus clothed
in smeared ashes of the dead,
the cannibals on the holy ghats
whom ordinary people fear in disgust.
The Manikarnika ghat drives conjures up school of thoughts
that lead me to my quest.
The 'Aghories' are Shaivites, devoted to Shiv;
Ascetics dwelling on and living off cremation ground;
Embracing death, devoting their life using corpse as allies
transcending the duality of life and death.
To carry the rituals around sexual rites;
Consumption of impure substance:
Derived from the death.

We see them in fantasy and exaggeration
forgetting that their underlying principle
transcends laws of purity to realize ultimate non- duality.
A reality - the ultimate far from distinction as 'Pure" or 'Impure'
Objects of fascination of both the Inside and Outside.

The Question springs up.
How can Kashi a place of veneration be a place of voyeurism?
Maybe for a mind set
Which isn't mine.

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Prayash Gupta*

The Search Within

The holy bells' soft trickling sound,
Overwhelms my restless heart,
With every step towards the sacred ground,
Mending bonds that drift apart.

Amidst a throng of eager souls,
Each one vying to be near,
Impatience reigns, compassion tolls,
Blind to those who beg, sincere.

In search of peace, I find my place,
My conscience seeks a gentle start,
I close my eyes, your name embrace;
Tears reveal you in my heart.

A Journey of Hope

In quiet moments, I embrace,
Eyes wide open, seeking grace.
Visions of hope and light arise,
From dawn's first glow to starlit skies.

Positive forces bring forth love,
Equality, and peace like a dove.
Spirituality's gentle caress,
Nurtures hearts, brings forth blessedness.

Hope and faith shine bright and strong,
In every heart, where they belong.
With every step, the light grows clear,
Banishing doubts, dispelling fear.

The eternal dance of good and kind,
In every soul, forever intertwined.
In every struggle, a lesson learned,
In every victory, love returned.

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